UNDERSTANDING BLACK UNDERGRADUATE FEMALES' SENSE OF BELONGING AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION

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ABSTRACT

As college and university continue to recruit and enroll more diverse student populations and maintain institutional priorities of diversity and inclusion, it is imperative we understand the distinct experiences of our minority populations. This research will specifically focus on the experiences of Black undergraduate females. To ensure the success of our Black females students, it is imperative we understand their need for a sense of belonging on a predominantly White campus in order to achieve higher-level opportunities of classroom and campus success.

Sense of belonging is defined as the ability to connect, feel validated, accepted, and matter. This understanding is key to Black undergraduate females' ability to successfully integrate academically and socially in their college environment. Existing research provides insight into the Black male experience, not limited to the challenges Black males face, as well as variables needed to enable Black males' educational success. However, there is a general lack of awareness and attention to the nuanced experiences of our Black female students on predominantly White campuses. What challenges *do* Black females face and what factors *can* enable their educational success? This missed opportunity of understanding of their experiences limits faculty, staff, and administrators from creating an environment where Black females can succeed both inside and outside the classroom. This research gives voice to the experiences of this seemingly silent minority and challenges campus environments to address their operating norm of campus rituals and culture.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the experiences of nine Black undergraduate females at one predominantly White urban institution located in the North

East. Through the use semi-structured interviews, this study seeks to understand in what ways Black female students' understanding of self, relationship development, and engagement with their campus environment aids in the creation of their sense of belonging to their institution.

Findings from this study demonstrate key components of belonging are rooted in understanding of self, and self in relation to others; the impact of participating in institutional programs; and the ability to navigate rules of engagement, both in the classroom and social environments. Participants demonstrate varying levels of belonging but provide key insight for higher education administrators to reflect upon their institutional programs, services, and opportunities to provide intentional space and place of support and ultimately find a place where they matter; their place of belonging.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this to my mother who has been an unwavering source of support and

encouragement to me as I pursued my education. Thank you for your unconditional love

and continual prayers; it has made all this possible.

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learner. Thank you!

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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

As we think about higher education today, college and university enrollment numbers continue to rise. In fall 2013, the U.S Department of Education (2015) identified 17.5 million students were enrolled in either a 2-year or 4-year undergraduate institution within the United States. Of that 17.5 million, 9.8 million (56 %) were identified as female and 7.7 million (44 %) identified as male. The sheer volume of students within the higher education system is astounding with females steadily outpacing their male counterparts.

White identified students still continues to maintain the majority of our college student populations, however, enrollment for Blacks more than doubled from 1.1 million in 1990 to 2.5 million in 2013 (US Department of Education, 2015). Higher education is no longer for the affluent, White, male student (Cohen, 1998; Tierney, 1992). Whether intended or not, higher education has become an intersectional space for students' identities, values, and experiences to merge together for an education of, and with, one another – both inside and outside the classroom.

By examining the experiences of Black female college students at a predominantly White institution (PWI), the desire is to learn more about what enables Black females' sense of belonging; in what ways do they connect with their institution; in what ways do they engage and/or integrate into the campus culture (both inside and outside the classroom); and in what ways does their identity development influence their experience and/or connection to their institution.

Statement of the Problem

The literature acknowledges that within the Black (for the purposes of this

research, African American and Black will be used interchangeably) community, Black females are entering higher education in greater numbers than their Black male counterparts (Strayhorn, 2012). But unfortunately, that is where the discussion ends and shifts to the experiences of Black males. There is a lack of awareness and understanding of the Black female experience at PWIs. Existing research provides insight into the Black male experience, not limited to the depiction of Black males in colleges/universities, challenges Black males face, as well as variables needed to enable Black males' educational success (Dancy, 2015; Harper, 2009; Strayhorn, 2012). However, research generally lacks attention to the nuanced experiences of our Black female students on predominantly White campuses. What challenges *do* females face and what factors *can* enable their educational success? These nuanced experiences of Black females illuminate the need for further exploration regarding their integration into the campus environment and what support should like for these students to be successful. This missed opportunity of understanding their experiences limits faculty, staff, and administrators from creating an environment where Black females can succeed both inside and outside the classroom.

Purpose of Study

This purpose of this study is to explore how Black females navigate predominantly White institutions in the pursuit of a college education. The outcome of the college experience is often categorized in how well a student performed academically, but it should also encompass this notion of belonging that addresses students' level of connectedness to their institution through peer/faculty connections, institutional programs, and persistence (Tinto, 2012a; Strayhorn, 2012; Winkle-Wagner,

2015).   It is through these points of connection that the outcome of academic success might be achieved.

There is a lack of research regarding what contributes to Black females' sense of belonging. Having this understanding can lead to greater implications of retention and persistence of Black females, creating *and* maintaining diverse student populations, fulfilling institutional priorities of inclusion, and creating a positive cyclical process of recruitment, enrollment, retention, graduation, to alumni giving. Combining the works of established theorist Janet Helms' (1990) racial/ethnic and gender identity development and the emerging conceptual framework of Terrell Strayhorn's (2012) sense of belonging, a phenomenological approach will be used to explore the following research questions:

1. In what ways do Black female students' identity awareness and exploration impact their sense of belonging at a predominantly White institution?

2. In what ways do Black female college students attending a predominantly White institution come to feel integrated into, or isolated from, the academic and social elements of the university environment?

3. What types of relationships are most critical for supporting Black female college students' sense of belonging at a predominantly White institution and in what ways do those relationships provide support?

These questions provide an opportunity to illustrate participants' experiences and narratives at one predominantly White institution.

Definitions

In order to situate the focus of this research, it is important to focus on the type of environment I am describing and the type of participants being studied.

1. <u>Black</u> – Participants in this study have identified themselves as Black. This social construct does not encompass cultural identities of the participants (e.g., African American). For example, one participant could identify as Black to some and Nigerian or Nigerian American to others. One does not supersede the other, but rather is how the individual chooses to identify herself.

2. <u>Female</u> – Participants in this study have identified themselves as female with no additional qualifiers placed on what this means for an individual. Female was viewed both as a biological and sociological understanding of self.

3. <u>Predominantly White Institution</u> – predominantly White institutions (PWI) are often categorized as colleges or universities with fifty percent or more of its student enrollment identifying as White (Brown & Dancy, 2010). It should be noted the institution being studied is 55.5% White-identified (Institutional Research & Assessment, 2017).

4. <u>Sense of Belonging</u> – sense of belonging is defined as the ability for one to self-identify with a group or community. It is a space/place where one feels as if they matter and feel accepted (Strayhorn, 2012). It is an intentional process through interactions with others (i.e., peers, faculty, etc.) that creates an experience of inclusion (Hoffman et al., 2002; Morrow & Ackermann, 2012).

Significance

The unique voice of the Black female student at PWIs has been somewhat limited

within the literature despite historical roots of oppression, isolation, and elitism dominating predominantly White campuses (Henry, Butler, & West, 2011; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2010; Reeder, & Schmitt, 2013; Woldoff, Wiggins, & Washington, 2011). Navigating the college environment can be challenging, even for the most adept student. Limited research has shown the collective Black female experience is rooted in issues of adjustment, lack of financial resources, feelings of isolation, an inability to set and complete goals, and feeling like a "guest in someone's house" (Jones, 2001; Winkle-Wagner, 2015). Additionally, this research demonstrates these students suffer from interpersonal issues, not limited to managing micro-aggressions, an inability to build relationships with faculty, and cultural incongruity where there is a lack of balance between Black female cultural values and the campus environment (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Henry, Butler, & West, 2011).

While all of these experiences are valid and acknowledged as detrimental to a student's ability to be successful, it also points to a larger piece of the Black female college student experience. There is an underlying notion of not belonging or mattering within the Black female's campus environment that has not been fully explored. When one does not feel accepted, it could feel isolating; when one is managing micro-aggressions from their peers on a consistent basis, it could make one feel not valued or that they matter. How can we address the underlying issues for more long-term results versus attempts at singular programming opportunities and/or housing accommodations (Jones, 2001)?

Many institutional priorities surround this notion of diversity and/or inclusion, both in the classroom, but also within the overall student experience. However, for many

institutions, the challenge is often what happens once you have enrolled this visually diverse population. It is imperative we understand Black female students' need for belonging on a predominantly White campus in order to achieve those higher-level opportunities of classroom and campus success. This research gives voice to the experiences of this seemingly silent minority and challenges campus environments to address the operating norm of campus rituals and culture.

CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

Black students often struggle with alienation and social isolation, which makes adjusting to college more challenging (Woldoff, Wiggins, & Washington, 2011). However, some research posits, if students are integrated into the academic and social fabrics of the institutions, there is a feeling of belonging, which can lead to success (Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007; Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, & Salomone, 2002). However, the formula is not that simple. Black students, particularly Black females, navigate predominantly White institutions differently than their majority counterparts. Understanding how students connect, feel validated, accepted, and matter is key to Black females' ability to successfully integrate academically and socially into their college environment. The ability for students to belong and feel committed to their institution increases persistence and student success and decreases the likelihood of student departure (Hoffman et al., 2002).

The purpose of this literature review is to explore what we know and do not know about Black females' (1) sense of belonging within the college environment; (2) engagement on a college campus; and (3) academic and social integration. Lastly, identity development will be used as a backdrop to the development of sense of belonging. The conclusion of this literature review will lead into the research questions and the importance of understanding Black female's sense of belonging at a predominantly White institution.

Theoretical Rationale

As I explore the experiences of Black females at a PWI, it will be important to first understand some of the developmental issues that Black females students experience,

particularly as it relates to identity formation. This four-stage model will help explore the intersection of Black female's identity development and their experiences of belonging at a predominantly White institution. Helms' framework will inform initial questions and explore the impact of participants' racial/ethnic woman identity and what, if any, connections to their sense of belonging.

While Helms' (1990) work is most notably known for its racial/ethnic framework, its womanist perspective is key in unpacking Black females' experiences at predominantly White institution. Additionally, I will incorporate Collins' (2000) Black feminist perspective to provide historical context of the Black female experience. Collins' explores how Critical Race Theory (CRT) has been used as the framework to discuss the intersections of Black women and class. While, this study will not delve into socio-economic status as it pertains to the participants, Collins' findings combined with Helms', can shed light into some of the cultural barriers Black females as a community have had to overcome and continue to face; as similar barriers emerged during the course of this study. Additionally, both theorists highlight intersectionality (albeit intersection of race/ethnicity with gender or race/ethnicity intersecting with class) and its impact on their experiences.

The established works of Helms' (1990) racial/ethnic and gender identity development will be combined with the emerging conceptual work of Strayhorn's (2012) sense of belonging to understand how Black undergraduate females navigate PWIs and find their place(s) of belonging. Sense of belonging is a construct where individuals self-identify with a group or community. It is an intentional process through interactions with

others (i.e., peers, faculty, etc.) that creates an experience of inclusion, or conversely, exclusion and not mattering (Hoffman et al., 2002; Morrow & Ackermann, 2012).

Review of the Research

Sense of Belonging

Strayhorn (2012) defined sense of belonging as, "… a basic human need and motivation, sufficient to influence behavior. [A] sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group (e.g., campus community) or others on campus (e.g., faculty, peers)" (p. 3). Strayhorn's hearty definition of belonging depicts desires of acceptance, mattering, value, and identity (Strayhorn, 2012). The core elements that define belonging can be equated to Maslow's hierarchy of needs (McLeod, 2014). Sense of belonging can be considered a basic function and/or understanding needed in order to address higher-level capabilities. Specifically in the higher education setting, "…the consummate goals of higher education cannot be achieved (or even pursued) until students feel a sense of connectedness, membership, and belonging in college" (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 18). Sense of belonging provides support and motivation to achieve, not limited to, higher levels of knowledge acquisition, performance and/or success and to ultimately persist at their institution.

Hoffman et al. (2002) conducted a study to understand how sense of belonging related to why students persisted or withdrew from their institutions. Hoffman et al. found sense of belonging was equated to a "valued involvement", in that it was most centered on intentional and/or purposeful peer relationships; it is about how individuals related, or not related, to one another in order to feel supported. Using this framework,

Hoffman et al. were able to draw conclusions based on the quality of relationships participants had with their peers and with faculty.

Quality student/peer relationships were when social and academic support emerged as important by both parties and when mutual comfort was displayed within the classroom environment. In essence, there is a mutual respect and value of (and for) one another that led to higher levels of comfort. Morrow and Ackermann (2012) found similar conclusions in their research of exploring the importance of sense of belonging and motivation in predicting persistence and retention. Their findings concluded that students were more likely to persist if there was peer and faculty support and classroom comfort. Similarly, O'Keeffe (2013) found that, " a sense of connection can emerge if the student has a relationship with just one key person within the territory institution and this relationship can significantly impact upon a students' decision to remain in college" (p. 607-608).

But how are these intentional and/or purposeful relationships created? There can often be limited opportunities to design sustaining relationships for students beyond a transition and/or first-year housing program. Research has demonstrated that Blacks attending HBCU environments have been able to cultivate this sense of belonging – there is a feeling of acceptance, respect, connection, and value from their peers and faculty/staff beyond their first year (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014; Reeder & Schmitt, 2013). How do we begin to emulate this notion at PWIs?

Hausmann, Schofield, and Woods (2007) defined sense of belonging as a, "psychological sense that one is a valued member of the college community" (p. 804). Hausmann et al. examined if sense of belonging could predict students' intention to

persist, what role, if any, could interventions (i.e., peer or faculty/staff connection, institutional insignia, etc.) play in increasing students' sense of belonging. Hausmann et al. found connections between integration into the academic and social fabrics of the institution and the presence of feelings of belonging. Participants who reported feeling more integrated into the academic elements of the institution experienced an increase in sense of belonging over time. It was also noted specifically for African American students that having more peer support was associated with an increased sense of belonging over time. Additionally, intervention methods did positively impact students' belonging because it provided motivation and enhanced their connections to the institution by producing feelings of importance and mattering. This study affirmed the strong connection between sense of belonging and persistence and its impact on academic integration. It challenges institutions to think creatively about how we are welcoming our students and creating points of connection from the beginning of the student experience.

Research has drawn connections between belonging and motivation theory (Morrow & Ackermann, 2012; Hausmann et al., 2007; Strayhorn, 2012). "Motivation theory posits that individuals have needs. Satisfaction of such needs leads to optimal functioning; deprivation or insufficient meeting of needs leads to pathology" (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 10-11). When applied to sense of belonging, there is a longing to feel included or connected to others. Similar to Maslow's hierarchy of needs (McLeod, 2014), if this foundational need of longing is not met, optimal functioning – i.e., positive academic performance, social engagement, etc. – will not be a likely outcome.

Sense of belonging research is somewhat limited, but in the research presented above, we can draw conclusions of its connections and importance to persistence

(Hoffman et al., 2002; O'Keeffe, 2013), student experiences of mattering (Morrow &

Ackermann, 2012; Strayhorn, 2012), and students' commitment to their respective

institution (Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007). These findings provide the

foundation for further exploration in understanding how Black females create and sustain

their sense of belonging, which can lead to long-term academic success and social

engagement on college campuses.

Engagement for Black Students

Limited information is available regarding successful experiences of Black

females at PWIs. However, literature regarding the experiences of Blacks (both male and

female) at HBCUs is extensive and can provide valuable insight. While HBCUs have

increased in numbers and academic offerings over time, in their inception, they provided

limited, and unequal, education as compared to their White peers. Many HBCUs were

initially focused on religious education and social skills. White teachers and

administrators led these institutions and in large part taught, "students codes of conduct

that were acceptable to White society" (Redd, 1998, p. 35). In essence, it was about

teaching Blacks to conform to White societal norms, not providing degree-granting

opportunities for Blacks or space for their unique identities to openly emerge. It was not

until 1915 that HBCUs began expanding offerings to undergraduate and graduate degree

programs and some professional degree-granting schools emerged (Redd, 1998).

HBCUs were perceived by its students to provide a consistent, supportive

environment – mainly through peer-to-peer relationships and student connections with

faculty and staff. But there was also a comfort among HBCU students to engage in free

exchange in the classroom environment and an atmosphere of support (Arroyo &

Gasman, 2014; Reeder & Schmitt, 2013). In these environments there was an underlying notion of mattering and acceptance. Woldoff, Wiggins and Washington (2011) found that, "Black collegians need to feel valued, safe, and accepted in order to feel at home, thrive during their time in college, and further develop into academically and socially well-rounded individuals" (p. 1048). These students needed to experience belonging in order to address the academic and social aspects of their college development.

What was it about these environments that enabled students to feel safe and secure to cultivate relationships, not only with their peers, but also with faculty and staff? Was it just enough to have seemingly shared cultural values? What made these environments rich opportunities for Blacks to succeed while their peers attending PWI environments struggled to feel included, important, and accepted? Patton (2016) offers a compelling argument regarding the complexity Blacks face when engaging in PWI environments, "despite the growth and change in U.S. demographics, the academy is an overwhelmingly White terrain in terms of physical representation of White students and symbolically in terms of curriculum, campus policies, and campus spaces" (Patton, 2016, p. 320). Patton continues by stating, " Concepts and phrases such as 'learning outcomes' 'assessment' and 'evaluation' are regularly used to gauge how students experience college but rarely account for, at least in a critical way, the nuanced experiences that shape the racial realities of college life" (p. 325).

Within these nuanced experiences, how are we creating inclusive environments, both inside and outside the classroom? In the PWI environment, there is an implied expectation that the student needs to adapt and change to belong, that students need to find ways to better integrate academically and socially within the campus environment to

be successful (Moxley, Najor-Durack, & Dumbrigue, 2001; Tinto, 2012a). This unwritten expectation needs to be explored and unpacked. If institutions have not changed and have remained stationed comfortably in "White terrain" (Patton, 2016) – both in student population, curriculum, and policies, how are minority students expected to learn and adapt to this culture?

While we can extrapolate potential similarities regarding the student experience at an HBCU and how these students have been successful, it is important to note the context is different, thus the overall experience will be different. Understanding the experience of Black females specifically at PWIs is crucial not only for the success of our students, but the success of our institutions.

Strayhorn (2013) conducted a comparative study of campus climate perceptions of Black and White undergraduate students attending a PWI and their intentions to leave. In this study, Blacks reported PWI environments as a, "cold, uncaring place" in large part because the lack of a "critical mass" of Blacks – in faculty, staff, and students – with whom to engage. Additionally, Blacks, in comparison to Whites who entered college, were *expecting* to encounter racism while in college. Strayhorn (2013) found correlations between Black students who felt strongly about the campus being a "cold and uncaring place" also possessed strong intentions of leaving the institution. While his findings were not necessarily new information, they pose the question how (and why) do these environments continue to perpetuate this unwelcoming and isolating environment (Fries-Britt, 1998; Sedlacek, 1999; Woldoff, Wiggins, & Washington, 2011; Winkle-Wagner, 2015)? Strayhorn (2013) offers some insight to explain the phenomena by highlighting the history of PWIs.

PWIs tend to have much longer institutional histories of exclusion and elitism

than diversity and inclusion. And this historical legacy of *dejure* segregation,

unapologetic exclusion, and overt discrimination on the basis of race continues to

affect campus climates today, which in turn may reinforce policies and programs

that foster students' expectations about facing racism on campus (p. 125).

This history and existing literature depicts Black students entering college at a

deficit; feeling defeated before they have begun. There is uneasiness, a lack of feeling

welcomed that continues to permeate campus environments. There is an internal

preparedness that Blacks will be singled out in the classroom, "feeling like the 'fly in the

buttermilk'" and an acceptance of the unlikelihood of your culture being visibly

represented on campus (Patton, 2016, p. 325).

Within the Black identity, Black females experienced dissonance between Black

cultural values and the larger White campus environment by having to continually

combat cultural stereotypes including the "White beauty standards"; experiencing

psychological issues of anger, anxiety, and depression; and health issues – not limited to

obesity and sexually transmitted diseases (Henry, Butler, & West, 2011). These issues

can often heighten Black females' feelings of isolation and not belonging within the

campus culture, which compounds their psychological and health issues, creating a cycle

of exclusion making it increasingly challenging for students to find the support and

resources needed to address these larger issues.

It is a challenge, and perhaps a hesitancy, to move from marginality to mattering

for many of these students due to deep historical roots of exclusionary, institutional

practices and elitism. We continue to read about the successful stories of Black students

(male and female) who attend HBCUs. But in order to face these experiences of oppression and elitism at PWIs head on, it is imperative that we understand the experiences of Black females and how they have developed their sense of belonging and success at PWIs.

Winkle-Wagner (2015) opened the door to understanding and providing voice to how Blacks, specifically Black females, are being successful at PWIs. Winkle-Wagner illustrates Black female college student success happens in large part due to relationships that offered support to their experience, not limited to student-faculty relationships, peer relationships, and family relationships. Historically, Black females have used different types of "safe spaces", both people and physical spaces, when faced with adversity; specifically it has been through the use of relationships with one another - family relationships (i.e., mother/daughter relationships) and connections to church or Black organizations (Collins, 2000).

Collins (2000) admits that relationships can seem scary and perhaps "dangerous", but a necessary risk to connect with others who can understand and empathize with what it means to be a Black woman. Collins provides an historical context of larger society enabling oppressive acts to ensure Blacks would maintain their standing and not obtain upward mobility; to effectively maintain their subordinate positions (Collins, 2000). While a seemingly defeatist portrayal, Collins highlights how connections to others enables the Black voice to be heard with intellectuals such as Maria Stewart, Zora Neal Hurston, and Alice Walker, to name a few who came together and challenged what society wanted to believe about Blacks. Relationships are an intricate piece of the Black female college student puzzle. It is necessary to understand the impact of these

relationships, how they are formed, and the support they offer, as we unpack the Black female experience and their sense of belonging.

Winkle-Wagner (2015) found that student-faculty relationships provided opportunities of support regarding future career plans and served as mentors who were able to provide guidance in identifying resolutions to student crises. These relationships provided formalized opportunities for Black females to identify a familial connection, often a *mothering* or "othermothering" figure, which could provide feedback and encourage academic success amongst their students.

The concept of "othermothering" is often used to describe the familial relationship between Black students and Black faculty/staff, typically found within the HBCU environment. "The concept of othermothering grew out of a survival mechanism during slavery when children and biological parents were separated at auction, and a "fictive kin" would take on mothering responsibilities for the orphaned children" (Mawhinney, 2012, p. 215).

Additionally, Collins (2000) found othermothering, "unlike the traditional mentoring so widely reported in the educational literature, this relationship goes far beyond that of providing students with either technical skills or a network of academic and professional contacts" (p. 191). Mothering others' children in slave communities was a necessity, as children were often orphaned by the sale or death of their mothers. However, the practice of othermothering was also extended to assisting women who were too poor to care for their children or who did not have the preparation or desire to provide the full range of mothering activities (Collins, 2000). This practice has consciously, or subconsciously, found its place within higher education, particularly at HBCUs.

Mawhinney, (2012) a Black professor at a HBCU details her experience in the university setting working with students and identifies five expectations of the "other mothering" role and the types of connection she maintained with her students. The first expectation was a pedagogical commitment, where professors placed learning as the priority and there was a commitment to provide additional time and care in developing lessons and setting high expectations for students. It was about ensuring that all students absorbed the information being communicated and/or presented; if not, alternate methods would be employed. The second expectation was relatedness, which detailed the approachability of the instructor. There was intentional time set aside to build relationships with students – during the instructor's office hours, during unscheduled time, at campus events, etc. or through other informal connections. The third expectation was advocacy. This expectation required the professor to serve as a voice for the student as needed, both within the class setting, but often to other external offices. This could entail communicating with financial aid office on behalf of the student to find alternate funding opportunities. The fourth expectation was expression of care – both emotion and physical expression. This was demonstrated through genuine praise of the student or being affectionate towards a student through physical contact (i.e., a hug) for their accomplishments, inside and outside the classroom. The last expectation was financial; it was about providing resources as needed for the student – both inside and outside the classroom. Mawhinney (2012) detailed a time after leaving the institution for another position, driving an hour and half just to take a book to a student for a paper.

These expectations illustrate seemingly parental responsibilities placed on (or assumed by) professors to support their students both inside and outside the classroom, in

financial and often therapeutic or counseling ways; but at what cost? Similarly Guiffrida (2005) found students, particularly Black students, arriving to college with the expectations of faculty to "go above and beyond" and provide academic, career, personal advising, and motivate them to excel in the classroom, and advocate on their behalf. Is this a fair expectation for all faculty and/or staff to engage with Black students in this manner?

Mawhinney (2012) addresses this internal conflict and discussed this notion of depressive guilt, "when a teacher feels that they are not meeting or attending to the needs of their students" (p. 217). In reality some of the student needs are truly unrealistic for a professor to meet. But what Mawhinney described was an environment where this was expected to ensure their students' success. How does this *other mothering* concept apply to PWI campuses? Are their "progressive" versions that still provides support to our students and empowers them to develop sense of belonging and connection to others without the extreme physical and emotional expense of their faculty?

Strayhorn and Saddler (2009) focused on more formal student/faculty relationships and measured the influence on Blacks' satisfaction with their undergraduate experience. The overarching benefits from mentoring revealed to have significant impact on students' career selection; socialization into the academic environment; retention; and overall satisfaction with college. While gender did not play a significant role in student/faculty mentoring roles, Strayhorn and Saddler, did find that Black students benefitted from "research-focused faculty-student relations that tend[ed] to be more formal, structured, and goal oriented" (p. 487). Their research illuminates the possibility of intentional student/faculty relationships that provide realistic expectations and

boundaries while still maintaining similar outcomes – supporting students, connection to career goals, and enabling them to make connections within the institution that other mothering relationships also provided.

Winkle-Wagner (2015), Mawhinney (2012), and Strayhorn and Saddler (2009) demonstrate the importance of student/faculty relationships and its connection to student success. They each demonstrate the value and importance of these interactions for student connection (and ultimately student success) to their institution. These interactions created space for students to feel like they mattered and belonged within the campus environment. While the context changes for each of the studies (both PWI and HBCU environments), it reinforces the need to explore students' sense of belonging at a predominantly White institution and learn what, if any role, student/faculty relationships play in developing connection to the institution and how these relationships develop over time.

Fries-Britt (1998) studied peer relationships of gifted Black students participating in a merit-based scholarship program. While her participants faced the "normative" issue of isolation on a PWI campus, this program provided an established peer support system (other high achieving Black students) and alleviated some of the experiences of isolation. While participants found value and support with others in the program, there was still an underlying desire to connect and have relationships with other Blacks on campus that was not readily accessible through this merit-based program. This program, while well intended, was actually creating a singular perspective of what successful Black students looked like on their campus. As more and more institutional programs such as this come to fruition, it is finding the delicate balance of creating affinity groups for support and

being cognizant of the diversity within the affinity groups and maintaining connections to the larger campus community.

Lastly, family relationships were found to be both a source of support for Black females, but also an impediment, to Black female success (Winkle-Wagner, 2015). Winkle-Wagner noted that, "many African American women struggle with family relationships throughout their time in college" (p. 186). There seemed to be a dichotomous approach to family relationships for Black females – either students sustained strong connections with family/home or severed those connections. For some, the parental role was a motivating factor that could help alleviate stress students faced while on campus. Kennedy and Winkle-Wagner (2014) found Black females' relationship with their family influenced their educational aspirations, provided insight into the college transition process, and offered emotional and/or financial support. For others, these relationships *caused* strain and stress and provided feelings of "homelessness"; never quite feeling at home in the PWI campus community, but also lacking connections with the family since coming to college (Winkle-Wagner, 2015).

Relatedly, Barnett's (2004) qualitative analysis of family support found positive relationships among Black college students. Her study found families had clear expectations and communicated often, and early, with their children about college. Additionally, families offered advice to their children regarding priority setting, responsibility, stress management, and how to manage race relations. Barnett found that parents were often the point of connection when students wanted support and/or comfort, to seek advice and/or guidance, and to seek out connection before stressful events (i.e., exams). Students in this study attributed their success in college to their parents,

"students felt that parental support was important in helping the child attain his/her goals" (p. 64).

The literature clearly highlights the importance of relationship development and its positive influence on Black female student success. However, the types of relationships and how they are formed and sustained are still not clearly defined. The common thread amidst all the literature is that regardless of the relationship, it should be something that is intentional and/or purposeful. I seek to explore the connections Black female students create and sustain as they engage in the PWI environment and if the presence of "fictive kin relationships" exists and its impact on their sense of belonging.

Academic and social integration

Tinto (1987) has been a staunch advocate of student integration into campus environments through academic and social connections. His research has been linked to academic persistence and success (Tinto, 1987). Tinto (1975) defined and/or measured academic integration in terms of grade performance and intellectual development. This understanding connects both extrinsic recognition (e.g., grades) and intrinsic reward (e.g., critical thinking skills, academic confidence, etc.). Within these findings, Spady (1971), illustrated strong correlations between males and their placing greater importance on the extrinsic aspect of academic integration; greater value was placed in grade performance over personal growth in knowledge obtainment. Additionally, it was found that females, more than males, placed greater importance on the intrinsic aspect of academic integration. Females valued the process of gaining knowledge over high-grade performance. Does the importance factor of extrinsic recognition or intrinsic reward shift for Black females if knowledge acquisition in the classroom in continually challenged

and unwelcomed?

Social integration was found to "occur primarily through informal peer group associations, semi-formal extracurricular activities, and interaction with faculty and administrative personnel within the college" (Tinto, 1975, p. 107). There is an intentional focus and connection to others, albeit through friendship, support networks, and interactions with faculty in formal and informal ways. When these components – academic and social integration – are absent, there is an increased likelihood of student departure from the institution. Would this same importance be displayed for Black females? Particularly, if they are experiencing feelings of exclusion and intellect is continually being challenged (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007)?

Tinto's (1987) research supported the notion that students who were fully immersed in the academic and social structures of the college environment persisted and ultimately thrived in the college environment at greater rates than peers who did not. While inherent in Tinto's argument is this notion of belonging and mattering, there is a missing element of what does this mean for minority populations. Research conducted during this time was centered on majority student populations, typically affluent and White. Specifically, there is an underlying sentiment of success within Tinto's argument – make good grades, gain confidence in the classroom, connect with faculty and staff at the institution. But how does this couple with existing research of Blacks' experiences at PWI environments – there is a lack of confidence in the classroom and connections are limited with faculty and staff? What does success look like?

Rendón, Jalomo, and Nora (2000) challenged Tinto's (2012b) academic and social integration theory by highlighting this notion of "biculturation" minority students

face. Grounded in the work of Valentine (1971), biculturation is, "where individuals live simultaneous lives in two cultures, two realities" (Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003, p. 49). Winkle-Wagner (2015) and Collins (2000) also reference this as a double-consciousness. Rooted in the work of W.E.B. Du Bois double-consciousness is viewed as, "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others" (Du Bois & Provenzo, 2005, p. 14). There is an internal conflict and/or expectation that there is a proficiency to navigate two worlds. There is an expected competency in both one's own culture and the culture of their respective institution. Rendón, Jalomo, and Nora recognized minority students are stepping into a "foreign" environment with expectations that are unknown nor understood by them.

De Anda (1984) takes it a step further and explores factors that impact biculturalism to produce this notion of dual socialization. De Anda explores the connection between two cultures (i.e., norms, values, perceptions, etc.) and one's ability to navigate both worlds either on their own or through the use of "cultural translators" (i.e., Black History month celebration). The ability to successfully navigate these worlds with more, or less, corrective measures provides insight to the degree of one's bilingualism and the degree of dissimilarity of the majority culture.

The further along one was in these factors, the closer to dual socialization and the ability to successfully navigate both worlds. In this concept, it dismantled Tinto's (2012b) notion of separation from any one culture (i.e., home) and assimilate to another (i.e., college), it is the embracing of both worlds to forage a new path. De Anda (1984) found that

> … dual socialization is made possible and facilitated by the amount of overlap
> between two cultures. That is, the extent to which an individual finds it possible

to understand and predict successfully two cultural environments and adjust his or her behavior according to the norms of each culture depends on the extent to which these two cultures share common values, beliefs, perceptions, and norms for prescribed behavior (p. 103).

While seemingly easy, institutions play a role in bridging the gap between two worlds. De Anda (1984) recognizes that integration, albeit academic or social, does not occur naturally for many minority students, but rather takes work on the part of the student *and* the institution. College can be a time where Black students, in particular, are facing the complexity of their culture and moving from a dualistic understanding to recognition of a multiplistic expression and understanding of what it means to be Black.

In spite of this, is it still expected they will gain confidence in the classroom and connect with others if they are facing issues of isolation, lack of acceptance or inclusion, and ultimately do not feel as if they belong? By belonging, or to use Tinto's (2012a) phrasing of possessing "social membership", Tinto posits students gain social support that could ease their transition, gain access to informal knowledge, and gain self-worth, which influences their academic performance. How does this become a reality for Black females at predominantly White institutions when often belonging is not possible?

Tierney (1992) also challenges Tinto's (2012b) academic and social integration model and likens it to a ritual or 'rite of passage'. Rituals, in the cultural sense, are a required process; "choice does not exist about whether to undergo the ritual; one simply partakes of it" (p. 609). When applied to the collegial environment, it can often leave students without a choice. You either "conform" to the rules and/or obligations of the environment or you do not succeed, and for many students failure or departure is not an option. It can create this cyclic atmosphere where the student cannot succeed in the college environment due to cultural barriers and understanding, but also cannot go home

and be deemed a failure. While this argument is seemingly rooted in semantics, there is also a representational component that should not be overlooked.

Tierney (1992) acknowledges that it can be difficult for minority students to engage in this model and that an alternative model, or approach, should be identified as college and universities continue to enroll more diverse students. He challenges us to recognize when minority populations step onto our campuses, we need to take note of what their individual needs are in acclimating to the campus environment and how to incorporate those needs and understandings into a success plan for the student. While his research is tailored to the experiences of Native American students, his argument can translate to other minority populations. Space needs to be established (literally and figuratively) for students to bring their full self to the environment and get involved in community where they are accepted and feel they, as an individual, matter.

Strayhorn (2012) argues that, (on a larger scale) "by interacting frequently (and in positive ways) with others on campus, students establish meaningful relationships (e.g., friendships), which, in turn, can be seen as supportive resources that can be brought to bear on the college experience" (p. 9). Sense of belonging, both in the classroom environment alongside peers and faculty (academic integration), and outside the classroom environment alongside peers and institutional programs, and structure(s) (social integration) can assist in students' connection to their college environment. Can this be the experience of minority student populations? With whom do they interact with frequently and are these connections rooted in belonging?

Hausmann, Schofield, and Woods (2007) began to investigate this and explored the impact racial/ethnic identity had on sense of belonging and predicting persistence

among African American and White first-year college students. Their research team examined variables of, connections to their peers and faculty interactions, support from peers and parents/families, commitment to their institution, and intentions to persist. Their findings found students who reported more integration with their academic environment experienced an increased sense of belonging over time. Additionally, participants who had initial increased peer and faculty interactions and peer and parent/family support also reported a greater sense of belonging. What these findings demonstrated was that students, in this study, who found support/community, i.e., felt accepted, valued and matter, persisted at the institution.

Hausmann, Schofield, and Woods (2007) specifically found pronounced patterns for African Americans who had, " more parental support [were] associated with greater sense of belonging at the beginning of the academic year" (p. 828). Additionally, African Americans who had, "more peer support was associated with an increase in sense of belonging over time" (p. 828). Much of the existing research emphasizes the need for students to build relationships with their peers and/or with faculty and staff. Hausmann, Schofield, and Woods support the need for continued relationships/connections with parents/families to aid in the creation of sense of belonging for these students.

Hausmann, Schofield, and Woods' (2007) research provides rationale that institutions should understand students' sense of belonging development as an initial step and/or outcome of a student's college experience. Greater insight to the experiences of Black females at predominantly White institutions can increase the likelihood that all students can develop a sense of belonging at their respective institution. As a result of belonging, students can engage in the academic and social aspects of their college

community and have greater opportunities for persistence.

Schlossberg (1989) provides an overview of how students get involved on a college campus. Rooted in the involvement research of Astin (1999), Schlossberg defines involvement as, "… connections between students, faculty, and staff that allow individuals to believe in their own personal worth" (p. 5). Similar to what Hoffman et al. (2002), Winkle-Wagner (2015), and Strayhorn and Saddler (2009) found, there is a relatedness between the student and others (i.e., faculty, staff, and/or peers) that is deemed essential to survive, and ultimately thrive, within the community. Schlossberg began to unpack how/why some students are involved and members of community while others are unable to establish connections or substantive involvement. However, there is room for more voices to be acknowledged and understood, specifically the experiences of Black females. At the heart of these findings was a connection to belonging, this notion of mattering. Mattering is a belief that we "matter" to others (Schlossberg, 1989).

While conversely, if students were experiencing periods of marginalization, they were not involved or had established connections to others (Schlossberg, 1989). Research often portrays Black women feeling disenfranchised by their college experiences due, in large part, to facing incidents of micro-aggressions on a consistent basis, and a lack of congruency with campus culture (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; Henry, Butler, & West, 2011). But in spite of these disturbing experiences, Black females continue to graduate from these institutions. There is a lack of research to understand how they navigate these challenging landscapes. Do Black females believe they matter within their campus environment and how does that understanding impact their experience?

Strayhorn (2012) believed the absence of belonging is "marginalization, isolation, or alienation from others" (p. 17). As humans, it is expected we will experience moments of marginality, particularly when we transition to new roles (e.g., from high school student to college student) or new environments (e.g., from hometown to a campus residence hall). There are moments where we feel unimportant and possess feelings of not belonging. It is important to note that to move from marginality to mattering is about belonging. It is connected to a basic human need to feel connected to, to be relational with, and being accepted by others (Strayhorn, 2012). This study will explore how Black females connect with others and find acceptance within the PWI environment.

Identity Exploration

As Black female enrollment continues to increase, it is important to understand their experiences. In 2014, the National Education Center for Statistics reported that Blacks accounted for 32.6 % of 18- to 24-year-olds enrolled in degree-granting postsecondary institutions. Of that percentage, 28.5 % were identified as Black males and 36.6 % identified as Black females (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). Literature on Black students is plentiful, but plentiful in a seemingly singular voice, the voice and experience of the Black male. The literature is rich with detailed accounts of the Black male experience – their successes, their challenges, their positionality within the dominant culture, and the campus initiatives designed to ensure and support their success (Harper, 2009; Quaye & Harper, 2007; Strayhorn, 2013). However, the unique voice of the Black female student has been somewhat limited within the literature. It has largely been aligned as part of, or hidden within, *all* Black student experiences or other minority student experiences (Henry, Butler, & West, 2011).

Janet Helms' (1990) racial and ethnic identity development model provides parallels for women's identity development (Constantine & Watts, 2002; Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003). Rooted in elements of Cross' (1971) stages of Black racial identity development, this framework can be relevant to understanding the development of Black females' identity, particularly in the college environment and the internal growth that may impact their abilities to externally develop relationships and/or connections with others. Helms (1990) outlines the traditional racial/ethnic four stage development that provides parallels to women navigating their female identities: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, and internalization stages.

Pre-encounter stage is when racial/ethnic women adhere to the societal norms of their gender and race/ethnicity; there is unwavering acceptance of presentation and behavior. During this phase there is an, "acceptance and internalization of traditional and stereotypical notions of sex roles" (Constantine & Watt, 2002, p. 186). Sometimes the identity/ies can be viewed in a demeaning manner where the majority race or gender is viewed as superior, albeit intentionally or unintentionally (Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003). The pre-encounter phase is how Black females might define self prior to coming to college – either through adherence to cultural stereotypes, family values, etc. – where they believe their race/ethnicity and/or gender, consciously or subconsciously, is inferior to the majority population on a predominantly White campus. This can be displayed through their association with others and/or their level of confidence in academic and social engagement opportunities.

The encounter stage is when the racial/ethnic woman has begun to question societal norms and look for alternative meaning(s) or explanations within society

(Constantine & Watt, 2002; Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003). Upon arriving to campus, Black females might enter an encounter phase where their norms and values are challenged because they begin to interact with other Black students and females who are different from them. These interactions begin to challenge their understanding of what it means to be a Black female – should they be passive and demure in the classroom or vocal, seemingly aggressive to belong, or a mixture of the two. This can often be displayed via clothing, speech, presentation of self, organizational alignment, etc.

The encounter and immersion/emersion stages begin to blend together as racial/ethnic women progress through, and out of, college. The immersion/emersion stage is when the racial/ethnic woman re-defines self in a positive manner (Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003). These students might have entered college not fully knowing or embracing self or their cultural values, succumbing to stereotypes and/or societal norms. In this phase, Black females begin to reject traditional norms and can exhibit hostility towards those who embrace traditional roles and habits (Constantine & Watts, 2002). This can be demonstrated in either close alignment to Black cultural values displayed through their speech and/or clothing. An example could be a Black female comes into their college environment, viewing women as passive individuals, but in college is exposed to strong, confident women who reject the stereotypical view of women as passive individuals. Or they have become acclimated to their institution through institutionally designed programming (i.e., specific housing accommodation geared towards Blacks or a transition programs to ensure academic success) and there is recognition that Blacks do not need to operate in a singular fashion, but rather embrace the complexity of their culture. This can often be a conflicting emotion, particularly if the

opportunity to engage with others that look like them (i.e., Black females) is limited within the college campus. These emotions can enhance feelings of isolation and not feeling included even within their own community.

Lastly, internationalization stage is when racial/ethnic women are at peace with their internal definition of self and ignores external definitions (Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003). This stage is considered a higher-level development and I would argue this phase typically could take place post-college. There is still an opportunity within the college environment to demonstrate the complexity of the Black female identity. There should be space for different types of Black females to emerge – confident, demure, vocal, and/or combination of Black females alike.

It should be noted the progression through the aforementioned phases takes time and does not occur within the first year of college, but rather multiple years within and beyond college. It is important as we think about the development of Black females on college campuses, how these identity development issues play alongside students' ability, or inability, to develop their sense of belonging within the campus environment. It is likely that dependent on where a Black female might fall within Helms' (1990) racial/ethnic womanist identity framework and how salient this aspect of their identity is, could determine their approach to sense of belonging within the campus environment.

Helms (1990) provides one lens to explore how a Black female begins to make meaning of "self" within the context of a predominantly White institution, how "self" connects to others – peers, faculty, and/or staff, and my overall research will show how those connections lead to belonging and mattering within the college environment. This framework could be applied to Winkle-Wagner's (2009) work where she coined the

phrase, the "Unchosen Me". Winkle-Wagner defined it as an "imposition on one's

identity whereby one perceives a need to accept and portray particular ways of thinking,

acting, speaking or being in order to belong within the social realm" (p. 23). These

experiences are seemingly parallel to students exploring their pre-encounter and

encounter phases of development. Existing literature of Black students on predominantly

White campuses highlights Black students are often laden with cultural stereotypes

and/or assumptions regarding their identity and academic competence (Constantine &

Watt, 2002; Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Winkle-Wagner, 2015). Others often impose

these identities through unknown assumptions usually stemming from cultural

stereotypes (e.g., angry Black female). The disheartening piece is that Black students

will often succumb to these identities often as a personal choice of self-preservation (e.g.,

reserving opinion in the classroom to avoid the assumption of speaking on behalf of all

Black students) or coercion (e.g., convinced by peers or institutional culture to

assimilate). These assumptions and stereotypes create barriers that do not allow students

to feel accepted and/or valued within the campus community. Winkle-Wagner (2009)

posits, "the academic-social integration model, which maintains that students should be

socialized into institutions, could facilitate imposed identities or Unchosen Me

characteristics" (p. 46). It is when students can readily identify these Unchosen identities

and begin to create their own identities (i.e., immersion/emersion to internationalization)

that there is potential for successful navigation of their institution. However, this growth

and development is not without potential barriers – albeit emotional and/or physical – to

their success.

Many institutions introduce minority students to college through summer

programs or specialized housing opportunities (Jones, 2001; Moxley, Najor-Durack, & Dumbrigue, 2001; Torres & Massey, 2012). Institutions will often assume, just because a student identifies as Black, this automatically equates to having similar experiences in college (or pre-college) with other Black-identified student and/or will ensure familiarity amongst other Black-identified students (Torres & Massey, 2012). These programs seem helpful from a macro-level – providing opportunities of support for Black-identified students to ease their transition into a new environment through peer-to-peer connections and perhaps formulate sense of belonging. But on a micro-level, these misnomers unintentionally create a singular "Black experience;" students begin to feel pressure to conform to a particular identity and/or practice as their same-race/ethnicity peers, even when they do not identify but choose to for the sake of inclusion and acceptance.

Hidden within this argument are cultural associations with what is deemed "Black" and "White". Cultural associations play an important role in how students are labeled and navigate peer relationships among Blacks and the overall campus community. These labels center on Black students' ability, and ease, to engage with White students, the frequency of those engagements, as well as perceptions of experiences based on Black students' clothing choices, music selections, and/or cultural behaviors. These perceptions of "Black-ness" by Blacks can create divisions within their already small community; creating labels of "high class" and "low class" (Woldoff, Wiggins, & Washington, 2011).

Common social norms at PWIs traditionally correspond to characteristics of "Whiteness"; specifically when one thinks about language, dress, behavior, etc., it is rooted in the majority culture's (i.e., White's) understanding and adherence. Within these

unspoken expectations, there are often rewards for conformity (e.g., acceptance in peer group, promotion to student leadership roles, etc.) and sanctions for being in opposition or viewed as rebellious (e.g., lack of interaction with other students, encouragement or coercion to change, lowered grades, etc.) (Winkle-Wagner, 2009).

Diversity within the Black community does exist and directly impacts students' ability to acclimate socially and academically in the college environment (Torres & Massey, 2012). When understanding the Black female experience, it is about understanding the diversity within the Black community – both as a Black student and as a Black *female* student. When institutions treat Black students, in this singular/static vein, it ignores the nuanced ways Black females have found "success" in their college experience and their desire to develop their own identity (Winkle-Wagner, 2015). Space is needed where Black females can question not only societal norms, but also look for, and accept, alternative means of being a Black female and owning that alternative meaning as they navigate the university.

<div align="center">**Summary**</div>

This research study aims to address the deficiencies in the literature to better understand how Black females are navigating predominantly White institutional environments. Existing research has demonstrated methods for student success through engagement with their campus (i.e., academic and social integration), but these strategies are not inclusive of minority populations. While there is a dearth of existing literature regarding the experiences of Black students on college campuses, this study will focus specifically on Black females' and their ability to create belonging at a predominantly White institution. There is a lack of research tailored to the Black female experience,

specifically understanding in what ways do they connect to their institution and what, if any, connections leads to an integration into the academic and social elements of the university environment. Are these connections solely based in relationships, albeit faculty and/or peers, and what type of support do these relationships provide?

Lastly, I seek to explore the connections between Black females' identity development and relationship formation that enables feelings of belonging, acceptance, and value within the campus community. These findings will inform future practice as a student affairs practitioner and how professionals cultivate a campus environment of inclusion and support.

CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY

In an effort to understand Black females' sense of belonging at predominantly White institutions, it is imperative to hear their stories; their lived experiences. Helms' (1990) provides a foundational understanding of Black females' identity development within the college/university environment. This study desires to lay the lived experiences of Black females' at a predominantly White institution over the foundational knowledge and explore how these experiences contribute to their overall sense of belonging. The following research questions will be used to guide this study:

1. In what ways do Black female students' identity awareness and exploration impact their sense of belonging at a predominantly White institution?

2. In what ways do Black female college students attending a predominantly White institution come to feel integrated into, or isolated from, the academic and social elements of the university environment?

3. What types of relationships are most critical for supporting Black female college students' sense of belonging at a predominantly White institution and in what ways do those relationships provide support?

Phenomenology

A phenomenological approach has been chosen as a way to illustrate Black females' lived experiences and unpack the essence of the phenomena, sense of belonging at a PWI. This study is unique in that unlike basic qualitative research, phenomenological research is a nuanced qualitative approach that focuses on a specific phenomenon (i.e., sense of belonging for Black females at a predominantly White institution) using smaller sample sizes versus looking at overarching experiences (e.g., sense of belonging for

college students or Black college female experiences) that are easier to generalize with larger sample sizes.

> Phenomenology, step by step, attempts to eliminate everything that represents a prejudgment, setting aside presuppositions, and reaching a transcendental state of freshness and openness, a readiness to see in an unfettered way, not threatened by the customs, beliefs, and prejudices of normal science, by the habits of the natural world or by knowledge based on unreflected everyday experience (Moustakas, 1994, p.41).

Grounded in the works of German philosopher, Edmund Husserl, phenomenological research is both a philosophical framework and a methodology. I will use a descriptive approach, seeking to understanding, and an interpretive approach, discovering meaning (Perry, 2013). It is my desire as a researcher, "… to grasp and elucidate the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of a phenomenon for a person or group of people" (Patton, 2002, p. 482). It is about understanding what is the phenomena (i.e., what does sense of belonging at a PWI look like for Black females) and what meaning can be associated with it (i.e., what meaning or value do Black females associate with sense of belonging). When we use the word "phenomenon", it is the collection of experiences, intentions, and everyday events at face value; not trying to draw a conclusion, but rather identify bits and pieces of what makes it an experience (Becker, 1992).

The process of collecting these students' lived experiences is not to *explain* the phenomena, but rather illustrate the phenomena as the selected Black female participants experience it. Intentionality is a foundational principle of phenomenological work and is found within the first component of this methodology. Key components of phenomenological research are epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation (or description), and synthesis (Giorgi, 1997; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002;

Van Manen, 1990).

It is the calculated use of the epoche, a reflective, analytical process that allows the researcher to assess their thoughts and opinions. Moustakas (1994) defined epoche as, "… a process of setting aside predilections, prejudices, predispositions, and allowing things, events, and people to enter anew into consciousness, and to look and see them again, as if for the first time" (p. 85). The researcher does not ignore their thoughts, but rather acknowledges them in order to be fully present within the phenomenon being studied (Giorgi, 1997; Moustakas, 1994). This study presents a unique challenge. The literature provides a conceptual description of sense of belonging from a macro-perspective. However, there is a void within the literature of how this connects specifically to Black females and Black females attending PWIs. It will be my role as the researcher, to acknowledge existing literature, but provide space and opportunities for participants to describe their experiences at a PWI and how they make meaning of it. Van Manen (1990) found, "If we simply try to forget or ignore what we already 'know,' we may find that the presuppositions persistently creep back into our reflections" (p. 47). Existing literature informed the questions used in this study. Additionally, as points of connections arose, I intentionally wrote my experiences down, as a means of acknowledgement, but also set them aside to allow for the participants'/co-researchers' experiences to come forward.

The second component is phenomenological reduction. It is about describing the phenomena as it unfolds in such a way that it retains its own meanings and intentionality, and provides a visual description reflective of that precise experience of the participant. Without revealing key identifying language and/or location, I attempted to use as much

textural or visual language in such a way to ensure the reader could understand the phenomena from the perspective of the participant.

Often the researcher can/will engage the participant with their own perceptions to seek clarity and to more fully understand the phenomena. Within phenomenology, there is a unique relationship between the researcher and their participants. By engaging the participants as co-researchers, the data is in its purest form by acknowledging my own preconceived biases with the participants to more fully understand the phenomena. During this process, the data was reviewed multiple times to understand it in its entirety, but also to determine patterns or clusters of themes that described the essence, or core, of the experience. It is during this process that the third stage of imaginative variation emerged.

Moustakas (1994) defined imaginative variation as the ability to create, "vivid and accurate renderings of the experience, rather than measurements, ratings, or scores" (p. 105). It is about using varying perspectives to create meaning of the experience being captured. Imaginative variation uses textual and structural descriptions (i.e., the imagination) to confront the phenomenon from differing perspectives (Moustakas, 1994). Textual descriptions are aspects of the experience that can provide insight and pieces, but not necessarily capture the essence of the experience; it can be easily equated to the "what" of the experience (i.e., *what* is being experienced through the eyes of the participant). While conversely, a structural description contains the "bones" of the experience and those that experienced the phenomena, or the "how" of the experience (i.e., *how* is it being experienced through the eyes of the participant) (Patton, 2002).

The final stage is synthesis or integration of descriptions into a unified

understanding of the experience, the essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher synthesizes the data, specifically the textual and structural language, to identify the key essence(s) of the experience. Through the use of themes collected from participants, the researcher answers the questions of, "what is the essence" and "what is it like" and "how" do we know it. During this phase the researcher is not drawing any conclusions on the interactions, but rather, allowing the experiences of the participants to connect and be pieced together as is, unpacking the deeper meanings of the phenomena for the participants. It should be noted this research is using an unconventional approach to phenomenology. I will be introducing and a framework, sense of belonging, on the data.

Study Site and Participants

The institution (Trent University) where participants were identified enrolled 29,416 undergraduate students in fall 2016; 53% identified as female and 12.5% identified as African American; with White-identified (non-Hispanic) students leading at 55.5% of the undergraduate enrollment (Institutional Research & Assessment, 2017). Data was collected from nine Black-identified undergraduate female college students, primarily through semi-structured interviews. A purposive selection of study participants was done to ensure different class standings (i.e., second-year – senior year class standing) at one urban institution located in the North East. The purpose for selection across class standings was to simulate possible longitudinal characteristics of racial/ethnic womanist identity development and explore the intersection and possible points of connection in participants' sense of belonging.

Study participants were identified through the use of purposeful sampling. As a

current student affairs administrator at the institution where participants were identified, I used my professional contacts to serve as a conduit to Black females across campus (e.g., student leaders, student workers, classmates, etc.). I reached out to colleagues detailing the type of participants I was seeking (i.e., Black-identified undergraduate females) and the purpose of the research study. I asked them to have any interested participants email me directly if they were interested in participating. This method resulted in a larger sample size than initial anticipated and a range of participants who were highly involved in engagement opportunities, variety of majors (e.g., science, social science, and business) and strong to limited and/or moderate participation and campus engagement.

Positionality

As a Black female administrator within the office of on-campus within the institution being studied, I was cautious about my positionality, specifically the level of access and assumed familiarity participants could have with me as opposed to a non-Black researcher. Precautions were taken to not assume connections and/or familiarity with participants so that it did not impede the ability to hear participants' experiences or feel compelled to act or intervene on their behalf if incidents of concern should arise. The participants provided insight to experiences on-campus that I was oblivious to and unaware even existed. While there was a level of comfort for many participants, the assumed sharing of identities was a limiting factor for some participants. It provided skepticism and/or issue of trust as they cautiously shared their experiences.

As the researcher, it is important to disclose that I identify as a Black female who attended PWIs for both my undergraduate and graduate education. As I reflect on my experiences as a college student in these environments, I am often challenged by how I

progressed through these institutions and what, if any, experiences were impactful. But it is these conflicting moments that have drawn me to the work of wanting to better understand the experiences of Black females at a predominantly White institution. What guides their (current and future) connections to the institution and what, if any, connections does that have to their Black female identity development? The experiences these participants chose to share with me as a researcher are valued and will inform my future work as a student affairs practitioner, but also can provide implications of student needs and ways administrators might create more impactful experiences to enhance students' sense of belonging to their institution.

Data Collection

Participants were invited to participate in two 45-minute face-to-face interviews to gather information regarding their unique campus involvement and connection. During the initial interview, basic demographic and involvement information were collected (via paper) and information related to pre-college experiences and campus involvement opportunities of the participant (via verbal response). The second interview built upon this information and delved deeper into participants' identified support network(s), how these networks were established, and their ability to navigate the campus environment, both inside and outside the classroom.

In addition to interview data collection methods, participants were asked to participate in a secondary data collection method, journaling. At the conclusion of the first interview, participants were given a journal to reflect on their experiences outside the interview setting, specifically around identification of support systems and intrinsic/extrinsic motivation. A journal and specific prompts were provided to

participants to complete prior to participation in the second interview. Please see Appendix B for complete interview protocol.

Both face-to-face interviews were more dialogic in nature and enable participants to speak of their full experience. Riessman (2008) stated that research interviewing should be viewed as a conversation, where conversational norms would apply, "… turn-taking, relevance, and entrance and exit talk (where a speaker transitions into, and returns from, the past time story world)" (p. 24). The approach was embraced. Interview questions were semi-structured to allow the questions and structure to be shifted and adjusted based on participants' responses, recommendations, and/or for enhanced accuracy of the phenomenon being studied.

Trustworthiness and Verification

Interviews were held in a private conference room to ensure participants could speak freely about their experiences without interference from others and so that it could be captured via audio with minimal disruption and/or background obstruction. All interviews were audio recorded, with participants' consent, and transcribed using online transcription software, Rev.com. The transcriptions were reflective of the participant and researcher (i.e., co-constructed) as well as reflective of just the participant in a series of thematic stanzas where the researcher's voice is removed (Riessman, 2008). This balanced approached was used because of the value in the researcher's voice being present. It provided context to questions being asked and gave verbal cues to how and/or why the participant responded in a certain way. In using both approaches, caution was heeded to ensure the voice of the researcher did not over-power the voice of the participant in subsequent interviews.

Transcriptions were shared with participants typically 36-48 hours post-interview to ensure the accuracy of their experiences were captured and recorded. Participants had had the opportunity to review and/or modify the transcriptions as they saw fit. Once received back from the participant, transcriptions were then reviewed in their entirety with the recording to ensure recording and participant edits were understood.

Typically a pilot study would have been recommended to test the validity of questions for a data collection process. For the purposes of this study, it was more important that space and opportunity were provided to the participant to share their full experiences and less about how accurate or valid the list of questions were. Instead, Creswell's (1998) "verification" over validity was employed. As part of the data collection and review process, Creswell's components such as, clarification of research biases, triangulation, thick, rich descriptions, and member checks were included to ensure the data collected had been verified and was deemed trustworthy.

Data Analysis

Atlas-ti qualitative data analysis software was used to assist in analyzing each transcript. The following questions were used during the analysis phase, "what stands out about the phenomenon? What is the most important aspect; what is next in importance? How do these different themes fit together" (Becker, 1992, p. 43)? These questions were used as a guide to determine not only the types of questions being asked during the interview phase and data collection process, but also used as a critical lens to view, review, and categorize the data to reveal the phenomena taking place. Additionally, using Moustakas' (1994) analytical process (epoche) to ensure my personal experiences did not cloud the experiences presented in the data. After each review of a

transcript, a memo was created to capture initial thoughts and reactions to the data. This

process enabled me to bracket assumptions and initial reactions to the data. This granted

me the opportunity to review the data a second time without assumptions and/or

prejudices interfering. Please see Appendix C for a memo example.

The use of journaling as a data collection method was analyzed similarly. Each

interview and journal was reviewed individually for themes and subsequent memos for

each participant was completed. Themes were collected by participant experiences and

summarized using participants' own words, both via transcripts and through the

journaling artifacts. This step was critical to ensure the actual phenomenon was being

captured. From this analysis a codebook was developed that initially identified over 120

themes and/or codes. Please see Appendix D for the complete list. After the full listing

of codes were developed, they were reviewed for redundancies and subsequently grouped

into four categories. Please see Appendix E for category group of codes. These four

categories were subsequently paired down into the final four themes[1].

Becker (1992) provided several different ways a researcher can present their

findings: individual case synopses, using a singular experience that evokes strong

imagery; illustrative narrative, using theme and/or specific examples from transcripts; or

general condensation, condensing information that is descriptive, but with less emotion.

A combination of approaches is being used to present the findings. There are

opportunities for specific participant experiences to emerge, but each participant's

perspective is provided in a thick description that brings life and reality to the

phenomenon being unpacked. Aligning with the work of Moustakas, (1994) thick

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[1] It should be noted codes around family were not included in the final draft of themes due to lack of
evidence to substantiate its impact on participants' sense of belonging.

descriptions, or textural language, enables the reader to visualize the experience and

understand the phenomena (i.e., sense of belonging) to be understood.

CHAPTER 4 –FINDINGS

Student Profiles

Nine Black undergraduate females reached out and were selected to participate in this research study. Each participant was given a rating of sense of belonging based on their experiences with understanding of self, their engagement with peers, and their overall navigation of the institution. Participants assigned a "High" status of sense of belonging possessed a stronger sense of self, as outlined by Helms' (1990) racial/ethnic and gender identity framework (i.e., further progressed in their development), possessed stronger relationships with their peers, and were able to successfully understand and navigate both the classroom and social environments. Conversely, participants assigned a "Low" or "Medium" status were challenged to navigate in one or more of the areas (sense of self, relationship with their peers, and/or understanding and navigating both the classroom and social environments). Table 4.1 provides demographic information of each participant with brief descriptions provided below.

Table 4.1 Participant Demographic Information

Participant	Class Standing	Major	Sense of Belonging
Ashley	Sophomore	Psychology	High
Chinonso	Junior	Public Health	High
Debbie	Sophomore	Finance	Low
Dina	Sophomore	Civil Engineering	Medium
Gee	Sophomore	Political Science	Low
Kesi	Junior	Strategic Communication	Low

Table 4.1 Participant Demographic Information (continued)

Maya	Junior	Public Health	Medium
Naria	Senior	Therapeutic Recreation	Medium
Young Queen	Junior	Management of Information Systems	Medium

Ashley

Ashley, first-generation college student, was the caretaker in her single-parent family before coming to college. Starting out a pre-med major, she strives to be more than just the "average college student". Highly involved in several student organizations, she often finds herself having to continually define and refine, what kind of Black person she wants to be while answering the question, am I Black enough. Ashley is keenly aware of points of privilege in her peers and points of deficits as a Black person and how it impacts her interactions with peers and faculty/staff members.   Ashley's college journey is an opportunity to make her family proud, but also an opportunity to re-write societal stereotypes of Black people.

Chinonso

Chinonso, born and raised in Nigeria, is the oldest of 4 children and the lone girl. Deeply influenced by her family and culture, education has always been a priority in Chinonso's family. While a self-proclaimed "social butterfly", many of Chinonso's peer connections still remain surface level. She is able to navigate different social cliques, but never establishes firm roots in any one setting. She is able to speak candidly about the institution, specifically its faculty and administrative staff, but counters this challenging

narrative with seeing a greater purpose for her time in college. She carries the weight of not wanting to let her family down, wanting to uphold the Black/Nigerian community values, and being better for the next generation.

Debbie

Debbie, born and raised in Nigeria, attended primary and secondary boarding schools and takes a counter-culture view to her "Blackness"; it is a privilege. She does not fully understand why African-Americans (i.e., Blacks) view themselves as "less than" others, Debbie sees it an honor to be the lone Black student within a classroom or class setting.

There is a decisiveness that exudes from Debbie as she describes interactions with her Black peers and/or interactions with faculty. She is selective in her co-curricular opportunities. There is intentionality in how she develops her network and connections, both while in college advantages (e.g., expand her own understanding of difference and increase confidence in future interactions), but also post-college advantages (e.g., job prospect opportunities). Debbie lives by the motto, *You've got to let the school pass through you and not just you passing through the school* shared by a high school administrator.

Dina

Dina, a civil engineering major, is very confident and matter-of-fact. She is acutely aware of the racial disparity as a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) major and candidly shares experiences of discrimination and exclusion in the classroom. She easily counts the number of Black students in her classes on one hand and shares having to continually assert her knowledge of the subject matter. In spite of

this, she is able to find internal gratification and motivation and does not let others deter her from her goals. Dina understands that she will have to work harder than many others because she is female and Black. This internal motivation, however, potentially serves as a barrier to being vulnerable and engaging with others.

Gee

Gee, a reserved personality born and raised to a working class family in the South Bronx. Growing up, the messaging was consistent; attend college because it is a means to an end. You will graduate with a guaranteed good job and good money. However, the college classroom environment is new for Gee. It is a place where students are strong-minded and vocal on their opinions of women, jobs, and the political process. In Gee's household, it was understood you are seen not heard; there are certain things that are not discussed in public. While Gee is continually challenged to find her voice, she admits there is a fear of sounding dumb and uneducated to her peers. Combine this self-consciousness with constantly being faced with micro-aggressions and combating stereotypical Black characteristics placed upon her just for being Black and/or from New York. Gee is struggling to find her connection to Trent University.

Kesi

Kesi has been on a journey to discover her identity. Since arriving to college, Kesi has found herself aligning with other Blacks and becoming increasingly more invested in the Black feminist movement. Kesi is beginning to experience a dissension in values as a member of both a feminist organization and a faith-based organization. There are areas she wants to be more vocal, but hesitant due to possible repercussions of peers in her faith-based organization.

There is a small group/circle of friends that Kesi trusts. She surrounds herself with people who think like her and understand her views as basic rights everyone should subscribe to and be afforded. Kesi is not totally committed to Trent University yet. She feels there are some systemic issues around the institution and its relationship with the community. Additionally, there is a concern with the lack of social consciousness many Trent University students possess.

Maya

Maya, born to two Jamaican immigrant parents, had limited knowledge about the college selection and entrance process. Maya, a recipient of a university scholarship, was provided the freedom to not have to engage in an extensive college selection process. Additionally, Maya participated in the university's summer bridge program to further assist in the college acclimation process. Maya's polished approach provides a unique, optimistic viewpoint of her experiences both inside and outside the classroom. Maya's experience with the social environment is overwhelming positive with refined observations of the social hierarchy the place Black Greeks are amongst the elites. However, Maya's classroom experience has been challenging and competitive, even at times overwhelming. She finds herself having find and develop her voice more to confront micro-aggressions and feel confident to give voice to her views of racial inequality.

Naria

Naria, a transfer student, is a caretaker to her two younger siblings back home, but also to the family she has created here at Trent University. Naria constantly thinks about how she role models positive behavior for the Black community. Naria desires to present

an upbeat Black woman image on a PWI campus; but acknowledges it is exhausting. Naria wants to show her imperfections, but worries about the impact for her and/or future Blacks that come behind her.

Naria shares clear examples of being ostracized in classes and feeling pressure to "prove herself" to faculty, experiences of faculty ridiculing and blatantly ignoring Naria when attempting to engage. But despite these setbacks, Naria's journey is less about her, more about those who paved the way for her to be here and those that will subsequently follow in her footsteps.

Young Queen

Young Queen's college journey is about being a role model for other Blacks on-campus, but also remembering her family who are sacrificing to ensure she can be here. But her journey has not been without its challenges. She is able to count on her hands the number of Blacks in her classes and her interactions with faculty have been equally challenging. Young Queen has attempted the same math course twice, with two different instructors, but coming to the same result each time – failed attempts. Young Queen's assessment of these failures, not for her lack of trying, but rather not feeling supported by her faculty when asking questions or sensing a lack of ability to meet students where they are through varied teaching methods.

Introduction of Themes

Sense of belonging is an emerging conceptual framework where individuals self-identify with a group or community (Strayhorn, 2012). It is an intentional process through interactions with others (i.e., peers, faculty, etc.) that creates an experience of

inclusion, or conversely, exclusion and not mattering (Hoffman et al., 2002; Morrow and Ackermann, 2012). This notion of belonging was explored for nine Black undergraduate females attending a predominantly White institution. What unfolds is sense of belonging being explored and found through participants' own identity of self (Who Am I?), the impact and participation in university sponsored programming (Institutional Programs), their understanding and engagement with the social culture (Social Rules of Engagement), and their understanding and engagement with the academic culture (Classroom Rules of Engagement).

Janet Helms' (1990) racial and ethnic identity development model provides parallels for women's identity development (Constantine & Watts, 2002; Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003) and is relevant to understanding the development of Black females' identity and the internal growth that can impact abilities (or inabilities) to develop relationships and/or connections with peers. Helms' (1990) outlines four stages of development that encompasses both their racial/ethnic and gender identities: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, and internalization stages. These four stages help inform how the participants are "entering" the college environment.

The first stage, the pre-encounter stage, is when racial/ethnic women adhere to the social or societal norms of their gender and race/ethnicity; there is unwavering acceptance of presentation of self and behavior (Constantine & Watts, 2002; Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003). For many participants, this encapsulated their transition to, and many parts of, their first year of college. For participants, college was the opportunity to affirm and/or create a new narrative of what it meant to be Black and/or a Black female.

I went to an all girls' high school, so I identified as a lesbian for I would say for about three years. I hung out with a lot of people who also identified as lesbians. I always stuck my tongue out. I would just do things like I guess, I don't want to generalize lesbians in general, but I would do things that I saw other people do who identified as lesbians. (Kesi, interview, September 26, 2016)

… going into my political science courses, that threw me off even more, because now you start to hear kids with their very strong-minded views on things like women, jobs, and their love, or their campaigning for Trump and things like that... I'm not used to hearing people being so open about ... I feel like in high school and back home, people are not very ... My father always teaches me this, "There are just certain things you don't speak about in public." You listen in and whatever, but even other people wouldn't speak about those things. Then, coming here, and hearing people so strong about it, and so opinionated on certain issues, I'm just like, "Mmm," but I was never really taught to speak out and be all over the place, and be so passionate ... (Gee, interview, September 12, 2016)

As participants navigated social and cultural norms, appearances, and places of belonging, it was challenging both their racial/ethnic and gender upbringings. Their first year of college created opportunities to meet new and different people, make connections, or for some, like Chinonso, begin questioning these connections.

Freshman year I feel like because I couldn't find anyone or I didn't connect with anyone on that level, looking back, I found myself trying so hard to fit in or belong to certain groups of friends. I know freshman year everyone was really clique-y, and they had their own groups of friends. If you saw one, you always saw the other. I never fit into a specific group of friends. I was always that person that was friends with maybe one or two people in the group, and then I became cool with everyone else. I feel like that was freshman year that I wanted to be in a group so bad. It was really detrimental, because then it was like I was trying to change myself to fit in or do things that everyone else was doing because that's what was cool or I thought what would make me be accepted in their group. (Chinonso, interview, November 17, 2016)

As participants navigated their first semesters, they soon began to challenge social norms. Participants explored how women "should" act versus how they "could" act – learning how to use their voice, differentiating for themselves what was masculine and feminine presentation in comparison to their home experiences.

> I feel like in today's society there's a certain look that a woman is supposed to have, and I used to feel insecure about it, but now I don't really care too much. I know I don't have that look that media-type, produced, male form of how a female is supposed to look like. I don't think I have that look. However, I do have the inner qualities of a female. I do get emotional. I'm sensitive, and all that stuff. I'm caring, nurturing, and stuff like that. I feel like also the way I dress. I wouldn't say I cross dress or nothing because I feel I have a more tomboyish kind of dressing style, but that's just my style. I could dress more masculine, and someone would just say, "Oh, she has to be gay because she dresses this way." Whereas for me, I'm straight as a B, but I like to mix feminine and masculine clothes together. That's just so fashionable to me. Some days I dressy real bummy, and other days I dress real lit. (Chinonso, interview, September 29, 2016)

Chinonso was burgeoning into the encounter stage. The second stage, the encounter stage, is described as when the racial/ethnic woman has begun to question societal norms and look for alternative meaning(s) or explanations within society (Constantine & Watt, 2002; Torres, Howard-Hamilton & Cooper, 2003). Growth in this stage of development was most evident in the participants. This discovery of coming to college and identifying with others that looked like them and thought both like and unlike them, was a new experience. Space was being created to examine self in new and unique ways. One participant, Ashley, experienced an awakening of self after attending renowned writer Ta-Nehisi Coates' talk on-campus. She began thinking about her identity in a completely different way.

> There is also being Black, because being Black impacts everything that you do, good or bad, which is crazy. It's so crazy because I went to the Ta-Nehisi Coates. I don't even know if it was a speech because it felt so personable, like he was just sitting there talking to everybody, like we are all in a room. The way he was like, "Race is like a social construct. It just didn't exist. It just came up in a whole bunch of courtified laws". I'm just like college is a crazy thing man because now that means a lot more to me than it would have meant in high school. He said things like wow me being Black was made up a whole bunch of people however many years ago and it does all that it does to me now is completely mind-blowing. They just made up this nifty idea of oh, we'll call them Black and we'll be White and we'll be better than them. As such, it affects me now and that in itself is just one huge impact being Black. (Ashley, interview, October 31, 2016).

While Ashley was questioning what it meant to be Black, others began questioning self, based on presentation of others, and making connections based on those who helped reconcile their understanding and desire of self.

> First of all, when I first came to [Trent], my hair was still relaxed ... When was it, I think it was in February or March 2015 I decided to cut all my hair off and go natural. That's something that I have to talk with my friends about, different ways to do my hair and different styles and hair moisturizers and things like that. (Kesi, interview, September 26, 2016)

> These new experiences, new people, and even new academic knowledge informed

new ways of thinking about self, Black culture, but also what was possible (or impossible) within the Black community.

> I hadn't realized I guess how many systems are in place to oppress Black people and Black women in particular. I think that it's made me cling to my Black friends more or especially my friends who are Black women more. Yeah, it's really made me feel like I belong more with my Black female friends. (Kesi, interview, September 26, 2016)

Through these new experiences, for some participants it was a reconciling of past experiences (positive or negative) that informed how comfortable or uncomfortable they were to engage with others.

> Personally, I'm gonna be honest, sometimes I don't feel comfortable with Black people. Like, I identify but there are some Black people whose personalities don't mesh. When I was younger there were certain type of Black girls that kind of bullied me. Not really, but obviously it left whatever it left behind, so I steer clear of. I was reminded of those type of Black girls in my orientation group, so I stayed away from them, and everybody else was White. (Ashley, interview, September 20, 2016)

There was a deliberate action to acknowledge these experiences, but also a challenge to push through and not allow her past experiences define the potential for new relationships.

> There's the ones that obviously feel entitled, and you can get that from just body language, mannerisms, the way they talk. Then ones that align with and understand

what it is to be, like, they don't claim to know what it is, but they understand what it is to be Black in America at this time. You get that from a lot of, I want to say like, not a lot of faculty but you'll find mostly faculty in that sense. You get that from White people who also identify as something else. Like, they're White and they're also gay, or they're White and also believe really strongly in this or that, or something that deviates from the norm. Then you just keep that in mind, put it all in this quick journal that you just scan through during the day in your head. You're just like, this is how I'm going to get through today when it falls into these situations, if that makes sense. (Ashley, interview, September 20, 2016)

For Ashley, there was an acknowledgment of the difference within the Black community, but also the ability to take mental notes of who she was interested in engaging with those she would prefer to leave alone.

The third stage, the immersion/emersion, is when the racial/ethnic woman re-defines self in a positive manner, with the last stage being internationalization stage when racial/ethnic women are at peace with their internal definition of self and ignore external definitions (Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003). Existing literature acknowledges these stages are higher-level development that is often experienced post-college for traditional aged students. This held true for the majority of participants within this study. While one participant, Naria, a senior, was easing into a re-definition of self and her desire to contribute more positive images of Black females, there were limited actions and/or articulated experiences to substantiate a firm stance and attainment of the immersion/emersion stage.

Using Helms' (1990) theoretical framework of racial/ethnic and gender identity development as a backdrop to the participants' experiences; we examine how they create belonging within a predominantly White institution. Sense of belonging was found as participants made meaning of self, their level of participation in institutional programs and their ability to navigate the rules of engagement, both within the social and classroom

environments.

Theme One: Who Am I?

Understanding their development as framed by Helms' (1990) helped articulate

how participants unpacked an emerging finding of "Who Am I" and "Am I Black

Enough"?

> There's also that worry of not being Black enough. I mean, I come from a pretty
> diverse community, but even there sometimes you're not Black enough and
> sometimes you're too Black, even, among the Black people. (Ashley, interview,
> September 20, 2016)

As students transitioned between pre-encounter and encounter stages, there was

this tension within self – do I "divorce" all that I have known and learned growing up or

begin to adopt this new perspective of what it means to be Black and a Black female on

this campus. As participants explored who they were post-high school, there seemed to

be a struggle to respond to "Who Am I". There was tension between confidence in self

and not succumbing to the pressure of being "Black enough".

> If I'm ever in a place where I have to question everything that comes out of my
> mouth, if it's being received okay, or if the other person I'm talking to is not
> responding the way that I think, then it's like, which switch do I have to flip.
> Sometimes, it's like you do have to flip a switch. Okay, do I have to ... not dumb
> down what I'm saying, but do I have to act a little bit different? That happens I
> guess with White people and Black people. (Ashley, interview, September 20,
> 2016)

Not everyone was open to growth and change; there was still a firm foundation based on

pre-college experiences. For one participant, you could tell there was a bit of resistance

to allowing herself to be open to change. She was able to recognize this behavior in

others, but attributed a negative connotation to the change in their behavior.

> I think that my identity has kept me who I am. It's sad to say, but I see a lot of,
> especially last year as a freshman, I saw a lot of people coming in, and I met you
> during orientation and you were one way, but now I see you hanging out with this

> group of people and you're totally completely a different way. I think a part of the reason why, I don't think I'm an introvert, but I'm so to myself is because I don't want to change myself for anyone. Even in sorority life and specifically Black sorority life, you'll find that people conform themselves to join a certain sorority. I didn't want to change myself for that. I wanted something that fit me where I can fall in and feel comfortable, you know what I mean. (Gee, interview, October 24, 2016)

It is possible that Gee was struggling with understanding self, and who that was in this new environment, post-high school. But it is also possible that she was confident and accepting of who she was and was not easily influenced by the college environment. This internal conflict of not wanting to change self made her question what she was seeing within the Black community at Trent University – cultural norms, engagement strategies, etc. – was this real or a superficial means of connection?

While others, such as Chinonso, attempted to meet different people, but was unsuccessful in making connections and still feeling like they did not fit in. But unlike other participants, Chinonso after time articulated *comfort* within her discomfort and ambiguous space.

> I still don't fit in. I don't have a group of friends or people, but I would still say me being comfortable with that makes me sort of fit in. It makes me feel more comfortable being myself, where I don't have the pressure of I want to belong to this group, or I have to act a certain way because I'm part of this group. I feel like my sense of belonging is by not belonging. That's really it. (Chinonso, interview, September 29, 2016)

This is a different approach that many might disagree and postulate it is just an avoidance tactic. Perhaps it is or perhaps she has found her belonging by creating new norms for what works for her; not allowing societal norms dictate belonging. The other aspect of understanding self in this, "Who Am I" concept that emerged is acknowledging the pressure to "perform". Often this "performance" came with societal expectations of what was deemed acceptable and appropriate.

It's like I know as a Black female, I have to present myself as polite. Obviously I have to present myself as somebody who has a command of the English language because you are expected to not be able to speak proper English, which is really dumb to me because how would I have gotten all the way to college, but I just don't get it sometimes. (Ashley, interview, October 31, 2016).

I think that depending on what group you're in, if you're Black and you're educated, then you have to know just everything that comes out of your mouth and you have to dress a certain way and you have to act a certain way. You know what I mean? If you're dressing a certain way, it has to be on point. You can't have an off day. (Gee, interview, October 24, 2016)

These expectations and pressure to adhere to these unwritten expectations align with Helms' (1990) pre-encounter stage of racial/ethnic and gender identity development. There is acceptance with conforming to societal standards versus always having to "re-write" and/or explain the behavior(s). Additionally, there was increased pressure felt to represent the entire Black community – whether you were a student, a food service worker, or faculty member.

With my own race, I try so hard. I've always felt like I have to prove myself. Even just, like, this pisses me off, but like just going to Cosi [food eatery on-campus] to get some food. There's a Black person behind the counter. Why are you frowning and act like you hate your life and your job? It doesn't contribute and makes us look bad, kind of. That's kind of how I look at it. I've worked in so many different jobs and regardless of how I'm feeling, I put a smile on my face. (Naria, interview, September 27, 2016)

I took a law-based class. It was African Americans and the Law. I was really excited for that class because not only was it African Americans but it was also law and that interests me too. That was the first time I'd had a Black professor and she was female. I was like, okay cool. This is awesome. On the first day she was like, "Do you guys realize that you segregate yourselves?" We were like, what? She was like, "We have all the White people here and we have all the Black people here. You guys just came in and sat down and chose seats this way. You weren't even thinking about it." I was like; okay I think I'm going to like this class. (Ashley, interview, September 20, 2016)

While this worker was not a student, there was still an expectation that she represent a certain image. While for the faculty interaction, there was the ability for

Ashley to see herself represented in the faculty member, but also have someone give voice to her own observations and challenge them. There was this constant feeling of being in a fish bowl. For some participants, it meant even hiding or glossing over aspects of their life and family, to present a certain image and/or avoid feeding into stereotypes.

> I can be myself, but only myself to an extent because White people have preconceived notions… I feel like I can't tell you everything about me. Like the fact that my parents are divorced, my mom's a single mom and I have a ... well, I call him my step-dad, but my mom's boyfriend. If they knew all those things about me, it's confirming what they think about most Black people. (Ashley, interview, September 20, 2016)

> I was also taught at a very young age that I will have to work so much harder than a lot of other people because I was female and because I was Black, but that didn't make me look at White people a certain way. I feel like that experience did make me look at them a little certain way because it was just like, we're all in these classes together and obviously I've proven myself to be here or I wouldn't be in this class, but for some reason you still don't want to be bothered with me, so I don't know. (Dina, interview, September 28, 2016)

Participants were cautious to promote positive Black images versus succumbing to stereotypical images society portrays. This "perfect" presentation of self can be exhausting. W.E.B. Du Bois discussed this as "double-consciousness" (Du Bois & Provenzo, 2005). It is the ability (or expectation) to navigate different cultural worlds – the larger majority culture (often deemed White culture) and their own nuanced Black culture. Each respective culture hosting its own set of rituals, norms, and expectations. Participants shared two types of "double" worlds, the school and home-self and the inside and outside of classroom-self. There is this push/pull of being at school and wanting/needing to remain focused on their education, but also feeling pulled (personally or by their family) home to serve as caretakers for them.

> I felt guilty. I felt really guilty; especially because my little brother. My little sister is six years younger than me, but she acts old. She's 18 now, but I think at that time she was 15, 16 or whatever. It was mostly like, you're going to be fine.

Then it's like, she's my little sister, she's a lot more naïve than I am, so it was kind of scary in that aspect. Mom is at work all these times, all these hours. Someone's stepping in to get them to school and take them home. I was calling her every day, like did you feed Dylan? What is he eating? Is he doing his homework? Did you help him with his homework? It was a hard ... that was probably one of the hardest things. (Naria, interview, September 27, 2016)

I want to be successful for [my parents]. I know how hard they have worked to not only be here but to be where they are. My parents really have the best interest of my brothers and I at heart. They work so many hours at work to provide for us the things they did not have. I love them so much and appreciate them. I struggle with not letting them down, or being a disappointment. Because they left their families in Nigeria to come here seeking greener pastures. (Chinonso, personal diary, November 17, 2016)

Participants also felt push/pull in their inside and outside classroom environments.

I guess you could say that almost every day is sometimes a culture shock. It's like, wow I just left my dorm room with all ... my safe haven, and now here I am, in a room full of White people. (Ashley, interview, September 20, 2016)

It's funny, though, because hanging out with the friends I hang out with, or the parties I go to, and things like that, it's all Black people. For a long time freshman year, I was just like, "I don't go to a predominantly White college. What are you guys talking about?" Then, I started going to classes more and more, and lectures, and things like that. I was just like, "Hmm. Well, there's not a lot of people who look like me here." That started throwing me off a lot. (Gee, interview, September 12, 2016)

As a result of navigating this tension of straddling two worlds, erupted the ability to code switch. Many had mastered the ability to "code switch"; the ability to alter their behavior in order to "fit in" or be more accepted, based on their environment and whom they were interacting with (Anderson, 1999).

The only thing they see first is your skin and your gender, and then they base everything about you off that until they talk to you, almost. I feel like college made me more aware that I am literally under the eye of scrutiny to whoever I don't really know, and they could judge me based off those two surface-level traits. Sometimes it makes me want to be that person that changes how I talk when I'm around White people. I feel like it happens sometimes. When I'm talking to a professor, I wouldn't be like, 'Hey, yo. What's really good with my grade?' I wouldn't say that, but I feel like it just happens when I talk. If I talk with slang, then I'm going to have to explain what that even means, because I'm pretty sure

you don't know what it means. Then I just code switch. (Chinonso, interview, November 17, 2016)

In that class, most of the stuff is easy to me. I've learned it already and I know I've learned it. It all makes sense and the teacher is talking Spanish. Most of the kids in there are like, "I don't understand." I'm like, "She's making perfect sense, I don't understand why you don't understand." She'll call for a participant or something, I won't be the first one to raise my hand. I won't just willingly volunteer the fact that I have all this knowledge. I think it's calling attention to myself I'm just not willing to do. There's already unnecessary attention, if that makes sense. Not already on you, but when kids walk into the classroom, they take note of the four Black kids that sit right there. If you're also the one Black girl that always raises her hand, and always knows the answer, and is always having conversations in Spanish that I don't understand with the teacher, it's just also more unnecessary attention. (Ashley, interview, September 29, 2016)

For many, it was a survival strategy, the ability to engage with others without additional justification or proof that they belonged there. Participants discussed combating social stigmas of being articulate or not succumbing to the "angry Black women" phenomena.

I think through social media there's always this stigma, so I think just more so trying to fight the stigma almost; like the angry Black woman thing, and being disrespected by my own race. Not necessarily being valued by not only other races but by my own. (Naria, interview, September 27, 2016)

In society, I have to present myself as approachable and nice because the minute that you get into an elevator full of White people it's like, they're not necessarily going to hold their bags anymore because you're Black, but it's like the minute that you start going off the handle, or you're yelling, or you sound like you have attitude it's like you fit the stereotype of what all of them believe to be a Black person. (Ashley, interview, October 31, 2016)

This need to perform or respond in a particular way aligns with Winkle-Wagner's (2009) work of the "Unchosen Me", where one accepts or portrays a specific way of thinking or being in order to be accepted and/or belonged. This survival strategy was a manner in which participants could potentially distract their peers to not focus on external identities, but rather see them as humans – people who could communicate, be intelligent, polite, etc. versus making snap judgments based on their external presentation. Winkle-

Wagner's work parallels that of Helms' (1990) encounter stage transition. Students are challenged to either conform to social norms or present an alternate perspective.

This research explored in what ways participants' identity awareness and exploration impact their sense of belonging. For many participants, sense of belonging was related to how they engaged with their peers. Table 4.2 highlights relationships between participants who articulated an "easier time" finding connections with peers through the social environment (i.e., "Black Trent" or through student organizations). These "easier" connections were found in participants' ease in meeting new and different people, an ease in allowing their sense of self to be shaped and influenced by their environment, and an ability to not shy away from the social environment, to engage with their peers.

It should be noted that participants' high school environments could inform their ease and navigation of the college environment. For example, if participants attended predominantly Black high schools, meeting other Black students at Trent University could be considered relatively easy versus a participant who attended a predominantly White environment, meeting and engaging with other Black students at Trent University could be considered challenging. Unfortunately this information was not obtained from all participants to be included in the analysis.

Table 4.2 Relationship between Sense of Belonging and Engagement with Peers

Participant	Sense of Belonging	Engagement with Peers
Ashley	High	Easy
Chinonso	High	Easy

Table 4.2 Relationship between Sense of Belonging and Engagement with Peers
(continued)

Dina	Medium	Easy
Maya	Medium	Easy
Naria	Medium	Easy
Young Queen	Medium	Hard
Debbie	Low	Hard
Gee	Low	Hard
Kesi	Low	Hard

Participants Ashley, Chinonso, Dina, Maya, and Naria shared examples of easily

finding connections. "Easier time" was identified as participants sharing multiple

opportunities they have engaged with peers – mainly through institutional programs (e.g.,

summer bridge, living learning communities, etc.) and an articulation of comfort in

meeting and engaging with different people.

> I feel like I've definitely gotten a lot more confident in myself. I'm still evolving as
> a person and still truly finding myself, but I feel like if someone were to ask me
> who I am as a person I would be able to listen and say, "I identify as Nigerian-
> American female, and this is why. These are my beliefs. This is why I believe." I
> feel I'm more vocal in regards to I can defend myself. I can stand up for what I
> believe in, whereas in high school I was more introverted and shy. In college you
> have to learn how to fend for yourself, a sense because you're not going to always
> have a professor that's going to be cognizant of those things. (Chinonso, interview,
> September 29, 2016)

> I like the people I hang out with. I hang out with a little bit of everybody I'd like to
> say, but I feel as we get older and know we're about to go out into the real world,
> you try to keep people like you closer because it's like they'll understand you more
> than somebody who isn't like you. I see it a lot in how my first semester friend
> Luke, we really just don't talk anymore. It's not that we're not friends, it's just like
> it just drifted off and it's because we can't relate to each other and we can't live the
> same lifestyle. (Ashley, interview, October 31, 2016)

When one feels more comfortable with self, there is confidence to engage with

others and confidence in self is directly related to their identity awareness. As

participants progressed through the pre-encounter/encounter phase, there is reconciliation with self to be open to changing the script of what it means to be a Black female. There is no longer an automatic acceptance of societal norms of what it means to be a Black female. This was evident for the participants in this study.

Conversely, Debbie, Gee, Kesi, and Young Queen articulated challenges to engaging with their peers on a variety of levels (Table 4.2). Particularly, there was a hesitancy to engage with peers who expressed themselves differently, a need for a "pep talk" to engage with others.

> I would say that my first semester, I was very withdrawn. I would spend a lot of time just in my room watching TV, eating, things like that. I ate by myself a lot. When I had a meal plan, I always ate by myself. (Kesi, interview, September 26, 2016)

> I have made it a goal for myself this semester to put myself out there more and speak up more and take more chances. Just if it means like saying "Hey" to the kid that I think is really cool in the class. I guess that would make me seen more as an individual but other than that I feel like I do what I got to do. I just do it. (Young Queen, interview, September 26, 2016)

How participants made sense of their identity in relation to others provided insight into how they engaged with their peers and ultimately how they viewed their connection and/or commitment to the institution. As participants reflect on their identity/ies, there was an evolution of self that encompassed comfort with self, values exploration, interpersonal relationships, social consciousness, and outward expression of self.

> I feel like I have a strong connection to the community. I had one before but it's like now I'm understanding more the struggles and the things that we are trying to do to better our community itself. I think that that identity has become stronger" (Young Queen, interview, November 11, 2016).

> My identity…. Your identity can be described in so many different ways. I guess I would describe myself as a 20-year-old African American student at [Trent] University. Goal driven, ambitious, determined and focused" (Maya, interview, November 13, 2016).

In conclusion, Using Helms' (1990) framework, the racial/ethnic and gender identity development highlighted the developmental challenges faced in understanding self, and self in relations to others at Trent University. Some participants were open to re-defining self after being exposed to the different ways Blacks presented and represented themselves, while others were challenged to veer from societal norms and family values. Participants understanding of self, both as a Black person and Black female person at Trent University set the course for their ability to engage with others.

Theme Two – Institutional Programs

This research study explored in what ways do Black female college students attending a predominantly White institution come to feel integrated into, or isolated from, the academic and social elements of the university environment. The participants attending Trent University acclimated, and in many ways acculturated, to the institution through institutional programs. These programs, not limited to summer bridge programs, living learning communities, and opportunities to live on-campus, acculturated participants to the social and classroom rules of engagement. The institutional programs provided a gateway of smaller communities of students to engage with peers, lay the foundation for lasting connections, and explore college expectations; it set the foundation for spaces of belonging and value to be created.

> Surprisingly I am really connected with everyone that was in that program [summer bridge]. I feel like the values that they instill in us during that summer program, like determination and strong bonds and communication, and just being dedicated and focused, and has helped me a lot… I never knew they had a program that was so invested in students that they took them for the summer, and basically helped formulate and instill in them values, and basically traits that help us succeed in the future. (Maya, interview, November 3, 2016)

> Currently in college, most of my friends that I've made, I made through my

Leadership LLC [living learning community]. My current roommates right now, one is a close friend of mine that I met through another friend at the LLC, and then all our other roommates that we live with were her friends that I met through her. That's pretty much how my social life came to be. (Dina, interview, September 28, 2016)

I thought they [faculty] would be nice, and hold your hand, and walk you through everything. I knew it would be different, but I didn't think that it would be just such an adjustment right away. When I did the summer bridge program, it was like a real wake up call, I guess, to see how professors acted and to see the expectations, how they do help, but you have to seek out the help on your own. (Kesi, interview, November 9, 2016)

In addition to these smaller communities of individuals, the institution provided hallmark programming (e.g., welcome week programs, incoming class branding, etc.) during their first year that consciously, or subconsciously, created messaging or expectations of what the Trent experience could be like.

When one thinks of belonging, particularly at a college or institution, there is often an associated pride and/or traditions of the institution often displayed through the use and wearing of institutional regalia, fight songs, active participation and excitement both inside and outside the classroom, and/or strong connections and/or relationships with peers (Bronner, 2012; Van Jura, 2010). Additionally, there is an assumed connection of an impactful experience will result in an increased engaged alumni – either through financial gifts and/or participation in activities (Rau & Erwin, 2015).

For these participants, there was an articulation of either feeling as if they belonged, (i.e., were committed to Trent University) or did not belong (i.e., no-committal to Trent University). In their personal assessments feeling personally attached to the institution and seeing how the institution created connections (i.e., if I had not attended Trent University I would not have done *x* or met *y*) were not viewed as causal relationships. For many participants, these were two separate and distinct interactions.

> I would say I'm not really committed to [Trent]. I like the people that I've met through [Trent], but I wouldn't say that I'm very "Go [mascot]. That's not me. I don't know what it is. I don't really connect with [Trent] that much. I really like the people that I meet through [Trent] and I like the organizations that I've met at [Trent], but I don't know. (Kesi, interview, September 26, 2016)

What Kesi highlights is a divide between what it means to be and/or feel connected to an institution. One perspective of feeling connected and sense of belonging is rooted in connecting to *both* the academic and social environments (Tinto, 1987); there is institutional pride, and rooted in campus/community tradition. However, Kesi challenges this perspective of what it means to be connected and/or committed. Is it about having a specific connection to the institution, (i.e., the academic experience), the purpose of the degree? Or is it enough to feel as if a connection was made with someone or entity. Does it have to be both?

It can be inferred that for Kesi, the "total package" experience was missing. It was not just about the relationships being developed, but there was more she wanted from her experience.

> Yeah, I would say that I don't really belong at [Trent] in terms of the whole Cherry Pride thing. I just feel like a lot of [Trent] students are really into [Trent] and ... that's not really me. I don't really wear [Trent] ... I mean, I have a lot of [Trent] gear that I bought when I was like, "Go [Trent]!" I wear it every now and again. I don't know. I might have gone to [local university]. I feel like I've met a lot more inclusive people at [local university]. Yeah, I don't know if I would have came here. I like the fact that I'm so close to my mom, but yeah ... I don't think I would have came to [Trent]. I think I'm not going to leave now because I'm a junior, but yeah. (Kesi, interview, September 26, 2016)

Despite having positive peer interaction experiences at the institution, there is a romanticized perspective of what being committed and having a sense of belonging for an institution looked like.

Conversely, participant Gee felt disconnected, but from a different perspective:

> I don't think I'm connected to this institution at all, actually. Maybe within my major I may feel more connected, just because I think that's one of the things that I love about college, that I can only study or focus on something that I'm interested in. Everything that I learn in political science, like, "Ooh", I'm very interested in it. I feel like with college comes the social experience, it's just a lot of different parts that don't even have to do with education. If I look at all of those things, whether it be networking-wise, social-wise, I don't feel as connected as I am to my education here. (Gee, interview, September 12, 2016).

For Gee, while there was excelling in the classroom, she lacked connections with her peers.

Participants Kesi and Gee present two unique perspectives. Kesi felt integrated socially at the institution through participation in student organizations and relationships developed with people across the institution, but not feeling connected to the institution. While Gee felt integrated academically at the institution through her classroom experience, but felt as if the peer connection was missing. Does belonging evolve when participants experience both academic and social integration as Tinto (1987) posits? Or is there this nebulous image that we have made students believe they must have to have a true connection to their institution?

To understand a student's sense of belonging at an institution is to understand the institution's culture of engagement for its students. For the participants in this study, many of their experiences of connection and belonging were created during their first year of college. During this pivotal year, many participated in institutional programs, not limited to summer bridge programs, living learning communities, and living in on-campus housing. These institutional programs were specifically marketed to first-year students and provided a gateway into understanding and navigating the institution.

> I joined the Leadership LLC my freshman year and so we got to move in a whole week and change early and so I just got to be in the city and meet all these people. My LLC was pretty small, so we just instantly clicked. A lot of us had similar

politics, so it was just kind of an instant family. We were alone on campus for a week, just around [the city]. I got to experience [Trent] in a different way before I even started classes, so it was pretty awesome. (Dina, interview, September 28, 2016)

Before starting at [Trent] I did a summer program here. That helped me become very connected to [Trent]. It was in the summer, so the campus was pretty empty, but we got to connect with different faculty. We got to take college intro courses that would prepare us better for college. I feel like that really helped me get more involved because it was a small, intimate group of us and we all had similarities, which why we [were] chosen to be in the program, so I think that really helped me, and the interest that they took in us. (Maya, interview, November 3, 2016)

The other freshmen in my wing, they were really welcoming. I remember that night that I came, I came later than other students. I missed most of the welcome week activities, and stuff. Then I saw students in the wing. They were trying to order Insomnia Cookies [food vendor] because we had these coupons, and they was asking everybody. People opened their doors. We gave our little share, like $2.00 because we ordered so many cookies. Then cookies came, and we would sit in the hallway and talk to each other, find out our names, where we were from. That was my first day on [Trent's] campus, and it was really cool because my fellow wing people were chilling. I see all of them now, so it's like, "Yo, we live in the same wing." We do our individual things, but we still remember freshman year. (Chinonso, interview, September 29, 2016)

People tend to stick to a group of friends they're comfortable being around. A lot of times, they build strong relationships early in college and that becomes they're family till they graduate from college. For example, if you live in a dorm during your first year, you make new friends there and perhaps relate with them on a daily basis. (Debbie, interview, November 1, 2016)

Summer bridge programs, living learning communities, and on-campus housing respectfully provided opportunities to make this large institution feel more manageable and enable connections with peers to formulate. Something as simple and small as ordering cookies helped defuse a stressful move-in experience and create points of connection for Chinonso. This experience was impactful as she was able to recall the experience three years later.

During a student's first year, there is significant acknowledgement and cultivation of institutional pride attributed to students through Orientation programs, Welcome Week

activities, Class branding paraphernalia (i.e., Class of 2020), and traditions programming

(i.e., Homecoming events). These opportunities created "forced" engagement and

connection amongst one another.

> I guess last year being a freshman kept me really connected with [Trent] just because ... it's weird but I feel like freshman year has this odd school spirit about it. You're getting here and it's like your first year at the university and you're just like, "[Trent] like is the best school ever. I'm in awe." You go to a majority of the football games and it's weird, because I haven't been to a single football game this year. I can't tell you anything about them. I guess [Trent] they pushed so much on you to be a class freshman year, like you are the class of 2019, and like this, that, and that. Then it's like sophomore year it's like you don't feel that connection anymore as like we're a class because it's like some people didn't even come back or that sort of thing. (Ashley, interview, October 31, 2016)

For participants who engaged in these opportunities, an expectation was set. The

institution had created opportunities for belonging and connection and the lack of a

continuation experience attributed this lack of commitment/connection beyond their first

year. These opportunities, nevertheless, were targeted to them as first-year students.

There was lack of "branding" or connection for them as they progressed through the

institution.

> There's nothing that I feel gives me a sense of like I'm a [Trent] student with another group of people. I know I'm a [Trent] student, but with another group people I only share that with probably my roommates and then like my cousin, but a group of people who we're all like, "We are [Trent]." It doesn't exist anymore past freshman year. (Ashley, interview, October 31, 2016)

Participants felt a noticeable difference of engagement and excitement from their first

year. There was a sense that there was not an institutional "place" for them.

In summary, institutional programs, primarily offered their first year, intentionally

or unintentionally created a gateway to Trent University. It was through these programs

that expectations and norms were created these participants. They acknowledged it

provided smaller, more focused opportunities to meet and find common interests with

their peers. It set the foundation of being able to identify into a group and/or community,

finding a place of belonging. But these programs did challenge the notion of what does it

meant to be connected to an institution – is it both an academic and social connection –

and do institutions, particularly Trent, recognize what is subconsciously communicates

when there is no institutional branding or marketing beyond the first year?

Theme Three: Social Rules of Engagement

As we think about institutional programs, they provided an introduction to many

of the relationships participants created at Trent University. Additionally, they provided

the conduit to the larger social environment of the institution. Relationships created

within these opportunities proved to be a key factor in deciding whether students chose to

remain at Trent University. If students found strong support networks within these

opportunities, they were able to articulate a connection to something larger.

Students/participants that lacked connection with peers similarly lacked

connection/commitment to the institution.

The social environment, the environment outside the classroom, played a

significant role in the student experience and finding place of belonging. Surprisingly, on

a macro-level, many participants articulated the social environment to be "cliquey" and

segregated.

> I don't think that anybody would think of it, but it's very divided. Who you hang out with determines what your social life is like. If you hang out with a lot of Black people, then you have one social life. I don't know what the other social life, it's like if you hang out with a lot of White people, or if you hang out with a lot of … because we have a pretty big Indian population here as well in Asian population here, so if you hang out with any of those groups, it's obviously different lifestyles, if that makes sense. (Ashley, interview, October 31, 2016).

> I would say it's kind of cliquey. I would say it's pretty cliquey. Everyone has a squad they hang out with. I don't really have a squad. I've never really had a

squad. I have friends, or I've hung out with squads, but I wouldn't say I'm in those squads. (Kesi, interview, November 9, 2016)

I had expected to be a little less cliquish because sometimes on campus and things, it feels like a lot of people have little cliques, or if you're not in a Greek organization you're a little left out, or if you're not in a big organization, that type of thing, you're a little left out. (Maya, interview, November 3, 2016)

I think the social environment is very cliquey. It's very cliquey. I think there's requirements for you to hang out with certain people. It's very rare that you see on campus interracial kind of groups. If you look on campus, everyone's hanging out with the same people. (Gee, interview, October 24, 2016)

Even though participants found the social environment to be divided on a macro-level, it was acknowledged, but not seen as a limiting factor.

I think that [Trent] has a lot of events that allow you to be socially active with groups of people or individual people outside of your own group. I know even though people try not to be clique-y, it automatically happens anyway. You always talk to those same people that you are comfortable with up. [Trent] has a lot of stuff like free food on Friday or the pep rallies where it's like open to everyone. I know I've met a couple people at those things like "Oh hey!" Just talking to them. Socially I think it's really nice. (Young Queen, interview, November 11, 2016)

The social environment here at [Trent], I like it. I feel like there's always something to do at [Trent]. I feel like a lot of people are really much friendlier than you would expect, because I went to a few programs before where I went alone, and I felt really welcomed and people were very social. I would say I like the social environment here. (Maya, interview, November 3, 2016)

Many admit there is a desire to engage with other non-Black students, but the comfort of being with people you know and also look like you, was stronger. Only one participant was able to identify times and opportunities when non-Black students attended social functions.

Personally, I feel like students should talk to as many people as they want or try to get to know as many people as they want. We never know who would be of help to us and likewise. Coming to a whole new environment, I wanted to have that because if I surround myself with new people from a whole different culture, I place myself in a position to learn about new people and their cultures. (Debbie, interview, November 1, 2016)

When they [students] have social events or social gatherings or kickbacks or block parties or house parties or homecoming events, I will always choose to go to a Black-hosted event or a Black-sponsored event versus going an event where there's going to be more White people and less people that look like me. I'm not to say if a White person were to come to a Black party, it wouldn't be offsetting. We would still include them in it, or show them what we do in our culture, more or less. I feel like if I were to go in the reverse, I would literally feel like an outcast. I've been to one, because I remember freshman year I went with my roommates. They were all White, and I just felt so socially awkward at that event. It wasn't like I was trying to, but it was like, "All right, I listen to y'all type of music, which is EDM, but I don't listen to it like that." I was like, "Oh man, I don't really know how you dance to this", but then when I took them to a Black party, it wasn't like, "Oh, it was awkward." It was like, "All right, we've heard this type of music", but I included them in, which they kind of didn't do when I went to a White party, almost.
 I feel like for Black people, we're more inclusive, and when we have block parties, we invite everyone. When you go, it's diverse. There's all different types of people. I mean, it'll be a lot of Black people, but it'll still be different faces, whereas if it were the reverse, it'd probably be one or two. (Chinonso, interview, November 17, 2016)

There was a culture being created parallel to the larger institutional culture, but also operated and was viewed as something distinct and separate. When participants engaged socially with their friends outside the classroom, they would often forget they attended a predominantly White institution.

The dynamic of it, I would say, not very diverse at all. It's funny, though, because hanging out with the friends I hang out with, or the parties I go to, and things like that, it's all Black people. For a long time freshman year, I was just like, "I don't go to a predominantly White college. What are you guys talking about?" Then, I started going to classes more and more, and lectures, and things like that. I was just like, "Hmm. Well, there's not a lot of people who look like me here. That started throwing me off a lot". (Gee, interview, September 12, 2016)

This separate culture being created was coined "HBTU" and "Black [Trent]", their social scene. This was the "space" or environment for social engagement. It is important to call attention to the use of "HBTU". This is a play on HBCU – historically Black college or university. It provides insight to how students viewed this social scene.

This was considered their social network – the network that provided updates on social

gatherings within student organizations and friend groups and dictated the social

hierarchy that was prevalent on-campus. "Black Trent" was the space to meet and create

friendships.

Participants describes "Black Trent" as the following:

> I think Black [Trent], it's sort of its own, what is that, like when you have kind of like a caste system? Black [Trent] has the elites, which would be the Greeks, and then they have the leaders, which are all the people on E-boards and things like that who make a stand. Then you have the general body, it's like people who aspire to either be Greek or who just go to these E-board meetings or student org meetings, or those that don't really care who just love to party and who love to be a part of Black [Trent]. Black [Trent] is just Black people. (Gee, interview, October 24, 2016)

> Because of the fact that there's not that many of us, like we've, I think all of us noticed that. If there's something going on at the [center location on campus] that has to do with one of the DJs that everyone within the Black community knows and we come out, it's like, "Hey, HBTU has come out." That's what we, that's what they prefer it to now on social media. (Young Queen, interview, September 26, 2016)

This environment provides classic examples of a subculture within the larger Trent

University culture.

The question of membership in this Black community was posed to participants.

If this was a prominent aspect to the culture at Trent University, was there automatic

acceptance into this community? How did Black students engage in this community?

> I think as long as your face is seen a lot in Black [Trent] then you're part of Black [Trent]. You know what I mean? Because all of Black [Trent] sees each other all the time whether it's at the [center location on campus] or it's at these organization meetings. You'll know who's in Black [Trent]. If someone doesn't know you within Black [Trent], then you're not a part of Black [Trent]. I really feel that way! It's weird.
> Even last year I could see that me not having a group to study with or me not having a group to do this with, I stopped going to parties so that in reality stopped me from meeting people because that's just where Black [Trent] meets. Not even,

but just outside of the academic level, you know? Sometimes you wanted to take a break. (Gee, interview, October 24, 2016)

What makes HBTU? Honestly, I feel like if you're an outsider looking in, you'll feel pressured to go to events, but if you already know people, you won't feel pressured to go to events. People feel like if you're Black you got to be mixie. Mixie is a term that we use where it's like, "Ah, you just want to be social and go talk to everybody or be cool or be the popping kid". (Chinonso, interview, November 17, 2016)

I feel like you're expected to support certain organizations, certain clubs. We recently had the minority showcase. It was so successful. I feel like as a part of being a minority you were expected to go and support. It was a big turnout. I feel like even if you weren't asked to go, it was expected of you. Once you saw the flyer for it, I was like, "Let me go support." Some things you see and say "You know what? Let me go just to support," but I don't feel like it's too pressured" (Maya, interview, November 3, 2016).

Acceptance into "Black Trent" was about being seen and having a presence in and around campus. This was the space relationships were created. There was a level of expectation to engage in "Black Trent". Physical spaces added an additional layer of understanding and presence of this subculture at Trent University. There were key places that denoted spaces for "Black Trent".

In the [Campus Computer Center]. Yeah, I feel like we definitely gravitate towards the [Campus Computer Center], especially at night. You'll see a lot of African Americans in there. I don't know, the vibe in the [Campus Computer Center] at night is like ... I don't know. Everyone knows we're there to be focused and we're there to get work done. (Maya, interview, November 3, 2016)

We were just talking about this yesterday with one of my friends. Why is it on Tuesdays and Wednesdays? All the Black students orgs be in the atrium. I don't know, for real. I feel like that's when they all host their events. I was like, "I never thought about it that way", but you go on Tuesdays, all the fraternities, sororities, and all the Black order, so BSU, SHO. They're all there. Then Wednesdays, it's the same thing. I was like, "I had never thought about it that way." Why do we all go at the same day? You can literally go to the [Student Center], probably go to every table, and then you're cool. You can just talk to people, and then they talk to you next time they see you. (Chinonso, interview, November 17, 2016)

There is kind of an expectation to be seen on campus, like the [Student Center] and the [center location on campus]. Well the Student Center and the [center

location on campus] are the biggest places. In the wintertime it's definitely the Student Center. In the summer and spring time it's the [center location on campus]. Especially at the [center location on campus] when they're just having little kick backs and there's a DJ or something it's like why aren't you here? (Young Queen, interview, November 11, 2016)

These physical spaces contained their own expectations – either creating accountability for being focused, expectations of presence of specific organizations, or space for communication strategies to emerge.

It is important to note, that these environments changed as participants' needs and expectations changed over time at their institution. What one participant enjoyed/needed their first year changed and adapted as they progressed into their junior and senior year

The Tech, it was great. The Tech was a place, we used to be in there all day. It was getting work done but you also saw your friends there and you could stop and talk. Talk for a little bit then it's, "I got to get back to this work," and everyone's in there encouraging each other. We got to make it. It wasn't always during finals either, it was the whole school year. I think this year, maybe because we're getting older, it's more so let's go to the library because no one's there. I think I might stay in my room and study. (Naria, interview, November 14, 2016)

This subculture, "Black Trent"/HBTU, created a space where students could comfortably engage with one another, but also find the support that was perhaps missing from the classroom.

A lot of people do refer to it as Black [Trent]. I really do like the Black community here at [Trent]. I feel like we're really strong together. Even in some of the organizations here at [Trent], like the Black Student Union or there's another one that I'm a part of, which is BPHA, which is the Black Professional Health Association, and I feel like we really support one another when it comes to things like that.
I feel like the Black, African American community here is very close-knit and very accepting of one another. I feel like you don't even have to know someone to talk to them or you don't even have to know them to say hi. Like, "Hey, are you going to this?" You know? I've had situations like that where there was a program in the Student Center, and I'm walking to it and I see a few people walking in the same direction. I'm like, "Hey, are you going to this program?" They're like, "Yeah. Are you coming? Let's walk together." That type of thing, so I feel like the

social atmosphere within the Black community here at Temple is very, very close-knit. Yeah, I like it" (Maya, interview, November 3, 2016).

On a macro-level of engagement, participants utilized Black [Trent], but on a micro, more intimate level, participants largely gravitated towards student organizations. It is important to note that their student organizations were largely skewed to cultural identities (e.g., National Council of Negro Women, Gospel Ministries, Black Student Union, or Black Professional Health Association). Many participants identified these organizations as being representative of issues and/or concerns they personally or culturally faced. Additionally, these organizations provided the space for meeting new and different people in more intimate relaxed environments, and creating a sense of family amongst their peers.

> I feel like a lot of the African American girls here, we try to gravitate toward different clubs and organizations that deal with our issues or relate to us, so I feel like you'll find a lot of the population in those type of clubs or interested in those. But yeah, I feel like ... I don't know why we gravitate toward each other. I just feel like it always ends up happening, but I'm not really sure of the underlining cause of it, but I just feel like it's based on comfort or it's due to comfort. (Maya, interview, September 14, 2016)

What Maya articulated was a connection to Maslow's (2014) hierarchy of needs. She was able to find a space of students where she felt comfortable (safe/secure) to explore issues related to self. Maslow articulated the need for people to have basic needs of safety and security met in order to achieve higher-level psychological needs. Other participants shared this sentiment in varied ways.

> When I went to my first NSBE [National Society of Black Engineers] event, I was blown away because, in my classes, it was basically the same dynamic as my classes back in high school, and it wasn't that there wasn't any Black people in my school. It was just in my classes, there weren't, so then I would end up just having those two friends really because if you weren't in class with each other, in high school, you don't see each other so you're not friends, but here it was kind of the same way. I never saw any Black kids really, so then I didn't have any friends for

the first whole semester of school. Then I went to a NSBE event, and I was just like, "Wow. This is where they all are because I don't see any of you guys ever." When you see it, you're just like, "I don't want to let this part go because I don't know if I'm going to see that again." You know what I mean? (Dina, interview, November 4, 2016)

I think that [Trent] is the kind of place where organizations a lot of times are like families. I felt like I didn't really have that family my first semester because I wasn't in [Trent] Gospel Ministries, but I think when I joined, I don't know, I just felt really included ... (Kesi, interview, September 26, 2016)

"Black Trent" was able to provide a broad stroke of opportunities to engage with one another. The student organization experience provided a more intimate space to create and develop relationships with one another. For one participant, Debbie, getting involved in student organizations was about taking advantage of all the opportunities college presented. This was sage advice passed along to her from a high school mentor.

One reason why I got involved was it's a good way to know people. It's a way to feel like you're actually getting an experience. There is one phrase my administrator in high school always said, "You've got to let the school pass through you and not just you passing through the school". It's not just you being there. You also have to get as much experience as possible and make your time worthwhile. I think getting involved in organizations is the primary way. (Debbie, interview, September 22, 2016)

Participants wanted more from their college experience. Debbie articulates a desire to have the "full college experience" where there is connection both inside and outside the classroom. As a participant who articulated challenges engaging with their peers, for her student organizations created a space for exploration of self, application of classroom information, and acquisition of new information not gathered in the classroom.

If I think about it right now, if I eliminate all the people I know from my organization, I would probably just be going to class, go back home, watch a series, sleep, wake up, and actually not feel like I'm in college. It has definitely shaped me because I do learn a lot of things, especially from the Institute of Management Accountants, that has given me a lot of exposure to the professional environment here. I've visited companies and been to a number of events for college students.

> I guess it is a constant thought because I worry about building my network. Building a good network in college with peers, faculty, and professionals is emphasized and so I always want to make sure I'm doing the right things to make myself a successful [Trent] student. Also, I love the idea of meeting and associating myself with people who are either more knowledgeable than I am or who are from other cultures which I would be interested in learning about. (Debbie, interview, November 1, 2016)

While Debbie utilized student organizations as an introduction to engaging with her peers, Maya saw student organizations as an opportunity to advance her own identity development and awareness.

> I joined NCNW, which is the National Council of Negro Women, and in that organization, I felt like my identity started to become a little more ... just brought to the surface a little more. They touched on issues that I didn't even know about. They talked about the history of African American women that I had not known before. They talked about a woman named Dorothy Height and how she started NCNW, and she basically is like a figure that, even though she's gone and passed away, that they look up to. And after that meeting, I actually went home and researched her, so I feel like that organization brought a lot of knowledge to me. (Maya, interview, September 14, 2016)

While social engagement had strong connections to belonging and connection, engaging with others was not any easy task for several participants.

> I would say that my first semester, I was very withdrawn. I would spend a lot of time just in my room watching TV, eating, things like that. I always ... I ate by myself a lot. When I had a meal plan, I always ate by myself. (Kesi, interview, September 26, 2016)

> I'm not going to lie, I still feel uncomfortable with the fact that I'm not socially out there, not always with people and stuff like that, but I think that that's changing. (Gee, interview, October 24, 2016)

The inability to feel comfortable engaging with their peers in social environments, limited their overall interactions with others.

> Even last year I could see that me not having a group to study with or me not having a group to do this with, I stopped going to parties so that in reality stopped me from meeting people because that's just where Black [Trent] meets. Not even, but just outside of the academic level, you know? Sometimes you wanted to take a break. Being socially comfortable was very important for me because I have to

live here, you know? My parents, they don't like me coming home, but they want me to feel comfortable. They didn't want me coming home every weekend and that's understandable. Being socially comfortable is very important. (Gee, interview, October 24, 2016)

In summary, social rules of engagement detailed a journey that participants experienced as they navigated "Black Trent" and then finding cultural student organizations that created family-like support networks for them. Each entity possessing a set of rituals and norms and seemingly parallel to the larger Trent culture. It is through successful navigation of social engagement that participants developed peer connections and began to find their places of belonging.

Theme Four: Classroom Rules of Engagement

Social engagement was a double-edged sword for participants. Many acknowledged there were expectations for them to be socially engaged, particularly outside the classroom. But there was this push/pull expectation inside the classroom.

> Some people just don't like class so they just come in with an attitude. Once the class is over they're out. Except you have a relationship with a person outside of class, that's when you really, really relate more. If you want to focus on the class some people get the close relationship when they work in smaller groups, which is outside of the class environment. Everything is still linking to outside of class. (Debbie, interview, September 22, 2016)

For others, when attempts to engage their peers in the classroom environment, it was often not reciprocated.

> I ended up sitting there, multiple classes, and they decided to create a study group, and I had been sitting there for weeks with them and everything and they decided that they were going to make a study group of themselves and not ask me to be in it, even though most of the time, my answers would be the correct one. When it was time to talk and be social, they would talk with me, but then they didn't want my input. (Dina, interview, November 4, 2016)

Dina's experience was not isolated. Social engagement in the classroom, for many participants came across as competitiveness and disingenuous.

> I think the academic environment here is very competitive. Academically, I don't get the vibe that people want to make friends. I really get the vibe that people just want to do better than another person, which is really disappointing for me because I know if I want something, I want everyone to share it, but I don't think that's the same incentive for everyone here in the university anyway. (Gee, interview, October 24, 2016)

> It's a little too competitive to a certain point, because you have to stand out, so a lot of people want to be competitive… Competitiveness looks like, for instance, asking your neighbor for help and them being a little vague with their answers because they want to do better on the assignment. What else? I'm trying to think of other examples. Yeah, I think just not helping a friend or classmate as much as you really can because you fear they will do better than you on an exam or assignment. (Maya, interview, November 3, 2016)

With this feeling of competitiveness, increased the level of isolation felt in the classroom.

Many remarked about not engaging with their peers in the classroom, especially their

non-Black peers.

> I feel like I hang out with a lot of Black people, and I don't think I do it intentionally. It just happens, almost. When I go to a class, I look to see if there's anyone in that room who looks like me. If there is, I sit next to them, not because I can't sit next to a White person, but I just feel like we're really in this together. We both have the same strikes against us, and we're both trying to make it different. (Chinonso, interview, November 17, 2016)

> I think personally I put expectations on myself as a minority in class. It's that unsaid competition thing. Sometimes, and it might not necessarily be true, but sometimes I just feel like the professors want to see what I'm going to do because I'm so different from everyone else or whatever sometimes. It might not be that case, it's just that pressure I put on myself. (Naria, interview, November 14, 2016)

> Unfortunately, a few participants had begun to normalize their experiences and

take the perspective of viewing their experiences as learning opportunities both as a

motivational tool, but also as preparation for the "real world"

> I know that it's not as competitive as an Ivy League school. That I know. I don't have to keep my notebooks guarded in case somebody wants to take them from [me] or anything, but it's definitely ... I feel like it depends on the person you are. Internally I am competitive with the people around me just for my own sake. If I see one of my friends they have a 3.3 GPA and I have a 2.9 I'm like, "All right so

you need to be like them and have a 3.3 or better". (Ashley, interview, October 31, 2016)

Sometimes it makes me think, is this what the business world is like? Then you hear things like, okay it's hard as an African-American in the business world. Is this prepping me for what's to come? (Naria, interview, September 27, 2016)

Participants shared experiences of discrimination, hearing derogatory comments, and often experiencing micro aggressions – from both faculty and peers – in the classroom.

In my anatomy class, me and my study partner, we used to study together, and one day, she invited her sorority sisters, But once they came to the library and they saw me, they were, like, really, really shocked. The other faces looked very shocked, and their eyes even opened. And then we took a little study break toward the end of the night, and then we were talking about, like, going to hot yoga or something like that, and me and one of her sorority sisters were from the same neighborhood, and her sorority sister was very shocked that I lived near her. And she was like, "You know where I'm talking about? The yoga studio?" And I'm like, "Yeah, I know what you're talking about." And she was very shocked, and I think that's one thing that threw me off, because I'm like, "Why are you so shocked that I live near you?" But I didn't know how to put it into words, and I also didn't want to, like, offend her. But yeah, that's one thing that really threw me off. She was very, very shocked that I knew where it was and that I lived so close to her. (Maya, September 14, 2016)

Overhearing a conversation and somebody makes a joke and drops the n-word. Those type of encounters. It creates such a negative thing. I'm here, I love everybody, but then you hear that and you're like wow. There's people that live on this campus that really don't like me because I'm brown or whatever. (Naria, interview, September 27, 2016)

The faculty leans more towards people who are not Black. It's like, "Oh. Well, your grades aren't that good," so they try to find something wrong with your application to say, "You should reconsider your career path. Are you sure you really..." They keep asking you that, and I feel like you have to keep saying, "Yes. Yes. Yes. I'm sure this is what I want do," and I don't really see that in the opposite color. (Chinonso, interview, September 29, 2016)

I was taught at a very young age that I will have to work so much harder than a lot of other people because I was female and because I was Black, but that didn't make me look at White people a certain way. I feel like that experience did make me look at them a little certain way because it was just like, we're all in these classes together and obviously I've proven myself to be here or I wouldn't be in this class,

but for some reason you still don't want to be bothered with me, so I don't know. (Dina, interview, September 28, 2016)

The minute you try to be out of your comfort zone and just talk to the person who is sitting next to you, whether they be White, Black, or Hispanic, most of the time, if they're White, it's more like ... I don't know, they usually try to tend toward a certain type of Black girl, so if I'm speaking this way, they are assuming that I'm talking with my hands, or I'm snapping, or I'm flipping my hair, and that's one issue I had with Temple in general, students at Temple in general. Even in high school, I don't like it, or my biggest pet peeve is when someone approaches me with the stereotypical Black girl slang, or whatever they want to call it, and expect for me to respond the same way. (Gee, interview, September 12, 2016)

These were challenging environments that participants engaged with in attempts to

receive an education alongside their peers. These feelings were further exacerbated by the

lack of Black students present in their classes. Many remarked counting the amount of

Black people in their classes on their hands.

I've noticed being at [Trent], like almost all my classes, it's like I can count all the African-American students on my hand, so [a] lot of times I just keep to myself and pay attention and do my work. Sometimes I have raised my hand but he doesn't see me, so I just go ahead about my business. (Young Queen, interview, September 26, 2016)

One of them is not that big of a lecture hall but it's ... I consider it a lecture. It's not a small classroom. We go to a predominately White institution so it's predominately White people in there. You obviously see a sprinkle here and there of different races, but predominately White. (Ashley, interview, September 20, 2016)

Of a class of, about 100 people, there will be about five African American women. It's not too obvious to people who aren't African American, but once you are, and you look around, it's kind of, like, why is there only five of us in here, you know? But the setting isn't uncomfortable or anything. It's just something that I tend to think about, like, wow, it's only five of us in here. (Maya, interview, September 14, 2016)

Most of my classes, especially my science classes in the college of engineering, the majority of them are White males, and that's pretty much it. I think in my Civil Engineering and Materials class, I am one of five females and one Black girl switched to a different section, so there's only two Black girls in the entire class. (Dina, interview, September 28, 2016)

In the classroom, participants felt the need to work twice as hard as their counterparts, mainly because the messaging being received was as a Black person, it would always be an uphill battle. Many were operating from a deficit perspective; there was a limitation on their success.

> Education is important and to do well is because you already have strikes against you because you're Black, one, and I have a strike against me because I'm a female. You will always have those two strikes, so in order for you to really thrive and make meaningful impact and change, you have to be in these certain positions. It'd be a lawyer or a doctor or an engineer or a teacher. You have to get your education first. (Chinonso, interview, November 17, 2016)

> I'm the only Black person in there so sometimes it's like this insecure thing. I just told my friend that. She's in [Business School] and we were just talking about how there are not a lot of African-Americans there. You subconsciously feel like you have to work twice as hard just because it's the business world. Nobody has really indicated that we had to, but I think it's just a stigma. Sometimes it sucks when you're the only person that doesn't know anything and it's like wonder why that is. Everybody seems to be educated on this. It's a little weird when you look around and don't see anyone like you or ... that's weird at PWI, but it's like you're the only one. (Naria, interview, September 27, 2016)

> However, being in college and having my first semester as a freshmen be a total flop, I thought there was no way I could be successful without good grades. My GPA was horrible. What pharmacy school or professional school was going to take me with those mediocre grades? I know I am intelligent, but after my unsatisfactory semester I started questioning my intelligence. Maybe society was right? Maybe I am actually dumb as shit, because I'm Black. And I know that's really crazy to say, because my mother would always reaffirm me of how intelligent and smart I was – all her kids were, but in that moment I didn't, even as I sit and write this I don't. (Chinonso, personal diary, November 17, 2016)

Not only are participants combating messaging from society, but also there was a need to combat self-doubt and family expectations and find confidence within themselves.

> It's hard finding the balance between what people expect from you and your actual capabilities as an individual. I'm in the learning process and even though I'm not yet where a lot of people expect me to be, I know I'm pushing hard and I think that's what matters. (Debbie, interview, November 1, 2016)

> I'd probably say my family's expectations is really to do well, and well as in exceptional. Good, great, wonderful, magna cum laude. It's that level of academic

expectation. I feel like their expectations is stemmed from what society's expectation, so it's like they coexist together. I feel like for my parents, they take education so seriously because they feel like there's no other way for someone who is African American to be successful in this society, and it kind of is true. (Chinonso, interview, November 17, 2016)

Participants had varying levels of comfort and interactions with faculty. There was a

mixed response of engaging with faculty and feeling supportive by them.

> Most of the professors are supportive. I feel if I was Black and I went to an Ivy League or a school that was like PWI, but it was like really PWI, I was one of 5 Black students, then it would feel not as supportive or welcoming, because I'd be like, I have to compared to all these White students, and I have to make sure I'm the best. (Ashley, interview, October 31, 2016).

> Two of my professors, they're just really open. Those classes are open discussion, they keep you engaged. I'm very into engaging in class. They just always ... they pick your brain. They seem more genuinely interested in you. They don't seem to have favorites or anything like that. Sometimes, you're in a class and it's like, you clearly like this person a little bit more. Yeah, they just keep it an open environment. If someone makes a mistake or does something they don't necessarily like, I like their approach to how they handle it. That's a big thing. They're just understanding. I can go to them. (Naria, interview, September 26, 2016)

> I think I connect with my professor for my persuasion class. I like her a lot. We don't talk outside of class, but I do enjoy her class. The way that she explains the material. She explains it in a way that everyone can understand. She isn't full of herself or anything like that. She's very calm and personable. (Kesi, interview, November 9, 2016)

But then there were participants who had challenging interactions with faculty and did

not feel as if they have been given the resources to truly be successful, often leaving

participants questioning the desire for the faculty to *want* to engage with their students.

> Surprisingly a lot of professors don't really talk about how to manage a heavy work, but some professors definitely do space out assignments to make it easier on the students, which I really appreciate, or extend deadlines, things like that help relieve stress and feeling of being overwhelmed, but a lot of teachers don't talk about balancing or like, "Hey, you guys should start this assignment some time now so that you are able to space out," which I feel like they probably should just to give students gages and just help people not to feel so overwhelmed at the last minute. (Maya, interview, November 3, 2016)

I'm just like I don't doubt that she's probably really good at math but I don't think teaching is for her. She would teach it and be talking to herself at the board as writing stuff up. I'm like you have a whole class behind you that's trying to learn, but okay. I was like I have to make sure I make a rate on Rate My Professor for the rest of my fellow classmates to never ever take her unless it's an absolute last resort. (Young Queen, interview, November 11, 2016)

I don't think that the classes are taught in a way that four hundred students would definitely take something away from it. It's just like, "Here's a Power Point, here's information. There's too many of you guys. Take a test." Sometimes I feel like this is set up for us to fail. (Naria, interview, November 14, 2016)

Some teachers, those no funny business type or whatever. They just give off this very serious, "I'm just going to teach my class and then I'm going to leave," and so that's the relationship I have with them. Others, there's more give and take kind of thing. They're not afraid to be told that they're wrong. The rapport with me and the rest of the class with them is easier and less intimidating, I guess, because when we do see something is wrong, we're not afraid to tell them, which I think is, for me, the best way of learning because if I'm scared of you, then I'm not going to be focused. (Dina, interview, November 4, 2016)

The overarching sentiment around faculty engagement was that it largely depended on the faculty member and how they staged their classroom experience. Many participants commented on their first day of class and how the professor set their expectations that determined how, and if, they chose to engage.

The professors, there are some really good professors who really care. I've had a couple of them who are really good, really care for their students, will host review sessions, be in office hours answering questions, be here late to help you come to and understanding. (Chinonso, interview, September 29, 2016)

Dr. xxxx taught it [Urban Studies course]. It wasn't the first thing he said, but one of the things he said was, "I basically do whatever the hell I want." He was just really laid back with this. That established a chill tone in the class. People felt comfortable talking to him. He was wild. I really want to take him again before I graduate if he's still here next fall. It was wild. That was a really interesting class. (Kesi, interview, November 9, 2016)

Participants highlighted negative interactions that demonstrated faculty's power and privilege that, in some ways, intimidated participants, but for many others made them

skeptical of future faculty. There was a power dynamic that is reasonably unrealistic for

many students to navigate. Ultimately, who's role and responsibility is it to establish the

faculty/student relationship?

> I always feel like a lot of professors like to exert their power and it's instead of, there was this thing of the idea of challenging your students by making things harder rather than challenging them by provoking their thought process. That's a big difference and I think a lot of professors get that misconstrued.
> I think I just try to stay professional, one. Also look at them as a human being at the end of the day. Even with faculty that I can't stand, I'll walk down the hallway and I'm like, "Oh crap, there's no one else in this hallway. I'm about to walk past her," but I still say hello regardless if they speak or not. Which sometimes they don't, no, all the time they don't. It's just I actually have walked past a professor who me and her have bump heads, also been ridiculed by her, she was wrong but that was last year. Bygones are bygones, whatever. I walk past and I'm like, "Hi, Dr. so and so," and she keeps looking. I was like, "Maybe she's in deep thought," happen again, she smirked real quick and kept going. I'm like, "Oh, okay. (Naria, interview, November 14, 2016)

> I feel like it was humiliating, almost. I wouldn't say that I'm a prideful person, but it takes a lot for me to sometimes ask for help when I feel like I should know it. If I come to you like that, I literally don't know what's going on, and at this point, I don't even know what I don't know. I'm coming to a professor who, like I said before, is like ... You have multiple degrees in this area of expertise, and then you look at me like I'm supposed to just know it, like I was supposed to wake up, read the book, and just know it off the top of my head. (Chinonso, interview, November 17, 2016)

Participants had expectations that faculty would be inviting, serve as a mentor, be

available during office hours, have an interest in them as students, while utilizing various

teaching styles to meet the needs of their students. While some expectations were met,

there were other experiences that were not expected.

> I guess my expectations for faculty was just to be welcoming, way more welcoming, and willing to talk more outside of class and stuff like that. (Gee, interview, October 24, 2016)

> I expected them to be top-notch and really interested in the students, not just wanting to do it like a job, but actually seeing to the fact that every student gets that education they actually came for. (Debbie, interview, November 1, 2016)

I think that faculty should try to make themselves available to students, of course with students working with them to find availability for extra help. I feel like they should welcome questions and be able to handle students not understanding something that in their eyes seems easy. Just teaching your subject the best you can and even listening to criticism and trying to change it if you need to and make the atmosphere nice in class. (Young Queen, interview, November 11, 2016)

I want them to care about what they're teaching. I want them to make it interesting to learn. A lot of classes, the subject isn't boring. I feel like when people say something's boring, it's not even the class or what you're learning is boring, but it's because you don't understand it and then the teacher doesn't make it interesting for you to learn, make it simple or break it down from its condensed form so that a layperson can understand it. (Chinonso, interview, November 17, 2016)

As we overlay the work of Tinto (1987) and his discussion of the importance of the academic experience, it begs the question of the causal relationship between the academic experience (specifically interactions with faculty) and creating belonging experiences for participants. If these relationships are found to be valuable, participants' experiences in this study raised the question of who takes the leadership in creating the classroom environment. Is it an equal division of responsibility to extend grace and develop the rapport? One participant discussed a fearfulness to engage in the classroom environment.

In my classes, I can say that I'm always so scared to speak my mind only because I'm afraid I'm not going to use the correct vocabulary, or I'm going to sound too hood, or I'm going to sound like I'm trying to use big words that I don't even know. It's kind of always been a part of me though, just being afraid to sound dumb, or being afraid to not sound like everyone else, so I just keep my mouth shut. The worst thing is sitting in a lecture hall and saying something, and then the professor not knowing how to respond because of one reason or another. I just never want to be that student. I just like to feel secure. I guess that just goes back out into the throw myself into the water thing. (Gee, interview, September 12, 2016)

In summary, classroom rules of engagement highlighted a counterculture experience for participants; it required participants to successfully navigate "double worlds". Skills and abilities used to engage and connect with peers outside the classroom were deemed

ineffective inside the classroom. There were obstacles to overcome in the classroom environment related to peer engagement, faculty interactions, and overall comfort in the classroom. For most participants, there was no connection created for them by way of the classroom experience. The classroom, in many ways, created spaces of exclusion and a space where participants could not identify and/or feel valued.

My last research question focused on the types of relationships most critical to Black undergraduate females and in what ways do they provide support. In exploring the types of relationships critical for supporting Black undergraduate, relationships are rooted in connections to self, most often found within their peer groups. As participants navigated both "Black Trent" on a larger scale and even some of the institutional programming on a smaller scale, there was a connection to self that provided an entry point to their understanding and exploration/navigation of the institution. Even if the engagement did not prove a lasting relationship, it created opportunities to engage with others.

While initially, surface-level connectors of interests and hobbies were explored, for more long-term relationships, participants were looking for support and encouragement in their relationships. They wanted peers who could motivate them as they navigated the college journey and environment.

> I've noticed that I like people that like the same music as me. Music is one of the best forms of expression I think and I like when I can just vibe over music with people. I also like people that are able to hold a conversation. A lot of people in my generation can't really hold a conversation or they don't know about what's going around them. (Young Queen, interview, November 11, 2016)

> I feel like they almost have to be artistic in a sense. If you're an artistic person, we kind of already connected, because that means you think outside the box or you're not afraid to think outside the box. Being an artistic person, it means you can challenge what I say, and I can challenge what you say. Then we can grow and learn from each other. I feel like most people that I'm super close with and tight

with, we all have an artist's mind, almost, and we connect off of that. It makes the relationship more special. (Chinonso, interview, November 17, 2016)

I would text my friend, "If I'm not in the [Campus Computer Center] tonight, please text me and tell me bring my behind." (Naria, interview, November 14, 2016)

It is within this subculture of Trent University that these relationships have been created and sustained for the participants. Institutional programs (e.g., summer bridge programming, living learning communities, etc.) provided the gateway to navigating Trent University. Through the immersion and participation of these programs, an entry point to the institution was created. From going through similar experiences, there was an inherent support system amongst one another sub-consciously built into their experiences. For many participants, peer relationships were formed through these programs and sustained over their time at the institution. For other participants, "Black Trent", specifically the subculture of student organizations, provided a secondary entry point to navigating the institution and providing opportunities for relationship development.

I've met other friends through different organizations. Freshman year when I first started going to [Student Program Board] and BSU is where I met a lot of different people. I kept a good amount of [interactions with] people from then. (Young Queen, interview, November 11, 2016)

Existing literatures highlights intentional, focused interactions with faculty can provide positive outcomes for students (Guiffrida, 2005; O'Keeffe, 2013; Morrow & Ackerman, 2012; Strayhorn & Saddler, 2009; Strayhorn, 2013; Winkle-Wagner, 2015). Unfortunately, participant experiences in the study with faculty vastly varied. While a handful of participants were able to identify one or two faculty members where they felt supported and/or experiences in their classes enabled them to explore self in different

ways, these relationships were not sustained beyond their class experience.

> I don't think across the board I expected all faculty to be strong supporters or encouragers. You take a class, and they're like, "Oh, if this class is difficult to you, you might want to rethink your major." That's not really encouraging or motivating. (Chinonso, interview, November 17, 2016)

Participants of this study did articulate clear expectations of their faculty interactions. Their expectations provide an entry point for further discussion of how intentional interactions and/or relationship with faculty would impact their college experience.

> I wanted faculty that were basically really supportive, always available for students when they needed them, and flexible with their learning styles. I wanted an instructor or a professor that knew how to teach in multiple ways and not just your standard lecture hall class. (Maya, interview, November 3, 2016)

> I think that faculty should try to make themselves available to students, of course with students working with them to find availability for extra help. I feel like they should welcome questions and be able to handle students not understanding something that in their eyes seems easy. (Young Queen, interview, November 11, 2016).

Summary

Strayhorn (2012) argues that, (on a larger scale) "by interacting frequently (and in positive ways) with others on campus, students establish meaningful relationships (e.g., friendships), which, in turn, can be seen as supportive resources that can be brought to bear on the college experience" (p. 9). Strayhorn's definition of belonging provides latitude to what makes a "college experience'. Strayhorn's definition of belonging does not provide a context as denoted by Tinto (1987). Tinto (1987) argued that the "college experience" entailed both social and academic experiences. But what the participants in this study have highlighted is that the experience is not as formulaic as argued by Tinto.

If anything, the impact of Helms' (1990) racial/ethnic and gender identity development played a larger role in understanding how participants navigated both the

social and classroom environment of the institution, which provided insight to sense of belonging. Participants exhibited varying levels of connection rooted in experiences based in the classroom or experiences based outside of the classroom. Unfortunately, none of the participants based their sense of belonging and/or connection as a result of experiences both inside and outside the classroom. It was as if these were two mutually exclusive, non-causal relationships.

Since there was a lack of context provided in Strayhorn's (2012) research and additionally through this study, only assumptions can be made regarding connections between belonging and success. This research did not provide evidence that belonging increased and/or even led to increased student success. This research was able to highlight students' ability to find networks of support that ultimately provided a community of peers where they felt connected and respected. While this research focused more on understanding these experiences, hindsight acknowledges that the questions posed during the data collected phase offered belonging as two distinct experiences and not separate, but equal experiences. Further research is recommended to determine what, if any causal relationships can be identified.

CHAPTER 5 – DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to explore Black undergraduate females' sense of belonging at a predominantly White institution. Sense of belonging was defined as one's ability to identify with a group or community (Strayhorn, 2012). It evokes experiences and emotions tied to mattering and providing motivation that influences behavior (Strayhorn, 2012). For the purposes of this research, sense of belonging was examined through relationship development and connection/integration into the social and academic elements of their institution. Additionally, this research explored the element of identity development; in what ways did their identity awareness and exploration impact their sense of belonging.

Findings from this research answered the following questions:

1. In what ways do Black female students' identity awareness and exploration impact their sense of belonging at a predominantly White institution?

2. In what ways do Black female college students attending a predominantly White institution come to feel integrated into, or isolated from, the academic and social elements of the university environment?

3. What types of relationships are most critical for supporting Black female college students' sense of belonging at a predominantly White institution and in what ways do those relationships provide support?

A phenomenological-type approach was employed to illustrate the lived experiences of nine Black undergraduate females. Using interviews and journaling techniques, sense

of belonging phenomena and how these participants made meaning of belonging was explored. The analysis of the data found the following themes emerged: identity development (Who Am I?), participation in university-sponsored programming (Institutional Programs), and navigation of the social environment (Social Rules of Engagement and the classroom environment (Classroom Rules of Engagement).

Identity development examined how participants unpacked the challenging question of "Who Am I" as it related to their identity development and their view of self within the larger Black community at Trent University. Participation in university programming revealed institutional structures and systems that consciously, or subconsciously, communicated expectations and norms of the academic and social environment of Trent University. Lastly, navigating the social and classroom environment were two distinct ways students were acclimated and acculturated into Trent University. However, in order for participants to be successful, there needed to be a comprehension of the rules of engagement, understanding that the rules differed based on the social and classroom environments.

Who Am I

"Who am I" coupled the dynamic intersection of participants' race/ethnicity and gender and examines how they make meaning of it this notion for themselves. Additionally, how they make meaning and position themselves within the larger community of Trent University. Janet Helms' (1990) conducted research of racial/ethnic and gender identity development, identifying 4 stages of development that participants might experience. There is limited research of coupling racial/ethnic and gender identity and its impact on how students develop belonging within a specific context (i.e., college

or university). Research findings were not definitive. However, for many participants, sense of belonging was related to how they connected with their peers in a social context. Links were found between participants' comfort/awareness in/of their own identity development and their own sentiments of belonging. What is unaccounted for, however, is the point of development in which they entered the university environment.

One of the major components of sense of belonging for participants were the relationships developed through their navigation of institutional programs and comprehension, application, of rules of engagement. Participants who possessed strong sentiments of belonging also had strong/positive experiences of peer engagement. For these participants, when they felt more comfortable with self, there was a confidence to engage with others and confidence in self was directly related to their identity awareness. As participants progressed through the initial pre-encounter/encounter phases, there was a reconciliation of self to be open to changing messaging about what it meant to be a Black female. There was movement away from automatic acceptance of societal norms of what it meant to be a Black female, but rather creating their own understanding and demonstration of what it meant to be Black. In this re-definition of self, those who were able to navigate it successfully were able to find/create spaces that supported who they were, even if it was viewed as different than societal norms.

Institutional Programs

Institutional programs had a direct impact on how participants acclimated and acculturated into Trent University. Participants spoke of specific programs such as summer bridge programming (i.e., summer conditional admittance program), living learning communities (i.e., unique on-campus living arrangements that provide direct

connections to a specific department or school/college), and living on-campus as ways

they learned how the institution operated and opportunities they began to engage with

peers in smaller, more intentional ways.

The unique component(s) to these institutional programs was they took place

during participants' first year of college. Additionally, participants spoke of messaging

received from the institution that helped create their sense of belonging and connection to

the institution and helped integrate (and in small cases isolated) them from the academic

and social elements of the environment. Many highlighted the branding of their class

(e.g., Welcome Class of 2020) and targeted messaging to attend specific events (e.g.,

Welcome Week or Homecoming) that were noticeably absent beyond their first year.

Participants did not articulate specific institutional programs that took place post-first

year of college. Programs offered during their first year intentionally, and/or

unintentionally, shaped their acceptance to and reception of the institution.

<div align="center">Rules of Engagement</div>

Lastly, participants learned the rules of engaging their environment, both from a

social and classroom rules of engagement. For many participants, understanding the

rules of engagement was the result of participating in institutional programs. By

participating in these programs, participants were able to explore, accept or refute, the

rules of engaging with the social and classroom experiences. Participants were quickly

immersed into the social network of the institution known as "Black [Trent]" and

"HBTU". This social network was the "it" scene for Black students attending the

institution. This is how participants were introduced to the culture of the Black student

community at Trent University, how many Black peers engaged with one another, and

what the early stages of community and support looked like. But for many, this social

scene provided an skewed reality of who attended the institution. "Black [Trent]"

enabled participants to immerse themselves in their culture and be surrounded by those

that looked like them, even if they behaved and/or dressed differently on a daily basis.

This skewed reality was juxtaposed against their classroom environment that was

isolating, competitive, lacking in diversity; a stark difference with the more

welcoming/more inclusive environment they experienced within "Black [Trent]".

Participants shared how they navigated these two worlds and learned how to

"code switch" (Anderson, 1999) in order to combat stereotypes and be respected by their

peers and faculty. Participants accepted that they would typically be the minority within

their classrooms and come to automatically seek out faces that looked like them

whenever they entered a new classroom space, in spite of lack of connection beyond skin

tone. While there was no handbook that provided these instructions, participants quickly

learned these rules of engagement.

Limitations of the Study

The experiences of the women who chose to participate in this research are *their*

unique journeys at *their* specific institution. The findings from their journey are limited

and will used to *inform* the experiences of other Black females at other predominantly

White institutions, but it should not be used as a generalization for all Black female

experiences at all predominantly White institutions.

One limitation to the study that should be noted is a divergent case within the

participants. Debbie, a Nigerian female challenged this study as her experiences served

as an anomaly. She attended boarding school in Nigeria prior to her arrival at Trent

University. She found peer engagement to be more transactional interactions versus how other participants viewed them; an opportunity to meet and connect and support each other. For Debbie, these interactions had a greater purpose, to network for post-college job connections and/or a relationship she could gain knowledge and/or awareness. Her experiences are important to highlight, but to serve as a reminder that within the Black community there are differing experiences and perspectives.

Another limitation of the study is the timeframe in which the study was conducted. While participants ranged in class standings, and connections within the institution, the data collection was only a snapshot of their experience; two interviews over a 3-month timeframe. The qualitative approach provided opportunities for participants to reflect on their experiences, but a longitudinal approach (e.g., over the course of a year) could provide a more detailed account of each participant to examine what, if any, growth and/or changes existed.

An additional limitation to this study was the data collection method. While interviews and journaling provided thick descriptions, a complementary understanding of the environment could have enhanced the data. Participant observations in specific identified campus locations, student organization meetings, and/or classroom experiences could have provided an additional layer of understanding of the social and classroom environments at Trent University.

As it relates to the data collection method, journaling did provide thick descriptions regarding their support networks. It was within these support networks where family emerged as an important part of participants' experiences. Unfortunately, journals were not reviewed until after the completion of the second interview and did not

provide ample opportunities for further follow-up and could not be fully incorporated into the findings section. Future research using journaling techniques should build follow-up opportunities to discuss and analyze journal entries with participants.

Implications for Practice and Policy

Although there are limitations, data from this study are useful in identifying implications for practice and policy in student affairs or higher education. Institutional programming was a key factor is helping participants understand and participate in traditions and rituals found in the larger university environment. However, it was clearly noted, these opportunities only existed within their first year of college. What opportunities can be made to extend programming beyond a student's first year of college to aid in feeling connected and provided unique opportunities to engage with their peers in intentionally designed ways. What ways can research on sense of belonging be connected to existing research on sophomore slump (Wang & Kennedy-Phillips, 2013).

Secondly, summer bridge/trio type programs are often federally funded initiatives that are dwindling, lacking financial support, particularly at Trent University. The unique aspect about these programs, particularly from these participants' perspective, is that it provided an introduction to both the social and classroom experience. If federal funds are not available to create and implement a specific summer bridge-type program, it is imperative to look at admissions practices to determine the rate of enrollment of Black females and how are we intentionally connecting these students to campus resources (e.g., Diversity Office, Cultural Center, etc.) to create intentional support networks and entry points beyond pre-college to understand and experience the academic and social norms of the institution.

Additionally, the participants in this study do articulate a strong connection to their student organizations and peers (developed through these student organizations). It is important to note, that the majority of participants acknowledged participation in Black cultural student organizations, organizations that addressed their cultural identities. It is important for student activities/student life professionals to take note of the student organizations that are being created and if they are not present, identify ways to encourage opportunities to create these spaces. At Trent University specifically, there was no presence of a Black Cultural Center. Participants created their own "centers" by using key spaces on campus (e.g., student union, computer center, etc.). It is important for institutions to examine what are intentional spaces and environments that can be designed for students to retreat to comfortably engage with their peers.

There is a unique opportunities for alumni connections and giving. While many participants struggled to articulate a connection to the larger Trent University, there was significant connections established through their student organizations and/or spatial and environmental designs of the campus. This could be a unique opportunity for alumni engagement and giving. Typically, alumni outreach to students to give back to the institution post-graduation. However, there is an opportunity to personalize a student's giving by placing attention to their points of connection to the institution. Instead of asking for funds to the overall institution (i.e., Trent University), could there be opportunity to personalize their giving and ask to give for a specific student organization (e.g., Black Student Union) or to upgrade a specific location of campus (e.g., residence hall) that could create lasting connections for the student, but also an opportunity for them to "pay it forward" and enhance connections between alumni and current students.

Lastly, it should be acknowledged that the aforementioned implications and recommendations could be tailored to any particular population – majority or minority populations. However, as I think about the participants in this study, a clear implication is the discussion of how are we creating space for Black females to show up, particularly in the classroom, and be acknowledged and in many ways embraced. Many participants shared not being "seen" by their classmates and/or faculty and would often blend into the classroom scenery. Institutions need to consider how are we creating intentional space for their voices to be acknowledged and additionally, how can we empower our Black females to use the voice even when they feel like it is being ignored.

Implications for Theory and Research

The findings of this study provide implications for future theory and research. There was a lack of articulated experiences of peer and faculty relationships/support in the classroom. Existing research demonstrates positive impact to a students' overall academic experience (O'Keeffe, 2013). There are opportunities to explore how to create intentional opportunities, specifically, examining how those relationships are initiated and offered and what is the long-term impact on a student's success, and what, if any, connection its creates to the participants' institution.

Additionally, there is an opportunity for intentional research on the causal relationships between inside and outside of classroom experiences and its connections to student success, specifically from an academic performance indicator (e.g., GPA and/or persistence). While this research explored social and classroom experiences as it relates to their connection to the institution, there is great opportunity to examine what if any relationship exists between the presence of either or both experiences and its connection to student success.

Conclusion

Sense of belonging is a construct where individuals self-identify with a group or community (Strayhorn, 2012). Each participant did possess a sense of belonging as defined by Strayhorn. However, there is dissonance between Strayhorn's research and Tinto's (1987) research as it relates to sense of belonging and connection to the institution. Tinto posits that connection is grounded in both the academic and social elements of the institution, while Strayhorn identifies belonging with a group or community, i.e., can be found within pockets in either elements.

For these participants, this experience was found in either the academic or social elements; no participant was able to find connection and belonging in both environments. Senses of belonging as outlined by Strayhorn (2012) highlights the ability to self-identify with a group and feel valued within a community. It should be acknowledged that neither Strayhorn nor Hausmann et al. (2007) articulate that this notion is context-bound. Tinto (1987) argued academic **and** social integration had to be present for student success. For the Black females that participated in this study, that was not evident and they were still able to find places of belonging within their institution. Sense of belonging was present

for these participants. They each where able to identify either through participation in institutional programs or engagement with peers through the "HBTU" social environment. Their social interactions created space for them to matter, feel respected, and valued.

It ultimately raises the question, what does institutional commitment look like? Does institutional commitment equate connection and/or identification with the academic **and** social environment? Does the iconic college experience exist for today's college student and if not what is the impact? For the participants in this study, this iconic portrayal did not exist. There was a greater purpose for their attendance in college, mainly for their family – whether it was an effort to prove an absentee family wrong or heeding the advice of extended family to stay focused and obtain good grades because they were looking forward to their graduation. Family was a part of these students' experience and what they sought upon attending Trent University.

While there is no definitive evidence that sense of belonging is connected to student success. This is worth further exploration to determine what, if any, connection exists between students who possess low, medium, or high sense of belonging and their ability to be successful at their institution. However, as a community of higher education, it is important that we are providing opportunities for students to feel like they matter, creating spaces for students to self-identify and further explore sense of self, and be engaged in the college experience beyond knowledge acquisition.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A – IRB APPROVAL

T TEMPLE UNIVERSITY
Research Administration

Research Integrity & Compliance
Student Faculty Center
3340 N. Broad Street, Suite 304
Philadelphia PA 19140

Institutional Review Board
Phone: (215) 707-3390
Fax: (215) 707-9100
e-mail: irb@temple.edu

Certification of Approval for a Project Involving Human Subjects

Date: 07-Sep-2016

Protocol Number:	23887
PI:	DAVIS, JAMES
Review Type:	EXEMPT
Approved On:	07-Sep-2016
Approved From:	
Approved To:	
Committee:	A1
School/College:	EDUCATION (1900)
Department:	ED:INFO & INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY (19130)
Sponsor:	NO EXTERNAL SPONSOR
Project Title:	Understanding Black Females Sense of Belonging at a Predominantly White Institution

The IRB approved the protocol 23887.

If the study was approved under expedited or full board review, the approval period can be found above. Otherwise, the study was deemed exempt and does not have an IRB approval period.

If applicable to your study, you can access your IRB-approved, stamped consent document or consent script through eRA. **Open the Attachments tab and open the stamped documents by clicking the View icon next to each document.** The stamped documents are labeled as such.

Before an approval period ends, you must submit the Continuing Review form via the eRA module. Please note that though an item is submitted in eRA, it is not received in the IRB office until the principal investigator approves it. Consequently, please submit the Continuing Review form via the eRA module at least 60 days, and preferably 90 days, before the study's expiration date.

Note that all applicable Institutional approvals must also be secured before study implementation. These approvals include, but are not limited to, Medical Radiation Committee ("MRC"); Radiation Safety Committee ("RSC"); Institutional Biosafety Committee ("IBC"); and Temple University Survey Coordinating Committee ("TUSCC"). Please visit these Committees' websites for further information.

Finally, in conducting this research, you are obligated to submit modification requests for all changes to any study; reportable new information using the Reportable New Information form; and renewal and closure forms. For the complete list of investigator responsibilities, please see the Policies and Procedures, the Investigator Manual, and other requirements found on the Temple University IRB website: http://www.temple.edu/research/regaffairs/irb/index.html

Appendix B – INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Understanding Undergraduate Black females' sense of belonging at a predominantly White institution

Opening Remarks
Thank you for your participation in my research study. The goal of this project is to understand how Black female students' create a sense of belonging at a predominantly White institution.

This study will be a 3-part study in which you will be asked to participant in interviews and a journaling exercise. During the interviews, I want to understand how your experiences at your institution. What connections have you made, not related to peers, faculty, and staff. How have you been integrated into the academic and social aspects of the academic environment? Lastly, how would you describe your overall commitment to the institution?

Collect Consent (dialogue)
Today's interview will be about **45 minutes to an hour long**. It will be audio recorded. No real names will be used in future publications or talks on the research. The identity of each participant and your answers will be kept strictly confidential. I hope that this interview will benefit you by giving you a chance to reflect on your experiences.

While your participation is highly valued, it is, of course, voluntary. You are free to participate or not, or leave the study at any time without penalty. You can refuse to answer any question that is asked of you. This research has been reviewed and approved by the Temple University Institutional Review Board. Please contact them at ▮▮▮▮▮ ▮▮▮ or e-mail them at: irb@temple.edu for any of the following: questions, concerns, or complaints about the research; questions about your rights; to obtain information; or to offer input.

Questions regarding the study may be addressed to Dr. James E. Davis, Education, 1301 Cecil B. Moore Ave. Temple University, Philadelphia PA 19122, ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮.

Demographic survey

1. Desired Pseudo-Name
2. Gender
3. Race/Ethnicity
4. Email
5. Phone Number
6. Did either parent and/or guardian attend college
7. Class Standing

8. Name Clubs/Organizations that you are currently a participant, not limited to Student Activities, but also academic and community organizations

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First Interview Questions

1. How would you identify yourself in high school?
2. Describe your family dynamic and/or involvement while you were in high school?
3. What role, if any, did your family play in the college selection process?
4. How would you identify yourself now that you are in college?
5. In what ways has your identity changed?
6. In what ways do you anticipate your identity to change
7. Describe your involvement?
8. How did you become involved?
9. Why did you become involved?
10. In what ways has your involvement impacted and/or influenced your college experience?
11. What is your major? Describe the types classes are you taking?
12. Describe your comfort level in the classroom. What are the class dynamics?
13. What types of interactions do you have with peers in the classroom?
14. How would you describe yourself since coming to college? How would you describe yourself as a Black female on this campus?
15. How would you define your sense of belonging to your institution?

Journaling Prompts

Thank you again for your participation in the first half of this study. Do you have any initial questions and/or concerns? You will have the opportunity to review the transcript of our conversation today. You will have the opportunity to make any changes or clarify any information you believe might have been misinterpreted.

The second part of the participation is using the journal provided to reflect on your experiences here at your institution. I will provide you a journal that I'm asking you to write down thoughts between now and our next interview. There are 2 prompts that have been included on the inside as it relates to your support system and what motivates you to be successful. Please bring it with you to our next meeting.

- Describe your support system while you are here in college.
- What does success look like for you?
- What motivates you to be successful at this institution?

Second Interview Questions
1. What relationships have you made with your peers, faculty, and staff?
2. Describe peers you are most connected with. How did these relationships form?

3. Describe your comfort level with faculty and/or staff. Do you feel supported by these individuals? Why or Why Not? How did these relationships form?
4. Are there other individuals or groups you are connected with within the institution? Who are they? How did these relationships form?

How have Black female college students integrated into the academic and social elements of the university environment?
5. What types of interactions do you have with peers in the classroom?
6. Describe your interactions with peers outside the classroom.
7. How have these interactions changed over time?
8. Are there specific locations on-campus you and your peers gravitate towards? Why or why not?

Describe your overall commitment to the institution. How does your sense of belonging impact this level of commitment?
9. How did this institution rank in your college selection? If you could do it again, what would you change?
10. If you could rank you commitment level to this institution on a scale of 1-5, 1 being least committed and 5 being most committed, how would you rank it? Why did you give it that ranking?
11. In what ways do you stay motivated while in college?
12. How has that evolved from when you first started college (if applicable – i.e., second year class standing or above)
13. What has been your proudest accomplishment while at this institution?
14. What goals do you wish to achieve while you are a student at this institution?

Closing remarks
Thank you again for your participation in the study. Do you have any questions and/or concerns? You will have the opportunity to review the transcript of our conversation today. You will have the opportunity to make any changes or clarify any information you believe might have been misinterpreted. Thank you again; your experiences will be part of my research to understand how Black females navigate such a large institution. If you have questions and/or concerns after this, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Miscellaneous
At the conclusion of the second interview, participants will receive $25 Visa gift card for your participation.

Appendix C – MEMO EXAMPLE

Below is an excerpt of a memo I drafted after reviewing participant Debbie's initial interview written October 8, 2016.

I was probably most nervous in this interview. Debbie was interview #4. Prior interviews had an ease and flow to the questions. While both differed greatly in terms of scope and responses, there was still an ease that was present. Today, there was almost a performance quality to the interview. I felt like it was a dual interview – I was interviewing Debbie, but also Debbie was interviewing me.

Debbie disclosed that she was of Nigerian descent and that she saw it a privilege if she was the only Black student within a classroom or class setting. Upon asking her to share more, she shared her observations of African Americans and not fully understanding why African Americans saw themselves as "less than" others. For her, she has always been surrounded by Blacks in Africa and could personally relate to the better or worse notion.

Additionally, I felt myself projecting in my questioning. I felt myself get defensive in the types of questions I was asking based on her non-verbals. At first, I thought there was some questioning of my project and almost some elitism in some of her responses. It was interesting, it was if I was transported back to college and feeling judge by Blacks within my own community.

Who knew that this many years later, I was still challenged by my "Black community" and struggling to fit it and seeking validation from others.

Appendix D – CODEBOOK

Code	Definition
Academic Engagement/Experience	Singular academic moments and/or experiences participants enjoyed
Academic Integration	Connection to their academic experience beyond a singular class or experience
Academic Motivation/Ambitions	Motivations to do well in class and/or persist to graduation
Academic Self	Participant defines self through an academic lens/major
Academics challenging racial norms	Class experiences that "called out" racial disparities, faculty empathized with minority students, or created space for open dialogue
Am I Black enough?	Am I Black enough/ Am I too Black?
Asserting self in the classroom/with peers	Examples of participants having to proud their intellect and/or contributions - dispelling initial stereotypes of their perceived academic performance
Belonging	Moments students identified they belonged and/or felt included
Black cultural organizations	Organization directly tied to the Black culture
Black image portrayal	Feeling pressure (peer or societal) to portray a certain image (positive) or pressure to speak on behalf of "Blacks"
Black Student Engagement	Observations of Black students engagement habits
Campus Organizations	References to different campus organizations and reflections of their impact
Class/Major application	Opportunities for experiential learning - academic learning outside the classroom
College Preparation	High school experiences that prepared them for college - i.e., guidance counselor and/or aided in their college decision-making
Colloquialism	Monikers used within the campus community to describe social interactions and/or groups of people
Combating stereotypical views of Black	Combating stereotypical views of Blacks e.g., portrayed by media and social media. Hiding parts of self as to not contribute to stereotypical views of Blacks

Comfort	Moments/experiences where students articulated feeling comfortable
Confidence/Self-Esteem	Moments where participant questions their abilities and/or opportunities presented to them
Connector	Person who connects participants to other engagement opportunities
Cultural acclimation	Experiences of acclimation to the culture of the college environment (positive or negative)
Cultural Impact	Intersectionality of their identity - e.g., Black + Nigerian
Cultural Involvement	Student organizations with a cultural focus
Desire for Black Faculty	Articulated interest and/or desire for Black faculty
Desire to engage more with others	Desire to engage (talk with, hang out) with other college students - both inside and/or outside the classroom
Discrimination Experiences	Students report being treated differently on the basis on their identity(ies) - covert or overt examples - experienced by the student
Existing in two worlds	Discussion from the participants of experience 2 types of "worlds" - having to act/respond/communicate differently Two-ness - Double Conscious-ness
Expectation of Black Student Presence	Students expectations of seeing other Black students on-campus (inside and outside the classroom)
Expectations of Faculty	Conscious and subconscious expectations participants have of their faculty (teaching style, student engagement, etc.)
Faculty engagement	Examples of faculty engagement (positive or negative)
Family Dynamic	How participants described their families (i.e., nuclear or extended) and personalities, mannerisms, etc. exhibited
Family Expectations	Participants experiences with their families as it related to their expectations of their academic performance, major selection, and career paths
Family not understanding college application process	Family not understanding college application process (cultural difference or did not attend college themselves)
Family response to attending college	Stages of denial
Family support selecting colleges	Articulated support of families during the college application/decision process of college selection

Feeling lost	Participant expressed moments of feeling lost - through campus culture shock, struggling with social connections, dealing with newfound independence
Fictive kinship	Descriptions of interactions with faculty that related to literature's fictive kinship (going above and beyond in care/concern/support
Gender Identity Development	Exploration of gender - specifically womanism, inclusive of women's sexual identity development
Guilt for attending college	Participant admitting they felt guilty for attending college - leaving family/friends at home
Hesitancy to confront behavior	Recognition that the others' behavior is wrong, inappropriate, or hurtful. Unsure of how to confront or approach the individual regarding the behavior.
Identity Development	Examples of development of self - not limited to interpersonal development, cognitive development and/or growth
In-class peer engagement	Lack of engagement
Influenced their college decision	People who directly impacted their decision to attend college
Inner Black culture difference	Experiences where participants discussed differing perspectives/experiences than other Blacks
Inner Black culture frustration	Feeling like other Black people make the "Black image" look bad or support negative stereotypes she tries to dispel.
Institutional Commitment	Experiences that determined commitment level to the institution (strong or poor commitment levels)
Institutional Program	Programs created by the institution that provided support, connection, and/or increased commitment to the institution for the student
Intrinsic Motivation	Ability to gauge success from within versus seeking external validation
Lack of Black representation	Student organizations created due to lack of Black representation within other organizations or professional fields and/or industries
Lack of commitment	Participant not feeling connected to the institution - for "moments" or extended periods of time

Lack of diversity in classes	Participant reporting small numbers of Blacks (including themselves) in their classes - average is 1-3 people
Lack of social connections	Lack of feeling socially connected to others on-campus
Leadership positions within the organization	Holding leadership positions within student organization(s)
Loner	Expressed moments of feeling alone and by themselves - either intentionally or design of the environment
Micro-aggressions	Comments that are offensive and/or reinforce stereotypes
Not wanting the attention in the classroom	Not wanting to draw perceived unnecessary attention to self e.g., responding correctly to a question posed by the instructor
Parental/Family Involvement	Involvement or parents/family with participants college experience (application process —> college attendance)
Peer Engagement	Examples of how peers engage (or disengage) with one another
Perception v. Reality of Black Presence	Participant experiences that made them feel like campus was more diverse than compared to later experiences
Perceptions of HBCU	Perceptions of HBCU student environments and how that has shaped their view and expectation of Black student interaction
Perceptions of isolation prepping for the "real world"	Reflecting perhaps the behaviors experienced is preparing for possible isolation in the business world.
Perspective Black Engagement	Perspective of how Black students engage with one another on-campus (inside and outside the classroom)
Pre-College Experience	Experience pre-college that impact their college experience (connection, confidence, preparation, etc.)
Pressure to speak for the collective Black	Pressure/expectation to speak on behalf of all Black students/people
Racial Identity Development	Experiences denoting growth and development within participants' racial/ethnic identity
Racial undertones to discussions (Class/Workshops)	Expressed discomfort by participants when discussions shift to race - either intentional racial conversations or implied decision-making is skewed because of race
Rationale of lack of diversity	Participant's rationale for lack of diversity on-campus (inside and/or outside the classroom)

Real World Ready	"Adulting" Experiences of discrimination or micro aggressions being rationalized as preparation for life after college when you encounter them on larger scales
Role modeling for family	Role modeling not only for family
Rules of Social Engagement	Expectations (conscious or sub-conscious) of how students engage with peers specifically, how different environments dictate different types of engagement (i.e., party scenes versus places on-campus)
SES Privilege	Participants witness socio-economic privilege amongst their peers (typically White peers)
Skepticism	Skeptical of how the institution operates - whose interest is being served
Social integration	Connection to their experiences with peers outside the classroom - social setting, student organization, places on-campus - points of social interactions
Social integration with a purpose	Attending social opportunities that related to the person's identity, interests, and/or academics
Social media connections	Engaging with peers via social media outlets - Twitter, Facebook
Space to be authentic self	Participants articulating space (physical or mental) where they can be their self
Student organization educating other cultures/races	Student orgs using the space to not only educate about that specific culture and/or icons, but also highlighting the nuances of the culture
Thoughts of systemic oppression	Reflections/"Awakenings" of learned information about systems of oppression
What college meant/Outcome	Participant's description of why they attend college
Why social integration	Explanation of why participants got involved

Appendix E – CATEGORIZATION OF CODES

Belonging/Lack of Belonging Dichotomy
- Belonging
- Desire smaller, more intimate settings
- Discomfort
- Feeling lost
- Institutional Commitment
- Lack of Black representation
- Lack of commitment
- Lack of connection to the institution
- Lack of social connections
- Loner
- Perceptions of isolation prepping for the "real world"
- Rationale of lack of diversity
- Segregated Socially

Family
- College Preparation
- Comfort
- Family Dynamic
- Family Expectations
- Family not understanding college application process
- Family pressure to complete college
- Family response to attending college
- Family support selecting colleges
- Fictive kinship
- Guilt for attending college
- Influenced their college decision
- Parental/Family Involvement
- SES Privilege
- What college meant/Outcome

Rules of Engagement
- Academic Engagement/Experience
- Academic environment
- Academic Expectations
- Academic Motivation/Ambitions
- Academic Self
- Academics challenging racial norms
- Asserting self in the classroom/with peers
- Balance
- Black cultural organizations
- Black Student Engagement
- Black Student Integration
- Campus Organizations
- Class Management
- Class/Major application
- Colloquialism
- Competitive
- Confusion between faculty/staff
- Connector
- Cultural acclimation
- Cultural connection
- Cultural Impact
- Designed to fail
- Desire for Black Faculty
- Desire to engage more with others
- Discouraging faculty experiences
- Environment
- Expectation of Black Student Presence
- Expectations of Faculty

- External Black community/culture pressures
- Faculty engagement
- Financial/College Cost Implications
- First Year Experience
- Hesitancy to confront behavior
- How relationships form
- In-class peer engagement
- Peer Relationship Values
- Peer Support
- Peers role modeling faculty/student interactions
- Perception v. Reality of Black Presence
- Perceptions of HBCU
- Perspective Black Engagement
- Pre-College Experience
- Racial undertones to discussions (Class/Workshops)
- Real World Ready
- Rules of communication
- Rules of Social Engagement

- Institutional Program/Service
- Involvement
- Lack of diversity in classes
- Lack of resources
- Leadership positions within the organization
- Peer Engagement

- Social Environment
- Social integration
- Social integration with a purpose
- Social media connections
- Student Leadership Position
- Student organization educating other cultures/races
- Student perceptions of faculty's ability to teach
- Support
- When social engagement does not extend to classroom interactions
- Why social integration

Who Am I

- Accomplishments
- Am I Black enough?
- Black image portrayal
- Combating stereotypical views of Black
- Confidence/Self-Esteem
- Cultural Impact
- Discrimination Experiences
- Existing in two worlds
- External Motivations
- Gender Identity Development
- Goals
- Identity
- Identity Development
- Identity Impact

- Inner Black culture difference
- Inner Black culture frustration
- Intrinsic Motivation
- Micro-aggressions
- Personal Restraint
- Pressure to speak for the collective Black
- Racial Identity Development
- Role modeling
- Skepticism
- Space to be authentic self
- Thoughts of systemic oppression
- Trying to fit in
- Using Black stereotypes for their benefit

The four above categories were grouped into four major findings areas: Who Am I (Who Am I), Classroom Rules of Engagement (Belonging/Lack of Belonging and Rules of Engagement), Social Rules of Engagement (Rules of Engagement), and Institutional Programs (Rules of Engagement). Family was not used as a major finding due to lack of substantiated connections. These codes left more questions than answers from participants.