

**IS THIS WHERE WE BELONG? EXPLORING THE CAMPUS
CLIMATE PERCEPTIONS OF BLACK MEN AT A
PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION**

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ABSTRACT

Literature indicates that while attending a predominantly White institution (PWI), Black men often experience stigmatization and feelings of alienation. Despite concerns of racial tension experienced by Black men at PWIs there is limited research exploring the campus climate perceptions of Black men in college. While Black students may have some similarities in navigating predominantly White campuses, there are relevant differences influenced by the intersection of race and gender. The post-secondary success of Black men has been identified as an area of concern in higher education due to the considerable disparities seen in college persistence and completion rates. However, discourse often focuses on perceived deficits of Black men in college instead of understanding how institutions can better support their success. There is a need to shift the conversation to explore how institutional climate plays a role in the experiences and outcomes of Black men. Research suggests that developing a sense of belonging is influenced by context and environment and can be challenging, but impactful for Black men. The current study seeks to understand the role that perceived campus climate plays in the development of sense of belonging for Black undergraduate men attending a PWI. The guiding research questions were: (1) What are the perceptions of campus climate for undergraduate Black men who attend a predominantly White institution? (2) How does the intersection of racial and gender identity influence the campus climate perceptions of undergraduate Black men? (3) How do the perceptions of campus climate influence the sense of belonging for undergraduate Black men? This qualitative study used various data collection methods including interviews, photovoice, and focus groups to gain an in-depth understanding of participants perceptions and experiences. Using an interpretative phenomenological approach, this analysis offers insights and makes meaning of 12 Black

men's lived experiences and perceptions of their campus belonging while attending a PWI. Eight themes emerged in response to the study research questions. The findings suggest that the campus climate perceptions of Black men are related to the intersection of their race and gender. Additionally, there were salient factors of campus climate that influenced the sense of belonging for participants in the study such as the absence/presence of Black peers and faculty/staff and supportive spaces of cultural familiarity. The findings of this study could have great implications for the future success of Black men as higher education institutions are confronted with declining enrollment and continued disparities in college persistence and graduation rates for their Black male students.

DEDICATION

To Elijah & Isaiah my beautiful, Black boys. You are my Pride & Joy.

I pray that you always know you Belong anywhere that you are.

To my Dad.

Thank you for always telling me that I could Be and Do anything that I put my mind to.

You knew this was possible before I could even imagine it.

I miss you and hope that I make you proud.

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I would like to first give all honor and glory to God who gave me the strength to see this journey through. There were many nights I wanted to give up. I prayed for the strength to persist and each time He provided. I gave my Best and God did the Rest!

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I never thought that I would earn a doctorate, but the seed was planted by my Dad. He told me I could do anything. A year ago, when he passed, I lost all motivation and didn't think I could possibly keep going, but I wanted to prove him right. He was so happy when I told him I was working on my doctorate and his favorite thing to do was brag about his children. If he were here, I know he would say – I told you that you would be a Doctor one day!

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Today many higher education institutions, with a majority White student body have enrolled more Black¹ students and have announced commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion particularly in response to the highly publicized instances of police brutality against Black people across the country. Prospective students find depictions of racial/ethnic diversity advertised throughout marketing materials leaving them with the expectations of a diverse learning environment in college. Due to a history of racial segregation, many Black students rarely attend a racially diverse school and are often a part of the racial majority in their schools prior to enrolling in college (Saenz, 2010). Even more so, attending a predominantly White institution (PWI)² can be a very isolating experience for many Black male collegians. Black men often feel a “culture shock” when they enroll in a college environment that feels nothing like what they are accustomed to. They find themselves being one of the few Black men on campus while navigating academic and social spaces making it difficult to adjust (Harper & Newman, 2016). Their experiences ultimately inform their perceptions of the institution and can cause feelings of uncertainty about their belonging and connectedness to the university.

Black men experience the college environment uniquely as the intersections of their race and gender identity impact how they are treated by peers, administrators, staff, and faculty (Brooms, 2020; Goodwill et al., 2022; Parker et al., 2016). Misleading

¹ The terms Black and African American are used interchangeably through this dissertation.

² The term predominantly White institutions is used throughout this dissertation to refer to institutions with a majority White student body. However, historically White institutions has also been used to describe these institutions to acknowledge the historical exclusion of diverse racial/ethnic groups.

descriptions of diverse student bodies and cross-racial tension have led to feelings of frustration and alienation for many Black men on campus (Parker et al., 2016). For instance, Black men only accounted for 4.5% of undergraduate postsecondary enrollment in fall 2020 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). Additionally, in fall 2015 the largest gender gap was among Black undergraduates with women making up 62.2 percent of Black undergraduates compared with only 37.8 percent who were men (Espinosa et al., 2019). There are many environmental factors that have made it challenging for Black men to connect with the campus environment (Harper & Newman, 2016; Patterson, 2018; Parker et al., 2016). Although Black men can be more selective when choosing which post-secondary institution to attend, they still encounter unwelcoming campus environments at PWIs that exclude them from many of the benefits that a college environment should provide. The environmental challenges that Black men experience are well documented in the literature and more recently there has been examination of how Black men persist despite the challenges (Brooms, 2019; Harper, 2015; Strayhorn, 2017). It is important to note that my focus on Black men does not devalue the experiences of Black women, however it emphasizes the importance of understanding how the intersection of gender identity influences student experiences and perceptions.

The study's focus on PWIs is also important as research does explore how institution type influences campus climate perceptions (Campbell et al., 2019) and student's level of belonging (Strayhorn, 2009). In 2020 only 9% of Black students were enrolled at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) which suggests that there are more Black students enrolling at other colleges and universities such as PWIs

(United States Department of Education, 2021). It is necessary that research looks closely at the experiences students have in the environment to develop a better understanding of the factors that influence these experiences. PWIs benefit from the enrollment of Black students who can be counted as a data point to measure the diversity of the student body. However, a closer look at their perceptions of the campus climate will determine if the institution has created an environment that makes Black men feel like they belong. More importantly, further examination of the unique perceptions of Black male undergraduate students at PWIs can also be helpful in identifying what can be done to create an environment that supports their learning and overall success.

Background/Context

The concept of climate has been discussed widely in higher education literature and various scholars have developed their own conceptualizations of campus climate (Bauer, 1998; Peterson & Spencer, 1990; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Woodard & Sims, 2000). An early definition of the concept refers to campus climate as “current perceptions, attitudes, and expectations that define the institution and its members” (Bauer, 1998, p. 2). As the literature on climate grew, other scholars expanded on the definition of climate including Rankin and Reason (2005) who defined campus climate as “the current attitudes, behaviors and standards of faculty, staff, administrators and students concerning the level of respect for individual needs, abilities and potential” (p.264). Although there are various definitions used to describe campus climate there is a general consensus that climate is formed by the perceptions and attitudes of the individuals that interact within the environment.

Hurtado (1990) was concerned with the perceptions of marginalized racial groups and more specifically defined racial climate as a socially constructed phenomena that is constructed by individual's perceptions and actions within an environment which are influenced by situational factors and historical context. Hurtado et al. (1998) added to the literature by outlining four dimensions of campus racial climate including: institutional history, structural diversity, psychological climate, and behavioral climate. Hurtado and colleagues continued to explore the importance of campus climate which led to the development of the campus racial climate (CRC) framework that views campus climate as a multidimensional phenomenon (Hurtado et al., 1999).

More importantly, the campus climate specifically at PWIs is a topic that needs to be further explored as Black students and other racial minorities still encounter campus environments where the same racial problems exist that have been discussed in studies from decades prior (e.g., D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Nettles, 1988). Studies that explore Black student perceptions of the campus environment often use comparison models to look at differences between PWIs and HBCUS (Campbell et al., 2019; Davis, 1994) or differences between White and Black students (Hausmann et al., 2009; Strayhorn, 2013). Conversely, this study will take an in depth look at the perceptions of Black men at PWIs only. While there are benefits to both approaches, a non-comparative approach is advantageous because it fills a gap within the existing literature. Additionally, it allows for a more comprehensive look at how participants experience a PWI with less focus on how it measures up to another institution type. This allows the study to focus less on the institution type and more on the population being studied.

The CRC framework (Hurtado et al., 1999) emphasizes the significance of an institution's historical context and majority of PWIs were not created with Black student's needs in mind. As Milem et al. (2005) noted, "Most predominantly white colleges and universities have a much longer history of exclusion than they do of inclusion and that this history continues to shape racial dynamics on our campuses" (p.16). Cress (2008) argues that understanding the factors that create campus climate may equip institutions with the information to change campus climate in ways that support all its students. With a significant proportion of the Black college student population attending a PWI there is a need for a deeper understanding of their perceptions.

Decades of higher education literature has demonstrated the significance of student perceptions of campus climate especially for marginalized populations (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Strayhorn, 2013). For example, research has consistently shown that student perceptions of campus climate differ across racial groups (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Johnson et al., 2014; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003; Strayhorn, 2013). Harper (2013) discusses the prevalence of racial problems that Black students face while attending PWIs and how they navigate campus racial climates that have been characterized as racist. Despite the troubling racial realities for Black students, White students are more likely to believe their campuses to be supportive of students of color (Cress, 2008; Rankin & Reason, 2005). Black students are more likely to expect racism and encounter racism than their White peers, and evidence shows that these experiences affect their perceptions of the overall campus racial climate (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Ncube et al., 2018).

Statement of the Problem

Higher education literature has examined topics related to enrollment, persistence, and degree completion for Black men (Boyd & Mitchell, 2018; Kim & Hargrove, 2013; Strayhorn, 2017). However, there are limited studies that look at these topics in relation to their perceptions of campus climate. While there are significant concerns about the college success outcomes of Black males (Brooms et al., 2015; Harper & Newman, 2016; Harper & Kuykendall, 2012) the institutional environments of predominantly white college campuses are not welcoming spaces for them. Cuyjet (2006) discusses the engagement, retention, and educational attainment of Black men and underscores the importance of institutional environment for this student group regardless of background, pre-college experience, sexual identity, and religious affiliations. Additional research also demonstrates that racial dynamics within the campus environment are a barrier that Black men face when navigating college (Boyd & Mitchell, 2018; Cuyjet, 1997; 2006; Iverson & Jagers, 2015). The racial climate on US campuses has become even more tense and hostile due to recent events. The spring of 2020 will always be remembered for the highly publicized acts of police brutality and murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery, among many others. These acts resulted in national outcry and attention to the effects of systemic racism for Black people in America. These events also led to protests and activism in a variety of contexts including university campuses. For some, these events empowered Black students to speak out about their experiences attending predominantly White institutions and demand more from their institutions beyond the generic anti-racism statements. Considering these events and the effects they have for Black individuals navigating predominantly White spaces, it is essential to understand the

perceptions of campus racial climate and identify what factors of the institutional context contributes to these perceptions. Therefore, this study seeks investigate how the campus climate of a PWI is perceived by Black men and what influence these perceptions have on their sense of belonging.

There are several studies that explore how racial identity influences the higher education experience for Black students. However, there is a lack of research that investigates the intersection of gender identity. Certainly, racial identity is an important aspect as students from stigmatized populations are more likely to be largely influenced by “belonging uncertainty” and more sensitive to issues of social belonging (Walton & Cohen, 2007). Consequently, when students are faced with seemingly nuanced situations and unwelcoming environments it can cast doubt on their sense of belonging (Walton & Cohen, 2007). Various studies have found that Black students are more likely than any other racial group to feel disconnected from their campus and report lower levels of satisfaction with the campus climate (Cress, 2008; Ncube et al., 2018; Walton & Cohen, 2007). The U.S. Department of Education reported that the percentage of Black students enrolled at HBCUs fell from eighteen percent in 1976 to nine percent in 2020 suggesting that more Black students are deciding to enroll at other institution types such as PWIs. It is imperative that studies on campus climate continue to consider the influence of racial identity to get an accurate picture. It is evident that hostile campus climates have a detrimental influence on the sense of belonging, academic success, and retention of students of color (Johnson et al.,2014; Museus et al., 2008; Strayhorn, 2013) which makes campus climate an important area of study. The literature on Black students’ campus climate perceptions often groups all Black students together. This is problematic

because it assumes that all Black students have the same experience and fails to consider the impact of their other identities.

Despite consistent reports of Black men having trouble adjusting to the college environment due to “feelings of cultural misfit” (Harper & Newman, 2016), frequent stereotyping, and discrimination (Allen, 2020; Boyd & Mitchell, 2018), there is a gap in the research when it comes to understanding their unique perceptions of the campus climate. Strayhorn’s (2013) study of student perceptions of campus climate and their intentions to leave college were examined for 391 participants. The results revealed that perceptions of campus climate played a significant role in Black students’ intentions to persist in college. Strayhorn’s (2013) investigation of race and gender differences also found that campus climate perceptions of undergraduate Black men impacted their intentions to leave college differently than the female undergraduates. Black men are also more likely than Black women to report instances of discrimination and prejudice present on their campuses (Cress, 2008). These within-group gender differences indicate an area of inquiry that should be explored in-depth.

There are limited studies that investigate the overall perceptions of campus climate for Black men. Most of the literature examining the impact of campus climate is often discussed in relation to students of color or Black students which ignores the different experiences that Black men have compared to other marginalized groups. Black men have needs and challenges that are not experienced in the same way as other student groups. Intersectionality theory posits that characteristics such as race and gender are layered and consequently impact a person's experiences and perceptions (Crenshaw, 1989). We cannot begin to understand the experiences of Black men without

acknowledging that their experiences are influenced greatly by the marginalization of their multiple social identities. Further exploration of their perceptions of the campus environment will shed light on how they make meaning of their experiences which can then be used to inform institutions on how to create an environment that is conducive to their success. To evaluate institutional practices related to campus climate it is critical to learn from the students themselves. In many cases, institutional efforts to address environmental concerns start and end with recruiting a racially diverse student body. However, there are additional factors that affect the campus climate of an institution that should be considered (Hurtado et al., 1998). This study aims to identify which campus climate factors are most salient for Black men attending PWIs.

Purpose of the Study

This study will use a multi theoretical approach to gain a deep understanding of the perceptions of campus climate for Black men attending a PWI. Racial and gender identity shapes individual experiences and perceptions in a way that needs to be addressed in the campus climate literature. This study is designed to examine how the institutional factors that shape campus climate influence the perceptions of Black men and their feeling of belonging within the institution. Therefore, this study will use qualitative methods to explore how Black men perceive the campus racial climate at a PWI and identify what dimensions of CRC contribute to the sense of belonging for undergraduate Black men.

Theoretical Framework

To fully explore the complexities of campus climate perceptions for Black men this study will use a multi-theoretical approach to understand the interplay between the social identities of Black men and their perceptions of campus climate. Using a multi-

theoretical approach grounded in Critical Race theory and Intersectionality theory the present study seeks to provide a multi-dimensional analysis regarding the campus climate perceptions of Black men. These theoretical perspectives are necessary for this study to maintain individual's racial and gender identities at the forefront of this analysis.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a theoretical framework developed in the 1970s by legal scholars including Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman and Kimberlé Crenshaw, among others to address the permanence of racism within the legal system and has since been used to explore the prevalence of systemic racism in all areas of society including the higher education system. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) subsequently utilized CRT theory to understand inequity within schooling. The various tenets of CRT can be used to examine the social disparities within systems that uphold White privilege and the oppression of marginalized groups (Hiraldo, 2010). CRT combined with the theory of Intersectionality introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 to describe the complexity of individual's multiple social identities that intersect and create distinct experiences of systemic oppression causing them to be "multiply burdened". These theories combined strengthen the analysis by considering the complexity of Black men's experiences due to their race and gender identities.

Additionally, the Campus Racial Climate (CRC) framework was used to conceptualize campus climate and provide a comprehensive understanding of the interrelated factors that shape campus climate. The framework originally identified four dimensions of CRC that are specific to individual institutions, including: structural diversity, an institution's historical legacy of inclusion or exclusion, psychological climate, and behavioral climate. A revised version of the framework renamed "structural

diversity” to “compositional diversity,” and added an organizational/structural dimension (Milem et al., 2005). The original framework also included two dimensions that are external to the campus environment which are the government/political environment and the sociohistorical context. This framework is useful for this study as it describes institutional climate from a multidimensional lens that includes several internal and external factors that influence how campus climate is perceived differently for diverse individuals.

Lastly, this analysis will be complemented by the work of Terrel Strayhorn who has conceptualized sense of belonging for college students emphasizing the importance of students’ perception of connectedness to the campus environment. Strayhorn (2012) developed a model that depicts sense of belonging as a human need to belong and its association with positive outcomes when satisfied. Educational research about Black men often cites belonging as a motivating influence that supports their overall success. Strayhorn (2018) notes that context and environment is an integral element to develop belonging. The combination of CRC and sense of belonging can be used together to inform research about the influence of campus climate for Black men in college.

Research Questions

The guiding research questions for this study are:

1. What are the perceptions of campus climate for undergraduate Black men who attend a predominantly White institution?
2. How does the intersection of racial and gender identity influence the campus climate perceptions of undergraduate Black men?

3. How do the perceptions of campus climate influence the sense of belonging for undergraduate Black men?

Research Methods

To address the proposed research questions qualitative methods will be used. The purpose of the study is to explore the perceptions of campus climate for Black men who attend a large public research PWI. An interpretive phenomenological approach to qualitative inquiry will be used to analyze the data and determine findings.

Methodological triangulation will be achieved by collecting data through in-depth one-on-one interviews, photovoice and focus groups. Interpretive phenomenology is an approach that can be used to explore how individuals make sense of their experiences with a particular phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Hurtado et al. (1999) note that perceptions of the climate will differ based on the person being asked. They also emphasize the importance of campus leaders including the experiences of all members of the campus community when embarking on changes to address campus climate. The use of phenomenological approach centers the experiences of the participants which will also make the findings more useful for campus leaders and administrators.

Key Terms Defined

Predominantly White Institution (PWI): Refers to an institution where White students account for at least 50 percent of the student enrollment

Belonging uncertainty: Walton & Cohen (2007) proposed that members of socially stigmatized groups are more sensitive to issues of social belonging due to a state of uncertainty of social bonds in academic and professional settings

Sense of belonging: Strayhorn (2018) draws from the work of Maslow (1962) and Rosenberg & McCullough (1981) to develop a framework for sense of belonging in college. Strayhorn defines this concept as a feeling of connectedness, and experience of mattering or feeling accepted and valued by the campus community

Campus racial climate: Individual institutions are influenced by a combination of internal and external factors that make up the climate for each institution (Hurtado et al., 1999)

Significance of the Study

The hardships of Black men in college have been examined extensively in higher education literature, however there is a gap when it comes to understanding their unique perceptions of the campus climate at PWIs. Understanding more about the perceptions of Black men in college is central to improving not only their college experience but their success outcomes. A more informed understanding of the unique perceptions of Black men could become a catalyst for campus diversity initiatives created with intentionality to improve the campus climate for this student group. Furthermore, this discussion is also essential to fill a gap in the literature.

Vaccaro (2014) noted that studies concerned with climate should explore more deeply how students from multiple and intersecting social identities experience campus climate. The consistent reports of hostile campus environments and lack of research that explores the perceptions of campus climate for Black men suggest the importance of my research topic. The available research highlights a need for a deeper understanding of how Black men perceive the campus climate and how this impacts their feeling of belonging and connection to campus. While Black students may experience many of the

same challenges, it is evident that the experiences of Black men in higher education differ significantly from their peers and there is more to understand about how it impacts their perceptions of the campus.

The significance of campus climate perceptions and the influence on various areas of student success has been documented in the literature (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Locks et al., 2008; Strayhorn, 2013). This study is particularly interested in the impact of campus climate perceptions on the sense of belonging for Black men. Sense of belonging is a significant predictor of students' intentions to persist at an institution regardless of background (Hausmann et al., 2007). In particular, Black men students have identified belonging as a motivating factor for their continued engagement (Brooms, 2019). The influence of campus climate on sense of belonging has been explored in the literature for other racial groups including Filipino Americans (Maramba & Museus, 2013), Asian Americans (Wells & Horn, 2015), and Latino students (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005). However, little is known about how Black men's perceptions of campus climate contribute to their sense of belonging.

Hurtado et al. (1999) note that because of the history of exclusion at many PWIs, administrators should examine whether there are "embedded benefits" that still exist and disadvantage marginalized groups. With Black men being less likely to persist and graduate compared to their peers there is a clear need to explore the role that campus climate plays. There is an established relationship between a student's sense of belonging and academic success. There is also a relationship between how students perceive the campus climate and their levels of sense of belonging. More research is needed to have a

clearer understanding of how the perceptions of campus climate for Black men contribute to their sense of belonging while attending a PWI.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The influence of campus environment is discussed extensively in research on student persistence and retention for all students and in particular for marginalized and underrepresented student groups (Cuyjet, 1997; Gloria et al., 1999; Johnson et al., 2014). For Black men enrolled in college the literature consistently highlights the racialized experiences and feelings of alienation and social isolation they experience on campus (Brooms, 2019; Cuyjet, 1997; Parker et al, 2016). Furthermore, the experiences that are unique to Black men make their adjustment to college challenging and influence how they perceive the campus climate of an institution (Brooms et al, 2015). Despite the challenges faced by Black men in college, there is a body of literature that emphasizes the successes of Black men in college. A consistent finding in the literature also suggests that when Black men develop a sense of belonging within the college environment the transition can be easier and the campus is perceived as more supportive (Strayhorn, 2017; Strayhorn et al., 2015). However, this requires the environment to have the necessary elements that allow for a feeling of connectedness and belonging to develop.

It is evident that Black men navigate society differently and the challenges they face while attending a predominantly White institution are unlike their peers. This chapter will review theoretical, conceptual, and existing empirical literature regarding the experiences of Black men on the campus of PWIs, with a focus on campus racial climate perceptions and sense of belonging. This chapter will discuss literature related to (1) race and gender identity (2) Black men in higher education (3) significance of campus climate

(4) sense of belonging for Black men and lastly will (5) introduce a multi-theoretical approach to examine campus climate perceptions for Black men.

Significance of Race and Gender Identity

Race and gender interact in the lives of students in complex ways. Exploring these interactions is an important step in addressing the gender gaps that are present in educational outcomes. Race and gender play a role in how individuals perceive and experience academic environments. For example, a quantitative study by Chavous et al. (2003) looked at how gender and race influence Black students' stereotype expectations, college integration and academic adjustment across different institution types. Their findings indicate evidence of gender differences in how Black students experience and respond to their college campus especially regarding specific institutional settings. Similarly, Keels (2013) conducted a longitudinal, quantitative study to examine gender and racial differences in student's grades and degree completion for a large sample of participants that attended 24 different PWIs. The study found significant gender differences in degree attainment among Black students. Specifically, 63% of Black women and only 48% of Black men had graduated after 4 years. After six years, 84% of Black women and 73% of Black men had graduated. Notably, Black students were the only group in this study with a significant gender gap in degree completion. This persistent gender achievement gap among Black students in college calls for continued examination of how both race and gender interact and influence students' college experiences and outcomes.

Black Men in Higher Education

Research on the experiences of Black men enrolled at PWIs often concludes that racialized experiences are common occurrences for this population on and off campus. While it is important to emphasize that all Black men do not have a singular experience or perception while attending college, there are common experiences that show up in the literature. This section of the literature review will discuss what is known about the experiences of Black men in higher education and where gaps exist.

Persistence and Degree Completion for Black Men

Success within the higher education context is most often measured by the likelihood of persistence and degree completion. For decades the higher education literature has been concerned with the racial disparities that exist in college success indicators for Black students. Black students who enrolled in college in Fall 2011 had the lowest 6-year completion rate (46 percent) and highest dropout rate (36.5 percent) across all levels of post-secondary education (Espinosa et al., 2019). Black students left college without completing their degree at a higher rate (29.1 percent), compared with 17.5 percent of Hispanics, 11.7 percent of Whites, and 7.5 percent of Asians. While Black students drop out for various reasons this data demonstrates that they are more likely to leave college than their peers. However, the outcomes of Black students in college are further complicated by the intersection of their gender identities. For example, the success of Black men in college has been a national concern for quite some time in the areas of enrollment, persistence, and degree completion. Black men in 2015-2016 enrolled the lowest percentage of undergraduate students (37.8 percent). In 2017, only 15.2 percent of Black men aged 25 and older obtained their bachelor's degree.

Furthermore, undergraduate Black men consistently have one of the lowest degree attainment rates and represent one of the smallest demographics on campus (Espinosa et al., 2019). These trends within the higher education landscape indicate a continued need to understand more about the experiences of Black men and how their intersecting identities play a role in their academic experiences and outcomes. Topics such as academic and social integration, experiences with racism/discrimination, and supportive factors are present in the literature about Black men.

Experience at Predominantly White Institutions

The literature discusses how Black men enrolled in college experience the environment of a PWI and the findings suggest that the environment created at a PWI can be unwelcoming toward Black men. For example, Black men attending PWIs report that they are constantly met with racial hostility which often causes feelings of frustration, alienation, and increased pressure (Boyd & Mitchell, 2018; Iverson & Jagers, 2015). Furthermore, the satisfaction and sense of belonging for Black students are reportedly lower at PWIs compared to their same-race peers enrolled at HBCUs (Harper, 2012). Despite these concerns, Black students continue to enroll at PWIs at a higher rate than HBCUs which conferred only 13 percent of bachelor's degrees earned by Black students in 2017 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Decades of literature have explored how Black students experience the environment of PWIs. However, there is limited research focused on how the campus environment is experienced and perceived by Black men. Consequently, this section will discuss relevant literature about the experiences of Black students as a whole and Black men specifically at PWIs.

Allen (1992) conducted a quantitative study to examine differences in the college experience for Black undergraduates who attended HBCUs and PWIs. The study employs a multivariate approach to examine students' academic achievement, social involvement, and occupational aspirations and the relationship with students' educational backgrounds, educational goals, demographic characteristics, and personal adjustment to college and the college environment. The study found that Black students in the study who attended a PWI reported lower academic achievement, lower levels of social involvement, and less favorable relationships with professors. Additionally, Black students' campus involvement was most influenced by racial composition, relationships with White students, and their perception of the college they chose.

Similarly, a study by Chen et. al. (2014) examined the relationships between Black student engagement and satisfaction at HBCUs and PWIs. This quantitative study included a large sample including 3,287 Black students attending 26 HBCUs and 2,638 Black students enrolled at 126 PWIs. The study found that gender had no statistically significant relationship with student satisfaction. Furthermore, although there was no statistically significant difference between HBCUs and PWIs for Black student satisfaction, the results indicated that for Black students a supportive campus environment was the strongest factor influencing student satisfaction at both HBCUs and PWIs. Ultimately, both studies acknowledge that environmental context has a significant influence on Black students, and they are more academically successful within environments that they perceive as welcoming and supportive. Additional literature has explored the relationships between the environmental context of a PWI and other factors such as first-year transition, sense of belonging, and academic achievement.

First-Year Transition

The first year of college has a significant impact on a student's intentions to persist and thus literature often focuses on students' experiences during this period. This is an important period for Black men entering college as it is their first introduction to a new environment and where their perceptions begin to form. Additionally, first-year persistence rates for Black men suggest that they are less likely to persist compared to their peers. Black men who enrolled in college in Fall 2011 had the lowest first-year persistence rates (78.5 percent) among bachelor's degree-seeking students (Espinosa et al., 2019). This is likely why studies focus specifically on the experiences and perceptions of Black men during their first year.

Harper & Newman (2016) conducted a phenomenological study focused on understanding the experience of Black men's transition in their first year of college. The findings indicated that lack of same-race peers, cultural fit, and racialized experiences were notable factors that impacted academic and social adjustments for participants. For instance, students described instances of feeling pressure and performance anxiety especially when they were the only Black man in the class. Some participants also noted that they chose to withdraw from other aspects of campus and self-isolate due to the problems they were facing. How Black men perceive the environment when they arrive on campus can often influence their student engagement behaviors on campus.

Student Engagement for Black Men

The literature demonstrates that student engagement can benefit students in several ways such as facilitating social and academic adjustment and forming peer relationships (Kuh et al., 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1987, 1993).

However, student engagement experiences can influence student populations differently, and thus literature on engagement for Black men is significant. For example, Strayhorn & Devita (2010) conducted a qualitative study with 149 first and second-year students attending 4-year institutions to examine differences in engagement for Black men across various institution types. This study found that Black men attending liberal arts colleges were less likely to engage in activities with peers than those at master's institutions. This finding contradicted previous studies that found students at liberal arts institutions to be more engaged. However, this finding was not true for Black men in this study. The findings point to the importance of examining the experiences of Black men. The findings also suggest that the environment of an institution had a significant impact on their willingness to engage with other students.

Patterson's (2018) study explored how Black men perceived their campus engagement experiences at a PWI and how it influenced their adjustment to academic and social life on campus. Majority of participants struggled to feel a part of the campus community which made their adjustment challenging. Participants noted that they were able to make friends within the recreation and leisure spaces however, in contrast, they were not as successful in the classroom environment. Only 3 of the 17 participants shared that they made connections through the classroom. Most students reported feelings of isolation as they were often one of few Black students in the class and excluded from peer study groups. Encountering instances of exclusion are common experiences evident in the literature and often perceived by Black men as a result of the social stigma associated with their race and gender identity.

Racialized Experiences on Campus

Encountering racism is a common experience for Black men attending PWIs and these experiences have a significant influence on their perceptions of an institution. For example, while some social spaces can provide opportunities for Black men to make friends, they also experience racism and microaggressions in those spaces. These encounters often leave Black men questioning what the incidents say about the broader university community (Patterson, 2018).

Parker et. al (2016) conducted focus groups with Black men to explore students' personal perceptions about the campus environment, institutional actors, and their sensitivity to diversity issues. The three themes that emerged included: divergent feelings of safety and belonging, institutional climate issues, and personal accountability. The study demonstrated that on campus there was an equal number of participants who felt unsafe and unwelcome as there were participants who felt safe and welcomed by the institution. This suggests that the individual experiences of the students on campus likely played a role in their perceptions of the environment. Similar to the findings of Harper & Newman (2016), participants in this study identified feelings of pressure to appear perfect or smart enough because they were the only Black students in a class with mostly White peers. Participants also felt the institution was not aware of the experiences of Black students on campus and was not transparent about racial issues. Regarding institutional climate, participants felt that the institution only claimed diversity when describing the environment; however, that was not their reality which resulted in feelings of mistrust, isolation, and alienation. These findings demonstrate a need for institutions to engage

Black men within their student population to be aware of their realities within various campus spaces.

Black men who have experienced hostile environments created by social stigma and stereotypes can continue to be impacted while they are enrolled in college. Steele and Aronson (1995) have identified this type of environment caused by negative stereotypes as “stereotype threat”. Inspired by Steele & Aronson’s (1995) examination of stereotype threat, Von Robertson and Chaney (2010) explored the influence of stereotype threat on the experiences of Black men who were attending a PWI. Stereotype threat theory was used as the lens to analyze the interviews with 15 Black male participants. The study was designed to understand how stereotype threat is facilitated by faculty, classroom environments, and perceptions of racism. Von Robertson and Chaney’s (2010) findings emphasized how the college environment may create an atmosphere that allows for the emergence of stereotype threat for Black men. Boyd & Mitchell’s (2018) study found that participants engaged less in campus activities if they experienced stereotyping or if they assumed they would be stereotyped. Furthermore, these experiences are negatively associated with academic success and persistence (Brooms, 2019). Boyd & Mitchell’s (2018) study found that the environment created by the existence of stereotypes can lead to the concept of stereotype threat especially when students find themselves being the only person of their race and gender within dorms, classrooms, student organizations etc.

Initiatives to Facilitate Success for Black men at PWIs

To combat feelings of isolation and alienation Black men often seek out support from smaller communities within the campus such as student support programs, Black faculty/staff members, same-race peers, and initiatives aimed at supporting Black men

(Brooms, 2017; Brooms, 2018; Brooms & Davis, 2017). Black cultural centers and Black student organizations have played a significant role in the success of Black men attending PWIs. A study by Mwangi et. al (2018) found that resources such as multicultural centers provide support for Black students that address their specific needs.

Literature has emphasized the positive impact of Black male initiative (BMI) programs that intentionally support positive experiences for Black men (Druery & Brooms, 2019). Many institutions across the country have established programs that specifically target Black male students as a response to the challenges that Black men are facing in higher education. There is evidence that these programs are perceived positively and can make a difference in their adjustment to the college environment and support their academic success. For example, Broom's (2018) study explored how students make meaning of their participation in a BMI program at a PWI related to their sense of belonging. The findings were categorized into four primary themes describing the experiences of students' involvement in a BMI program. The first finding was that students identified the BMI program as a "safe space" for them to connect with other Black men and allowed them to develop a community on campus. A second theme that emerged was the establishment of campus connections with faculty, staff and administrators impacted their experience. They expressed that these relationships helped to relieve some concerns about their adjustment to college and provided mentorship opportunities. The third theme identified was "enhancing academic experiences" which included the academic focus of BMI, out-of-class learning opportunities, and academic support. The last theme that emerged was the impact on identity and sense of self for the participants. A significant number of students expressed that the program taught them

more about their race and gender identities which allowed them to see their value and feel empowered.

BMI programs have been used to address success outcomes for underrepresented students, specifically Black men attending PWIs. The research indicates that these initiatives can address their unique needs and provide an environment that cultivates a space for Black men to develop community and sense of belonging on campus. However, the research also indicates that Black men still feel disconnected from the broader campus community suggesting that there are other factors that remain unaddressed. Students' membership in programs and organizations should enhance the student experience and not replace connectedness to the broader campus community. Further research should investigate factors that support feelings of belonging and connectedness outside of membership in programs and student organizations.

Significance of Campus Climate

A review of literature on campus climate reveals various conceptualizations of the term campus climate. Concepts like environment, culture and climate have often been used interchangeably to describe the context of higher education institutions with various definitions and measured differently (Rankin & Reason, 2005; Peterson, 1988). In early discussions of campus climate scholars thought the phenomena of campus climate to be too complex or intangible to study (Peterson & Spencer, 1990; Crosson, 1988). Even still understanding and measuring campus climate has been a critical focus for many higher education institutions.

Defining Campus Climate

The prevalence of climate was first discussed extensively as a concept within organizational behavior research. Peterson & Spencer (1990) used the work on organizational climate by Hellriegel and Slocum (1974) to apply the concept of climate to the higher education context. Peterson & Spencer (1990) differentiated the term environment as the broadest concept that encompasses internal and external factors influencing the organization while culture and climate are concepts that describe different parts of the internal environment of an institution. Broadly defined climate is “the current common patterns of important dimensions of organizational life or its members’ perceptions of and attitudes toward those dimensions” (Peterson & Spencer, 1990, p. 7). Culture, compared to climate, is less focused on current perceptions and attitudes and more concerned with shared beliefs and values that members have about the organization. According to Peterson and Spencer (1990),

The major features of climate are (1) its primary emphasis on common participant views of a wide array of organizational phenomena that allow for comparison among groups or over time, (2) its focus on current patterns of beliefs and behaviors, and (3) it's often ephemeral or malleable character. Climate is pervasive, potentially inclusive of a broad array of organizational phenomena, yet easily focused to fit the researcher's or the administrator's interest (p. 8).

Peterson (1988) proposed a framework to conceptualize organizational factors that impact students. One of the domains identifies three types of organizational climate: the objective climate, perceived climate, and psychological or felt climate. Objective climate is focused on the patterns of behavior within an institution. Perceived climate focuses on the participants' understanding of how the organization functions. Psychological, or felt, climate is concerned with “how participants feel about their organization, including their loyalty and commitment to it, their morale, their beliefs

about their quality of effort, and their sense of belonging” (Peterson, 1988, p. 31). This framework is a broader approach that does not address how different groups on campus may perceive the climate, however, the topic of campus climate has been seen as important for the success of students attending higher education institutions.

The work on campus climate was further enhanced with the addition of a racial/diversity lens which acknowledged that racial dynamics have an impact on how individual students perceive the environment. Hurtado (1992) was specifically concerned with the prevalence of racial tension occurring at predominantly White colleges in the 1980s and developed a study that examined the perceptions of Black, Chicano, and White students from 116 PWIs. This quantitative study examined differences in student perceptions of the environment across various institution types and characteristics (i.e., size, selectivity, enrollment diversity). Findings suggested that college composition variables (size, selectivity, ethnic enrollment) had varying impacts on students’ perceptions across racial/ethnic groups. Black students were more unsatisfied with their campus environments than other groups relative to their perceived high levels of racial tension and low levels of institutional commitment to diversity at their institutions. Approximately one in four students perceived considerable racial conflict on their campuses; and even more at four-year large, public, or selective institutions. Hurtado (1992) concluded that there is not one single element of the environment that can mediate racial tension on college campuses and perceptions vary from one institutional context to the next. The combination of internal and external influences affects each ethnic group differently and Hurtado (1992) recommended continued research on the experiences of

individual ethnic groups to identify which elements uniquely influence the perceptions of each group.

The literature on campus climate continues to explore the differences in campus climate perceptions for different groups on campus. Jones et al. (2002) conducted four focus groups to explore the college experience of Black, Asian-Pacific American, Chicano/Latino, and Native American students at a 4-year predominantly White research institution. The study examined the experiences of students at a PWI and identified similarities and differences among the groups. The study found that all four groups questioned the university's commitment to diversity due to the lack of a diverse student body, lack of faculty of color, and student's feelings of "not belonging and feeling different". The study revealed that most students reported experiences of overt racism and did not feel supported by the institution to defend themselves against these behaviors resulting in self-isolation. Focus groups revealed that most Black students in the study reported that they limited their interactions with other ethnic groups and participated only in multicultural events. Students overwhelmingly felt that the institution's multicultural center serves as an instrumental approach to facilitating student satisfaction with the climate. This finding elicits a question about how students of color are impacted by institutions that do not establish multicultural centers on their campuses and how institutions intentionally facilitate cross-racial interaction across racial/ethnic groups.

Dimensions of Campus Racial Climate

Hurtado and colleagues continued to explore the importance of campus climate which led to the development of the campus racial climate (CRC) framework that views campus climate as a multidimensional phenomenon (Hurtado et al., 1999). Hurtado et al.

(1998) outlines four dimensions that are critical to how campus climate perceptions are shaped. The dimensions include institutional history, structural/compositional diversity, psychological climate, and behavioral climate. The dimensions outlined by this framework provide a guide to understanding campus climate perceptions. This section will define each dimension and discuss its relevance to the experiences of Black men in higher education discussed in the literature.

Hurtado et al. (1998) highlight the residual impact that a history of racial exclusion has on the campus climate of many institutions. Higher education has an undeniable history of strongly opposing racial integration which is evidenced by the legal proceedings that were needed to force institutions to enroll a diverse group of students. The Supreme Court Decision of *Brown v. the Board of Education* in 1954 is known as the landmark case that determined the policy of separate but equal and racial discrimination in public education to be unconstitutional. This allowed Black students to seek admission at all-White colleges, however, racial exclusion remained in these institutions of higher education (Anderson, 2002). Subsequently, discrimination based upon age, sex, race, or religion by higher education institutions was prohibited by the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

The legislation still did not guarantee the desegregation of the colleges and universities. HBCUs were primarily the only institutions providing higher education for Black students until the 1970s. Many institutions refused to comply with the court decisions until the NAACP filed a suit against the Office of Civil Rights known as *Adams v. Richardson* in 1973. The desegregation of higher education was a long and arduous process that was forced upon institutions and although Black students started to

enroll it was very clear that they were not welcome. Although there were momentous legal cases and legislation that transformed the landscape of American education, it also meant that Black students were forced to navigate racially tense educational environments.

Colleges and universities continue to struggle with racial climate issues, because of the lack of attention to the history of institutional response to diversity issues (Hurtado et al., 1998). Additionally, institutions need to investigate if some current policies and norms may be deleterious to student groups who have historically been excluded from higher education. Institutional history can influence the perceptions of individuals who attend PWIs especially if there is no acknowledgment of the history of exclusion or evidence of a commitment to diversity and inclusion by the institutions.

Feagin et al. (2002) completed focus groups with Black parents and students to investigate the influence of an institution's racial reputation. The perceptions of an institution can be damaged for Black individuals who often experience racial discrimination combined with community memories of past racial oppression. The study emphasizes that these memories are often shared through stories handed down from family members in response to the "whitewashing" of racial history in America (Feagin et al., 2002). Furthermore, over time there is a cumulative impact from hostile interactions with White people that can influence the overall perception of higher education institutions. The findings of this study indicated that the understanding of an institution's history of racial climate influences perceptions of the institution and college choice for parents and students of color. Students in the focus groups noted that the number of Black students can lead to a more positive perception of the institutional

climate to combat the negative reputation. Additionally, the researchers concluded that the findings suggested Black students' overall experiences at PWIs are significantly different from their White peers. Feagin et al. (2002) noted that,

There is no clear suggestion in any of the parental accounts that the experience of Black SU students was highly rewarding beyond the attainment of a good education and a college degree. For many White students, in contrast, the university experience doubtless marks a special time in their lives which creates fond memories, and which enhances their self-esteem and personal and collective identities (p. 179).

Notably, the family and friends of participants were more likely to describe the experience at the institution as tolerable as they managed to attend the school with “no serious problems”. Overall, the findings concluded that the racial reputation of an institution made attending a traditionally White university difficult for Black students and their parents.

Hurtado et al. note that an institution's commitment to diversifying the student body communicates a message of institutional priorities. Hurtado (1990) found that Black and Chicano students who perceived lower racial tension on campus also perceived commitment to diversity as a high priority at the institution (p. 558). Furthermore, the representation of same-race peers and faculty impacts how members of different racial/ethnic groups experience the other campus climate domains (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005). Previous studies have also revealed how the presence of same-race peers influences individual student experiences.

Brooms & Davis (2017) conducted a qualitative study to understand the college experiences of 59 Black men at three different PWIs. Through one-on-one interviews with participants, the researchers explored how the student's race and gender identities influenced their college experiences and how relationships influenced their motivation to

persist. Black men consistently reported that while they considered the campus to be “diverse” it was racially segregated. Black men were confronted with specific challenges such as: being policed on campus and racially profiled by students and faculty (Brooms & Davis, 2017). To overcome these challenges the participants in this study depended on support and encouragement from peers and faculty who were also Black men. The presence of same-race peers and faculty allowed the participants to overcome feelings of alienation and exclusion, however, they did not feel a sense of inclusion or belonging at their school outside of those relationships. This study demonstrates the significance of racial/ethnic diversity; however, representation alone does not mediate the issues with campus climate.

Numerical representation of various racial/ethnic groups is not only beneficial for racial/ethnic groups, but some research indicates that interaction across racial groups is beneficial for all students (Johnson et al. 2014). A diverse college campus can provide students with opportunities to interact with peers from different backgrounds and influence how individuals navigate in a diversifying society (Hurtado et al., 1998). Pike & Kuh (2006) designed a quantitative study to investigate if there is a relationship between the structural diversity of an institution, interactions among diverse groups of students, and perceptions of the campus environment. The findings in the study indicated a positive relationship between increased student diversity and increased levels of interaction with diverse groups of students. Interacting with diverse groups had the strongest relationship with structural diversity than any other institutional characteristic (i.e., institutional control and institutional mission). These findings provide evidence that as student diversity increases students are more likely to engage with peers outside of

their own race/ethnicity. On the other hand, the results indicated that the perception of the supportiveness of the campus environment was not related to the diversity of the student population or the number of diverse interactions. However, as Hurtado et al. (1992) point out perceptions of campus climate are influenced by a combination of factors. Additionally, this study looked at the number of diverse interactions and not the context of those interactions.

The behavioral dimension of climate focuses on the frequency and quality of social interactions on campus including instances between individuals from different racial/ethnic backgrounds and the overall reality of intergroup relations on campus. The way students interact with each other, faculty, staff, and administrators is an important element in how students' perception of campus climate is formed. Literature supports the influence of the behavioral dimension for Black students in college. Strayhorn et al. (2017) found that Black students who describe their experiences while attending PWIs often recount instances of stereotyping and microaggressions which evoke feelings of isolation and exclusion. Johnson et al. (2014) found that students of color who observed or experienced racism on campus had increased "academic environment stress and diminished their feelings about the campus environment, affecting commitment to the institution, and ultimately their persistence decisions" (p. 92). Additionally, students who experience negative interactions with others on campus may feel like they do not belong at the institution, which can then lead to lower levels of academic self-efficacy and motivation (Roksa et al., 2017).

Von Robertson and Chaney (2010) utilized semi-structured interviews with 12 Black men to examine their experiences at a PWI related to factors that are associated

with a positive campus environment. Analysis of the interviews identified two emerging themes: the experiences of racism and racial microaggressions on campus and the perception that the Black experience is not important to faculty and the university. Seventy-five percent of the participants experienced some form of racism or racial microaggressions. Similarly, seventy-five percent of the participants indicated through various experiences that they felt that faculty did not work with Black students outside of class or have any positive interactions with Black students. Some participants concluded that this was a result of the lack of Black faculty members.

Faculty are not the only institutional actors that students encounter at PWIs. Iverson and Jagers (2015) completed focus groups with 23 undergraduate Black men who were attending a PWI in the Midwest. The participants consistently described experiences with institutional staff (advisors, faculty, administrators) who often assumed they were academically unprepared and disengaged which resulted in fewer opportunities extended to them compared to White students. Iverson and Jagers (2015) also noted that Black men reported that they experienced high levels of surveillance by university police and residence life staff, and they were often compared against their White peers to determine what was acceptable behavior. Similarly, Parker et al. (2016) found that Black men developed mistrust for campus police due to racial profiling and difference in their treatment compared to White peers.

Peer-to-peer interactions are also a significant element of the behavioral dimension of CRC. Chang et al. (2006) conducted a quantitative study to examine the effects of the frequency of cross-racial interaction (CRI) for students and institutions. The researchers were interested in if the level of cross-racial interactions impacts three areas: openness to diversity, personal/cognitive development) and self-confidence. This study

drew from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) survey data conducted first in 1994 for freshmen students and then the students were administered a second follow-up survey in 1998 at the end of their fourth year. The researchers collected a sample using the original students who completed the 1994 Survey and 1998 survey to examine how students felt that various college experiences had changed or affected them. The findings of the study indicated that higher levels of CRI had a positive relationship with students' reported growth in areas such as their knowledge of and ability to accept different races/cultures, critical thinking ability, and self-confidence. The findings were statistically significant and positive even after controlling for differences in students' backgrounds and in institutional characteristics. The researchers also found that students in the study who attended institutions with higher average CRI levels reported greater individual gains in openness to diversity suggesting that they benefited from being in an environment with more students interacting across racial differences.

The behavioral dimension of climate is concerned with the context of interactions, conversely, the psychological dimension of campus racial climate involves how students perceive group relations, racial conflict on campus, and institutional response to diversity issues. Parker et al. (2016) indicated that Black men were disappointed that their institutions did not live up to the expectations of diversity that they were led to believe when applying. For some participants, this led to feelings of regret toward their decision to attend a PWI. Students in this study expressed feelings of isolation and alienation because they were the only Black students in most of their classes. Being the only Black man surrounded by White students induced feelings of anxiety and fear (Parker et al.,

2016). These negative feelings were then reinforced by experiences of racial profiling by campus police resulting in mistrust.

Experiences of discrimination and bias are factors that contribute to how Black students develop their self-concept and view their institution. Black students are more likely than any other racial group to feel disconnected from their campus because they do not believe it represents their identities (Walton & Cohen, 2007). Although Black students can be selective when choosing what post-secondary institution to attend, they encounter experiences at PWIs that exclude them from many of the benefits that a college environment should provide. Hussain and Jones (2019) study looked at the experiences of Black, Latino, and Asian students and found that a negative campus climate is particularly detrimental for Black students when compared to participants from other minority groups. A negative campus climate is associated with a lower sense of belonging and less confidence in their institution's commitment to their cultural identity (Hussain & Jones, 2019; Parker et al., 2016). With the consistent experience of racial hostility described by Black men, it is necessary for higher education institutions to acknowledge these experiences and examine institutional practices that can address this very real issue.

The experiences of Black men enrolled in PWIs differ from their peers in various ways and negative experiences have a significant impact on students. Racialized interactions with faculty, staff, and peers combined with a lack of same race/gender peers and an unwelcoming campus environment are critical to shaping campus climate perceptions for Black men. The subsequent sections will explore belonging as an individual influence that literature has identified as salient to the success of Black men enrolled at PWIs.

Sense of Belonging for Black Men

Strayhorn (2018) posits that belonging differs according to factors such as ethnicity and gender. One of the seven core elements that Strayhorn identifies is that sense of belonging is more important in certain contexts, at certain times and in certain populations. In some social contexts, certain individuals have a higher need for belonging than others if they are more likely to feel unsupported, unwelcomed, or lonely (Strayhorn, 2018). Strayhorn (2018) posits that “the absence of belonging is marginalization, isolation, or alienation from others” (p. 29). These are all words that have been used to describe the experiences of Black men, especially in the environment of a PWI. The research on Black men in college points to the notion that sense of belonging is a critical factor for the success of Black men.

While a hostile environment can have a negative effect, research has also examined how Black men who perceive hostile environments are also able to resist stereotypes and persist toward their higher education goals. Belonging is a concept that has been found to be a motivating factor that influences confidence for Black men and aids in their successful outcomes (Brooms, 2019; Strayhorn et al., 2015). A quantitative study by Strayhorn et al. (2015) assessed the relationship between undergraduate Black men’s well-being, sense of belonging, and confidence in their transition to college. The findings indicated that sense of belonging was positively correlated with student’s confidence in their transition to college. A core element identified by Strayhorn (2018) also notes that the intersection of college students’ social identities influences belonging, and this has been evidenced in the literature. For example, using a large, multi-institutional sample, Duran et al. (2020) analyzed survey data from 7,888 students across

8 institutions. The study found that Black students and first-generation students had significantly lower belonging compared to their peers. Additionally, the results also revealed the effects of engagement on campus did not have a positive effect on the belonging of continuing-generation Black students compared to the entire sample. Duran et al. (2020) concluded that the institutions had not created welcoming environments for Black students to develop belonging.

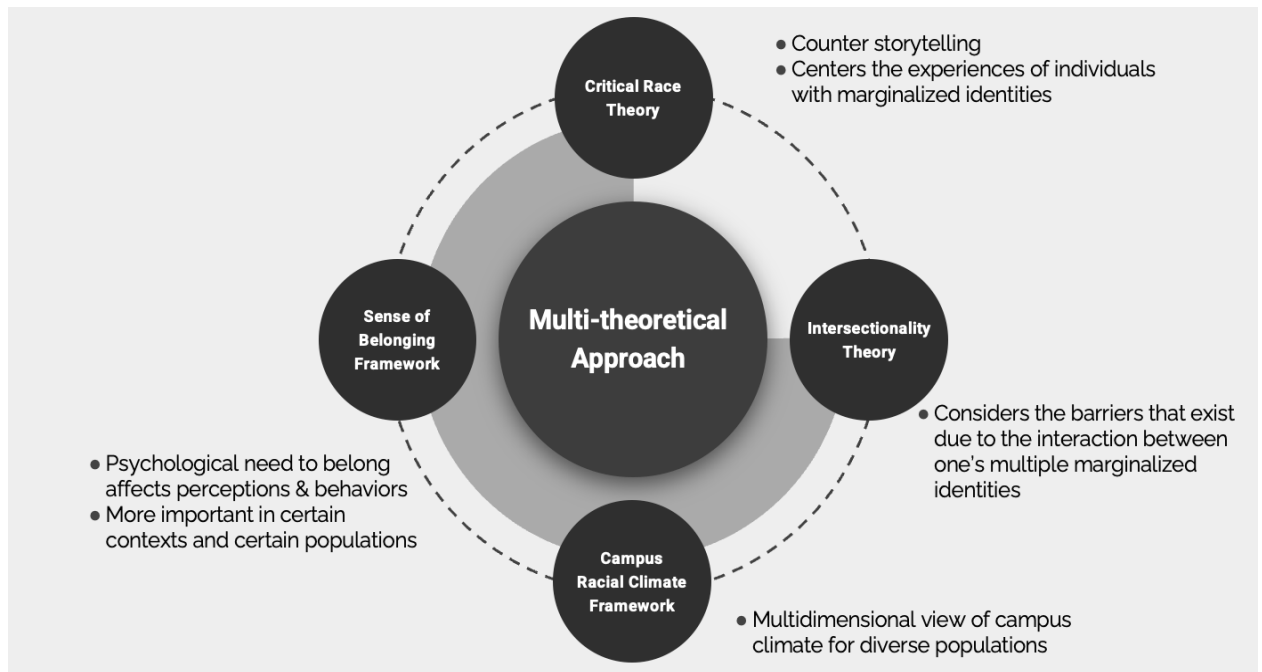
Research suggests there are connections between campus climate and student belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Museus et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2018). Locks et al. (2008) implemented a comparative quantitative study to examine the impact of campus climate perceptions and interactions on various student outcomes including sense of belonging. Their study suggested that increased perceptions of racial tension led to a decreased sense of belonging, a finding that held across racial groups. Additionally, a qualitative study by Kim et al. (2018) examined how campus climate affects sense of belonging and how the effect differs by race/ethnicity. The findings indicated that students who perceived the campus climate positively were also more likely to experience increased sense of belonging. The study also found that Black students had the lowest mean scores for sense of belonging with Black men being less likely than Black women to feel a sense of belonging on campus. In some cases, a sense of belonging can have the greatest influence on a college student's outcomes. When lacking, the absence of belonging can take away from a student's social integration, satisfaction, and academic achievement. When fulfilled, sense of belonging can support students' academic achievement, retention, and engagement. Although sense of belonging can

promote success for all collegians, research suggests that it is especially significant for Black men enrolled in college (Brooms, 2019; Strayhorn, 2015; Strayhorn, 2009).

Multi-Theoretical Approach

The campus climate perceptions of Black men and the relationship to their sense of belonging is a complex topic. To explore the topic fully this study will use a multi-theoretical approach to frame the research and analysis of this study. The Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Intersectionality Theory will be used as foundational theories that emphasize the critical components of race and gender that influence how participants perceive the campus environment. Additionally, for this study, the concepts of campus climate and sense of belonging are conceptualized using the lens of Hurtado’s Campus Racial Climate framework and Strayhorn’s sense of belonging framework.

Figure 2.1 Multi-theoretical Approach



Critical Race Theory

CRT has been used to examine the role of race and racism in perpetuating existing disparities. Solorzano et al. (2000) identify CRT as a theory that “challenges traditional paradigms, methods, texts, and separate discourse on race and gender by showing how these social constructs intersect to impact communities of color” (p. 63). Originators of CRT within legal studies including Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Richard Delgado challenged the notion that the legal system was color blind and emphasized the salience of race embedded in American institutions and systems. This framework originated from the critical legal studies (CLS) movement and included five tenets: counter-storytelling; the permanence of racism; Whiteness as property; interest conversion; and the critique of liberalism. These tenets can all be applied to understand race and diversity issues within higher education institutions because of their ability to reveal racial inequity (Hiraldo, 2010). Counter-stories can be used to examine campus climate by providing Black men a voice to share their experiences of marginalization within the environment. The permanence of racism suggests that the construct of race influences how our society functions and ultimately provides privilege to White individuals in most areas, including education. This theoretical framework centers race and the direct impact that systemic racism has within the educational context.

Intersectionality Theory

Intersectionality theory was first introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a feminist and legal scholar who explored the complexities of oppression experienced by Black women (Crenshaw 1989). Crenshaw (1991) discusses the importance of accounting for multiple grounds of identity when exploring how people experience the world around

them. In sum, she argues that one cannot assume how Black women experience a problem will be the same as White women or Black men simply because they share the same race or gender. When multiple identities are not acknowledged in research it erases the experiences of individuals who hold multiple marginalized identities. Crenshaw (1991) asserted that “the problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference, as some critics charge, but rather the opposite—that it frequently conflates or ignores intra-group differences” (p. 1241). For example, the intersection of race and gender are significant to understand within group differences. Crenshaw (1991) later introduced three forms of intersectionality, including structural intersectionality, political intersectionality, and representational intersectionality. Although this theory was introduced as a feminist perspective to understand the oppression of Black women who are doubly disadvantaged, it has more recently been used as a lens to explore the experiences of Black men in higher education. While Black men hold privilege in society due to their gendered identity it is still questionable as to why they underperform in college and are underrepresented on college campuses. Intersectionality theory suggests that the convergence of race and gender identities shapes individuals’ experiences. This lens is beneficial for this study to understand how Black men perceive the campus climate uniquely and how race and gender play a role.

Campus Racial Climate Framework

The Campus Racial Climate (CRC) framework will be used to conceptualize campus climate and as a lens to understand the experiences of the Black men that participate in the study. To establish a model that would allow researchers to conceptualize campus climate for diverse groups, Hurtado et al. (1998) conducted an in-

depth review of the literature and developed a framework to describe how campus climate for diversity is formed within institutions. Hurtado et al. (1998) insisted that to address campus climate there was a need for institutions to pay attention to racial/ethnic diversity as higher education was quickly becoming a diverse environment. The CRC framework is not limited to perceptions and attitudes, but Hurtado and colleagues identified internal and external dimensions that influence the campus climate for diversity. The internal dimensions include the following: an institution's historical context of exclusion, structural/compositional diversity, behavioral climate, and psychological climate. Hurtado et al. (1998) emphasize the importance of how these interrelated dimensions influence each other and are in no way disconnected from one another. The development of this framework was needed to encourage institutions to look beyond the numerical representation of race/ethnicity as the only factor influencing campus climate for diversity. Although this framework was introduced in a study for Latino students it has implications that can be used to guide a comprehensive examination of campus climate for various racial/ethnic groups.

Sense of Belonging Framework

Like campus climate, sense of belonging has been conceptualized by various scholars and multiple definitions have been introduced in the literature. Models of student persistence often include elements of belonging which indicates the importance of this concept. Other theorists have also alluded to the concept of sense of belonging. Hausmann et al. (2007) found that sense of belonging is a "significant predictor of both institutional commitment and intentions to persist, even after controlling for student background" (p. 830). It has also been referred to as social belonging (Baumeister &

Leary, 1995), school belonging (Goodenow, 1993), group cohesion (Bollen & Hoyle, 1990), and mattering (Schlossberg, 1989). However, Terrell Strayhorn's definition will be used in this study as it attempts to convey a combination of various definitions within the literature. Strayhorn (2018) defines sense of belonging in college as "a feeling or sensation of connectedness, and the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the campus community" (p. 4). Strayhorn (2018) conceptualized sense of belonging as a part of a motivational framework that posits that students have a psychological need to belong that impacts their perceptions. Furthermore, he argues that belonging is significant because it operates as a motive that can drive behavior.

Strayhorn's (2018) framework builds on Maslow's (1954) work on belongingness which theorizes that until an individual satisfies their needs including the need to belong, they are not able to reach their full potential. Through a review of the literature on belonging, Strayhorn developed a conceptual model that identifies seven core elements that are useful for defining sense of belonging:

1. Sense of belonging is a basic human need
2. Sense of belonging is a fundamental motive, sufficient to drive human behavior
3. Context, time, and factors determine the importance
4. Sense of belonging is related to mattering
5. Social identities intersect and affect sense of belonging
6. Sense of belonging leads to positive outcomes
7. Sense of belonging must be satisfied as conditions change

(Strayhorn, 2018, p. 30)

Chapter Summary

Perceptions of the campus climate of an institution are the focus of this research study, which is multidimensional and includes institutional history, structural diversity,

psychological climate, and behavioral climate. These factors influence how diverse the campus feels and how Black men feel included and valued on campus which significantly impacts their experiences. The literature on Black men attending PWIs demonstrates that more often than not there are negative campus experiences that influence their overall perceptions of institutional climate. However, there are no studies that utilize the CRC framework to explore how the institutional climate influences their perceptions.

The cultivation of a student's sense of belonging is also particularly important to this research study. Belonging has a positive influence on students' persistence and success and is particularly impactful for marginalized students who are entering an environment where they will experience racial tension and feelings of exclusion.

Strayhorn (2018) argues that “the current literature base does not help us to understand how organizational or institutional attributes, conditions, ethos, and practices influence college students' sense of belonging, directly or indirectly” (p. 24). This research study attempts to move towards this by first understanding Black men's perceptions of their campus climate and the influence on their sense of belonging.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS

This study explored the intersection of race and gender and its impact on campus climate perceptions and sense of belonging for Black men. This area of research is supported by the evidence of gaps in persistence rates and college degree attainment for Black men compared with other students (Strayhorn, 2017; Cuyjet, 2006). Guided by critical and identity theories, this dissertation examines the perceptions of campus racial climate among undergraduate Black men and explores how these perceptions influence their sense of belonging to the institution. Specifically, Hurtado's CRC framework and Strayhorn's sense of belonging framework guided the analysis and understanding of institutional factors that influence their perceptions and how these factors interact with the concept of belonging. Furthermore, Critical race theory and Intersectionality theory were used as a lens to acknowledge the racial and gender identities of the participants as central to their experiences. Critical race theory asserts that race and racism are necessary critical lenses that should be used to understand the experiences of Black men within higher education and as it relates to racism and campus climate for diversity. Included in chapter three is an overview of the rationale for the choice of methods, an explanation of the selection of participants, the study setting, and the research design. Subsequently, the data collection procedures and a summary of data analysis procedures will be described. Lastly, study limitations and positionality are discussed.

Rationale of Methods

This study utilized a qualitative approach to inquiry to address the research questions. Creswell (2018) notes that qualitative methods are used to empower the

voices of those often marginalized in society. The guiding research questions for this study are:

1. What are the perceptions of campus climate for undergraduate Black men who attend a predominantly White institution?
2. How does the intersection of racial and gender identity influence the campus climate perceptions of undergraduate Black men?
3. How do the perceptions of campus climate influence the sense of belonging for undergraduate Black men?

Qualitative research is often used when the current theories that exist are not adequate for certain populations or lack the complexity needed to address the problem (Creswell, 2018). Merriam and Tisdell (2015) point out how qualitative researchers do not seek to identify cause and effect but “might be interested in uncovering the meaning of a phenomenon for those involved by understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 5). The current literature on campus climate lacks research that reflects the experiences of Black men and by using qualitative methods their stories are highlighted. Through qualitative methods, this dissertation gives voice to a group of Black men attending one single institution.

This study explored individual perceptions and attitudes about the campus climate and identified common themes or beliefs across the participants. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) note that qualitative researchers are interested in “understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p.6). Creswell (2018) argues that qualitative methods are useful when a research problem is best understood within a specific context or setting

where participants experience the problem. The data can also be organized and interpreted to provide findings that can be a basis for interventions targeting the identified problem. The findings will then be much more useful for practitioners and administrators to use as recommendations can be generated from the qualitative findings.

An interpretative phenomenological approach (IPA) was used for this qualitative study to explore individual participant experiences while also identifying commonalities across participants as they experience a phenomenon. Four of the original phenomenological philosophers were Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre. Although they all had their distinct perspectives there is a focus on the complex understanding of a person's experience influenced by how an individual is situated within the world (Smith et al., 2009). This approach is most appropriate for this study because as Smith et al. (2009) note, IPA "pursues an idiographic commitment, situating participants in their particular contexts, exploring their personal perspectives" (p. 32). Overall IPA allowed the researcher to use an interpretative lens to understand how people describe their life experiences. With this approach, the researcher was able to gain a better understanding of how the campus climate of a PWI affects the perceptions and sense of belonging of undergraduate Black men.

Research Design

Site Selection

The study focused on undergraduate students attending a predominantly White, public, research institution on the East Coast located in an urban setting. It has a majority White student population, but it is often perceived as an institution that attracts a diverse demographic due to its location, affordability, and mission of accessibility and

community engagement. The study will focus on the undergraduate student population who make up most of the student population. This institution enrolled just under 30,000 undergraduate students in fall 2019 which was approximately 75 percent of the total student population. Less than 13 percent of the undergraduate student population identified as Black while approximately 55 percent identified as White. Additionally, in fall of 2019 the university reported that Black males made up just under 10 percent of the undergraduate male student population compared to White male students who accounted for almost 60 percent of the total male student enrollment. Like many other PWIs, Black students fall behind their White peers in both 4-year and 6-year graduation rates with a 15 percent and 9 percent difference respectively. This institution was an ideal site for this particular study as Black men are underrepresented on the campus and there is also evidence of disparate outcomes when compared to their peers. Creswell (2018) emphasizes the importance of the context or setting of a particular problem for research. Qualitative methods allow us to explore what people experience in a particular setting and their deeper thoughts related to their responses.

Participant Selection

The study research questions were best answered by a specifically defined population therefore purposive sampling was used to identify participants. IPA research generally relies on a small homogenous sample which allows the researcher to identify a closely defined group that will be significant to the research question (Smith et al.,2009). This study aimed to recruit at least 10 participants and ultimately this study includes data for 12 Black men who participated in the study. This sample size is appropriate because IPA studies generally use a small sample to allow for a detailed and in-depth case-by-case analysis (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). In order to participate the students had to

meet the following eligibility criteria: 1) 18 years or older 2) self-identify as a Black man, and 3) currently enrolled full-time in an undergraduate degree program at the study site. All 12 participants met these three requirements in order to be eligible for the study. Although not a requirement participants had all been enrolled for at least one semester at the institution.

Participant Recruitment

To recruit participants flyers were created detailing the study and placed strategically in classrooms, building message boards, and throughout the student center. These are heavy-traffic areas and the most effective in reaching a variety of students on campus. Flyers included a QR code to scan with a mobile device for more information about the study and a survey to sign up. Upon IRB approval, flyers were shared with staff, faculty, and student leaders who could share the opportunity with their student network on campus. This strategy was used to ensure that the opportunity was shared widely with students in all areas of campus.

The researcher contacted faculty, advisors, and support staff who could identify students that fit the criteria and can share the opportunity verbally and through established listservs. Director-level staff members of various student-facing departments (i.e., residential life, university tutoring center, diversity center) were identified and sent emails which included an IRB-approved recruitment email (Appendix A) that summarized details of the study including the purpose, eligibility criteria, and any potential benefits or risks associated with the study. Interested students completed an eligibility survey (Appendix B) that was used to confirm their eligibility for the study. Once a participant met the inclusion criteria, they received a consent form (Appendix C)

containing information about the study and a Demographic Questionnaire (Appendix D) to collect background information such as race/ethnicity, gender, family income, and academic information as of Fall 2022 (i.e., GPA, class standing, major). This information once collected was used to learn more about the varying characteristics of the participants and to provide some context to their engagement on campus. This information was compiled into a table and used to create a profile of each participant. Once consent was provided and demographic information collected participants were invited to schedule an interview.

This dissertation includes findings for all 12 individuals who participated in the initial interview. 10 out of 12 participants completed the full study and participated in one follow-up focus group or second individual interview. Although all 12 participants were Black men, they had various characteristics that added to the diversity of the sample. A detailed profile of each participant is presented in Chapter 4; however, the table below presents demographic information on each participant.

Table 3.1 Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Age	State of Residence	Major	GPA*	Student standing	Student Housing type	Student org. member
David	20	Pennsylvania	Computer science	1.3	freshman	Commuter	No
Ezra	19	Pennsylvania	Art	3.5	sophomore	Commuter	No
Hakeem	19	Florida	Advertising	3.9	sophomore	Campus dorm	Yes
Jacob	23	Pennsylvania	Computer Science	2.83	senior	Commuter	No
James	22	Georgia	Business Management	3.18	senior	Off-campus (i.e., apartment or house)	Yes
Jared	21	North Carolina	Sport Management	2.45	senior	Off-campus (i.e., apartment or house)	Yes
Kendrick	19	Pennsylvania	Undeclared	3	sophomore	Commuter	Yes
Micah	23	Pennsylvania	Business Management	3.11	senior	Commuter	No
Shane	22	Pennsylvania	Film and Media Arts	3.49	senior	Commuter	No
Sharif	22	Pennsylvania	Health Professions	3.77	senior	Campus dorm	Yes
Simon	18	Delaware	International Business	3.73	freshman	Campus dorm	Yes
Terrence	19	Maryland	Film and Media Arts	3.7	sophomore	Campus dorm	No

*Self-reported cumulative GPA as of Fall 2022

Data Collection

This study used three forms of data collection: interviews, photovoice, and focus groups/follow-up interviews. Prior to being interviewed participants were provided a consent form distributed via email for review and verbal consent was obtained.

Participants also provided consent for their photos to be used as part of the study. The data for this study includes individual interviews for all 12 participants. 10 out of 12

participants submitted photos and 7 participants attended a follow-up focus group. Due to scheduling conflicts, 3 participants completed a follow-up individual interview with the same open-ended format as the focus group. The findings of the data collected will be presented in Chapter 4.

Interview Protocol

During phase one of data collection participants participated in individual interviews in a semi-structured format. IPA studies use an idiographic mode of inquiry that relies on in-depth data collection which can be captured through in-depth interviews (Smith et al.,2009). Interviews were an effective data collection method to establish a rapport with participants and gain a full understanding of the participant’s perceptions of the institution’s campus climate and how it influences their feelings of belonging. The researcher followed a semi-structured interview format as suggested for IPA research by Smith et al. (2009). The use of a semi-structured interview format was advantageous for this study as it encouraged participants to reflect on their experiences and the researcher had the flexibility to probe for more information (Smith et al., 2009). IPA is ideal for data collection methods that will “invite participants to offer a rich, detailed, first-person account of their experiences” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 56). The interview protocol (Appendix E) included open-ended questions that are meant to encourage participants to feel safe engaging in dialogue with the researcher about their experiences. The questions were written in a way to allow students to talk freely about relevant campus experiences. Additionally, the semi-structured format allowed for the researcher to be flexible in altering the protocol. For example, many students referred to their pre-college experiences and talk about the climate they experienced in previous schooling

experiences. Once I noticed that this came up in the first few interviews this format allowed me the freedom to ask follow-up questions and also inquire about these experiences with remaining participants as well. Following each interview, the researcher sent a thank you email with directions for the next phase of data collection which included a question prompt and link to submit photos.

Interviews lasted on average between 45-60 minutes long. Interviews were recorded via Zoom and transcribed using the Rev transcription service. To ensure the accuracy of transcription and to aid in the data analysis process the researcher listened to the recording and cleaned up the transcripts following each interview. The researcher then read through each transcript multiple times to become familiar with the data and to make initial notations before the coding process.

Photovoice

Photovoice was used as phase two of data collection in this study. Photovoice is a method where participants take photos that represent observations of their environment and can be used as a method to facilitate dialogue to discuss important issues (Wang & Burris, 1997). This study utilized this as a tool to guide the focus group discussion and inspire participants to discuss their own perceptions in relation to the photos. For example, there were two participants who both submitted photos of a campus event which allowed for dialogue about how campus events hosted by Black student organizations create a sense of belonging. Strack et al. (2018) used photovoice as a qualitative method to explore environmental issues for Black men on campus and to give them a voice to advocate for specific changes to campus leaders. Photovoice has also been used as a method to explore campus belonging for queer students of color (Duran,

2019) and campus racial climate for graduate students of color at PWIs (Bowers et al. 2020).

Following the individual interview, each participant was asked to take photographs that represent belonging and community within the campus environment or photos that represent a lack of belonging. Participants were provided an open-ended prompt which asked participants to:

Observe your environment on campus and use your camera phone to capture images that illustrate any of the following:

1. Your perception of the campus racial climate of the institution
2. Presence of Belonging for Black men at the institution
3. Absence of Belonging for Black men at the institution

At the end of this photo collection process, they were asked to select only 3 of the photos and include a brief caption uploaded through a submission link. Wang and Burris (1997) note that photovoice is beneficial for participants to communicate their perceived needs in a powerful way using visual images. 10 out of 12 participants provided photos during this phase. After further discussion with participants about their experience with photovoice I found that there were varying levels of comfortability with the action of taking photos within their environment. However, the photos they submitted were appropriate in response to the prompt and allowed for relevant conversation within the last phase of data collection.

Focus Group Protocol

The third phase of data collection was conducted through a combination of focus group interviews and follow up interviews with the 10 participants who submitted their

photos. Patton (2014) notes that focus groups are “especially useful for hearing from groups whose voices are often marginalized within the larger society” (p. 477). To prepare for the focus groups participants were asked to review their photos and select 3 of the photos that they feel best responded to the prompt. Participants were asked to include a brief caption for each photo they selected which will be analyzed as data in this study. The photos and captions were compiled into a slideshow and displayed during the focus group and used to generate dialogue between participants. These focus groups and interviews explored three areas of interest: 1) what meaning do participants attribute to their photographs, 2) how the campus does/does not cultivate belonging and 3) how the campus can increase Black men’s level of belonging. The focus group protocol (Appendix F) included open-ended questions that allowed participants to engage in dialogue with the researcher and each other to answer questions connected to the photos and questions related to their overall sense of belonging at the institution (Appendix B). The focus groups, which included 7 participants, lasted 60-90 minutes and the follow up individual interviews, with 3 participants, lasted 30-45 minutes. Focus groups and interviews were audio recorded and transcribed using the Rev transcription service with participants’ consent. This method of data collection was selected to allow the researcher to hear various perspectives by listening to conversations among participants and to give participants an opportunity to reflect on their environment to elicit further data about their perceptions to complement the initial interviews. All participants were also informed of the confidentiality of their participation. To ensure confidentiality, participants will not be identified by name and identifying markers will not be included in the discussion of results. The researcher will be the only person with participant names. To further protect

confidentiality participants were given guidelines about how to maintain confidentiality of other participants throughout the focus groups.

Data Analysis

This study followed an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) process as outlined by Smith et al. (2009). This study was designed to seek in-depth information regarding how undergraduate Black men perceive the campus climate and how this perception shapes their belonging. IPA is appropriate for this study because as Smith et al. (2009) describes, IPA studies are primarily concerned with participants' experience of a specific phenomenon. Smith et al. (2009) notes that "IPA is concerned with trying to understand what it is like, from the point of view of the participants" (p. 53). Therefore, this the study followed an idiographic approach to analysis which aims to offer insight into how individuals make sense of their experiences.

To analyze data for this study, the researcher began with epoche, as outlined by Moustakas (1994), which is the process of setting aside preconceived thoughts or judgements about the topic of belonging for Black men in college. The researcher acknowledged these assumptions through reflexive journaling, writing one's own thoughts or observations about belonging for Black men at the institution. From there IPA suggests that the researcher "brackets" these ideas from influencing the research which can open up new ways of seeing this phenomenon.

Interview Data Analysis

To start the data analysis, process the researcher conducted multiple close readings of each transcript as suggested by Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014). The researcher first listened to the audio recordings while reading the transcript to make sure the participant's words were accurate. Once the transcripts were cleaned up, the researcher

continued to immerse oneself in the data by completing several close readings of each individual transcript. During this process initial notations were made in the margins which Smith et al. (2009) refers to as free textual analysis. During this process the researcher made notes to paraphrase some parts of the interview, identify impactful statements, highlight surprising comments, question the data, or comment on language used by the participant. Furthermore, member checking was used to increase trustworthiness and participants were provided a copy of their transcript. The researcher sent an email inviting each participant to review the transcript and researcher annotations for accuracy with an opportunity to respond with feedback or questions. None of the participants responded with any feedback or additional questions.

Transcripts were uploaded into a qualitative research software analysis program called AtlasTi to systematically complete the coding process and identify emerging themes and patterns across participants. As suggested by Smith et al. (2009) the researcher completed another close reading to identify the initial codes. Inductive coding, also known as open coding, was employed by reading through the data line-by-line. At this point the researcher compiled a list of codes and defined their meaning/relevance to the study. Subsequently, the researcher noted any connections and clustering of codes which can be used as a guide for further coding. Thornberg et al. (2015) highlights the benefits of this type of coding which helps researchers to “identify details and become acquainted with the data... Gain distance from their own and their participants’ taken-for-granted assumptions” (p. 410). The researcher read through each transcript and coded line by line as many times as needed to make sure there is a thorough understanding of the data.

Subsequently, deductive coding was employed to analyze each transcript using a framework analysis. This analysis was first guided by counter storytelling, a tenet of CRT. The researcher looked at the data to identify the stories of individuals whose experiences and voices are often not included. Intersectionality theory was used as a lens to uncover how participant's perceptions are influenced by their race and gender identities. Additionally, while not a focus of the study, during some of the interviews participants' other intersecting identities were discussed in response to some of the interview questions such as ethnicity and sexual orientation. The dimensions within the CRC and sense of belonging framework were used to discern thematic categories as a lens to understand how Black men perceive the campus climate. For example, majority of the participants talked about impactful experiences with peers or faculty on campus. These statements or quotes were coded as "behavioral climate – peers or faculty/staff". Additionally, many participants spoke about the diversity of the student population which was coded as "structural/compositional diversity". By using these frameworks to guide analysis the researcher made connections with prior research and identified how the concepts of campus climate and sense of belonging interact within the experiences of the participants in the study. Lastly, each transcript was labeled with the participants' pseudonym and date of the interview. This process was repeated for each individual transcript.

Once all transcripts were coded the researcher reviewed codes across participants and identified patterns across the data to cluster the data into broader themes that address the study research questions. Through this analysis the data was grouped into five themes that are described in chapter five.

Photovoice Data Analysis

Photovoice is unique because the photos themselves are not the data to be analyzed by the researcher. The photos are instead used as a means to elicit responses from the participants. This study followed a process that includes participants selecting photos and contextualizing them through descriptive captions (Wang & Burris, 1997). The researcher reviewed participants' photos and the captions that illustrate meaning and contextualize the images from the perspective of the participant (Latz & Mulvihill, 2017). The researcher looked for the wording used by participants in their photo captions to identify connections to the themes that emerged from the individual interviews. By reviewing the photos and captions prior to the focus groups the researcher was also able to formulate additional questions to ask during the next phase of data collection through focus groups and follow up interviews.

Focus Group Data Analysis

This study included two focus groups and three follow up interviews which were audio recorded. During the focus groups, participants assumed the role as participatory researchers by analyzing their photos and describing the meaning behind each photo. Latz and Mulvihill (2017) note that "In a sense, photovoice focus groups can be seen as opportunities for data generation and initial meaning making of those data" (p. 83). This format allowed for participants to give voice to the photos they selected and elicit discussion with other participants about each other's photos. The researcher was then able to analyze this data when reviewing the focus group transcripts. In this way the researcher is not interpreting the photos themselves but instead analyzing the stories or interpretations that participants offer during the focus group or follow up interview. In the

weeks following the focus groups the researcher reviewed the transcripts of each session and used both inductive and deductive coding to highlight meaningful dialogue between participants. Deductive coding was used to identify statements and conversations that align with the codes identified through the analysis of the individual interviews. While this analysis relied upon a predetermined set of codes, inductive coding was also used to identify any other codes that emerge outside of the deductive coding process.

Once all interview and focus group transcripts were coded, the researcher identified themes across the data and presented the findings in a narrative form theme by theme as discussed by Smith et al. (2009). The identified themes and sub-themes are discussed in narrative form through rich, detailed descriptions which gives voice to the participants. Subsequently, there is a section that discusses the findings from the focus groups and follow up interviews.

Researcher Positionality

Considering the positionality of the researcher is an important component of phenomenological research. The researcher for this study has been a higher education administrator for 10 years and in these various professional roles often supported Black students who are navigating a PWI. The time spent in these student facing roles led the researcher to this particular topic. The researcher's previous relationships built with students who fit the profile of study participants introduces a personal connection to the study. Additionally, as a Black woman working in higher education the researcher has also felt the impact of being a support for Black students who feel isolated or out of place in predominantly White spaces.

As an alumnus and former employee of the study site the researcher has a personal connection to the study site itself. Many changes at the university have been observed in these different roles including the demographics of the student body. Personal connections to the site can come with some preconceived notions about issues with the campus environment as it relates to Black students. Having attended a PWI and navigated challenges as a Black woman, the researcher has her own personal experiences that connect with the focus of this study.

It is not possible to completely remove all assumptions and biases, but the researcher can be aware of them going into the study and throughout. To address this the researcher used bracketing and reflexive journaling. Drew (2004) refers to bracketing as “the task of sorting out the qualities that belong to the researcher’s experience of the phenomenon” (p. 215). For this study, the researcher used bracketing early in the research process prior to data collection and then reflexivity throughout the research process as suggested by Creswell and Miller (2000). Reflexive journaling was used by creating a written record throughout the research process to note personal thoughts and feelings that come up while analyzing the data. This is about acknowledging the researcher’s role and how prior experience, assumptions, and beliefs can have an influence on the process.

Trustworthiness of the Study

To support trustworthiness and credibility, triangulation was used. This study used multiple theories as a lens to analyze and interpret data. Three forms of data collection were also used for this study to develop a comprehensive understanding of the research topic (Patton, 1999). As Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2007) point out, using

methodological triangulation can strengthen the rigor and trustworthiness of a study's findings. The methodological triangulation in this study involved the review of data collected through different methods in order to provide a more accurate picture of the qualitative results. For example, the importance of representation and value of relationships came up in both interviews, photos and focus groups. The results from these multiple methods complemented each other and provided an in-depth understanding of the data while also highlighting different perspectives of the phenomenon.

Member checking was also used as suggested by Creswell (2018) to increase believability of the data and researcher's interpretations. After the researcher completed a close reading of the transcripts and added initial notations the participants were sent a copy via email with the researcher's initial notes in the margins. This provided participants the opportunity to check for accuracy of transcripts and to offer any comments or clarity in response to the researcher's interpretations. This method of member checking increases the rigor and trustworthiness of findings as discussed by Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2007), however the participants in this study did not offer any feedback or clarification in response.

Creswell and Miller (2000) suggest another way to establish credibility in a study is to "describe the setting, the participants, and the themes of a qualitative study in rich detail" (p. 128). The findings of this study were written in narrative form including direct quotes from participant interviews and rich/thick descriptions of the context and the meaning-making/themes which supports trustworthiness. Providing vivid detail, gives the readers a clear understanding of the data and confirms that the findings are credible.

Rich/thick description also supports future practice implications which can be useful for practitioners in other settings or similar contexts (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This study utilized qualitative methods to understand the campus climate perceptions of Black men who attend a predominantly white institution. Additionally, it explores how these perceptions influence the participants' sense of belonging. The methods used give voice to the participants lived experiences and shed light on the factors of campus climate that are most salient for Black men. The following research questions guide this study:

1. What are the perceptions of campus climate for undergraduate Black men who attend a predominantly White institution?
2. How does the intersection of racial and gender identity influence the campus climate perceptions of undergraduate Black men?
3. How do the perceptions of campus climate influence the sense of belonging for undergraduate Black men?

This chapter will present the qualitative data collected through individual interviews and focus groups/follow up interviews. Additionally, this chapter includes introductions to each participant to provide some context to complement their words. The study included 12 participants who all identify as Black male undergraduate students. This chapter will begin with detailed profiles for each participant. These profiles include an introduction to individuals' background, their first impressions of the institution, and details about their student engagement. Pseudonyms are used for participants and the institution to protect the participants' identities.

Participant Profiles

Hakeem

Hakeem is a 19-year-old Black male. At the time of this interview, he was in his second year of college. He grew up in Florida and decided to attend college in the Northeast because the institution offered him the most financial aid and he would be near his siblings. He comes from a family that emphasizes getting an education and specifically he talked about his older siblings who attended technical school and traditional college. Hakeem applied to college undeclared initially, but quickly decided to double major in Advertising and Spanish. He chose these majors because he felt that Advertising and Marketing are recession proof career fields and his experience in dual language programs from a young age led him to also major in Spanish. He is planning to apply to law school after completing his undergraduate degree.

Hakeem felt that he came to college prepared for the transition because he had completed 24 credits of dual enrollment during his last year of high school. This precollege experience prepared him for how college was structured differently academically than high school, but not necessarily the social aspects of college. As a freshman he initially stayed to himself and was not very involved, but he attributes that mainly to the impact of the Covid pandemic. Hakeem also centered a lot of his current perceptions about the campus climate of Central City in relation to his previous schooling experiences.

Today as a college student Hakeem is in the university's honors program and a member of several student organizations. He is employed on campus as a resident assistant at the institution and lives in campus housing. Overall, he considers his

perception of the institutional climate to be generally positive as a Black man attending a PWI, especially in comparison to his pre-college experiences growing up in Florida.

Jared

Jared is a 21-year-old Black male. He is originally from Charlotte, North Carolina. He comes from a college educated family specifically both of his parents attended college as well as a host of aunts and uncles. Jared talked about how since both of his parents attended and met at an HBCU he was torn between having a HBCU experience or attending a PWI. At the time of this interview, he was in his fourth year of college. He is majoring in Sport Management with a minor in Communication. He decided to attend Central City University because the school offers a good program for his major and it is located in a city. He also received the most financial support from the school compared to the other schools he was interested in. He has always been very involved in sports and grew up playing football and then started playing rugby in high school. He chose his major because he wanted to keep sports in his life even if he would not be a professional athlete.

Jared's first impressions of the university environment were positive. He was able to meet people fairly easily and has felt welcomed. He talked about his first introduction to the campus through Orientation and learning about the history of the buildings helped ease his transition. He was also able to attend a two-week summer program which gave him an opportunity to meet other students. During his freshman year he attended sports events, student activities, and engaged with organizations which made his first year enjoyable.

Today as a college student Jared is involved in several university student organizations including professional, social, and religion-based organizations. He is also a member of the rugby team which is a student intramural sport club. He lives in off campus housing. He is also involved in various community service opportunities which allows him to invest in the surrounding community which is very important to him.

David

David is a 20-year-old Black male. At the time of this interview, he was in his third year at Central City University. He was born and raised in Pennsylvania. He has two siblings, and he is the middle child of his two brothers. His mother earned an associate degree, and his oldest brother is working on his degree at the local community college. Although he started his college career three years ago, he is still a freshman based on his credits earned. He decided to attend Central City because it was the most affordable option and close to his home so he could commute easily and save money to pursue his initial goal of medical school.

David's first impressions when he came to college was that the diversity of the campus was very similar to his high school and so that made him comfortable. He feels like his racial identity is not a significant factor in how he sees himself within the university environment and he immediately felt accepted. During his first year he talked about how much he socialized and "partied a lot" which allowed him to make friends. He also joined a sports club for track and was able to meet people that way. However, after his first year, he became busy maintaining his classes and part-time work and has not been able to spend much time getting involved on campus. Although he has struggled academically, he mostly describes his perceptions of the institution positively.

Today as a college student, David commutes to campus and lives at home while maintaining part-time work. He is not involved in any student organizations or clubs. Of the participants, David has had the rockiest time academically based on his GPA and he has made several major changes. He originally planned to attend medical school and started off in science-focused majors and more recently he is interested in the film industry and has decided to major in computer science. He is confident that he has found a major that suits his interests and passions.

Sharif

Sharif is a 22-year-old Black male. At the time of this interview, he was a senior preparing to graduate in a few months. He was born and raised in Pennsylvania, but his parents are immigrants from Nigeria. He comes from a highly educated family with both of his parents having obtained Masters degrees in Chemistry and Nursing. Sharif has two older siblings and one younger sibling who have all either completed or are currently enrolled in college as well. Sharif is a Health Professions major, and he talked about how his parents' career fields and emphasis on education influenced on his decision to attend college and his interest in the medical field. He chose to attend Central City University because of the location within a city which is different from his more suburban hometown. He did not want to attend a campus that was isolated from other areas because he wanted to make sure he could engage in activities outside of the campus itself. He also was influenced by his sister who graduated from the same institution previously.

His first impression of the campus was that he expected it to be more diverse and he often found himself being the only Black male within academic and social spaces. He had an expectation that the institution would be diverse based on how it is advertised and

where it is located. He describes his first semester on campus as enjoyable and he immediately began to socialize and engage in activities. However, his first year physically on campus was cut short due to the Covid pandemic. He feels he missed out on some opportunities to develop friendships or network with others because his second year of college was completely online from home. Despite the challenges with the pandemic, he found ways to get connected and engage on campus once he returned for his subsequent years.

Today as a college student Sharif is in his final year as an undergraduate student. He holds an executive board position in a student organization for Black students on campus. He is employed on campus as a resident assistant and lives in campus housing. He is applying to medical school and plans to begin after graduating this year.

Kendrick

Kendrick is a 19-year-old Black male. He was born and raised in Pennsylvania. He is in his second year of college and is currently an undeclared major, but he is exploring Communication studies as a major. He originally entered college as a Business major and decided that it was not the major for him. He decided to attend Central City University because it was a school closer to home than the other schools he was considering and the Covid pandemic made him rethink moving too far from home. He also shared that his mother attended the school to obtain a graduate degree, so he was familiar with the institution. The other schools he considered were located in the south and he was initially very interested in attending a HBCU, but ultimately ended up at Central City.

Kendrick talked about the challenges he faced in his first year with feeling motivated in his classes and connecting with his peers. He attributes some of this to his decision to start in Business classes which he found out did not align with his interests. He found it hard to connect with other students his in his first year because most students did not seem to talk to each other. He also is a commuter student, so he rarely stayed on campus to attend events or engage in organizations his first year. Since switching to undeclared he has found himself connecting with other students more and getting more involved.

Today as a college student Kendrick continues to commute to campus, but he is part of a student club related to his major of interest. He wants to start getting more involved so he recently applied for a study away program that will allow him to engage with peers and faculty while also traveling out of state and learning more about his major.

Simon

Simon is an 18-year-old Black male. He is originally from Nairobi, Kenya and moved to the United States at the age of 6. He now resides in Delaware with his family. He has a brother who also attended Central City University for graduate school, and this influenced his college choice. He talked about his experience touring the campus and feeling “something in his heart” that told him to go there. He is pursuing a degree in international business with a minor in Spanish.

Simon’s first impressions of college have been positive overall, and he feels he has made a smooth transition. He was one of the few participants who took no time to get involved and felt it was easy to find community by using social media to find out about student organizations and activities. He talked about some roommate issues in his first

semester, but once he switched buildings, he was able to get settled with new roommates that he felt comfortable living with.

Today as a college student Simon lives on campus and works part-time as a student worker. He is involved in several student organizations for Black students and African students. He is also involved in a Latin study semester where he takes some courses cohort style with the same group of students. He has developed strong relationships and bonds with peers and faculty in his first year of college.

Micah

Micah is a 23-year-old Black male. He was born in Nigeria and his family came to the United States when he was seven. He grew up in New York and now resides in Pennsylvania. At the time of this interview, it was Micah's fifth year of college, and he was a senior pursuing a business degree with an interest in entrepreneurship. He already runs two businesses himself, so he is excited to be almost done with college. His mother went to college in Nigeria and his dad did some college but did not finish his degree. However, his parents have always emphasized the importance of going to college and being educated. He talked about having a difficult childhood but expressed gratitude for his experiences. He also talked about balancing his family responsibilities with college including helping to care for his brother who has autism.

Micah's impression of college is that it is a business, and he is a consumer. He labeled himself as a "super senior" because he started college 5 years ago. He talked about challenges he faced regarding finances, the Covid pandemic, and environmental factors. He also talked about the resources that are offered for students especially related to entrepreneurship. He emphasized the idea that college is what you make it and

although his road has been longer, he has made a lot of connections while being in college.

Today as a college student, Micah commutes from home but he gets involved as much as he can on campus. He is involved in the entrepreneurship student club, and he has even been on a student panel where he talked about his own business in front of other students. Although he is not a member of any student organizations, he does attend many of the events hosted on campus by Black student organizations.

Terrence

Terrence is a 19-year-old Black male. He was born and raised in Maryland. His grandparents immigrated to the United States as children and his family originates from Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago. He has a twin sister, and he comes from a college-educated family with both of his parents being college graduates and his sister who is also in college currently. At the time of this interview, Terrence was in his second year of college and pursuing a degree in Film. He talked about the location of Central City University being appealing to him and it was different than his suburban hometown.

His first impressions of the university have overall been positive and spoke about the diversity of the student population and his appreciation for seeing other racial and ethnic groups on campus. During his college selection process, he visited other institutions and noticed the lack of diversity in the student population. Location and diversity ultimately influenced his college choice.

Today as a college student Terrence lives on campus. He is part of a BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) mentorship group within the Film department. He enjoys being a part of this community but shared that most of his life majority of his

friends tend to be White. He is not a member of any official student organizations, but he has made friends on campus.

Shane

Shane is a 23-year-old Black male. He was born and raised in Pennsylvania, and he is Haitian American. He has several siblings and grows up with his mother raising him. He transferred to Central City University after attending a local community college for two years. He made the choice with his family to start his college career at community college to avoid the financial burden of student loans for the first two years. His transition from high school to community college was smooth and even though people mostly kept to themselves there was a good deal of diversity at his community college. He decided to attend Central City University because of the proximity to home and the ease of transferring from the community college. He is a Film major and aspires to be a Film director one day.

His first impression of the institution was impacted by the pandemic since all his courses were over Zoom for the first year. He transferred at the start of the Covid pandemic, and he had to adjust to the structure of the online classes. The only engagement he had with professors or peers was through Zoom and he recalled being uncomfortable in some instances where comments in the chat contained racial undertones and microaggressions. He expected that Central City University would be a lot more diverse based on its geographical location, and he was surprised by the lack of diversity especially within the Film department.

Today as a college student Shane is a senior and will graduate next year. He is a commuter student and works part time within the film school. He has not joined any

university student organizations but is part of a BIPOC mentorship group within the Film department. The mentorship and peer relationships he has developed in this group has been very important to his experience at the university.

James

James is a 22-year-old Black male. He was born and raised in Atlanta, Georgia. He is the youngest child in his family with two older siblings. He comes from a family with several college educated family members including his father, stepmother and sister who attended college. At the time of this interview, he was in his fourth year of college and pursuing Business Management as his major with a minor in International Business. He has played football since the sixth grade and received a scholarship to play football for the university. He decided to attend Central City University because of the location in a city environment, the business program, and the opportunity to continue playing football.

His first impressions of the campus were positive, and he has overall enjoyed his time within the campus. He has enjoyed meeting students and faculty from all over the world and from different backgrounds and cultures. He also talked about his membership on a sports team and how that helped him build a community right away with teammates.

Today as a college student James lives on campus and continues to be a member of the football team. He is also a member of a student organization for Black athletes that was recently started on campus. He is preparing to graduate this year.

Ezra

Ezra is a 19-year-old Black male. He was born and raised in Pennsylvania, but his parents are immigrants from West Africa. He is the oldest of his four brothers and the

first in his family to go to college. At the time of this interview, he was in his second year of college and pursuing Painting as his major. He is very passionate about being an artist and using his creativity to create art through drawing, painting, and even through music. He always knew from a young age that he enjoyed art and being creative but found out in high school that he wanted to be a painter and decided to pursue art school. He decided to attend Central City University because he received the most financial aid from this institution and other art programs that he researched were very expensive.

His first impression of the campus was that there were not many Black students like himself visible on campus and they were especially absent in his art specific classes. He was surprised by this and expected the student population to be a lot more diverse. He also noticed that in his major specific classes it has been a female dominated space. This experience has been consistent throughout his first two years and impacted his perception of the institution. He has not engaged much in the campus outside of the art school and says that he comes to campus for class and to work on his art and otherwise he does not engage in any other spaces.

Today as a college student Ezra is in the university's honors program and works part time within the art school. Ezra has not joined any university student organizations, but he does go to a club on campus for any student who is a person of color and an artist to come and work on their art together. This club has presented him with an opportunity to connect with other artists of color on campus.

Jacob

Jacob is a 23-year-old Black male. He is originally from a Caribbean island called Grenada. He lived in Grenada for 19 years before coming to America to attend college as

an international student. At the time of this interview, he was in his fifth year of college and pursuing Computer Science as his major. Jacob decided to attend Central City University because he had a cousin who attended the school and when he did his research online it looked like a nice place to attend college. He was also drawn to the variety of extracurricular activities that were available for students.

Jacob had a difficult transition, and his impression was that he felt unwelcome and excluded. He described instances of students avoiding conversation with him and making assumptions about him because of his appearance and/or accent. He came to college excited to meet new people and he was not met with that same openness from others. He talked about his experience as a Black man but also as an international student. Although the start was challenging for Jacob, he did eventually find some community within the university but all throughout his time as a student he has had a variety of experiences both positive and negative.

Today as a college student Jacob works multiple part time jobs on campus and lives in off campus housing. He is not currently a member of any student organizations, but he was previously involved in a soccer club and a dance team on campus. He is preparing to graduate this year.

Emergent Themes

This section of chapter four focuses on the themes that emerged from participant interviews. Since this study has three research questions the findings will be presented with a description of the emergent themes that correspond to each research question presented in the study. Following the discussion of themes, this section will include a summary of salient findings from the data collected through photo voice and focus

groups/follow up interviews. There were several noteworthy findings that will be discussed. Through this analysis, eight emergent themes were identified that encompass the perceptions and lived experiences of the participants who engaged in this research. This chapter will present the findings from individual interviews, focus groups and follow up interviews. The emergent themes address the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of campus climate for undergraduate Black men who attend a predominantly White institution?
2. How does the intersection of racial and gender identity influence the campus climate perceptions of undergraduate Black men?
3. How do the perceptions of campus climate influence the sense of belonging for undergraduate Black men?

While each participant had unique experiences and perspectives from each other there were common perceptions and experiences that emerged as it relates to the research questions. These are presented in the table below and will be discussed in detail subsequently.

Table 4.1 Summary of Emergent Themes

	Theme	Subthemes
Research Question 1	“There’s not a lot of us here”	Absence of Black people on campus “You have to know where to look”
	Where you are matters	Climate within academic departments Finding belonging outside of major
	Feeling a sense of home	Absence of Black people is felt Black people create a sense of home
Research Question 2	It begins before college	Significance of High school experience
	“I have to work twice as hard”	Stigmatization of Black men Influence of Stereotype Threat
	We need a space just for us	Navigating Stigma, Stereotyping & Shame Safe space for Black authenticity
Research Question 3	“It’s the people I have met here”	Relationships with peers Relationships with faculty/staff Relationships with surrounding community
	“I don’t go where I’m not wanted”	Navigating predominantly White spaces

Interview Findings

“There’s not a lot of us here”

“There are people who are going to come here and feel like they belong. And it's not necessarily the Black students because there's not a lot of us here at the end of the day.”
- Sharif

As discussed in Chapter 2 and throughout the literature on campus climate, the presence of same-race peers and staff is a significantly important element of institutional campus racial climate (Brooms & Davis, 2017; Harper & Newman, 2016; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005). The CRC framework in particular highlights structural diversity as an important aspect to a supportive campus climate for students of color. In response to research question #1 the data collected through individual interviews uncovered that the challenge of finding cultural community was particularly salient for majority of participants in this study. Depending on how students navigate this process when they arrive on campus can influence how they perceive the campus climate. This theme will be discussed through two sub themes: 1) Absence of Black people on campus and 2) “You have to know where to look”

Absence of Black people on campus

Every participant was asked about their expectations and initial perceptions of the institution and majority of participants talked about their shock to find such a small Black student population on campus. For example, Sharif knew of Central City University from an older sibling that attended the institution previously. When discussing his expectations and then the reality as a new student on campus Sharif shared, “I was expecting it to be a lot more Black. I will say it was funny because when my sister, my oldest sister, she entered college in 2014 and she graduated what, 2019...Her whole class was, it seemed

like the Black community had a very tight-knit community and it was like, there was talks of [Central City being like a H B C U]”. Sharif talked about how his sister’s experience was a significant factor that pushed him to choose the institution and he was excited to experience what she described. Furthermore, he went on to say, “I just assumed that we would have more Black people coming over here. But it seems like the school is a bubble. The [surrounding] community is very Black, but the school itself is not. So, I think I got those confused”. This same sentiment of an expectation of diversity was shared by other participants as well. This difference in expectations and reality can impact individual perceptions of campus climate. Similarly, Ezra talked about how the absence of other Black students was one of the first things he noticed when arriving on campus. He shared,

So, when I first got to [Central City University], one of my first biggest things I noticed was that there's not really a lot of Black people, especially at the art school. At first it really did bother me a little bit because I really felt out of place for a little while. And at the same time, I was also the only Black person in a few of my classes while also being the only male in my classes. So those two things kind of made it hard for me. But I would say that being a Black man [here], I wouldn't say it's challenging, but I would say you don't really have attention like that.

Ezra talked about how all of his interactions with peers and faculty have been nice but still noted that the absence of Black classmates does still impact him. He stated,

I would say the interactions with peers are also the same. I try to be nice to everybody. The only thing is the whole difference of cultures and everything, but I do find myself talking a lot to female females who are people of color more than white people. So, I do have a lot of Black friends who are girls in my art classes.

It was interesting to hear Ezra describe his experiences because although he had not experienced any overt racism or discrimination, there was still an uncomfortable feeling

that made him feel isolated. While Ezra acknowledged that it was at least helpful to have Black female peers he went on to say,

Sometimes it's, it's kind of hard because there's only so much, I could relate to with a whole group of women. But then again, there's White males in the class that I could talk to, but I don't really connect with them enough. But I would say that being in class without another Black male kind of makes me feel like the single one out.

It seemed that for Ezra having peers that shared only the same racial identity provided more connection than White men who shared only the same gender identity. However, his responses clearly demonstrated his desire to have peers who share both the same race and gender identity as him. This connection for him would provide a different connection that he feels he is lacking. Shane also explained that “I'll still stick by the other black students because that sense of community is something I need”. Most of Ezra’s experiences were in the classroom setting and within his academic department. There were other participants who also felt this isolation in the classroom setting due to being the only or one of the few Black men. This same uncomfortable feeling was shared by other participants as well in other places on campus. For example, Simon talked about how it felt to step into different spaces on campus where he was the only Black person there. Simon stated,

Sometimes I feel out of place, especially in predominantly white spaces. Once again, I haven't faced any microaggressions, so I think it's just because I can't relate to certain people. That just makes me just walk away. One time I was at my old dorm, and I went up to the Honors LLC, and they were I mean, it's racially diverse, but there's a lot of white people as well. I was the only Black kid there, and I only went there because a friend was there, and I just felt sort of out of place.

In Simon’s response he is acknowledging that although he sees the campus as diverse the overrepresentation of White students does impact his perceptions and ultimately his behaviors i.e., leaving a space). Sharif talked about how this same experience happens in

student social spaces as well. He stated, “I think that a lot of Black people can relate to going out to any type of function that's just hosted by say a frat on campus and you're going to be one of the few Black people there. That's just a common experience”.

Kendrick talked about why from his perspective it would be better to have more Black students on campus. He says,

I think with the majority that I can see of the university being White people, it is slightly harder for me to connect than say the HBCUs I toured because having a larger group of people that I can see on a daily basis that don't look like me and don't think the same things as me or don't have to worry about the same things as me is it's not off-putting, but it's just, it's a lot more slightly more difficult to deal with than if there is a lot more people that look like me on campus that were there constantly.

When asked what would improve the campus climate for Black men, Ezra’s immediate response was to further diversify the student body. To improve the campus climate for Black men at Central City he suggested:

I feel like if they would start or honestly just accepting more Black people into the school...I feel like when I'm in class, it's a lot of Black people that I know could be here. And it kind of bothers me a little bit because okay, this person's here, but why isn't that person here...you should be able to go to the school and not just see White people. Especially for a school that promotes diversity. That's what really sold me onto [Central City] when I got accepted.

Ezra’s comments allude to a feeling of being deceived by what he believed would be a very diverse student body where he could find cultural community. However, he found that his expectations of diversity on campus did not match the reality at all. Hakeem talked about his overall perceptions of the campus climate stating, “I would say my perception is that, you know, get here, they talk about inclusivity, but I don't really see it happening. And so, I would say that would be my perception is that I feel like some things are a little deceptive”. Sharif also felt that he had been misled by how the

institution presents itself as a diverse community and he has heard other students express these same feelings. He shared,

I think it's just more of that, I don't want to say false advertising, but it's not being completely truthful about the population on campus. They're trying to promote the minority, which is nice. But then that just feeds into the notion that this isn't a PWI, but it is. And I've talked to a bunch of my first-year students that are like, 'I didn't realize how White [Central City] was when I was coming here'... You see the advertisements that they put out. I was even in my freshman year, they got me to be in some commercial that was playing on Hulu and on YouTube telling me to advertise for people to come here. I'm like, damn, y'all got me too. But that's just not the truth of it.

Micah had a similar experience that he shared, "So I've ended up on diversity posts where they just take a picture of that, didn't tell anybody they were going to take a picture of that and be like, oh look at our diverse community". Research discusses how these perceptions can lead to feelings of frustration and alienation for many Black men on campus as discussed by Parker et al. (2016). Majority of participants did however describe the campus as diverse and inclusive of students with various marginalized identities. While each participant had their own perspectives about the diversity of the student body it was clear that structural diversity was very important to each participant. Some participants also commented on the opportunity to interact with students from other races and ethnicities. There was an expression of appreciation for exposure to this especially for those that were not used to this prior to college. James talked about how having other students of color in his classes even if they were not Black was important to him. He stated,

I would say it is majority White kids in my classes. But there still are bits and pieces where there's not, even if, someone may not be African American such as myself, they may be from India or somewhere in Korea, China, Japan and stuff like that.

While Sharif focused more on specifically the absence of Black peers stating,

I get here and it's like I didn't realize the predominantly white institution. I didn't realize how not diverse it would be. You go to class and you're the only Black person in the class, you go to walk around, and you don't see too many faces that look like you.

However, he also made it very clear that, similar to James' perspective, Sharif felt that all types of diversity is beneficial and he welcomed the opportunity to be in conversation with other racial/ethnic groups. He said,

I think people need to broaden their worldview and broaden their horizons on as far as who they're talking to and what they're seeing. Because again, if you surround yourself with people who only look like you just end up in an echo chamber. And that's just not beneficial. And that's the one thing that I will say about even being a part of the [a Black student organization]. It's like it's nice to be surrounded by people that are like me, but then when we get into it, it's like we need to be having these conversations with people outside of our group.

All in all, the significance of this theme for the participants in this study can be summed up by a quote shared by Micah who stated,

I also think that the things that we have around the way that we socialize define, the way that we view ourselves and when I'm in a place that I'm told is for me but have a hard time finding people that are like me, it can feel isolating which is part of the behavior of, okay, well this can't be true. Let me go find others. And some people might not have the response that I have...most people's response to feeling isolated would be to isolate.

The climate at Central City made the participants in this study feel that the only way to find cultural community is if you go looking for it and for some that is harder to do than others which brings up the next subtheme that emerged from the data.

“You have to know where to look”

The lack of Black peers adds a barrier for Black students to find a community they can connect with through shared cultural experiences. The findings clearly demonstrate that finding cultural community on campus is important to the participants and a significant aspect of their campus climate perceptions. There are elements of a PWI

that make it particularly challenging to find that community and that belonging as a Black man on campus. Shane commented on the impact of overrepresentation of White people on campus. He stated,

So, when we're at a PWI and we have all the White people clicking up together and helping themselves, helping each other out, giving themselves internship opportunities, connecting with professors, that leaves us out. Yeah, that just leaves us out. So, for Black people, for Black men, to find that sense of belonging is hard.

Many participants were able to find community eventually despite challenges, which demonstrates that it is not impossible to navigate; however, the needs of each student varies depending on personality characteristics and marginalization of identities. The findings in this study uncovered a shared perspective across participants that the institutional climate leaves students to find community themselves but that path is not the same across student groups. This can be more difficult for Black students when it is difficult to find other students with shared cultural experiences.

Participants in this study talked about their path to finding community and it was clear that some individuals had a harder time than others. Micah talked about some challenges of finding community on the campus of a PWI. He stated,

One general sense that I get from our people is that we don't know where we're at on campus. Especially not when people first start out at this college. You go to your classes, especially if you're in a business school, it's you and one or two other Black people, everybody else. And it's like, unless you join an organization that is specifically for us, it's like, I don't know where we are...it's a little difficult in the actual lived experience of it. If you know where to look, you'll be able to find someone that looks like you here.

When asked if the institution creates a climate that helps students to find community many of the participants said it is left up to the student to navigate this. David responded,

I don't think the university does much, specifically for Black men to make them feel welcome. I think they just, it's just there and it's just flexible. So,

it just gives you certain things and it's up to you to use those things and it's up to you to socialize.

Similarly, Hakeem shared, "I don't think enough is done to tie people together. I feel like especially here, they just leave you to do your own thing...I don't feel like there's really an inclusive environment". Although Hakeem made this critique about the climate at Central City, he also feels that students are accountable for their own experience and the college experience is what you make it. He stated,

I feel individually it's just what you make it. And sometimes it could be a really good experience, sometimes it could be a not so great experience. My first year, that fall semester, I was by myself so much, but spring semester started to turn around, but I don't feel like that was any effort from the university. I feel like that was just incredibly individual just to put myself out there.

Some participants found it to be less challenging to find community and utilized student organizations as a path to community. Simon reflected on his first semester on campus and his use of social media to find community quickly. He shared,

It was relatively easy to find Black students. For example, there was a page on Instagram where the 2026 class, or particularly the Black 2026 class would post their bio on the Instagram page and then they would get posted and that's a way they would network and meet different people. And for the black student organization, I knew about them I think around orientation...and I was like, I'm interested in going. And it was easy to find them. I just went to the student center and went to the meeting.

While Sharif who is an executive member of a Black student organization talked about the challenges to finding cultural community for Black students at this PWI.

It is definitely more difficult for Black students to go out and find it because it's like for White students, there's a lot of people that you can mingle with. For Black students, it's like there's not a lot of people that we can mingle with. And I don't say that Black and White people can't get along. It's not that. It's just you want to find people who are culturally similar to you it's just you have more there. There's more bonding that is there.

An additional consideration is that not all students have the social capital and knowledge about how to engage or find community in college. Like Central City, many institutions use orientation events and campus housing staff to bridge that gap and connect students with a community. For example, as a resident assistant, Sharif talked about how a large part of this position is to encourage students to get involved and find community on campus. He makes it a point to talk to Black students and encourage them to get out and meet people on campus. However, he emphasized that the institution does not do enough to support this agenda and it is left solely up to students to figure it out. He shared,

I don't think that there's enough push for people to actually get involved because as an RA, I see it firsthand. If these residents don't go out and do it for themselves, it's not happening. And that's why I really try to sit down with them and be like, okay, what are you interested in so that we can get you involved so that you can feel like you do belong somewhere. Because again, especially for students who don't live in residence hall, if you never had an RA, you probably wouldn't know about half the things that [Central City] does offer...I feel like there's more that the university could do for sure.

All the participants in this study shared different experiences regarding how they found a community of people on campus. However, all participants made it clear that they were on their own to figure it out when they first arrived on campus.

A few participants also mentioned the impact that the Covid pandemic had on their ability to connect with other students and find belonging on campus. Hakeem attributed some of his reluctance in the first year to the lack of opportunities to socialize and meet people due to the Covid pandemic restrictions. Similarly, Sharif talked about how Covid impacted his engagement. He shared,

Missing out on the friendships, on the career opportunities, just the networking opportunities definitely was a hindrance. And then coming back junior year, it was weird because things were open, but you could tell people were awkward, people were not used to being around other people.

And then on top of the fact that we were all wearing masks, it was very not personable. People were not, it wasn't the college experience.

Jacob also mentioned the impact of the pandemic on his level of engagement on campus

He stated,

I was in the soccer group, and I was in a group called [Central City Break dancers]. That is a dance group. And I felt more connected with people by being in those groups. And I felt like I was seeing more of what a university can give by being in that group. But because I spend most of my time online, and last year, you're trying to come back in person. Now I feel really disconnected.

The participants in this study all came to Central City at different times and were impacted by the pandemic in different ways. Overall, it seems that the institution itself did not make any adjustments to how it brought students together to build a sense of community. Instead, it is still left up to students to figure out how to find community.

While college is seen as a time to grow individually, an institution should consider how the social skills of students today have changed since the pandemic and for some student groups the path to find community could be more challenging than others.

Where you are matters

“The climate feels like you could ask any Black student, they'll tell you that they're fine. But I feel like we are all kind of walking on eggshells because there is a different type of feeling whenever me and other black students get together.” - Shane

Campus climate is often looked at from an institutional perspective, however the data in this study suggests that students are experiencing more than one climate at Central City. Another theme that emerged through the data was the perception that the climate changes as the students move through different parts of the campus. The participants in this study were all situated in different academic departments and these differences seemed to have an impact on how students perceived the institution overall. While this study did not intend to compare across academic departments, all of the participants

talked about what they observed in their specific departments and how that impacted their overall perceptions. This theme explores how participants in the study described their perceptions of the climate within various academic departments compared to other spaces on campus.

Climate within academic departments

Shane was the only participant who had transferred from another institution and had some perspective to share about that unique transition. He shared that his previous institution which was a local community college was much more diverse and he was surprised about this since Central City is situated geographically within a predominantly Black area. Shane said, “it kind of feels like I have to erase my blackness to not go crazy in [the Film department]”. He detailed his experience transferring as a Film major. He said,

People say that film is a white male-dominated space, but I didn't think they were talking about that when I actually arrived...I want to say outside of maybe two or three classes, out of maybe 10 film classes that I've taken. I've been the only Black male in a lot of them. The only other time it's been maybe a Black woman and we can share the solidarity of we're the only Black people here. But other than that, it's been mostly other White males or White women that are in the classes.

He continued to talk about how as one of the only Black students it was particularly difficult to sit in Film classes where issues related to race, or culture were being discussed. He shared,

And that change was just, at first it didn't really bother me because I knew what I was getting into to a point. But when it came to the media and culture class over Zoom whenever they would talk about something that wasn't really something that White male people could relate to and it was more like a Black issue or a black topic, then it would just be, I guess the most inane things to read from people.

Shane shared other instances where he felt the need to speak up about culturally insensitive comments made by White peers to which in one instance his professor was unsupportive. Shane also described an interaction in the department where he was given feedback from a media and culture professor that made him feel very uncomfortable. He shared,

Everybody else got movie recommendations that seem normal and maybe even interesting things that I might've wanted to check out. He comes over to me and he says, your script is about a Haitian character, so you should watch 12 Years of Slave to understand what the character is like. And I was completely caught off guard.

When asked about his sense of belonging within the Film department Shane responded,

I feel as though it's, since that media and culture class was one of the first semesters that I took at [Central City], I don't feel connected to it at all in a way at least the [film] department, I don't feel as though I belong. I feel like I'm kind of an outlier, a visitor in a way because there's so few black people in the department.

Terrence was also a film major and while he has been at Central City for less time than Shane there were notable differences in how Terrence described the campus climate compared to Shane. It is important to note that although Black men may have similarities in their racial and gender identity there are some differences in how they experience and perceive their environment.

There were also participants within science focused majors who talked about their perceptions of the climate within their department. When asked about his perceptions on the campus climate David described his experience socializing with peers in the computer science department. He shared,

I think it depends on the class and it depends on the major because in computer science there's definitely a lot of anti-social people and there's a lot of introverts who stick to themselves and that's not comfortable with talking with other people. So, a lot of them just need to stick to their own stuff if they're in their own little bubble and they don't really socialize and

talk. So, in those type of classes, my computer science class, I usually just stick to myself.

Similarly, Jacob talked about his experiences within the computer science department. He shared,

I was trying to make new friends because I had nobody basically at [Central City], and people were either avoiding me or trying not to talk to me. They thought that I didn't understand English well. They assumed that I was dirty as well...I feel like most of the people in that major or in that school itself are of Caucasian background.

Jacob talked about how he believes that there are not many people of color in the department due to the challenging courses and many end up switching their major. He also recalled instances of classmates refusing to work with him on group assignments.

Finding belonging outside of major

In contrast, Jacob described his experiences taking courses outside of his major where he experienced a different climate. He shared,

I have taken a few dance classes from [Central City] as well. And I feel like although most of the dancers there tend to be of, I guess Caucasian background or an Asian background or something else most of the dance teachers there are of a minority background and it feels like you're seen, you feel like you can talk, feel like you can answer. You feel like people aren't catered to in those classes.

Jacob seemed to find belonging in the classroom setting more successfully outside of the academic department for his major. Similarly, Shane talked about other buildings where he felt more belonging. He explained, "If I'm in the student center, I feel more connected because it, it's like I look around and I see Black people and they're playing Black music. I go to even the liberal arts college...I feel more connected there than I do whenever I'm in [the Film building]". Shane clearly identified the differences in climate across campus and was actively seeking out supportive spaces to counteract the negative experiences he was having. Over time many participants similarly were able to navigate the

environmental challenges without changing their major. Despite the challenges within the department, Jacob did describe some positive interactions within the department that were impactful for him. He said,

I would say in the beginning it's kind of rough...this seems like you got to be for yourself type of thing. But as I got into my second year and my third year in school, more people were more open to helping me...I even had a White man tell me Hey, we're all going through this together and I do not want to see you fail. And that really helped me have some form of faith.

Overall, Shane felt like an outsider in the film department, especially in classes. When asked if he feels his identity is reflected within the campus climate Shane shared how there is a lack of representation throughout his department,

In the classrooms or at least the students in the classroom, it's not being reflected, and the contents not being reflected. And even real-life practical examples, we're not being represented and reflected. So, I am kind of holding onto a pipe dream and that makes me feel, that's probably what plays into making me feel like an outsider and that I don't belong in, I guess that section of [Central City].

Sharif shared similar thoughts about his experience as a health professions major. He stated,

Me and my major, I'm a health professions major, there's not a lot of Black men in that major. So, it's like, I can count maybe five other Black men that I've met through that whole thing. So, it's like to find belonging in there, it's not finding it with people who look like me. So, I have to go out of my way to find that kind of belonging.

The significance of this theme can be summarized by two comments made by Ezra. He mentioned, "I think that because of how used to not fitting in at [the art department], I feel like I already have it in my mind that if I go elsewhere on the campus, it'll probably be the same experience or worse". The perceptions that he formed within his academic department have not only impacted his sense of belonging, but also his motivation to engage anywhere else on campus. Ezra went on to say,

I feel like I'm at a point where it doesn't even feel like I'm a [Central City] student, but I'm so far removed from the identity of [Central City] that it really feels like I'm coming to do what I have to do and then go home. That's what it feels like right now. I wouldn't say I'm mad at it, but I feel like if I did feel more comfortable there, I would have a better time.

As students experience different departments either through taking general courses or elective courses, they notice differences. Kendrick even talked about how his perceptions have started to change slightly since switching academic departments. He talked about some of the noticeable climate changes including diversity of classes and the willingness to socialize among the students. He stated,

I think that [Central City] has an environment that I've noticed where people will often be more scared to talk to people in [the business school]. People say that I've heard that [business] students don't really talk to each other, which was true from my experience. And then going in to [communication studies] and just taking some gen eds this year it's been a noticeable difference where people are a lot more talkative and willing to share experiences and it might just be because of the classes.

The participants in this study all had various majors at the institution. When asked about their view of the campus climate, participants consistently talked about their experiences within their academic departments separately from other areas of the campus. It became clear that campus climate varies across academic departments and has a great influence on the individual perceptions of each participant.

It begins before college

"I wouldn't say that I didn't feel welcome at [Central City] just because there weren't too many people like me because it's just been like that my whole life." -Sharif

While this study did not set out to explore participant's experiences in prior schooling environments it was evident that most of the participants discussed their current perceptions in relation to previous experiences. This theme illustrates the significance of participant's previous schooling experiences and how those environments

continue to impact how Black men view their current environments. Black men are continuously impacted by the social environment they live in including where their previous schooling took place. This can be a positive or negative influence depending on the individual.

Significance of High school experience

For some participants, the climate at Central City University was familiar and reminded them of their high school. David said, “it reminds me of my high school because I went to Central High School and both institutions were diverse with different races” and on the other hand Kendrick said, “I would say though that my high school was more diverse or I think it was because it was less people and we were in one building, it was easier to see the diversity”. Hakeem also shared, “coming from my high school just makes me more aware of when I'm looking around, I'm like, damn where are the Black people? I'm like, okay, it's time for me to go”. These comparisons helped to shape the lens through which participants perceived the diversity of the campus and in some cases even affected their behaviors.

For participants who were coming from environments with a similar racial makeup, it could result in more positive perceptions. When James was asked to talk about the diversity he sees on campus and in his classes, he talked about how the classes are majority White, but he has not felt uncomfortable or excluded and he suggested that his previous school environment prepared him for that. He said, “I feel like a lot of that has to do with where I did come from, there were, of course, a lot of White kids in my classes”. He went on to say,

There have been a few times where I was the only Black kid, but not very many. But it never made me feel like, oh, I wish there were more Black

kids in my class or things like that. I mean, it'd be nice too, but it never necessarily bothered me like that.

The familiarity that James had with being one of the few Black students in a classroom setting was comfortable for him and it seemed to shape the way he perceives his current environment. Similarly, Sharif talked about his previous experiences with finding community and “fitting in” which was very similar to his current experience. He explained,

I grew up in a suburb that was predominantly White. So, for me, my race and my ethnicity and my culture has never been something where I fit into anywhere specifically because even growing up, I'm Black American, but I'm more specifically Nigerian and that isn't even the same thing. So going around and talking to people, I'm more able to find pieces of people that I fit in with. So, I wouldn't say that I didn't feel welcome at [Central City] just because there weren't too many people like me because it's just been like that my whole life.

When Kendrick was asked if the absence of Black faculty impacted his perceptions or sense of belonging, he shared, “I wouldn't particularly say so because for most of my education I haven't had predominantly Black professors or teachers. So it's not really a change”. Students who attend schools with predominantly Black peers and staff prior to college could perceive the climate of a PWI much differently than the participants in this study who shared this perspective.

Research suggests that Black boys can experience racially tense school environments from a young age (Howard, 2008; 2014). These experiences can shape the way that they view school or view themselves (Howard, 2008; 2014). For Hakeem, he talked about his schooling in Florida before entering college where he experienced instances of racially motivated microaggressions and stereotyping. He shared, “I feel like especially in high school and middle school, I feel like it was a little microaggressive. So I'm appreciative that that's not the case over here”. Hakeem recounted instances of

stereotyping from peers regarding the way he talked or questioning his intelligence which made him feel excluded in the classroom settings prior to college. Hakeem stated, “I also feel like because of what I've had to deal with before just being in high school or in middle school where my intelligence is really a question or it's questioned”. When he was asked to talk generally about his perceptions of the campus climate at Central City, he often made statements about his previous schooling experiences even when he was not directly asked about them. For example, he stated,

Comparing my middle school and high school experience, I feel like the racial climate is probably significantly better just as far as diversity of people who are in your classes. Because I feel like, especially in high school, it was really a problem where I would be in class, and I'd just be the only Black person there.

In Hakeem’s case he seemed to view Central City as a positive environment because he was not experiencing any of these same negative situations. He said, “I do appreciate that here it's not as much of a thing as it is home. Especially in my high school”. Throughout the interview Hakeem and Jared both alluded to climate differences between their hometown and the city where Central City is geographically located. Hakeem stated, “Overall, especially compared to the great state of Florida, I feel like I've definitely had much better experience up here”. Similarly, Jared’s hometown was also in a southern state, and he shared “I would say that the university as a whole whether that's, a combination of staff attitudes, student attitudes, things of that nature are more aware of social injustice in general, and racial injustices as a whole than what I'm used to now. Again, I also come from the south, so it's just different”. Both of these participants who were from southern states attributed geographical location for some of the climate differences they noticed.

Overall, it is very clear that previous experiences are very important aspects that influence the current perceptions for the participants in this study. These experiences continue to shape how they view the institution they currently attend. This can vary by the individual but is an important consideration when thinking about how to best support Black men when they arrive on campus. Their previous experiences and interactions with other people also shape how they perceive their sense of belonging within an environment. Notably this theme also emphasizes the importance of this research study. The campus climate perceptions and experiences for Black men within higher education will continue to impact how they view themselves in the future whether that is professionally or academically beyond their undergraduate careers.

"I have to work twice as hard"

"You have to look a certain type of way and you have to talk a certain type of way so that you don't come off as this stigma. That's what it is at the end of the day." – Jacob

The literature discussed in chapter 2 suggests that a common experience for Black men is their subjection to racism at PWIs. However, almost all of the participants in this study when asked about their experiences on campus shared that they had not experienced any instances of overt racism. Although only one of the participants reported experiencing any overt racial discrimination or prejudice many participants described uncomfortable situations, they experienced related to their racial identity. Despite the absence of this experience, the majority of participants talked about an internal pressure that they put on themselves to prove they belong in their classrooms or the campus environments. This included modifying their behavior to fit a certain expectation, performing well academically or even how they dressed in order to avoid confirming a negative stereotype.

Stigmatization of Black men

All participants were asked how their identity as a Black man impacts their perceptions of the campus climate and one common theme was their awareness of how they are being perceived by others within the environment. Simon even specifically identified some of the assumptions that are made about Black men. He stated,

There's a lot of people that think black men cannot be professionals. There's this narrative that Black men are lazy and all this stuff like that. So, I feel like there are a lot of hardworking Black men out there who do have the drive. They do have the passion, they just don't have the guidance that they need and they don't have that person on their side that tells them like, Hey, we got you.

Jacob was the only participant that talked about being treated differently because of his racial identity. As an international student he talked about the adjustment he had to make to the racial dynamics in America and the xenophobic treatment he experienced as an international student as well. He shared,

The whole culture shock thing happened...I knew that certain things existed. I know racism and privilege and whatnot, but to the extent that I seen it or experienced it, it was shocking to actually see it happen. I was trying to make new friends because I had nobody basically at [Central City], and people were either avoiding me or trying not to talk to me. They thought that I didn't understand English well. They assumed that I was dirty as well.

The intersection of Jacob's identity as a Black man and international student influenced his perception and experiences compared to some of the Black, American-born men in this study. On the other hand, there were other participants who seemed to form their perceptions based on the threat of being stereotyped or mistreated because of their identity. For example, throughout the study it was clear that Jared had an overall positive perception of the campus climate. He shared that he had experienced no instances of

racial profiling on campus, but he was still very aware of how he presented himself on campus. Jared explained,

I don't walk around with my hood up and I try to dress more business casual than not when I'm on campus, well in general, but especially when I'm on campus and just I try not to be somebody that would be profiled.

It was interesting to see how Jared described the campus as welcoming while also sharing that he altered his behavior to avoid possibly being profiled on campus.

For context, the Central City university surrounding community had been experiencing increased crime around Central City's campus which impacted students in different ways. Shane made an interesting point about policing on campus which is an evident issue for many Black men at PWIs as discussed in chapter 2. Although Shane did not have any negative interactions with campus police himself, he suggested that the school does not seem to be aware or concerned about how police presence impacts Black students. He stated, "As for the rest of the school, I don't feel like they even take into mind how black students feel with them constantly talking about increasing police presence on [Central City's] campus". Jacob made a related comment in reference to Black men on campus being "alert and conscious" of their own presence. He mentioned,

I think from a male, Black point of view, you have to be more alert. Cause most of the crimes that are happening in the area are said to be by Black males. So we already have a stigma against ourselves.

The social stigma associated with being a Black man causes some of the participants in this study to be aware of their identity in ways that other students do not have to be concerned with. Jacob went on to say, "I feel like it caused me to hold my breath sometimes when I'm even on campus because it's just be aware, be alert and always be

ready to explain yourself'. Many of the participants seemed to be premeditating potential issues that they could face due to their race and gender identity.

Influence of Stereotype Threat

Some participants talked about a pressure to perform well in academic settings in order to be respected or acknowledged. This is evident in previous research on campus climate perceptions for Black men attending PWIs (Parker et al., 2016). Ezra talked about a feeling of invisibility and that he would have to over perform in order to be acknowledged within the art department. He stated,

It makes me feel like I have to work twice as hard as everybody else. So, I would say that being a Black male at [Central City] makes me feel like I have to work harder. I feel like I have to work harder to be recognized a bit more because of how much of a minority I am.

Ezra talked a lot about the isolation he experienced as a Black male within the art department which also resulted in pressure to stand out or go above and beyond what may be required of other students. He shared,

For example, in [the art department building] there's always a bunch of paintings put up from the students in the hallway and just on the walls and stuff. And that's one of the things that I would really want to be able to do in the future. But in the back of my head it's like, will my work even be noticed? My work has to be so much of a high standard for it to even be noticed because of how unnoticed I am.

The pressure felt by many of the participants can be attributed to the social stigma that is often associated with the Black male identity in many contexts including academic spaces. Sharif talked about his experience as one of few Black men in a health professions major. He shared,

When you're the only Black person in that class, you need to try twice as hard. You can't be the lowest scoring in the class because that already feeds into this stereotype that you're not supposed to be there...It makes me want to work harder, but should that be the reason that I want to work harder? I don't think that's fair, but I do it because people are going to see

me as less than. And if I am less than, then you're confirming the stereotype.

Sharif's comment alludes to the concept of stereotype threat and research discusses how Black men are more likely to experience this when they are one of few in an environment (Boyd & Mitchell, 2018). Sharif also made comments about his performance being tied to "earning respect" from others. He stated, "If I'm going to be a Black man and pull up in sweats and then ace your quizzes and ace your exams, then you have to treat me with respect that I do deserve". Sharif did confirm that he had not experienced any overt racism, however, stereotype threat still impacted him. It is noteworthy that the overrepresentation of White peers and faculty combined with social stigma impacted the perceptions and behaviors of many participants in the study. Jacob talked about the isolation he felt when he first came to campus and often being treated like his ideas were not good enough by peers. He stated,

So, there's a lot of gaze that you experience while you're walking on the campus as well. There's a lot of persons that don't want to talk to you in terms of group assignments because they don't think that you understand what you're doing or what you're saying. They don't think that you are smart or you're on their level. So it's, I don't need to talk to you. Your ideas don't make sense. This happened to me so many times in group assignments.

Simon also commented on feeling like he must act a certain way within the academic settings in order to fit in with his White peers. He explained,

I feel like I haven't faced any racial microaggressions or outward aggressions. I felt like I haven't faced those, but sometimes I feel like I have to play into respectability politics because when you're in the [business school] and you're around all these White men who don't have to play into that. And sometimes I feel like I have to be sharp, be alert, be on point every time, because if not, I would just be looked at as just like, oh, this other Black kid who just really doesn't really care.

Simon believed that he had been taught before coming to college to monitor his own behavior when in certain contexts and so this has become an automatic response especially when in the presence of majority White people. He went on to say,

Because growing up I had to learn to avoid being seen as a stereotype of this loud black man. Even though at the end of the day, respectability politics doesn't really serve well. I think just having that ingrained so much growing up, it's pretty much natural for me.

In various ways the campus climate perceptions of the participants in this study were all influenced in some way by the social stigma associated with being a Black man in America. This includes the low expectations that have been attributed to Black men throughout their educational experiences. Additionally, the experience of having few Black peers in the classroom exacerbates the pressure to prove themselves in the classroom and throughout campus. These findings suggest that understanding how social stigma continues to influence the perceptions and behaviors of Black men is necessary to support their success.

“It’s the people I have met here”

“It's not really the campus, it's more so the people...” – David

The way students interact with each other, faculty, staff, and administrators is an important element in how students’ perception of campus climate is formed and specifically how Black men feel belonging on campus (Strayhorn, 2017). While more than one factor played a role in creating belonging for the Black men in this study, interactions and relationships with individuals at the institution was one of the most salient. This theme will be addressed through the following subthemes: 1) relationships

with peers 2) relationships with faculty/staff and 3) relationships with surrounding community.

Shane shared his overall perception of the university's view on Black men on campus. He stated,

I haven't really heard anything about Black men. It's just one of those things where we're just not really talked about as much. Not positively, not negatively. It's just people don't really talk about Black men...I feel like unless you're bringing the school value monetarily or headline wise, they don't really care about you.

This was a perception that was shared across most participants in this study. They did not get the sense that Central City as an institution wanted to support them as Black men specifically. For example, Shane stated, "They want to be inclusive only to keep up appearances and probably if anything, get more students to apply. But in terms of actually making the students feel safe and welcomed and included, they don't really care".

However, the relationships that developed with people on campus made a significant difference for all the participants in this study. Multiple participants talked about the people on campus who they felt genuinely cared about their success and the significant influence those people had on their sense of belonging.

Relationships with Peers

Higher education research is very clear that peer relationships are one of the most important factors that impact students in college (Astin, 1997; Bonner & Bailey, 2006).

The participants in this study are no different and they spoke about many significant relationships they have developed while at Central City University. For many of the participants the peer relationships they formed played a significant role in the belonging that they feel within the institution. An important part of this finding included the various spaces where these relationships were able to form.

A few participants even went as far as to separate their connection with the institution from the friendships or relationships that they formed. Simon stated, “I view the university as not only a university, but also a business and in terms of how they function and how they run things. And so, when I'm with my friends, I'm able to be myself”. Sharif similarly separated the two when asked what makes him feel like connected to Central City and that he belongs there. He stated, “I’m not exactly sure if it's the university itself as much as just the people that I've met here. I will say that, yeah, I think it's just the people that I've met here”.

Participants formed these relationships in various ways. Some participants connected with peers by joining student organizations or spending time in spaces created for students to socialize. Jared talked about connections he has made within his campus ministry organization and professional student organizations which have made him feel like he belongs. He also talked about his connections with other organizations that provide a sense of community. He stated,

There's an organization at [Central City] called [Strong] that does a lot of nonprofit philanthropy stuff and it's just a lot of, most of them are just young Black men and that's the space I feel comfortable in even if I'm not a part of that organization.

Simon similarly shared,

I'm a part of the [Black student organization], I remember one day we were talking about the things that the PWI does or does not to make Black people feel included. And also I'm also involved in the African student organization...I feel connected to those groups more so because we can relate to shared experiences and things that we've gone through. Of course, we're from different countries and everybody has their different cultures, but there are shared traits. And being Black and being African it, it's definitely has its own set of experiences that people can relate.

Jared also talked about physical spaces specifically created for students to meet each other and connect. He stated, “Being around places that I feel most comfortable, which is

a lot of times around student organizations or student only spaces whether it's the student center". Shane also mentioned the student center as a space where he feels connected, he stated, "If I'm in the student center, I feel more connected because it, it's like I look around and I see Black people and they're playing kind of black music". Similarly, Jacob talked about specific spaces for students to come together in the student center where he feels he can be himself and all his multiple identities are accepted. He stated,

I feel like the student center, the gaming section, there's a gaming lounge in the back. I feel like that space, especially for me, feels really inclusive of everything, like minorities sexualities, everything. So I feel like that specific place on campus for me is probably the one place that I can go to and just be myself without expecting anybody to say anything or judge me.

There were also participants who talked about the impact of formal and informal student support groups that they were a part of through their academic departments. These spaces proved to be very impactful for Black men who had challenges with finding that community within the classroom setting. Simon was also able to find community through a learning community within his academic department. He described it as a cohort style student group that allowed him to connect with peers with similar major interests by taking courses together. He shared,

I found my people from this program I'm currently doing the Latin American Studies semester, and it draws you to be closer to your classmates because you have all these classes together. And so it's just, it's been an amazing experience connecting with them.

Shane and Terrence both talked about a student group they joined as BIPOC students in the Film department. They described this as an informal mentorship group that meets a few Fridays each month to come together and support each other socially and professionally. Terrence shared,

It's just nice to be in a group of people who are all working in the same field and they all look like you. And they're all unified in the sense that we're not White. But it's nice to be with a group of people like that because for me, where in my personal experience, I hang out with a lot of people that are White usually, and that's perfectly fine for me. But it's nice to be with people that look like me.

Terrence shared that while he feels his identity as a Black man in the Film department does not make him feel excluded, he still appreciates that this space is available for him.

While Terrence and Shane seemed to have different experiences overall within the same academic department, they both felt the group was impactful for their experience at Central City. When asked about how having this support group has impacted his sense of belonging, Shane stated,

It's very disheartening at times. But I feel like we do band together as Black students a lot and put on for our people. I mean, we do everything that we can to stay motivated. And if there's one thing that's really helped me, I want to say it's the BIPOC mentorship group that's played a big part in, I guess why I'm still even in film school in the first place. If it wasn't for that and the people that I met in that program, I definitely would've either given up or I wouldn't have pursued it still with this level of persistency.

Shane said that Black faculty and staff members within the Film department encouraged him to join the group and identified the group as a significant motivator for his persistence. Shane's experience connects to Strayhorn's (2018) sense of belonging framework which identifies sense of belonging as a motivating factor that drives behavior. Relationships with people on campus and the existence of supportive social spaces on campus created for the students and sometimes by the students is clearly an important element for the participants who have found belonging at Central City.

Cross racial interactions with peers were identified as significant for a few participants however the positive influence of having Black male peers was significant for most of the participants in the study. This finding is in line with the research

discussed in chapter 2 regarding the impact of having connections with other Black men while attending a PWI (Brooms, 2017; Brooms, 2018; Brooms & Davis, 2017). As discussed previously Central City has an indisputable overrepresentation of White students which makes the presence of other Black men even more important. However, because of the small number of Black men on campus presence and connections with other Black men have been essential for participant's sense of belonging.

Simon talked about one of his early connections with another Black man on campus. He stated, "my first RA was a Black man. I connected with him really well and he just put me onto a lot of things. Taught me a lot of things as far as how to navigate college". Simon also pointed out how difficult it can be to connect with other Black men on campus. He stated,

So there's really no opportunity presented for Black men to be able to connect with each other except fraternities and stuff like that...I think there's a lot of spaces where they [White men] are able to connect more but for Black men, considering there's not that many of us, it's harder. I think it makes it harder for Black men to see themselves here in the university.

Simon's suggestion is for Central City to host events specifically targeted at the Black male population to foster those connections.

Kendrick talked about transitioning from a business major to communications major. During this transition he noticed that he came across more Black men in his classes and it had a positive influence on his motivation to connect with his peers. Prior to this major change he did not find himself wanting to talk with classmates and from his perspective he felt that his peers were unmotivated to socialize as well. When asked about his perception of having more Black men in his communication classes he stated,

I feel like so far this semester I've noticed with the Black men in my class, there's almost an immediate connection where it's like we'll see each other

and kind of recognize that we're in similar positions and it's a lot easier to communicate and form a relationship based on that. When you have a starting point you already know without even having to talk to the person, then it makes it easier because most people build that I know build relationships off similar things.

James made the point that for him as a football student-athlete he had a built-in community that he was able to find community with and make strong connections with peers. He shared,

Because I'm a part of a team already, I don't have to find other people. If they come along great. Hopefully they do come along. But I'm not at a deficit. But I do like to expand my network. Don't get me wrong, I want to know people outside of sports, but I know it's harder for other students that may not come into college with friends or people they know to go to school with.

In James' case, being a part of a sports team and having pre-established connections to a community of peers assisted with the transition. From his perspective he has not struggled with feeling excluded in predominantly White spaces or felt pressured to disconfirm stereotypes. When asked about how and where he has been able to find cultural community James stated, "I'm not necessarily actually seeking it out because I already have some. But I'm not opposed to making or building any other relationships. But for me, I find that my teammates, I got my three tight guys". As a football player on the Central City university team, James is around other Black men daily which could potentially combat some of the challenges for other participants in this study who find themselves in mostly White spaces daily and not as many connections with other Black men or Black peers in general. A notable finding that emerged was the consistent response from participants when they were asked how they see their race and gender identities represented on campus. The only answer from multiple participants was their

identities were not represented or that the only way is through student-athletes and athletics marketing materials (i.e., basketball and football teams).

Relationships with Faculty/Staff

As discussed earlier, research shows that Black men are often impacted by stereotype threat and for many it has been important to develop supportive relationships with faculty and staff. These relationships can provide much needed guidance and acknowledgement to Black men who may feel invisible or excluded in predominantly White academic settings. These relationships can also provide validation that they belong.

One way that Black men have been able to feel connected and acknowledged is through the relationships with staff and faculty. Shane talked about how important the presence of faculty has been for him throughout his journey. He stated,

The influence that having Black faculty members and students around is that it kind of allows me to let my guard down and that there's a sense of community there....And even then, just teaching me how to operate as somebody that's Black in the film space, because there is operating as somebody who's Black in professional spaces, but in film spaces, it's an entirely different type of ego that goes into it for a lot of people, a lot of White male people.

Shane talked very fondly about two Black faculty members, in particular, who he has received guidance and support from. He stated,

I wouldn't have been able to get this far without her. And even then, her and George have teamed up to mentor me and they see the potential and they're like, all right, we're going to guarantee that you make it. We see it. We're going to do everything that we can to push you to further heights.

Hakeem also talked about the importance of faculty being intentional about curriculum and diversification of the content presented in class. He stated,

My professor, she tries to diversify who comes in and it's not just a bunch of white people talking to us. And I also appreciate that they make us

aware of programs that can help us. I got an email two months ago about how there was a specific internship placing program for Black men who were over this certain GPA and they targeted me because they saw my GPA.

Overall, showing care and attention to Black male students is a factor that can combat some of the climate challenges that Black men experience.

Relationships with surrounding community

Some of the participants in the study identified the surrounding community as an extended community that creates belonging for them on campus. Although Central City is a PWI, it is situated in an urban area that has a predominantly Black population and surrounds Central City's campus. Many of the participants also felt protective of the community and had a sense of responsibility to the community. In some cases, it is the surrounding community that drew participants to come to the university because it felt like a supportive environment for Black students. Jared stated,

Being a Black man, I would say I have felt very welcomed at this particular university, which the more I see my friends that went to PWIs, I just know that may not have been their experience. But I think just for me in [this city], it is more on the diverse side. And so there is a very strong Black community. There's a very strong community of immigrant families as well. So not only have I been able to have a piece of home in a community that I am familiar at [Central City], but I've also been able to learn about more than just Black and White, which is all that I knew for the most part.

Simon also brought up the influence of the surrounding community when asked if he sees his identity reflected anywhere within the university. He stated,

I don't really walk around reflecting on the identity of me as a Black man until I'm in predominantly Black spaces or predominantly White spaces. But there's definitely a major Black influence as we are in [this city]. And it's has a major Black population.

Simon also talked about the influence of the community members who work on campus.

He shared,

I know it's random, but in the dining hall you really connect with some of the employees there, they're from the community and they really make the effort to connect with the students. And I have extremely good service there.

The employees within this space are predominantly Black and reflect the racial identity of the surrounding community, but not the rest of campus. While not close relationships, Simon identified his passing communication with these individuals as a source of belonging. This is likely because the rest of campus does not reflect his racial identity and he can feel a sense of cultural community from the adults there. Shane similarly felt connected to the community, but also protective because of how they are treated by other students on campus. This created a negative perception of the campus racial climate and decreased Shane's sense of belonging. He shared,

I think about when I see some of the people that don't go to [Central City] that are just regular residents and how I hear students talk about them and look at them and even interact with them. I feel less connected because it just feels like they just want to be rid of just the [neighborhood's community] culture in its entirety, just so that they can have a better school. And it's just like if you wanted a better school, you should have went somewhere else.

It was evident that some of the participants felt a sense of belonging because of where the campus is situated. This connection with the community even led one participant to get actively involved in the community. Jared talked about his engagement off campus and how it creates a sense of belonging for him. He shared,

I would say if [Central City] had more opportunities to invest into the Black men in our community, because for me that was something that I did outside of [campus]. I did it with another organization that's not connected to [Central City] and that has helped me so much to feel a sense of belonging in [this city] and actually be able to invest into and helping the community that I'm a part of and also be able to learn from that same community as well.

In many ways Jared's recommendation to include more opportunities for Black men to connect with the community illustrates the significance of these connections he has formed while at Central City.

Summary of Interview Findings

The themes that emerged from the analysis of interview data indicate that the campus climate perceptions for Black, undergraduate men are influenced by the intersection of their race and gender identity. Both identities affect the way Black men perceive the environment and feel belonging within the institution. Majority of participants often felt isolated in certain spaces because they were often one of few Black men in predominantly White spaces such as classrooms, student events, and social events. There were also notable differences across participants who were in various academic departments. They also faced challenges feeling a sense of belonging because the path to finding community was not clearly laid out, but participants felt it was left up to them to navigate. Furthermore, participants perceptions of the environment were heavily influenced by previous experiences in their home or school environments which suggests that Black men are not a monolith and there are other factors that will impact how they view the campus climate. Overall, each participant's perceptions were influenced by their race and gender identity which highlights the complexity of Black men's experiences attending PWIs.

Focus Group Findings

Throughout the focus groups and follow up interviews many of the same themes discussed above emerged as the participants engaged in dialogue with each other and talked about the meaning behind their photos. There were two focus groups facilitated by

the researcher. There were seven participants who were able to attend one of the focus groups. The other three participants completed a follow up individual interview with the researcher to discuss their photos. There were two participants who completed an initial interview but did not respond to the researcher when asked to submit photos or attend a focus group. The findings described in this section are based on 10 of the 12 participants in this study.

This section of the chapter will describe the data collected from the focus groups and follow-up interviews. This data complements the findings discussed above while also adding to the depth of understanding about participants perceptions and experiences as it relates to this study topic. These findings also illustrate further similarities across the participants in this study.

Feeling a sense of home

“... those relationships I have with other Black men on campus, they make me feel like I belong..” - Jared

As previously discussed, the small population of Black people on campus made it much more difficult for Black men to identify cultural community on campus. There were various photos that led to conversations about either the absence or presence of Black people on campus and how it influenced the participant’s sense of belonging.

Absence of Black people is felt

Ezra shared a photo from his classroom that displayed the lack of diversity in the art school. He stated,

The second picture is just me pointing out the fact that in most of my classes I am the only male and if I'm not the only male, I'm probably the only Black male there. I feel like there's only so much that you can relate to when you're the only Black male in class.

Additionally, multiple participants submitted photos of a faculty strike on campus that illustrated the predominantly White faculty at Central City. Sharif talked about the meaning behind his photo of the strike and described it as “it was like a sea of White and non-black people and then you saw in the back it's one black dude”. Sharif felt that the image illustrated what it looks like to attend a PWI. Other participants who included images of the strike also discussed the need for more diverse staff and how overwhelming it was to see the lack of diversity. For example, Kendrick stated,

I think at some points it makes it harder to talk to professors because even if they could come from similar backgrounds, it's they wouldn't really understand what I go through because we look different just based on that. So I think it makes it not impossible obviously, but it makes it a little more difficult to connect personally.

Ezra also referenced how the absence of Black professors impacts him. He stated,

Currently, I would say that I'm pretty detached from the whole [Central City] identity, I really just feel like I just come to campus and go home. That's how I feel most of the days, I feel like a lot of it has to do with there's a lack of professors that are of color. Most of my professors are White, and I think that even though my professors are great, I'm not saying that because they're White, they're bad professors. I would say that if there was more of a presence of professors of color, I think it would be a more positive thing. It would be more motivating just including more things that actually from bring diversity and kind of help Black students out with their experience at [Central City].

Jacob responded in agreement about the need for more representation in teachers. He responded to Ezra's point stating,

I do agree that having more representation in terms of teachers would also help us as well as give us, I guess better relationships because Well, they could relate more to I guess, how I'm feeling in the class and what I'm going through, or they might be able to give me advice on something that somebody else may not be so inclined to give.

In Jared's follow up interview he mentioned how the rare presence of Black professors in his major is impactful for him. He stated,

I take note of when professors do look like me because I automatically connect with them more. So we've had the two newer professors in my department, one is a Black lady and another guy is a Black man. So those are two people that I just connect with automatically. I got in their class and I was like, oh, awesome. I was excited to see them in a sense because it was something different than what I was used to.

There were several photos submitted that illustrated the impact of having other Black people either on campus or around campus. Through these images and the conversations that followed it was evident that majority of the participants agreed that having other Black people visible on campus is very impactful for them. This supports findings identified through the initial interviews, however this additional data suggested that it was more than just the compositional/structural diversity of the campus.

Black people create a sense of home

Participants in the study talked about Black people provided a feeling of comfort and belonging for them. Most of the participants submitted photos that illustrated relationships they formed with Black peers or staff on campus and talked about how important those people were to their sense of belonging. Shane included a photo to represent belonging which included Black peers that are within the film department. He described his photo saying,

Those two are people that I've had classes with probably my entire tenure in the film department. And there's probably only one to two other Black men that I could point to and probably honestly even less Black women that I could point to in the entire department.

He also included a photo of a memorable film set where all the people there were Black, which he described as a rare occurrence. He shared,

This set I was on was different than most of the other sets that I was on...It was a certain type of environment when we got to sit down and talk with each other as Black men and as black people in general. Especially when one of the actors was Clifton Powell and we got to sit and talk to him about just life. I think that was the weekend of the shooting in Buffalo

where the shooting dropped a manifesto or something like that and we got to hear Clifton's thoughts on it and it was one of the most memorable sets I've ever been on because the director was Black, assistant camera was Black, pretty much all of the actors were Black too. All of the important actors, the star roles were Black. And it was one of the most diverse sets I've been on to this day.

Engaging with other Black people when you are in predominantly White spaces most of the time makes these opportunities even more impactful and memorable. Micah included a picture of himself and Black, male peers along with a campus security guard who is also a Black man. This prompted conversation about finding community and belonging through genuine people who show care towards them. Micah shared the photo of Kels and stated,

One of the pictures I submitted was just me and my homies by the student Center. One of my friends, his name is Kels, he does the [campus security] thing. So, he just sits there and he's a really wonderful guy, bubbly, wonderful personality. Everybody knows him over there. And so that's a cool dude and he holds space for a lot of people. I tell him all the time, I'm like, bro, when you're not here, people be asking where you're at.

Shane also shared the same sentiments about the impact of Kels' presence.

Yeah, he really is a GOAT [greatest of all time]. On Thursday there was a film festival that I was a part of and then after my film I see him out of the corner of my eye, he comes over and daps me up and says good job. He doesn't really play around about caring about everybody that comes by. He actually will make sure that you are accounted and taken care of. That's never happened to me. I told one of my teachers when the film festival would be, and it mean a lot to me if he came by. They didn't come by. I told Kels 30 minutes before and he comes down and watches it is just, it's amazing. And that for me meant a lot to me to where it's just that little corner of the student center is a really bright spot for me.

Sharif, who also knew Kels, commented, "If three men in this group are talking about the same person, how he's doing a great job, that speaks volumes". Similarly, in a follow up interview with Jared he talked about a photo he submitted of himself with his mentor that he called Mr. Z who is a mentor from the surrounding community that has been a

significant influence on his sense of belonging. Mr. Z approached Jared and another Black male student one day on campus and has since been an important connection for Jared. He shared,

I guess it's just unexpected. Cause I came here and that wasn't exactly what I explicitly was looking for when I came to [Central City], but it is something that I see value in that is definitely something that makes me feel like I belong. And those interactions, those relationships I have with other Black men on campus, they make me feel like I belong. I'm a part of the community even though I'm not from [this city] ...Just a sense of welcoming, a sense of home, a sense of community. I probably say those are feelings I associate with that.

Jared also talked about his connections with the campus ministry organization he is a part of. It seemed that this organization played a significant role in his life as a college student. He spoke very highly about his religious beliefs and the group of people that Jared has formed relationships with through this organization. He talked about how his campus ministry reflects his racial identity and the impact that has had for him. Jared shared,

The campus ministry as a whole spans more than [this university], but all the students [who come from Central City] are Black. And so the dynamic with us and just conversations we can have a lot of times since we can lead lean towards just our experience as Black men and women at [Central City].

When asked how important this community has been for him Jared said, “It is basically my second family while I'm here, not around any family”. However, Jared felt that the Central City institution itself did not give him a sense of home overall. Simon similarly mentioned the concept of “family” when describing the impact of his connection with dining hall staff who are predominantly Black. He stated,

The dining hall, the people that work at the dining hall for sure. I think they, especially at [the cafeteria], they make a particular effort to make you feel welcomed and it just reminds me of home...Because I see people

that look like me and in a way it, it's a feeling of home it, it's all an emotional feeling for me.

The presence of other Black people created a sense of home and community that the Black men in this study did not seem to feel in every part of the campus. The participants gave examples of individuals going out of their way to show acknowledgement or genuine care and how impactful that is for them. Their experiences suggest that the presence of Black people on campus is more than just numerical representation for them, but it is a sense of cultural community that makes them feel at home which leads to belonging.

“I don’t go where I’m not wanted”

“I expressly don't go where I'm not needed or where I feel like I'm not wanted...” - Shane

Another theme that emerged through the focus groups and follow up interviews was that the participants are intentional about the spaces that they put themselves in. In the second focus group two of the participants talked about their intentional avoidance of certain spaces on campus where they feel they are not welcome or assume they would not be comfortable. Some of the submitted photos displayed physical spaces which led to conversation about uncomfortable spaces on campus that make them reconsider if they fit into the environment.

A few participants talked about how they navigate certain predominantly White spaces on campus by avoiding them all together because of how it makes them feel. Ezra shared,

I'm more of an introverted person, but I'm open to talking to new people. But at the same time, I would say that seeing such a large amount of people that don't look like me is kind of intimidating. So I would say it's a little bit of both that kind of drive me away.... if I am wanting to sit down in a space like that, it's the pressure of everybody around weighs down on me and it kind of makes me self-conscious of, do these people like me?

Do they notice me that much? Just a lot of negative thoughts that come around.

Jacob responded in agreement,

I would say one of the reasons why I kind of avoid large crowds is because there is an unpredictability that comes with them is you, you're really conscious of the fact that certain people may not like you or you're conscious of the fact that people may move if you sit in the space that you want to sit in and they're sitting in. So it's kind of trying to avoid a situation that kind of runs through my mind when I avoid large crowds. It's like, okay, these people may not like me. These people may act different when I move into this space, so let me just not go through the hassle of that happening.

Similarly, Shane talked about avoiding uncomfortable spaces when he can. He stated,

I expressly don't go where I'm not needed or where I feel like I'm not wanted. Where if I'm not working, then I'm not in that building and I'm not around any of those people or those students because I know what type of time it is. And I'm not going to sit around and pretend to be anybody's friend just to get ahead in the film department. I'll go hang out with my friends who I do know.

This avoidance that participants are talking about is not supportive of the belonging that Black men deserve to feel on campus. Many of the participants described belonging as comfortability to go anywhere on campus and feel welcome and respected as a Black man. Ezra talked about one of his first experiences in a class at Central City where he immediately felt like he did not belong in the classroom. He shared,

There was this one class that I had to take in freshman year, and the minute I walked in I was like, my jaw dropped, and I walked out. I never came back, and I was like, the fact that I never came back, it still bothers me to this day because I shouldn't be that bothered or I shouldn't be that intimidated by people.

Jacob emphasized how negative experiences can impact an individual's willingness to seek out community. He stated in response to Ezra's story,

Before I came here, I was willing and open to meeting new people. I didn't care about the space at all. I wasn't bothered about who they were, what particular ethnic group they were part of. I was just more on the I want to

be friendly, I want to meet people. I want to get to know people, and having that pushback or having them move away from you or having them feel like there's something wrong with you had me closed off to the option of getting to know more people.

Ezra also shared how this experience impacted him. He stated,

It impacted me greatly because ever since I haven't taken an in-person general education class, I just thought it would be easier to take them all asynchronous and take my art classes all in person. I don't think it's for the same reason as before, but I guess over time being at [Central City and in the art school], I've just been realizing that it's not for me, well it feels like the place isn't for me. So I just rather go home as early as possible or stay home as much as I can and only come when I need to.

As discussed earlier some of the participants are premeditating that they will be treated negatively. This may be connected to negative experiences or just the assumption that they will be treated differently. Many of them attribute this to the lack of Black people in the spaces, but there is also a connection to the stigma associated with their identities that has made this an automatic response in certain contexts.

We need a space just for us

“A lot of it is about perception and we have so much negative, unnecessary and undue negative perception attached to us..” - Micah

Navigating Stigma, Stereotyping & Shame

The concept of shame as a Black man and the hesitancy to be authentic in predominantly White spaces was brought up in a focus group. Specifically, there was a back-and-forth conversation that illustrates how Black men feel that their authentic selves are often condemned in predominantly White spaces which causes them to either alter their behavior or avoid those spaces. Shane talked about how Black men are perceived on campus and the lack of space for them to be themselves. He stated

I feel like there aren't that many spaces on campus because we are at a PWI. I feel like for Black men, our kind of spaces are seen as inherently more dangerous than most other White spaces. Where people see a group

of White students gathering, they're probably thinking, oh, they're just doing whatever. They see people of other cultures and ethnicities and races hanging out together and they think nothing of it, but they see a group of Black men gathering together they already have preconceived notions about what we might get up to, the kind of music that we're going to play or something like that already. So, I feel like it is just harder for us to just exist in a space that isn't necessarily built by us, for us.

Micah responded in agreement stating,

The point that you just made about preconceived notions is everything....I feel like a lot of it is about perception and we have so much negative, unnecessary and undue negative perception attached to us that it's like when we want to do things that we truly should naturally be able to do, there's a level of almost shame attached to it and now I got to look at myself and hope I'm not leaning into the stereotype.

Sharif also added to the conversation by telling a story that illustrates the assumptions often made about Black men. There was a shooting of a campus police officer that occurred prior to the focus group. He talked about a comment made by a White peer and how he had to navigate the conversations. The White student made the comment, "I can't believe it was a white dude that shot this cop". Sharif then took on the burden to explain to this individual what his comment implies about criminality and Black men versus White men. He shared his response to his peer with the group,

We had a whole discussion about why it's wrong because he still can't see because he is like, oh, well by statistics, the crimes that happen are committed by Black men. I had to rephrase the question. What if you said I'm not surprised that a Black man shot this cop? And then that's when he understood...That's what you just implied by saying that you were surprised that a White person shot the gun.

Not only did Sharif explain this experience of correcting his peer who made comments with racial implications, he also reflected on how there is a societal perception that is placed on all Black men regardless of who they are outside of their race and gender identity. He stated,

That's what we deal with. We're all Black men. That's what is on our shoulders. That's how we get looked at when we're in this city. I walk around with a du rag and people don't think I'm a pre-med student. They just see a Black man regardless of what we are actually doing. That's just how we're portrayed.

Micah also talked about how the stigma associated with being a Black man makes it more challenging to create your own spaces within a PWI. He stated,

I feel like when it comes to building our spaces and when it comes to belonging, I think we deal with an added level of shame that we shouldn't have to just as regular human beings. I feel like just on top of that, building a community is already hard. Building a space for yourself is difficult because we're so concerned about how other people see us.

The concept of stigma and how it impacts Black men was also indicated in the initial interview findings. However, the focus group data added to the exploration of campus climate factors that are most salient for Black men. Although the stigma still exists and impacts Black men some of the participants in the study talked about how spaces created for them can address some of these challenges.

Safe space for Black authenticity

The comments made by participants emphasizes the importance of having community with other Black men to navigate these unique challenges. It also suggests a need for Central city to provide these spaces for Black men to find this community. Jacob spoke about the impact of having space that you can relate to because of your identity. He stated,

I feel like you would do better. You would feel better, you would want to study more, or you would want to try harder if you can identify with those spaces...I feel like it is necessary for people to see themselves in spaces so that they can become better.

Photos of a Black student showcase event elicited conversation about the importance of authentic Black spaces to push back on the social stigma that Black men experience.

There were two participants, Micah and Sharif, who attended the same student event hosted by a Black student organization and submitted photos illustrating the importance of having space on campus for unapologetic Blackness. The participants described this event as a showcase with performances from Black students on campus that included rapping, dancing, and other forms of artistic Black culture. It was described by Micah as an “us space” where Black students did not have to be concerned with how they were being perceived by others. It was clear that the participants in the focus group valued those opportunities to come together as a Black student community without any fear of judgement. Micah stated,

The issue is that the collective stories that we have about other people and the way that they're applied and the way that they affect us makes it hard for us to navigate. So it's like we want to do just regular things. Like the showcase was Thursday and they had a cipher at the end. So we went up there we were all just fooling around, freestyling, doing whatever else and enjoying ourselves. And I'm like, I'm glad this is an us space.

Micah suggested that in general there is no space for Black men to engage in behaviors that may be natural or enjoyable for them because it has negative perception attached to it. There were other participants in the focus group that didn't attend the event which led to discussion of how Central City does not promote Black culture or related events well. While there are clubs, student organizations and events for Black students available at Central City, these opportunities are few and far between for students.

Ezra commented on how being a part of a club to socialize with his peers has been important for feeling a sense of belonging as well. He stated,

I would say when I go to certain social events, like the art club I go to, which is a club for artists of color, I think things like that helps me, that makes me feel a lot better about my place here at [Central City].

According to participants in this study they are also not widely advertised by the institution which makes it challenging to connect students. This lack of advertisement can leave many students isolated from a potential community of peers. This was suggested by multiple participants as a potential recommendation for the institution to support belonging for Black students. For example, Kendrick mentioned,

I think that there should be more promotion for certain things. I know when I went to student fest, within the school of communication there are a lot of different majors and different clubs. So I think if there was something like that, but a Black student thing, because I heard from one of my professors, that there was a Black Lives Matter organization within the campus, but I would never have heard of that if my professor didn't mention it. So I think more advertising for these things would definitely go a long way.

Similarly, Jacob talked about how Central City currently does the bare minimum as it relates to emphasizing the importance of diversity or pushing events. He said,

When it comes to diversity they try their best to look the part. It's kind of the same thing as we said before, [Central City] would say something but not live it. So they would do the bare a minimum as in, okay, we're going to talk about Black history month and let's say like, we're going to talk about this and we're going to hold a few seminars here and there, but after the time passes, so after the month passes, then it's nothing whatsoever or you barely see a post or you barely hear anything. So, I feel like it does exist, but it's the bare minimum.

As discussed earlier social stigma and previous experiences impact the perceptions of Black men. However, the conversations that participants had about the importance of Black student spaces illustrates how these spaces can provide a sense of belonging that cannot be accomplished otherwise.

Summary of Focus Group Findings

The themes that emerged from the focus group and follow up interview data reinforce the findings from the initial interviews. These findings extend the understanding of Black men's perceptions as it allowed them to illustrate their experience visually and

give voice to their environment. It provided an opportunity for the participants to observe their environment and reflect on the climate of the institution. Overall, these findings highlight the significant impact of social stigma for Black men in predominantly White spaces. Black men are hyperaware of their identity because of the negative perceptions attached to them. Consequently, the participants in this study value spaces where they can be authentic in their Blackness without fear of shame. These findings contend that the presence of Black people not only provide numerical representation, but more notably, these interactions and relationships created a sense of home for many of the participants.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Summary of Study

The purpose of this study was to examine how the campus climate of a PWI is perceived by Black undergraduate men and identify which aspects of campus climate influence their sense of belonging within the institution. This qualitative, phenomenological analysis used a multi-theoretical approach to gain a deep understanding of the perceptions of campus climate for Black men currently enrolled at a single predominantly White institution. These perceptions are also informed by the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic which forced campus closures resulting in personal and academic challenges for college students across the world. The unexpected switch from in-person to online learning disrupted how students experienced learning and collaboration with peers. The participants in this study entered college at various times and thus were all affected differently by the pandemic and consequently the way that they are perceiving the climate is Covid informed. The findings shed light on the unique campus climate perceptions of Black men and the factors that are salient for facilitating belonging. This chapter will discuss the meaning, importance, and relevance of the study findings as they relate to the research questions and the previously discussed literature. After interpreting the findings of the current study, the chapter will discuss the implications for theory, practice, and provide recommendations for future research.

Research demonstrates that the racial climate that exists within a PWI can be an isolating experience for Black men in college. Black men often feel a “culture shock” when they enroll in a college environment, when it is different than their expectations or

previous environment (Harper & Newman, 2016). This experience can be particularly isolating when they find themselves being one of the few Black men on campus. These environmental factors can make it difficult to adjust and feel supported within the campus environment (Harper & Newman, 2016). While there are many Black men who successfully navigate these challenges, there is concern about the academic success and persistence of Black men in college overall as they continue to lag behind their peers in graduation and persistence rates. The experience of Black men in college is complex due to the intersection of their race and gender identities. As a result of these disparities, the experiences and perceptions of Black men in college is an important area of research as it relates to recommendations for practice and future research.

Throughout the literature, student perceptions of campus climate within PWIs are often discussed from the perspective of a particular racial group. However, there are intersecting identities, such a gender, that impact these perceptions and cannot always be captured within a study focused on Black students as a whole. Within the literature, scholars have found that Black students are more likely to have negative perceptions of their campus climate compared to their peers due to challenges with racial hostility, microaggressions, isolation, lack of representation, and overt racism (Solórzano et al., 2000; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Johnson et al., 2007; Griffin et al., 2016). The literature also indicates that students' perception of their environment has an impact on their overall experience while attending the institution (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Museus et al., 2018; Rankin & Reason, 2005). Notably, students with marginalized identities are more susceptible to belonging uncertainty (Walton & Cohen,

2007) which can cause individuals to question their place within their campus environment.

Although all Black students may have some shared experiences it is important to acknowledge the differences in their experiences and outcomes. Remarkably, the academic outcomes for Black men and women are disproportionate indicating that their experiences and perceptions should be explored separately to understand their unique needs. Despite the gaps in academic persistence and completion rates, there is limited research that explores the campus climate experiences and perceptions of Black men specifically. Notably, scholars have found that Black men are negatively impacted by unwelcoming campus climates within PWIs. Findings suggest that Black men experience racial hostility, microaggressions and stereotyping which leads to feelings of alienation, decreased involvement, and increased academic challenges (Harper & Newman, 2016; Parker et al., 2016; Boyd & Mitchell, 2018; Patterson, 2018). The concept of sense of belonging has been identified as a positive influence on Black men's success in college (Strayhorn, 2009; 2013). However, there is a lack of research that explores how the perceptions of campus climate for Black men influences their sense of belonging to the institution. The findings of this study contribute to campus climate research and addresses this gap in the literature.

This study adds to research that emphasizes the lived experiences and perceptions of Black men who navigate academic environments that are not always welcoming or comfortable because of challenges created by the institutional climate. Additionally, the research highlights a vulnerable group that is often dismissed as unprepared, unmotivated and disengaged by secondary school staff, higher education institutions, and peers

(Cuyjet, 1997; Bonner & Bailey, 2006). Instead, this study focuses on how Black men perceive the institutional environment and how these campus climate perceptions contribute to their sense of belonging.

Discussion of Findings

The previous chapter focused on the findings of the study and this section will answer the research questions based upon the themes presented in Chapter Four. As a reminder, the research questions that guide this study are:

1. What are the perceptions of campus climate for undergraduate Black men who attend a predominantly White institution?
2. How does the intersection of racial and gender identity influence the campus climate perceptions of undergraduate Black men?
3. How do the perceptions of campus climate influence the sense of belonging for undergraduate Black men?

Campus Climate Perceptions

The first research question in this study asks about the overall climate perceptions for Black men attending a single, predominantly White institution. When discussing their overall campus climate perceptions, participants were most critical about the lack of diversity on campus and the institution's lack of intentionality with connecting students together. This feeling of being alone to figure it all out contributed to the perception of Central City. The perceptions of campus climate that emerged overall illustrated that the Black men in this study perceive the institutional climate at Central City as *deceptive, disconnected and individualistic*. The findings indicate that participants expected Central City to be a diverse and welcoming environment where they could easily develop a community of peers no matter where they are on campus. These unmet expectations had

an impact on participants' perceptions of the institutional climate and their sense of belonging. There were apparent factors that contributed to participants' perceptions including racial diversity of the campus, difficulty finding cultural community, and inconsistent climate across campus.

Consistent with prior research, the diversity of the campus played a significant role in how participants perceived Central City's campus climate. Although the participants had an understanding that they would be attending an institution that was considered predominantly White they expected to have access to a larger community of Black peers. The expectation of racial diversity at Central City was influenced by the institution's geographical location and the way in which the institution marketed their student population as highly diverse and inclusive. Given that participants' expectations and reality did not match up, this contributed to some negative perceptions and adjustment challenges for participants. Some participants also perceived this incongruence as deception on the part of the institution which contributed to individual perceptions of the racial climate at Central City. The findings also indicate that the pre-college experiences of each participant played a significant role in how the climate was perceived. These pre-college experiences and expectations impacted participants positively and negatively. For some participants who came from racially hostile environments the climate at Central City was preferable to their previous environment. While others came from environments that were very similar to Central City and had various responses to the climate. This signifies that while there were consistencies across participants, all Black men will not perceive their environment entirely the same. This

finding suggests the importance of understanding individual student's backgrounds and providing the support that meets individual needs.

Diversity is a value add for higher education institutions and many students today, regardless of race, value being in diverse environments as it prepares you for the diversifying society that we live in. Institutions should consider the impact that messaging about campus diversity has for students with marginalized identities. Transparency is important when it comes to communicating about diverse representation for individual student groups. Diversity is often communicated as a dichotomy between White students and students of color however this can be a misrepresentation of how students will experience the campus which can lead to feelings of frustration and mistrust (Harper & Newman, 2016). A few participants also voiced their frustration with their image and likeness or presence on campus being used for marketing purposes, but not feeling valued as a member of the campus in any other capacity. These factors contributed to the climate being perceived as deceptive and disconnected. Diversity should not be used as a marketing tool in a way that ultimately can lead to disappointment or unmet expectations for certain student groups. Diversity is not just a selling point for institutions to reel in students of color but should be considered a responsibility of institutions. It was clear that the participants believed that having a diverse learning environment requires accountability of the institution to ensure that the environment is serving all individuals especially those with marginalized identities. The findings suggest that majority of the participants in the study felt Central City fell short in this area which impacted the institutional climate for them.

Coming into a new environment can be difficult for anyone, however students often seek out individuals who they can relate to culturally. Participants perceived that they were alone to navigate the process of community building at Central City and the lack of other Black, male students made it difficult to find that community. There was no evident pathway that participants could access that guaranteed they could find cultural community quickly. While new students are often given an overall introduction to campus during Orientation and Welcome week events there is unlikely to be information that specifically addresses the needs of Black students specifically, since the events are addressing the entire student body. Participants in this study talked significantly about the challenge of finding peers who shared their same race and gender identities. In contrast, one of the participants who is a football student-athlete did not experience these challenges since he had a built-in community of other Black men as a member of an athletic team. He acknowledged this as a benefit that allowed him to feel like he belonged almost immediately. It was evident that there was a lack of resources at Central City to facilitate this type of community building for the other participants. Outside of membership in student organizations or being lucky enough to be connected with someone, participants in this study felt that they were left on their own to find other people on campus which can be harder for some than others.

Participants seemed to also form campus climate perceptions within their various academic departments. While this study did not explicitly seek to explore differences between academic departments it became clear that participant's overall perceptions were significantly impacted by their experience within their academic discipline. There were some participants who experienced feelings of isolation and exclusion due to a lack of

representation in the classroom setting and limited support networks within their academic departments. A study found that a significant predictor of students' overall satisfaction is their perception of the academic context or academic climate within their institution (Graham and Gisi, 2000). Students spend majority of their collegiate journey interacting within the context of their academic major. The likelihood of student persistence and degree completion relies on their success within their academic department. The findings suggest that the climate perceptions of students within academic departments is an important area that should be addressed by an institution in order to provide the support needed. The findings correlate with prior research that identified campus racial climate issues in academic departments related to STEM fields which suggested that Black men experiences challenges in these departments ranging from an unwelcoming academic climate, feeling invisible, and a lack of same race peers and faculty (Strayhorn et al., 2013). These findings highlight a need for campuses to evaluate climate within academic departments and establish proactive initiatives to address related concerns. A few participants in the study were able to combat some of these challenges through the support received through BIPOC initiatives such as mentoring programs and student clubs, however participants were still impacted significantly by the challenging climates of their department.

Another finding in this study suggests that the participants separated their perception of the overall institutional climate from their perception of the micro communities they built with peers and institutional staff and faculty. The impact of relationships with same-race faculty and staff was evident in the findings of this study which is similar to research that suggests the importance of having a diverse faculty and

staff population to provide mentorship and support to Black students (Brown, 2011; Sinanan, 2016). The presence of Black staff and faculty seemed to provide a sense of comfortability and relatability that participants did not sense throughout the campus. The presence of Black faculty was less common across campus and that absence was felt by the Black men in this study. However, participants in this study who had the opportunity to connect with Black staff or faculty acknowledged the impact it had on their ability to cope with the campus climate. Some participants were disappointed by the lack of diversity, however they felt that they adjusted easily because they were accustomed to a predominantly White academic environment prior to college. While some of the participants came from diverse high schools, a few were shocked to find they were the only Black students in their classes. This finding not only emphasizes the importance of diversifying the faculty and staff within predominantly White institutions, but it calls attention to the detrimental effects that this absence of cultural diversity has on students.

Despite the lack of Black faculty and peers in the classroom setting, some participants tried to find support in other Black staff or through Black student clubs or organizations. There were six of twelve participants who were official members of student organizations, however there were some who participated in more informal student groups. Unfortunately, there were some participants who avoided spending time on campus or socializing as a result of the disconnection they felt within campus. It was interesting that regardless of their overall perceptions, all 12 participants stated that if given the chance to make a different choice in their college selection they would still come to Central City. Many of them cited their reasoning to be the affordability of the tuition, location, and the valuable relationships they have made with people. Out of all

these factors positive interactions with people on campus emerged as a significant influence on how participants perceived the climate.

Influence of Race and Gender Identity

The second research question asked how participant's race and gender identity influenced their campus climate perceptions. Walton & Cohen (2007) proposed that members of socially stigmatized groups are more sensitive to issues of social belonging due to a state of uncertainty of social bonds in academic and professional settings. Overall, the perceptions of participants in this study were influenced by how they are viewed in society as Black men. This can be described as *the burden of being a Black man*, inspired by a comment made by a participant who characterized his identity as a Black man as something he carries on his shoulders. Throughout this study majority of participants shared consistent experiences of internal pressure, concern about how they are viewed, and fear of confirming stereotypes. These findings indicated challenges that Black men have to overcome in order to navigate the world. It should be the role of institutions to establish supportive initiatives that can proactively address these challenges.

As discussed in chapter 2, the literature on campus climate for Black men often includes discussion of racial discrimination and experiences of racial tension. However, in this study 11 out of 12 participants felt they had not experienced any overt racial discrimination or mistreatment while attending Central City. However, there were discussions of the challenge of navigating microaggressions as Black men throughout their campus experiences. Additionally, while the participants did not feel that there was any racial tension among groups on campus, there were some participants who felt that

the student body was mostly racially segregated within social groups. While this finding does not coincide with some of the previous research about racial hostility towards Black men, it is important to note that the absence of racial tension alone did not lead to a sense of mattering or belonging for the participants in this study. In fact, majority of participants in the study expressed that *they felt unseen, unheard and unimportant as Black men* from an institutional perspective. In simple terms the participants in this study did not feel like the institution cared about them in any way. Some participants described the institution as a business that is merely selling them a product. This feeling of invisibility caused participants to feel disconnected from the institution and perceive the climate as detached.

Even in the absence of extreme or overt racism, the social stigma that is often associated with being a Black man in America continued to impact these participants even as they enrolled in college. For many of the participants these perceptions were formed prior to enrolling at Central City. Prior research discusses the pressure often felt by Black men while in predominantly White spaces and the negative impact it can have if there are no protective factors in place (Brooms, 2019; Harper, 2015; Strayhorn, 2017). Several of the participants felt the pressure to prove that they belonged especially within academic settings where they feared they would fall into a stereotype or be perceived as unintelligent or lazy by White peers or faculty. This finding demonstrates the need for institutions to acknowledge this reality and provide Black men with the support needed to combat these challenges. Although majority of participants did not experience overt racism, they did feel they had to navigate the environment in a specific way due to their identity as Black men. While the stigma of being a Black man was not caused by the

environment at Central City there was no sense of the institution contributing to the breaking down of these stereotypes. In fact, the lack of acknowledgement felt by participants made it difficult to find support to navigate these challenges. Despite these challenges, all the participants were persisting in their academic journeys and used these challenges as motivation to continue at Central City.

Although participants felt disconnected and detached from the institution, they were able to find their way to identify supportive spaces and people within campus. In most cases these were spaces with other Black people which provided cultural familiarity. Many participants were able to identify micro communities within Central City where they felt connected and developed belonging, however they felt that this was not because of the climate at the institution. Participants felt there was bare minimum emphasis from the institution to create a community for them specifically as Black men. Despite Central City's stated commitment to diversity, the institution does not have any dedicated physical campus space for any marginalized identity groups. Outside of student organization membership there is no clear pathway for Black men to connect with other peers or staff who may have some shared cultural experience.

The findings in this study demonstrated that the Black men in this study value this connection and were seeking out people who can relate to their race and gender identity. Many predominantly White institutions have established multicultural centers and research demonstrates that these cultural spaces serve as a vital resource for Black students attending a PWI (Patton, 2006). The benefits for Black men being connected with a Black cultural center can include access to a community of peers and supportive staff, supportive space with academic and social support, providing a home away from

home, and affirmation of cultural identity (Hypolite, 2020; McElderry, 2022; Patton, 2006). Establishing spaces such as Black cultural centers, Black student organizations and Black Male initiatives on campus allow for Black men to see themselves reflected in the campus community and foster a sense of belonging on campus. Patton's (2006) research discusses how Black culture centers within PWIs can be successful in improving campus climate and creating a sense of belonging. The research was a qualitative study where she interviewed thirty-one students to understand what students gain from accessing a Black cultural center. Patton (2006) found that students who experienced social and academic isolation attending a PWI benefited from the Black culture center positively in areas including social adjustment, involvement, leadership, and identity development. Counter cultural spaces provide a starting point for Black students to gather and know that they can be culturally affirmed and understood while also providing them support needed to be successful in college.

Campus Climate and Belonging

The third research question asked about how campus climate perceptions influence the sense of belonging of Black men. Previous studies suggest that for marginalized student groups, institutional climate has a significant impact on sense of belonging at PWIs (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Maramba & Museus, 2013; Wells & Horn, 2015). The findings in this study suggest that there were factors of campus climate that had a significant influence on sense of belonging for the Black men in this study. Strayhorn (2018) discusses the importance of sense of belonging for historically marginalized students and suggests that students' perception of campus membership can influence how belonging develops for individuals. For institutions, understanding campus

climate perceptions and how sense of belonging develops for Black men is important to establish successful initiatives that support their individual needs.

Notably, the study findings indicate that the lack of same race peers and the small Black, male population in particular was significant for the Black men in this study. The Campus Racial Climate (CRC) framework developed by Hurtado et al. (1998) identifies structural/compositional diversity as an important dimension of campus climate. In this study the lack of diversity presented as a barrier for Black men to feel a sense of belonging. It was more difficult to feel included or valued within spaces where Black men felt the pressure of being “one of the only”. This finding supports previous literature that discusses the isolation and pressure felt by Black men in predominantly White classrooms (Harper & Newman, 2016; Parker et al., 2016). The lack of same-race peers resulted in many of the participants feeling conflicted about the campus being diverse or inclusive of their racial identity. However, all the participants talked about the value of being connected to the few Black male peers and staff members they met through various avenues including campus housing, student organizations, social and academic settings, etc. These connections contributed greatly to participants’ sense of belonging.

The findings revealed that for the Black men in this study positive interactions with people on campus fostered a sense of belonging. The supportive relationships and interactions that participants had with peers, institutional staff, faculty and administrators had a direct impact on their sense of belonging. This seemed to be the most notable factor that supported the sense of belonging for the participants. Strayhorn (2018) asserts that sense of belonging is related to mattering and for many of the participants the people they were connected with made them feel cared about. However, it is important to note that

for majority of the Black men in the study they had to go out of their way to build these relationships. Overall, the findings suggest that Black men were able to develop a sense of belonging at the institution despite feeling unheard and unimportant to the institution because of the strong relationships they formed with individuals.

Summary of Discussion

This study sheds light on the experiences and perceptions of Black undergraduate men attending a PWI. It demonstrates the complexity of navigating a predominantly White campus environment as a Black man. The findings also reveal how the campus climate has an influence on how participants view themselves within the context of the campus community and beyond as future professionals in certain career fields. As institutions push to recruit Black students to diversify campuses, higher education administrators, staff, and faculty should consider ways in which they can also improve campus racial climate to create an environment that develops all students' sense of belonging on campus, but especially those contending with socially marginalized identities. The findings of this study offer insight and perspective about what institutions should consider related to supporting the success of Black men.

Limitations Of Study

Due to the design of the study, these findings are not generalizable to all students who identify as Black men. Additionally, this study is based on a small sample size of 12 participants and these findings cannot be representative of the entire Black, male student population at Central City. Although there were various characteristics that made this a diverse sample, all but one of the participants in this study had above a 2.8 GPA. This limits the findings to only include perceptions of students identified as academically strong. The findings of this study are also limited to the perceptions of students at a single

institution. Multi-institutional studies have shown that the climate for diversity varies from one institutional context to another. This means that the findings cannot be generalized to other institutions, however the findings still contribute to the higher education campus climate literature. However, the study does not seek to generalize the findings, but the aim was to gain an in-depth understanding of the participant's experiences and perceptions. Smith et al. (2009) emphasizes the goal of an IPA study is to detail the perceptions and experiences of a particular group instead of making general claims and therefore is more focused on detailed analysis of individual cases. Additionally, Mertens (2012) posits that qualitative research does not seek to draw conclusions that can be generalized beyond the research setting.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the last two academic years have changed the landscape of higher education and resulted in restricted engagement on college campuses nationwide. A limitation of this study was the restricted campus engagement that students have experienced over the last two years. This limitation was explored and acknowledged through many of the interviews with participants. The nature of this study suggests that students have had similar experiences with the campus environment, however much of college students' experience the last two years has been a mix of online and in-person engagement. Consequently, this is important to keep in mind because the restrictions have in some ways limited time spent physically on campus and students' ability to engage with the campus environment.

Lastly there were limitation of the research design that should be considered. The intended design of the study was to have all participants complete an initial interview followed by photo collection and a focus group. There were twelve participants who

completed initial interviews and only ten who completed the photo collection.

Additionally, there were 3 students who missed the focus group and therefore completed a second interview with the researcher instead. While the follow up interview allowed for the researcher to ask questions following the focus group protocol, it did not allow for those participants to engage directly with other participants. However, the data collected through these follow-up interviews was still pertinent to the research questions.

Implications

This study extends our understanding of the role of campus climate and sense of belonging for Black undergraduate men attending PWIs. The findings of this study introduce several implications relevant to theory, practice, and research efforts. There is indeed a need for continued research that seeks to understand the unique experiences of Black men in every aspect of their college experience. Regarding theory and practice this study emphasizes the significance of race and gender identity to the perceptions and lived experiences of individuals. It supports the assertion that individuals with marginalized identities are uniquely impacted by their environment, and it is necessary that higher education professionals be aware of the needs of all students and take action to improve the environment. These implications are essential for the success of Black men who face unique challenges navigating the campus environment of predominantly White campuses.

Implications for Theory

The complexities of this research topic benefited from a multi-theoretical approach as a lens to analyze the data. The present study was grounded in Critical Race theory and Intersectionality theory to provide a multi-dimensional approach that places individuals' identities at the center of the analysis. These theoretical perspectives

maintain that the racial and gender identities of historically marginalized groups interact and have significant influence on an individual's lived experiences. These perspectives were both necessary to provide a full picture to make meaning of participant's perspectives and experiences. This multi-theoretical framework was also complemented by the Campus Racial Climate (CRC) framework and Sense of Belonging framework which provided a lens to analyze the data and understand in what ways these concepts relate to the perceptions and experiences of the participants. The constructs from these theoretical approaches were essential to the study design and used to develop data collection protocols, analyze data, and reflect on study findings. Considering more than one theoretical lens allowed for a comprehensive analysis that introduced new insights and perspectives for an in-depth understanding of the research topic.

The use of CRT as a lens to understand the experiences of Black men gives voice to individuals with racially marginalized identities who often experience feelings of invisibility within a predominantly White space. In fact, many of the participants expressed gratitude for my attention to their stories and thoughts because from their perspective no one seems to care about their lived experiences. CRT has several valuable tenets that can be applied to reveal racial inequity within the education system (Hiraldo, 2010). The theory asserts that counter-storytelling by individuals from marginalized racial identities is necessary to magnify their lived experiences and truths to disrupt the dominant culture narratives. Not only did the participants in this study share their true experiences and perceptions of a White dominated campus culture, but they also contributed their stories of persistence and academic success to the literature of Black men in college. This lens allows for the data to expose and critique normalized discourse

that perpetuates racial stereotypes and problematic beliefs held by the racial majority. CRT includes another tenet identified as permanence of racism, which asserts that race is a social construct that influences how our society functions and provides privilege to White individuals in areas within society including higher education institutions (Solorzano et al., 2000). Acknowledging the role that race plays within the education system is necessary to understand why the stigma that participants contended with has such a significant effect on the way they navigate predominantly White environments. CRT offers a useful lens to the issues affecting Black men and an opportunity to challenge deficit perspectives and interpretations. CRT also recognizes the intersectional nature of oppression in understanding how race intersects with other identities to shape people's experiences.

This analysis would not be complete without considering the complexities of participant's race and gender combined. Intersectionality theory asserts that individuals' multiple identities intersect and shape how people experience inequality and privilege. In order to understand this complexity, intersectionality can be used as an analytic tool to understand the lives of Black students and in this case Black men specifically (Johnson, 2013). An intersectional approach to analysis, focuses on understanding how interlocking systems of oppression and privilege influence the lived experiences of individuals (Crenshaw, 1991). Crenshaw (1991) asserts that in research when multiple identities are not acknowledged it results in an erasure of experiences for individuals who hold multiple marginalized identities. This theoretical lens acknowledges the complexity of Black male identity. There is a need for continued scholarship on Black men that uses

intersectionality as a lens to center race and gender. This study contributes to the understanding of the role of race and gender in the experiences of Black men at PWIs.

Campus climate can be defined as the attitudes and behaviors of students, faculty, staff, administrators within an institution (Rankin & Reason, 2005). Campus racial climate is particularly concerned with how racial diversity impacts student experiences within the campus environment. Harper and Hurtado (2007) have identified two important themes that are important to this research. Research indicates that campus racial climate is a multidimensional phenomenon made up of several interconnected dimensions and climate perceptions differ by race. This framework acknowledges racial identity as influential and outlines significant aspects of campus climate that are relevant to how perceptions are formed. Campus climate has not been used specifically as a theoretical lens to explore the campus climate perceptions of Black undergraduate men attending a PWI. While it was useful to have a conceptual understanding of the various aspects of campus climate, the CRC framework places a heavy emphasis on cross cultural engagement which was not as significant for the participants in this study. However, the current study extends the CRC framework to issues pertaining to Black men and offers new insight for understanding how campus racial climate is relevant for this population.

Strayhorn developed a conceptual model that identifies seven core elements that are useful for conceptualizing sense of belonging. Strayhorn (2018) asserts that context, time and factors determine the importance of an individual's need for sense of belonging. This study focused on the context of a predominantly White institution and factors of campus climate that are relevant for Black men. Overall, this conceptual framework has been successfully used as a lens to explore factors that contribute to the success of Black

men (Brooms, 2018). Research suggests that sense of belonging is a motivating factor that can drive the behavior of Black men and this study contributes to this scholarship on Black men in higher education. On the other hand, the findings in this study suggests that there are other significant factors, outside of belonging, that contribute to the success of Black men at predominantly White institutions. Majority of participants believed that sense of belonging was very important for marginalized students to navigate PWIs. However, majority of the participants were still successfully navigating their academic journeys despite the challenges they faced in finding belonging within the institution. The findings suggest that success for Black men is not predicated on feeling belonging within an environment or a particular institution, as the participants in this study did not feel particularly connected to their school but they were still successful academically and socially in navigating the challenges of a PWI as Black men.

Implications for Practice

Many of the participants felt deceived by the claims of diversity made by Central City. Admissions departments should be transparent when communicating about campus diversity to underrepresented groups. The findings reveal that cultural familiarity provided a sense of home for participants that created a level of comfortability and relatability that participants valued. When planning for recruitment, administrators and admissions departments should consider the representation of marginalized groups in academic departments, classrooms, and social spaces as these are the areas where participants felt the absence of cultural familiarity most. This study also found that participants' perceptions and experiences were impacted by the lack of representation in many of the academic and social spaces. Admissions departments should identify

initiatives that can lead to increased numbers in the Black male student population as well as the retention rates of these students so that the diversity will continue beyond the first year. This highlights the need for institutions to break down the barriers to finding cultural community by establishing clearer paths that Black men can make genuine connections with individuals on campus.

One of the challenges presented by the absence of Black students is the difficulty Black men face in finding cultural familiarity on campus. They identified small pockets of cultural community and counter spaces that made a significant difference in their experiences. While impactful, these spaces did not facilitate widespread community or address larger systematic barriers that Black men experience. Student affairs professionals should consider how Black students may have unique challenges finding community through the traditional channels that are offered due to the low number of other Black students and the White-dominated campus culture. The higher education landscape has also been forever changed by the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. Some participants discussed the willingness of college students to engage socially with each other. Institutions will need to consider how they proactively support students to engage with each other and encourage community year-round. The first couple of weeks of welcome may not be sufficient to ensure that students adjust socially. Institutions may need to consider that placing all accountability on students to know how to find community and engage socially may leave many students isolated and disengaged throughout their academic journey which may not promote successful outcomes academically or personally for students.

For staff and faculty members who interact with Black men at PWIs, these findings revealed the significance of every relationship and interaction for these participants. Institutions should consider what specific initiatives are in place to facilitate opportunities for community and relationship building tailored to Black men on campus. Participants in this study emphasized the lack of dialogue or consideration of their experiences or thoughts on the state of the Black experience on campus. Institutions should consider having regular dialogue with Black male students about their experiences and the supports needed to facilitate a campus climate that makes them feel like valued members of the campus community. There has been an increase in Black male support and mentorship initiatives at PWIs. For institutions that are serious about improving the success of Black men in college, it is imperative that these initiatives be a part of the institutional commitments to diversity.

When participants discussed their value to the institution, they spoke about the lack of attention or acknowledgement from university administrators. There was an expressed need for initiatives that strengthen the Black community throughout campus. Participants in this study consistently shared that they had limited exposure to administrative staff which was perceived as a lack of care about the student body. Institutions should keep in mind the importance of talking directly with students and keeping the lines of communication open. Students can communicate their individual needs when given the space to do so. Executive-level administrators, (i.e., president, vice presidents, and vice provosts), college/division-level administrators (i.e., deans), and departmental-level administrators, (i.e., department heads and directors) should consistently provide opportunities for open dialogue with their Black, male students to

understand their needs and to create a support model that is more reflective of their needs. This is especially important for PWIs who find that there are disparities in college persistence and completion for their Black male students compared to peers. One participant, Shane, talked about a time where he expressed an issue he experienced to a new academic dean and how this dean inquired more about his experiences and perceptions of the department. Although every issue could not be solved immediately, he felt this was a starting point to addressing some of his perceived climate issues within the academic department. Individuals in these roles would need to prioritize hearing directly from students in order to address some of the inconsistencies in climate across campus and to also address any negative perceptions for marginalized student groups.

The findings indicate that campus climate is not always consistent across institutional departments. Many institutions use campus wide survey tools to look at campus climate or satisfaction surveys to gather data on student perceptions. However, these evaluation tools do not always capture the anecdotal data that can paint a clearer picture. It is important that students with marginalized identities are engaged directly by academic department heads and shown genuine care about their experiences and overall well-being. Additionally, in this study participants were able to navigate climate issues within their academic department through membership in an informal mentorship group for students who identify as BIPOC. Academic departments should consider creating these counter-cultural spaces within academic units. This can be particularly supportive for Black men who are in majors that generally lack diversity in students, staff, and curriculum. These spaces give opportunity for students to combat any feelings of

alienation and provide a space for support from peers who can understand their experience.

The findings of this study shed light on the very real effects of social stigma and stereotype threat for Black men which is supported by previous research (Boyd & Mitchell, 2018; Walton & Cohen, 2007; Von Robertson & Chaney, 2010). It is the responsibility of higher education administrators, faculty, and staff to acknowledge this experience and establish initiatives that can support the unique challenges that Black men face. College is a significant time of identity development and personal growth and in order to overcome the effects of stigma Black men need to feel understood and supported within their environment. It was evident in the findings that many of the participants found support through relationships with Black staff and faculty on campus and through peer support with other students of color, primarily Black students. Predominantly White institutions need to consider the significance of having counter cultural spaces for students with marginalized identities as a form of support and space for identity development and personal growth. While there are identity-based student organizations that students can join to make social connections there is need for a more formal community space where students can foster a cultural community with resources tailored to their individual needs.

Implications for Future Research

This study provides an interpretative phenomenological analysis to understand the perceptions of campus climate for Black, undergraduate men at a single predominantly White institution. The findings of the current study provide several implications for future research. The study used three forms of data collection which was effective in

gaining an in-depth understanding of the research topic. This study provides evidence of the utility of photovoice as a method to emphasize participation and action of participants which captures rich data that is meaningful to the participants. Photovoice is a worthwhile data collection tool for research topics that are concerned with understanding how participants perceive their environment. It also encourages participants to engage in supportive dialogue with one another. Participants were also able to put their experiences and thoughts into words while hearing perspectives from other participants which resulted in an in-depth collective dialogue. On the other hand, for some participants photovoice may be difficult to understand or they may find it challenging to capture their perceptions in photos. When considering photovoice as a research method one should also consider the topic and whether it can be successfully captured in a photo. Additionally, researchers should be sure to explain the use of photovoice and confirm that participants have a good understanding of the expectations.

While the findings of this study shed light on the significance of campus racial climate and sense of belonging for Black men, it also raises questions that can be explored in future research. First, given the limited literature on campus climate perceptions of Black men attending PWIs this study highlights the need for more attention on this area of inquiry. As the findings indicate, Black men continue to be impacted by social stigma that has been attributed to their identities. This demonstrates a need for continued focus on literature that empowers the voices of Black men and illustrates their real lived experiences to combat these negative stereotypes. There are many negative portrayals of Black men as underachieving and unlikely to succeed in college however, this study highlights the lived experiences of Black men that are

successfully navigating the challenges they are faced with. Research focused on what factors contribute to the success of this population, instead of deficit focused literature, offers a clearer path forward towards addressing the gaps in success outcomes for Black men. Additionally, future research should consider employing a comparative study that looks at gender differences among campus climate perceptions between Black men and women. This study sheds light on the role of environment and signifies a need for responsibility and accountability from institutions. It is important that institutions know what their marginalized students are experiencing and implement initiatives that address the challenges and provide the resources that they need. Further research in this area will provide implications for practice that can inform the work of institutions.

A limitation of this study is the use of a single institution. Research has shown that campus climate can vary from one institutional context to another (Zerquera & Gross, 2017). Future research should consider including a sample from multiple institutions. This would allow for an analysis of how various institutional climates may impact Black men similarly or differently. This comparison of findings across institutional contexts would strengthen the understanding of the role of campus climate for Black men at PWIs. Additionally, the site for this study was located in an urban area which provided the participants access to a diverse neighboring community which allowed for some cultural familiarity. Future research could also consider a comparative study that looks at differences campus climate perceptions based on geographical location of a PWI.

The findings of this study revealed the significance of the participants pre-college environments geographically and academically. For the participants who came from

predominantly White environments they seemed to have less of an initial cultural shock however they still were impacted by the threat of being stereotyped as a Black man. Future research could explore more in-depth how pre-college environments influence campus climate perceptions and/or sense of belonging when attending a PWI for college. The findings of this study suggest that there could be different perceptions and needs for those who may be coming from predominantly Black environments where they are not accustomed to being one of the few Black people in academic or social settings.

The participants in this study came from various academic departments based on their selected major. Many of the students talked about their climate perceptions in relation to the academic department. This is understandable as a lot of their time is spent in classes and within the context of their major. Participants seemed to have more positive views of the institutional climate in some academic departments than others. Future research can do a comparison based on academic major to see if a student's major influences their campus climate perceptions and/or sense of belonging. This research could also shed light on the academic outcomes of Black men in higher education and the impact of climate related to their academic department.

Lastly, the findings suggest that the Black men in this study would have benefited from a formal space on campus where they could gather with same-race peers and feel supported. The establishment of Black cultural centers is a debated topic as some people believe that it can be divisive and discourage cross-cultural engagement. However, literature contends that Black cultural centers offer a wealth of benefits for Black students at predominantly White institutions. Future research can explore the differences in campus climate perceptions for Black men who attend PWIs with access to a Black

cultural center compared to those whose campus does not have an established cultural center for Black students.

Conclusion

This exploration contributes to the existing campus climate literature and expands the understanding of how campus racial climate can influence sense of belonging for Black undergraduate men. Black men who attend predominantly White institutions navigate the campus environments in a way that is influenced by the intersection of their race and gender. While sense of belonging may not be as significant for all individuals, it has significant effects on motivation and achievement of those living with a marginalized social identity (Walton & Cohen, 2007). Individuals with marginalized identities perceive their environments differently and it is vital to understand their perception of the campus environment and how it contributes to belonging. The current study offers invaluable perspective that can inform higher education professionals who are tasked with supporting students within diverse learning environments. The insights from this study have the potential to expand scholarship focused on supporting Black men in college and acknowledge their experiences and perspectives as valuable and important. As campuses continue to diversify, higher education institutions must focus less on integration and realize that it is their responsibility to create a climate that makes all students feel their identities are included and valued. This can be accomplished by establishing counter cultural spaces.

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APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT EMAIL

You are invited to participate in a research project titled: *Is this where we Belong? Exploring the Campus Climate Perceptions of Black Men at a Predominantly White Institution*. This is a qualitative study seeking to understand more about the experiences of Black men as an undergraduate student attending a PWI.

The goal of the research is to gain a better understanding of how elements of the campus environment are perceived by Black men as they navigate attending a predominantly White institution. Additionally, the study aims to explore how these perceptions influence participant's sense of belonging to the institution.

You may qualify to participate in this research study if you...

- Are 18 years or older
- Identify as Black or African American
- Identify as Male
- Are an undergraduate student enrolled full-time (at least 12 credits)

For this study, participants will be asked to:

1. Complete a brief demographic questionnaire (10-15 minutes)
2. Participate in an interview (60-minutes)
3. Take photos using your camera phone in response to a prompt
4. Participate in a focus group (60-90 minutes)

You will be asked questions that require you to reflect on your experiences as a student. Your individual interview will be conducted either in-person or via video-conferencing technology or by telephone. Focus groups will be conducted in-person on campus.

With your permission, your interview and focus group session will be audio recorded, however all data collected through this study will remain confidential and used only for research purposes. In addition, as a participant, you will be asked to select a pseudonym to maintain personal confidentiality in all reports of the findings.

Interested? [Please click this link to sign up!](#)

Your voluntary participation is appreciated. As an incentive, participants who complete the study will receive a \$25 Amazon gift card. Please see the attached flyer for more information. You can contact Paris Williams to answer any questions that you have about the study.

APPENDIX B

ELIGIBILITY SURVEY

1. Name:
2. Email:
3. Phone Number:
4. Are you age 18 years or older? Yes or No
5. Do you identify as Black or African American? Yes or No
6. How do you identify in terms of your gender identity?
7. Are you enrolled full-time (12 or more credits) as an undergraduate student? Yes or No
 - a. If yes, what higher education institution do you attend?
8. Do you have a cellular phone with a functioning camera? Yes or No

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT

Title of Research	IS THIS WHERE WE BELONG? EXPLORING THE CAMPUS CLIMATE PERCEPTIONS OF BLACK MEN AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION
Investigator and Department	James Earl Davis, PhD – Principal Investigator Paris Williams, Doctoral Student – Student Investigator Higher Education (19031)
Why Am I Being Invited to Take Part in This Research?	<p>We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are 18 years or older • Identify as Black or African American • Identify as a Man • Are an undergraduate student enrolled full-time at the study site
What Should I Know About This Research?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Someone will explain this research to you. • Whether or not you take part is up to you. • You can choose not to take part. • You can agree to take part and later change your mind. • Your decision will not be held against you. • You can ask all the questions you want before you decide.
What Happens if I Agree to Be in This Research?	<p>Initially, you will be asked to complete a Demographic Questionnaire (10-15 minutes) to collect demographic and student information.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete a brief demographic questionnaire (10-15 minutes) • Participate in an interview (60-minutes) • Take photos using your camera phone in response to a prompt over two-week period • Participate in a focus group (60-90 minutes) <p>Examples of questions that will be asked include: How does the university environment reflect your identity as a Black man? How would you describe the current racial climate within the university? How does the combination of your race and gender identity influence your perception of the racial climate?</p> <p>With your permission, the interview and focus group session will be audio recorded, however, all data collected through this study will remain confidential and used only for research purposes. With permission photos collected by participants will be shown to other participants during focus groups for the purposes of the study only. In addition, as a participant, you will be asked to select a pseudonym to maintain personal confidentiality in all</p>

	<p>reports of the findings. The electronic audio files, photos, and transcriptions will remain saved as password-protected and accessible to Paris Williams.</p> <p>Participants could potentially experience minimal discomfort as they reflect on their experiences. In order to minimize risk, participation is completely voluntary. Participants can choose to skip any questions that make them uncomfortable. Participants are in control of what they want to share and can stop their participation at any time.</p> <p>There will be no negative consequences for participants who decide to leave this study. If a participant decides to leave the study after completing any of the stages of data collection, they should contact investigator Paris Williams to request their responses be excluded from data analysis.</p> <p>The anticipated total time commitment for participants is 160-195 minutes. Participants will be involved in this study for approximately one month. At the conclusion of the full study, participants will receive a \$25 Amazon gift card as an incentive.</p>
<p>What Happens to The Information Collected for This Research?</p>	<p>To the extent allowed by law, we limit the viewing of your personal information to people who have to review it. We cannot promise complete secrecy. The IRB and other representatives of those organizations may inspect and copy your information.</p> <p>To protect your identity, you will be able to select a pseudonym for the study. If you do not select a pseudonym, one will be created for you. Your true name, contact information, or other identifying information will not be linked in any way to your transcripts. Your contact information will only be maintained for follow-up purposes and will be saved as a separate file with the student investigator.</p> <p>Risks associated with communicating and sending documents via the Internet will be minimized by not requiring identifying information in the documents and maintaining information containing your name or email separately from your demographic questionnaire responses and interview transcript(s). Email communications with attached documents will be downloaded, saved as a hard copy, and immediately deleted upon storage.</p> <p>Access to contact information and transcriptions will be limited to Paris Williams. Contact information, electronic audio files, and transcription records will be deleted/destroyed once the research is completed.</p>
<p>Who Can I Talk to About This Research?</p>	<p>If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, contact:</p> <p>James Earl Davis, PhD – Principal Investigator Paris Williams, Doctoral Student – Student Investigator</p>

APPENDIX D

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Background

1. Name:
2. Email:
3. Phone number:
4. Age:
5. How do you identify in terms of your gender identity?
6. How do you identify racially?
7. What state do you reside in permanently?

Student Information

8. How many credits have you earned so far as an undergraduate student?
9. Select which one best describes your housing status:
 - a. Campus dorm housing
 - b. Off-campus housing (i.e., apartment/house)
 - c. Commute from home
 - d. Other _____
10. Are you a member of any student organizations?
Select: Yes or No
11. What is your major?
12. What is your current undergraduate GPA?

APPENDIX E

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Tell me a little about yourself and why you chose to attend this university?
2. How would you describe your experience as a Black man attending this predominantly White university?
3. How, if at all, does the university environment make you feel like you are a valued member of the campus community?
4. How have your experiences influenced your perceptions of the university as a whole?

Campus Climate for Black men

5. How does the university environment reflect your identity as a Black man?
6. How would you describe the current racial climate within the university?
7. How does your race and gender identities influence your perception of the racial climate?
8. How would you describe your interactions with peers, administrators, and faculty at the university?
9. What messages about your identity as a Black man have been communicated to you from peers, administrators and/or faculty?

Belonging/Connectedness

10. How does the campus racial climate of the university impact (positively or negatively) your feeling of belonging or connectedness to this university?
11. How do the messages you receive about your identity as a Black man impact (positively or negatively) your sense of belonging or connectedness to the university?
12. How can the university make Black men feel like they belong on campus?
13. If you were able to go back in time, would you still come to this university? Why or why not?
14. Is there anything further that you would like to share?

APPENDIX F

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Describe the photos you have taken and what they say about belonging.
2. What thoughts or feelings came up as you took these photos around campus?
3. What spaces on campus have you felt most valued and connected?
 - a. What contributed to this sense of connectedness?
4. What do all of the images shared today communicate about your collective experiences at this school?
5. What are some of the common perceptions that emerge from these photos and today's discussion?
6. How can the university make Black men feel more welcome and connected to the university?
7. What would you like to communicate to campus leaders through your photos and words about your experience as a Black man at this institution?
8. Is there anything further that you would like to share?