

“IT’S LEVELS TO THIS”: BLACK UNDERGRADUATE FEMALE STUDENT
PERCEPTIONS REGARDING THEIR LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT IN
BLACK STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study describes the experiences of Black undergraduate women who are involved in a Black student organization at a public predominantly White institution (PWI) beyond the freshman year. Understanding how these students are involved, the meaning they make of their participation, and how they simultaneously manage extracurricular activities, and their academic responsibilities is essential to providing Black women with support that will help reduce barriers to persistence. Questions about their level of involvement provide insight into how these students perceive their participation in student organizations. The following research questions are aligned with the theoretical suggestions made within Astin's Theory of Student Involvement and Patricia Hill Collins' Black Feminist Thought: How do Black undergraduate women describe their experience as members of a Black student organization on a predominantly White campus?, How do Black undergraduate women make meaning of their extracurricular involvement in a Black student organization on a predominantly White campus, How do Black undergraduate women simultaneously manage their extracurricular involvement and academic responsibilities while trying to reduce barriers to college retention, What perception do Black undergraduate women have regarding the role extracurricular involvement in a Black student organization plays in their persistence and academic outcomes?

For this study, I utilized three tenants from Black Feminist Thought Framework (Collins, 2000) in collaboration with the Student Involvement Theory (Astin, 1984) to provide a critical lens during the investigation of Black undergraduate women who are involved in a Black student organization. The emerging themes from the study indicated the importance of Black student organizations on white campuses and the type of experiences Black

undergraduate women have as members of such groups. Staff members indicated a lack of university services and support in retaining and assisting these students. The emerging themes of the study are creating culturally relevant experiences, taking on leadership roles, strategies to manage academic and extracurricular activities, Benefits of Involvement, controlling narratives and definitions. Findings from this dissertation study have the potential to contribute to the literature on Black undergraduate women and their experiences in culturally relevant student organizations.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to every Black woman. More specifically, I dedicate this to all the Black women who are trying their best to focus, progress, persist, and succeed in a world where their life is harder due racism, gender discrimination, and White supremacy. You deserve more resources and opportunities to help you progress, persist, and succeed in whatever it is that you dream of. You deserve to be the leader in the room. I also want to dedicate this study to the six Black women who shared their stories about their experiences within Black student organizations. Your voices have been heard and your experiences matter. Black student organizations, centers, clubs, and special interest groups are necessary and vital to supporting Black students who attend predominantly White institutions.

Thank You

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Over the last forty years, national enrollment data has shown that Black students have been enrolling at colleges and universities at higher rates, yet their graduation rates have failed to reflect significant growth when compared to White students (NCES, 1976-2017). For example, the 2016 enrollment data show that over eleven million White students were enrolled in a post-secondary institution in the fall, while Black students accounted for just over 2.5 million (NCES 2016). Further, the National Center of Education Statistics (2016) data show that White students make up 64.1 percent of degrees conferred while Black students account for 10.5 percent. This disparity of Black students disproportionately enrolling and graduating at far lower rates than White students could put Black students at risk of not obtaining a degree needed to be considered in a competitive workforce.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor Statistics, there were 7.5 million job openings in March 2019, and employment increased by 263,000 in April 2019 with more projected gains to follow. In addition to the importance of acquiring a degree to increase employment opportunities, scholars assert that individuals who never fully integrate into campus life by joining a student organization will be less likely to partake in civic engagement initiatives and more likely to need financial assistance from the state and become incarcerated six years after graduation (Bowman, Park, & Denson 2015). If attrition rates remain high and graduation classes continue to lack diversity, the non-diverse graduation pool will also be reflected in a national and international workforce.

In the case of Black undergraduate women, the national postsecondary data from the last 5 years show that degrees conferred have increased (NCES 2015-2019). In 2019,

Black undergraduate women were awarded 122,632 degrees while Black men were awarded 67,664. Overall, when Black women are compared to other women, they lead all other women from other ethnicities except for White and Hispanic students. Black women also received more degrees than men from all races except White men. Although Black women have had some success in school, the goal is to have all Black college women complete degrees and graduate.

Considering the importance of acquiring a degree, school administrators have offered a multitude of resources to help Black college students feel socially and academically prepared to take on the challenges that affect their college journey to degree completion at a predominantly White institution (PWI). One resource that colleges and universities offer to boost retention numbers and college satisfaction ratings is a diverse list of ethnic student organizations (Harper, 2007; Museus, 2008). In fact, over the last ten years there has been an influx of Black Student Unions, Black Student Organizations, Black Culture Centers, and Multi-Cultural Centers appearing on predominantly White campuses. The increasing presence of such minority-centered establishments is in response to the lack of space and resources available to meet the needs of Black students on White campuses (Guiffrida 2003, 2004; Harper 2007; Patton, 2006).

One article that highlights the importance of having a minority-centered space on a White campus is, "Black Culture Centers: Still Central to Student Learning" by Lori Patton. In the 2006 article, she contends that Black Culture Centers provide a safe space for Black students who often feel oppressed and isolated within the larger campus community. Further, findings from her study regarding student gains suggest that this type of safe space offers Black students the opportunity to become involved in various

capacities, find a sense of community on campus, receive an education on Black history, develop their Black identity, and feel supported while existing within a space that allows them to be vulnerable and comforted without judgment from the majority group on campus. She concludes that minority-centered establishments create a bridge between Black students and a predominantly White institution which benefits and “facilitates student learning” (p. 8).

Although some scholars express the benefits of student involvement on learning, retention, and student success, educators and school administrators question whether Black undergraduate students’ participation in Black student organizations affect their academic preparedness, academic outcomes, and retention rates (Chambers & Walpole 2017; Guiffrida, 2004). Some scholars and educators suggest that Black undergraduate students who are more invested in the mission and environment within a student club or organization will have a harder time focusing on achieving good grades (Baker, 2008; Guiffrida 2004; Fleming, 1984; Tinto, 1993). Thus, participation in a student organization or club could have the potential to negatively impact a student’s academic success.

A lack of focus on studying and preparing for courses can result in failed courses and low retention rates (Fleming, 1984). Moreover, such a decrease in retention will have a negative impact on the degree completion rates of Black undergraduate students (Fleming, 1984). This trend of low graduation rates of Black undergraduate students will not only affect the workforce and college population, but it will also impact the continued distribution of institutional funds given to student life departments. For example, if students become over involved in campus life to the point that it hinders their grades and

ability to persist, colleges and universities could consider cutting funding and decreasing the list of available organizations and events run by student life departments.

Statement of the Problem

Despite researchers suggesting the benefits of having culturally relevant spaces and resources at predominantly White institutions to support minority student retention, there is limited literature that specifically centered the experience of Black women who are members of Black student organizations (Croom, Beatty, Acker, & Butler, 2017). One thing that has been recommended by scholars is related to predominantly White institutions being challenged to offer and support students who want more culturally relevant experiences (Fleming, 2012; Grier-Reed, Madyun, & Buckley, 2008; Musues 2014; Musues, Yi, & Saelua 2017; Xu, 2018). More specifically, researchers recommend that colleges and university incorporate more anti-racist practices on campus, more faculty development on culture competency, more anti-racist curriculum, and more retention plans that center the needs of Black students (Grier-Reed, Madyun, & Buckley, 2008; Tierney 1999;2000; Xu, 2018). However, there is limited research about the experiences of Black undergraduate students who are involved in race specific interest groups, clubs, or student organizations while enrolled at a predominantly White institution. More specifically, the researchers that do cover Black student involvement either always investigate Black men and women together as one monolithic group, or they mostly focus on the experiences that Black students have while being members of a Greek letter, religious, or athletic organizations (Baker, 2008; Guiffrida, 2004).

Alexander W. Astin constructed the Theory of Student Involvement. Astin (1984) defines involvement as “the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student

devotes to the academic experience” (p. 518). This theory is concerned with the variations of student involvement and how it relates to student development and academic performance outcomes. Astin (1984) lists five basic assumptions within student involvement theory: 1. Involvement is related to the physical and psychological time and energy invested in a specific thing; 2. Involvement is continuous and the amount of energy or time a student invests in something will vary from student to student; 3. The theory of involvement has both quantitative and qualitative features; 4. The amount of effort and time a student puts into being involved in something will impact student learning and development outcomes; and 5. How effective a policy is will be directly related to the efforts put forth to increase student involvement.

There is available research regarding what effect aspects of student involvement (i.e. level of involvement) has on a student’s academic success after year one (Baker, 2008; Guiffrida, 2004). However, many of the studies regarding the effects of involvement are quantitative and include data on majority White participants. This poses an issue because if researchers only recruit freshmen and majority White participants for their studies it limits what is known regarding the involvement of non-White sophomores, juniors, and seniors who aspire to persist through to degree completion. Moreover, a shortage of current research regarding how involvement affects non-White upperclassmen, especially Black upperclassmen, will limit our understanding regarding how various aspects of involvement (i.e., level of involvement, meaning of involvement) impacts the social and academic experiences of underrepresented students.

Another issue that exists is the small amount of research that focuses exclusively on Black female students in comparison to White students. More specifically, while

researchers go back and forth about whether involvement in student organizations at colleges has been linked to improving the retention rates, social experiences, and grade point averages of students (Astin, 1984; Guiffrida, 2004), little is known about whether Black female students perceive their level of involvement in Black student organizations as being beneficial to their academic preparation and success beyond their freshman year of college. In general, there is a shortage of contemporary literature on the overall Black female student experience in higher education, specifically the experience of Black undergraduate female students at predominantly White four-year institutions. Although college enrollment and degree completion numbers have increased for Black female students, social scientists have devoted little attention to conducting qualitative studies on how these students perceive aspects of their membership to Black student organizations. Without further investigation into the experiences of Black female students at PWIs, scholars cannot understand how this group of students successfully navigate Black student organizations in a university environment where they are the minority.

This shortage of information on Black college women is the result of researchers putting more energy into investigating the ongoing academic challenges of Black male college students (Strayhorn, 2017). According to United States National Center for Education Statistics (2016), the number of Black undergraduate males enrolling in college and persisting through to degree completion is lower than that of Black female undergraduates. For example, the 2016 report shows that 125,746 Black females and 70,554 Black males received a degree from a postsecondary institution. However, the 2016 Fall enrollment data show that 959,000 Black males and 1,629,000 Black females enrolled in college (NCES, 2016). Although the above data indicates that degrees are

being conferred to Black students who remain enrolled, both Black female and male students have historically struggled with similar academic and social challenges while matriculating within institutions where they are the minority (Allen, 1985, 1992; Fleming, 1984; Sedlacek, 1999).

While there is a need to understand the factors contributing to the high attrition and low retention rates of Black male students (Strayhorn, 2017), the unique experiences of Black female college students should not be understudied. Moreover, having more quantitative studies than qualitative studies decrease the amount of current qualitative literature available for Student Affairs personnel to utilize when trying to understand how students describe their experiences in their own words. Qualitative research provides a rich in-depth description of a participant's experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this study, I utilized three tenants from Black Feminist Thought Framework in collaboration with the Student Involvement Theory to provide a critical lens during the investigation of Black undergraduate women who are involved in a Black student organization. Because Student Involvement Theory has not always taken into account the social and academic outcomes of Black students who are actively involved in Black student organizations, together both frameworks helped expand on the Student Involvement Theory.

Since the 1960's higher education institutions have been challenged by Black students to provide better resources when it comes to understanding how they can retain, support, and graduate more students from this ethnic group. This study is significant as it is important to focus on not only what affects student retention and attrition but also how students, especially Black students, succeed despite the barriers they face while attending predominantly White institutions.

The Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study was to gain a better insight of the extracurricular experiences of Black undergraduate women who are involved in a Black student organization at a public, predominantly White institution beyond the freshman year. Understanding their experiences as members, the meaning they make of their involvement, how they manage extracurricular activities and academic responsibilities simultaneously, and their perceptions regarding the role extracurricular involvement in a Black student organization plays in their persistence and academic outcomes is essential to providing them with support that will help reduce barriers to persistence and degree completion. Interviews, observations, and document reviews were used during the data collection and data analysis process. Below, are the research questions that guided this study:

1. How do Black undergraduate women describe their experience as members of a Black student organization on a predominantly White campus?
2. How do Black undergraduate women make meaning of their extracurricular involvement in a Black student organization on a predominantly White campus?
3. How do Black undergraduate women simultaneously manage their extracurricular involvement and academic responsibilities while trying to reduce barriers to college retention?
4. What perceptions do Black undergraduate women have regarding the role extracurricular involvement in a Black student organization plays in their persistence and academic outcomes?

Definitions of Terms:

Involvement- “student involvement refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (Astin, 1984, p. 518)

Extracurricular Involvement: Extracurricular involvement refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to extracurricular student activities on campus

Overinvolvement- The extent to which a student has mentally and physically invested time and energy into an organization to which is becoming a detriment.

Race-specific special interest groups: A special interest group created specifically to engage and connect college students who have the same race and ethnicity.

Black Student Organization: A student organization created specifically to engage and connect college students who identify as Black or African American.

Non-Greek Letter Organization: A student organization that is not an affiliate or an extension of a fraternity or sorority.

Retention: An institution measure of whether a student stays in school and matriculating through to degree completion

Persistence: A student measure of whether a student choose to stay in school and matriculating through to degree completion

Meaning Making: The meaning a person makes from the experiences that have in life

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This research study utilizes constructs from the lens of Student Involvement Theory and Black Feminist Thought (BFT) to provide insight into the college experiences of Black Female Students who are members of Black Student Organizations. To provide context, a list of gaps, and a rationale for conducting the study can be found in the literature review. The review has been divided into the following four parts: (1) Black college women's experiences at PWIs; (2) effects of involvement on the undergraduate college experiences at PWIs; (3) effects of Black student involvement in Black student organizations at PWIs; and (4) theoretical frameworks.

Black College Women's Experiences at Predominantly White Institutions

The literature on Black female student experiences indicated that they face a great deal of academic, psychological, and social challenges within various aspects of their college life at a PWI (Chambers & Sharpe, 2012; Henry, Butler, & West 2011; Howard-Vital 1989; Patton, Haynes, & Croom, 2017; Winkle-Wagner, 2015). Researchers have found that one of the reasons Black female students struggle is as a result of being stereotyped and having to exist within a hostile environment that perpetuates racism and is unequipped to meet the needs of Black female students (Donovan, 2011; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001, Leath & Chavous, 2018). In Leath and Chavous (2018), the researchers quantitatively examined how Black students at all grade levels experience racial climate and stigma at PWIs in comparison to other racial women groups. The findings from the study indicated that Black female students experienced more racism and unpleasant interactions on campus than other women from different ethnic backgrounds and cultural groups. These findings of racial and unpleasant interactions are present throughout the

literature and often involve stories of White faculty members and peers questioning whether Black female students were smart enough to be enrolled in college. Moreover, Black female students experienced being excluded from study groups, silenced during classroom discussions, and stereotyped by peers. These negative experiences impacted the academic performance and satisfaction of Black female students more than women from other races. Leath and Chavous assert that Black women have academic and social challenges on campus that are both alike and different from other women. They conclude that universities need to promote an inclusive environment and create programs that improve gender and race issues as students who experience negative interactions have less academic motivation and poor academic outcomes. These findings and conclusions are consistent throughout the literature.

In addition to the challenges of navigating a hostile environment, researchers assert that race and gender differences add additional stress to the academic and social barriers that impact Black female students on White campuses (Chambers & Sharpe, 2012; Jackson, 1998; Hotchkins, 2017; Patton, Haynes, Croom, 2017; Winkle-Wagner, 2008). As stated in Jackson's (1998) mixed-methods study that specifically explored how race and gender influenced the experiences of Black female college students, "colleges and universities should reexamine their diversity efforts and consider their students as multifaceted people whose school experience are not affected only by either their race or their gender but by both their race and their gender" (p. 360). This statement is relevant as Black students have unique needs and identities. Further, being a Black student on campus can be stressful when trying to socially integrate within a university environment where traditions, values, and norms differ from their own, which leads to unsatisfactory

retention and high attrition rates (Robinson-Wood, 2009). Robinson-Wood (2009) asserted that outreach is critical to supporting Black female students who battle with stress. This outreach can come in the form of mentoring, tutorials, and counseling on campus. Providing resources to help Black female students will positively impact how they experience college inside and outside of the classroom.

Black College Women's Classroom Experiences

One researcher that specifically focused on Black female student experiences in the classroom environment at a PWI was Booker (2016). In the qualitative study, it was reported that six participants experienced stress related to the inaccessibility and approachability of faculty members, the lack of authentic and relatable instruction, the pressure of being the spokesperson of an entire race, and dealing with microaggressions that came from existing within a classroom where the discussions often encompassed culturally insensitive language. Conversely, participants shared that faculty who were friendly, approachable, and willing to help students beyond the time spent in the classroom made these participants feel encouraged and eager to learn. However, some participants often interacted with faculty who lacked interpersonal skills and compassion for students who needed extra help. Additionally, since professors were predominantly White, participants often expressed feeling like the faculty made no effort to try to make instruction relatable to all students and not just the majority group.

This lack of authentic instruction resulted in African American students becoming disengaged in the classroom discourse especially since it appeared that the only time Black students were welcomed to participate was if the topic of conversation "pertained to poverty, crime, music, or civil rights" (p. 223). The constant pressure of being sought

after to speak on issues related to Black people was exhausting, marginalizing, and often resulted in insulting and poorly thought-out responses from peers which as a result added to the microaggressions these participants felt daily. Due to negative interactions with faculty, students felt unwelcomed and considered withdrawing from the course and major altogether. Although these findings illustrate some of the alarming interactions with White faculty and peers, the participants shared that they did not experience the above with every White person on campus. Booker (2016) concludes that Black female students experience negative interactions in the classroom which should warrant institutions to enforce diversity training and seminars on campuses that serve a diverse student population.

Additionally, scholars have found that Black students experience isolation and alienation while attending a PWI because of their inability to socially integrate into the White college environment (Domingue, 2015; Hannon, Woodside, Pollard & Roman, 2016; O'connor, 2002; Winkle-Wagner, 2015). For example, researchers reported that students often felt like they did not fit in which then resulted in them becoming overwhelmed by the task of having to navigate two separate worlds: specifically, a Black world and a White world (Hannon, Woodside, Pollard & Roman, 2016). Throughout the literature findings showed that within the White community on campus, students often felt isolated, unwelcomed, and less connected to White student organizations. However, within the Black world students were met with a challenge of trying to find a sense of community without completely excluding themselves from the White community on campus. Overall, the findings from most of the studies on Black female students show

that the participants felt like existing within a hostile racial climate added to the list of things that negatively affected them academically, socially, and psychologically.

Black College Women Leadership Experiences

Regarding social interactions, research studies show that Black female students also experience unique challenges while taking on leadership opportunities at PWIs (Domingue, 2015; Hotchkins, 2017). For example, Hotchkins' (2017) qualitative study explored the experience of six Black female students who were elected lead board members within predominantly White organizations located at one public and one private university. Much of the data reported shows that Black female students encountered constant microaggressions and push back from their White male peers within the organization. These findings were consistent with Domingue's (2015) study on leadership experiences of Black female students at PWIs. For example, participants also reported feeling silenced, stereotyped, and inundated with microaggressions caused by White peers who did not respect their leadership due to blatant racism. One example of how racism was present in these hostile situations was during the times where White students would constantly challenge the authority of a Black student and remained insubordinate until a White student leader interjected and gave orders. Both researchers agreed that the combative behaviors of White peers made Black female students feel frustrated and uncomfortable which later forced them to create a "buffer" around how they interacted with their White male peers. This coping strategy required them to lean on their White female peers to communicate with White male members to decrease conflict that often occurred because the male members did not like taking direction from Black female students (Hotchkins, 2017). However, Black female students need to build

relationships with their White female peers before enlisting them as allies to fight battles with White male students on their behalf.

Other coping strategies of Black female leaders consisted of relying on the support and motivation from their mothers and educational leaders in their lives, using Black history as a source of empowerment, joining Black social networks, looking to faculty for mentorship, and seeking out White allies to combat oppression (Domingue, 2015). Domingue (2015) concluded, “Sources of nourishment are intervention strategies or interruptions to the various types of oppression Black college student leaders face on campus” (p. 470). Similarly, Hotchkins (2017) concluded that if a Black female students can figure out how to cope with negative peer interactions due to their race and gender, then the discomfort and burnout tied to dealing with racialized issues will decrease. Lastly, these two researchers assert that it is the job of the administrators to change the racial climate of the institution while also providing support for Black female leaders of predominantly White organizations. Having resources to help these students cope with microaggressions that arise due to race and gender will help Black female students be successful on campus.

Black Women Barriers Related to Homelife

Another aspect of the Black female student college experience that has been researched relates to how Black female students navigate family ties as they deal with the stressors of feeling like they do not belong within a PWI. Two articles that explored how Black female students navigate family relationships while attending and PWI are Kennedy and Winkle-Wagner (2014) and Winkle-Wagner (2009). The findings from the qualitative study by Kennedy and Winkle-Wagner (2014) indicate that Black female

students rely heavily on family support while they navigate PWIs. For example, participants reported that having the support of their families motivated them to get up and work harder every day. Kennedy and Winkle-Wagner (2014) concluded that Black female students who keep family ties while building their independence will have a positive impact on their college transition and persistence.

Conversely, the findings from Winkle-Wagner's (2009) study indicated that Black female students struggled with fitting in on a predominantly White campus while also dealing with the pressure of maintaining close ties with family. In the study, participants often reported feeling in conflict due to the weight of having to consider family obligations. Further, participants expressed that once they transitioned to a White college environment, they felt like they no longer fit in with their friends and family back home. One way that students coped with the struggle between family and school life was to disassociate from either family, friends, or the campus. Having to choose which relationship to sever caused more stress and made them feel homeless or like they didn't fit in anywhere. Another way that they coped was to find safe spaces on campus where they could engage with other Black women who were experiencing the same things. Winkle-Wagner (2009) concluded that because PWIs fail to effectively support the culturally diverse needs of its student population, keeping strong familial ties was important to Black female students' adjustment to college. She further calls on universities to include programs and training that will foster the inclusion of parents. These studies highlighted additional emotional and social struggles of Black undergraduate female students who attend PWIs.

Coping Through Spiritualism

In addition to the coping strategies mentioned throughout this review it is important to note that Black female students often rely on spirituality to cope with stress. Two authors who focus on Black female student experience with spirituality at PWIs are Patton and McClure (2009). In their qualitative study, they found that although spirituality is essential to helping Black female students cope with stress related to racism on campus, PWI are rarely equipped with spiritual resources that support them. For example, participants reported a lack of designated space to practice their spirituality on campus which resulted in them looking external for resources. Patton and McClure concluded that spiritual development is an important piece to consider when serving a diverse student population. They further suggest that programming geared towards religious development is critical to meeting the needs of Black female students who want to develop spiritually on campus.

In sum, it is important to note that there is a substantial amount of literature detailing the obstacles and unpleasant encounters that Black female students face on predominantly White campuses (Chambers & Sharpe, 2012; Henry, Butler, & West 2011; Howard-Vital 1989; Patton, Haynes, & Croom, 2017). Research findings indicated that students have had trouble with peers and faculty in and out of the classroom, developing their Black identity, finding safe spaces, connecting with White student organizations, and trying to assume and maintain successful leadership positions on White campuses. It should also be noted that many researchers have looked at Black female students as a monolithic group instead of considering that students have different within race characteristics that impact who they are (Winkle-Wagner, 2015). This research study will

consider the within race characteristics of Black female students. Some of the gaps and limitations of the literature on Black female students is that they had a small number of participants. However, engaging in two or more interviews with each participant allowed them to clearly articulate their experiences in detail while the researchers gathered rich data.

In addition to studies having a small participant pool, researchers rarely considered intra-racial differences among Black female students. In sum, all the researchers concluded that Black female students continue to face academic, social, and psychological challenges that impede their learning, adjustment, and involvement in college. Most of the research that focuses specifically on Black women experiences on predominantly White campuses are due to racism and sexism. O'connor (2002) noted that although Black women experience racism on White campuses, the ways in which they experience can and have changed over time. Nevertheless, researchers who have used various methods to study the factors that impact the college experience of Black students at PWIs found that students who are involved with student organizations have a better chance of remaining longer than students who are not involved in a student organization (Guiffrida, 2004).

Additionally, research findings suggested that the increased opportunity to persist will increase if Black students have Black centered spaces and networks to connect with while on White campuses. Black centered spaces, networks, and organizations have been found to help Black students develop their Black identity (Porter & Dean, 2015) while being nurtured, appreciated, and validated by peers and mentors who looks like them (Hannon, Woodside, Pollard & Roman, 2016; Harper, 2007; Patton, 2006). Given this

information, scholars have suggested that Black students should become involved in student organizations (Baker, 2008; Harper & Quaye, 2009), specifically minority student organizations (Guiffrida 2003, 2004), so that they can fill a void that comes as a result of feeling like they do not belong because their cultural norms are different from that of their White peers. Conversely, Tinto (1993) asserted that Black students must disassociate from subgroups at PWIs if they want to fit in to the majority culture. Despite negative interactions with White peers and faculty, Black students continue to seek opportunities to socially integrate while on a PWI (Sutton & Kimbrough 2001). Thus, researchers encourage more qualitative research that includes various aspects of Black female students' college experience. The next section will review the empirical studies that focus on the effects of their involvement at a PWI.

Involvement and the Undergraduates College Experiences at PWIs

A collection of empirical studies exists regarding the effects of student involvement during the undergraduate years of college. However, many studies have focused specifically on the effects of involvement in Greek letter organizations (Debard & Sacks, 2012; Hevel, Martin, Weeden, & Pascarella, 2015; Kimbrough, 1995; Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998; Walker, Martin, & Hussey, 2015; Long, 2012). In general, much of the quantitative findings are consistent in reporting that there is an array of psychological and social benefits to being involved in Greek or non-Greek co-curricular and extracurricular activities on campus. Researchers who did not specifically focus on Greek organizations found that some of the benefits of being involved included positive effects on a student's well-being (Kilgo, Mollet, & Pascarella, 2016), comfortability learning during in-class sessions (Ullah & Wilson, 2007), and more

meaningful interactions with faculty and peers (Case, 2011). Bowman, Park, and Denson (2015) added that being involved in a student organization also increases the chance for a student to experience positive civic engagement outcomes. While involvement in student organizations on campus has been linked to increasing student engagement and satisfaction with campus (Tinto, 1993), a debate remains about whether involvement in different types of student organizations directly influences a student's academic success and decision to remain enrolled.

A debate exists within the literature on involvement in student organizations and its impact on academic performance. Only a small collection of studies reported that involvement influences a student's academic success (Webber, Bauer Krylow, & Zhang, 2014). Conversely, other researchers contend that membership in student organizations does not positively impact a student's academic outcomes if they take on too many membership responsibilities (Guiffrida, 2004). Another detriment to being involved in college includes not being aware of the number of hours spent engaging in activities which can, in return, cause a detraction and negatively impact the student's academic performance (Zacherman & Foubert, 2014). Zacherman and Foubert's, (2014) study presents strong findings on the relationship between engagement and academic performance. They found that "the time spent involved in cocurricular activities has an impact on how students perform academically" (p. 166). More specifically, they reported that low involvement in activities increases academic performance, moderate involvement (11-30 hours per week) does not impact grades positively or negatively, and excessive involvement (more than 30 hours per week) will result in a decline in one's grade point average. In Weber, Kylow, and Zhang's (2013) quantitative study on student

involvement, it is concluded that, “students who devote more time to their academic activities will be the recipients of success” (p. 609). Sutton and Kimbrough (2001) concluded that it is the institution's responsibility to make sure all students are involved in activities and organizations on campus that positively impact their academic performance and social life.

In sum, several studies include data from White participants which can pose an issue as it limits researchers' ability to accurately generalize about minority populations. Another thing to note is that researchers who have chosen large research universities as their research site often utilized the National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE) to statistically analyze social and educational outcomes and its link to student involvement (Kuh, 2009; Pascarella, Seifert, & Blaich, 2010; Weber, Kylvow, & Zhang, 2013).

Although Pascarella, Seifert, and Blaich, (2010) suggested that “institutions using the NSSE can have reasonable confidence that the benchmark scales do, in fact, measure exposure to experiences that predict student progress on important educational outcomes” (p. 21), when making inferences, researchers must consider the demographics of the student population that completed the survey.

Black Student Involvement in Black Student Organizations at PWIs

Contemporary research on the benefits of Black student involvement in Black or ethnic student organizations is available but limited. Most of the available literature showed that many scholars have focused on Black student involvement in Greek organizations instead of other organizations that are not affiliated with Greek life (Bowman & Holmes 2017; Chambers & Walpole, 2017; DeBard & Sacks, 2011; Delgado, Cherniack, & Gloria, 2014; Greyerbiehl & Mitchell Jr., 2014; Patton, Bridges,

& Flowers, 2011). The results from Sutton and Kimbrough's (2001) quantitative study regarding trends in Black student involvement confirmed that Black students gravitate more toward Black student groups and Black Greek lettered organizations. Much of the research on Black students at PWIs reported that the decision for Black students to join ethnic and minority organizations was a result of them needing to feel a sense of community on a White campus (Guiffrida, 2003; Harper, 2007; Museus 2008, 2014; Museus, Yi, & Saelua, 2017). More specifically, Museus (2008) concluded that ethnic organizations serve as spaces where students can express themselves freely while being culturally validated by peers within their race. Conversely, Sutton and Kimbrough (2001) concluded that "while multicultural organizations serve as a major co- curricular experience for the majority of Black students at predominantly White campuses, they must also serve as valuable conduits for minority students' future involvement within traditional campus organizations" (p. 38).

Whether an organization is Greek affiliated or not, scholars have found that Black student involvement in minority student organizations is linked to helping Black students become socially adjusted at predominately White institutions (Doan, 2011; Greyerbiehl & Mitchell Jr., 2014; Guiffrida, 2003, 2004; Harper, 2007). Due to the challenges they face within PWIs, Black students describe Black student organizations as entities that provide safe spaces for them to receive additional support that will help them cope with microaggressions, stereotypes, and racial tensions (Guiffrida, 2003, 2004; Harper, 2007). Additionally, these spaces help them locate resources that will help them successfully navigate a predominately White campus (Guiffrida, 2003, 2004; Harper & Quayle, 2009).

Thus, having support from an ethnic group or organization while at a PWI can be beneficial to improving the social integration and retention rates of Black students.

Beyond social integration, scholars have contended that there are a multitude of other benefits to minorities being involved in Black student organizations on predominantly White campuses (Delgado, Cherniack, & Gloria, 2014; Greyerbiehl & Mitchell Jr., 2014; Guiffrida, 2003, 2004; Harper, 2007; Patton, Bridges & Flowers, 2011). Findings from a few qualitative studies indicate that students feel their involvement in such groups assists them in discovering cultural connections with peers of the same race, building faculty relationships, feeling confident in expressing themselves, and developing their racial identity (Guiffrida, 2003, 2004).

In contrast, some scholars contended that Black student involvement in Black student organizations can be detrimental to their academic success (Baker, 2008; Fleming, 1984). Although Guiffrida (2004) found benefits to involvement in Black student organizations, he also highlighted a few findings that presented some concerns. For example, he found that students who express being overly committed to a Black student organization also reported that their overinvolvement has had a negative impact on their grade point averages because they put significant time and effort into focusing on the organization's agenda. The findings from his study also show that students who have a hierarchical leadership style become overworked due to their inability to delegate tasks to other peers within the group. Hierarchical leadership was described as a style of leadership that involved students who were overly active and overly involved in all aspects of a student organization's programming and events.

Similarly, Fleming (1984) argued that Black student involvement in Black student organizations at PWIs cause a distraction, which results in those students paying less attention to their schoolwork. These findings were supported by Guiffrida's (2004) study in which he interviewed both high achieving and low achieving students who were involved in the same Black student organization. In his qualitative study, high achieving students spent a moderate amount of time within the organization because they valued getting good grades over being over-invested in the organization. They indicated that they found it almost impossible to give an equal amount of focus to both, and jeopardizing their academic success was not an option.

Baker (2008) investigated this topic further as she studied the effect of underrepresented student involvement in six different types of student organizations. The organizations that she includes in her study were political, arts based, athletic, religious, Greek letter, and Black centered. She found that, based on a student's gender and race, the type of student organization a student is involved in can have a direct impact on his or her academic success. For example, she found that involvement in political student organizations had no effect on the academic performance of Black female students though it did for Black males. She concluded that, although involvement in student organizations can be beneficial to Black and Latino students, failure to join an organization that best accommodates a student's needs will negatively affect their academic success. Despite positive findings presented in the literature that details the benefits of being involved in Black student organizations, disagreements among scholars regarding the specific impact of Black student involvement in Black student organizations remain.

It should be acknowledged that scholars have asked an array of research questions regarding the impact of membership in Black student organizations on social integration (Guiffrida, 2003), racial identity (Harper, 2007), social capital (Greyerbiehl & Mitchell Jr., 2014), student engagement (Patton, Bridges, & Flowers, 2011), cultural adjustment (Guiffrida, 2003), civic engagement (Bowman, Park, & Denson 2015), and academic achievement (Guiffrida, 2004). However, there is much that remains unknown regarding the details of whether student involvement in student organizations impacts academic achievement of Black females beyond their freshman year. For example, since few studies have focused on student perceptions regarding their level of involvement, there is still a need to research student perceptions regarding the hours they spend within their student organizations. Considering that researchers have presented both positive and negative quantitative findings (Baker, 2008) about this topic, it is important to also qualitatively research the effects membership has on Black college students (Guiffrida, 2003, 2004).

Further, given that the majority of studies chose to focus on how membership affects Black freshmen or those who are involved in minority Greek organizations, this current study will aim to study the effects of membership in Black non-Greek letter student organizations on Black female undergraduates that are in either their sophomore, junior, or senior year of college. More qualitative research is needed to explore what meaning Black female students ascribe to their level of involvement. To better understand the complex conditions under which level of involvement in Black student organizations becomes an asset or liability to Black female undergraduate students at predominantly White institutions, this qualitative research design is set up to explore the

experiences of Black female students involved in a Black student organization during their sophomore, junior, and senior year of college.

Describing Involvement, Engagement, Participation, and Integration

There is a vast amount of research that investigates how involvement impacts various aspects of a student's college experience. Due to high demand regarding the need for college personnel to understand the quality of a student's college experience and how it relates to retention, two widely cited scholars have created theories to aid in our understanding of effective measures needed to evaluate student learning and its association to academic outcomes during the undergraduate years (Astin 1984; Tinto 1993). It is important to note that due to similarities in the definition of involvement, engagement, participation, and integration, researchers have often used the terms interchangeably throughout the scholarly literature, which has led to some definition overlapping and confusion (Wolf- Wendel, Ward, & Kinzie, 2009). In Astin's (1984) Theory of Student Involvement, "Involvement refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (p. 518). Slightly different, in Tinto's (1993) theory of academic and social integration the term integration is used to describe how a student integrates into academic and social constructs of the institution. This includes how students engage and interact with faculty, staff, and students, as well as how they adopt the norms of the majority and adhere to the mission and policies of the college or university they attend (Tinto, 1993).

Kuh (2016) used the term engagement to describe the efforts students put forth in activities that impact their college experience. Further, Kuh (2016) adds, "both student effort and institutional effort are needed to increase the odds that all students will

complete their studies and graduate with the knowledge and proficiencies they need to survive and thrive in the twenty-first century” (p. 49). Despite some overlap in the definitions used to describe student involvement Wendel, Ward, and Kinzie, (2009) emphasized that the construction of a theory involves an ongoing process that will continue to evolve over time which in turn will add to the original characteristics and postulates created by the theorist. Wendel, Ward, and Kinzie concluded, “common definitions, clear terminology, and openness to critique of dominant paradigms will help researchers, practitioners, and others address growing concerns in higher education” (p.426). Although Astin, Tinto, and Kuh have used different terms in the literature to describe involvement, the meanings are parallel and differences between them are largely linguistic. For the sake of simplicity, this study will utilize Astin’s (1984) definition of involvement.

Theoretical Frameworks

Student Involvement Theory

Discontent with non-theoretical and informal attempts by educators and administrators to critically explain how academic programming and policies relate to student achievement and development, Alexander W. Astin constructed the Theory of Student Involvement. Astin (1984) defines involvement as “the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (p. 518). This theory is concerned with the variations of student involvement and how it relates to student development and academic performance outcomes. Astin (1984) lists five basic assumptions within student involvement theory: 1. Involvement is related to the physical and psychological time and energy invested in a specific thing; 2. Involvement is

continuous and the amount of energy or time a student invests in something will vary from student to student; 3. The theory of involvement has both quantitative and qualitative features; 4. The amount of effort and time a student puts into being involved in something will impact student learning and development outcomes; and 5. How effective a policy is will be directly related to the efforts put forth to increase student involvement.

The Theory of Student Involvement was originally tested during two of Astin's earlier studies. The 1975 longitudinal study focused on college dropouts and the factors that affect student persistence. Findings from the study suggest that students' decision to stay in college was attributed to their involvement or lack of involvement in the college environment. It turned out that residing on college campuses, having a membership in fraternities and sororities, participating in campus extracurricular activities, and having a job directly on campus increased the likelihood that a student would persist and stay enrolled in college. Astin emphasized that students who spent more time on campus had more opportunities to get involved in the campus community. Further, he asserted that "living on campus substantially increases the student's chances of persisting and aspiring to a graduate or professional degree" (p. 525). This assertion suggested that students who live on campus will have greater opportunities to become integrated into the campus life and lesser instances where they are distracted by what is going on back home.

Additionally, findings from the 1975 study of dropouts show that students who have similar characteristics, norms, and beliefs as those of the college, will fit into the college environment and have fewer issues with persisting. Astin asserts that this finding is due to a student's ability to assimilate and identify with the characteristics of an

institution, which in turn makes them more likely to be involved on campus. Additional findings from Astin's 1977 longitudinal study supported the conclusion that various types of student involvement were found to be linked to the constantly changing characteristics of the incoming class of freshman. This theory is considered to have one of the strongest frameworks to inform higher education studies regarding student involvement at college.

The use of this theory will provide a theoretical and methodological blueprint to understand and explain the various levels of student involvement and how they relate to a student's academic performance beyond the first year of college. However, it is important to note that the findings of Guiffrida's (2004) study regarding how involvement supports or hinders the academic success of Black students refutes Astin's theory of involvement. More specifically, Guiffrida (2004) concluded that the more involved a Black student became in campus life, the higher the chances were for them to become over involved which will have resulted in them failing and not being retained. However, it is essential to note that Guiffrida's research questions heavily focused on the extent to which involvement became an asset or liability. He did not specifically and purposely seek participants' perceptions regarding their exact hours spent involved in a student organization during a semester.

Although his findings do not reflect Astin's suggestion that more involvement equals more learning, this current study will add to the literature by constructing and utilizing research questions regarding student perceptions of their level of involvement. It is appropriate to use this theory as both Guiffrida (2004) and Astin (1984) suggested that future researchers focus on a student's level of involvement (i.e., hours spent) when measuring various academic or social outcomes. Further, as the third postulate states in

the theory of involvement, “Involvement has quantitative and qualitative features” (p. 519). Thus, in this study, the extent of a student’s involvement will be explored qualitatively by asking the participants how they perceive their involvement in student organizations affect their academic performance and persistence. Since Student Involvement Theory has not always taken into account the persistence and retention outcomes related to Black students who are actively involved in Black student organizations, use of Black Feminist Thought helped magnify the voices of Black undergraduate women who described what they used to persist while simultaneously managing their extracurricular involvement and academic responsibilities.

Black Feminist Thought

The theoretical framework Black Feminist Thought (BFT) was created by Patricia Hill Collins (2000) because she truly believed that there was much to be learned from listening to and understanding the past and present experiences of Black women in American society. Moreover, BFT is concerned with ending the suppression and censorship of Black women’s ideas and removing the narrative that says they must remain the subordinate group in American society (Collins, 2000). As described by Collins (2000), BFT is a critical social theory that evolved based on the notion that the ideas and thoughts of Black women should not be silenced and oppressed by anyone who wants to have any kind of leverage. The act of suppressing the ideas and thoughts of a group is a form of oppression that gives the dominant group systemic control and power over the minority group which in turns “fosters this pattern of disenfranchisement” (Collins, 2000, p. 4). Breaking down the foundation of BFT, she described how African

American women have historically suffered and been oppressed in three areas of their lives.

First, Black women have been victims of labor and economic exploitation in which they held service jobs for which they were often overworked yet underpaid and sometimes never compensated. Second, she highlighted the political inequities that “denied African American women the rights and privileges routinely extended to White male citizens” (Collins, 2000, p. 4). Third, she states that the stereotypical images that have been depicted of African American women were created by the White majority to keep this group oppressed. By understanding the economic, political, and racist dimensions that have added to the oppression of Black women, knowledge is gained about why, in most cases, this specific group has not been afforded the same societal opportunities as White Americans (Collins, 2000).

Since Black women continue to be labeled as powerful yet marginalized, their ideas and voices must be sought after and heard to challenge the stereotypes and misconceptions planted by the dominant group (Collins, 2000). Moreover, Black feminist scholars have also suggested that researchers use the BFT theoretical framework when studying Black women as they feel it provides a lens that is most appropriate when analyzing the unique experiences of women who identify as Black or African American (Collins, 2002; Crenshaw 1989;1991; Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Most of the literature involving African American women utilizes this theory as a way to connect and validate the experiences of African American women in PWIs (Hooks 1981; 2000, Collins, 2002, Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Collins (2002) further explains that the use of BFT is important when trying to understand why the experiences of African American women

are different from others who are not of the same gender and race. In addition, she highlights that BFT consists of three key themes:

First, the framework is shaped and produced by the experiences Black women have encountered in their lives, even though others have documented their stories. Second, although the stories and experiences of each woman are unique, there are intersections of experiences between and among Black women. Third, although commonalities do exist among Black women, the diversity of class, religion, age, and sexual orientation of Black women as a group are multiple contexts from which their experiences can be revealed and understood. These themes may not become apparent to African American women initially, so one role of Black female intellectuals is to produce facts and theories about the Black female experience that will clarify a Black woman's standpoint for Black women (Collins, 2002, p. 268).

In sum, using Black Feminist Thought combined with qualitative methods to study the college experiences of African American female students will challenge societal stereotypes held by the dominant group. As Collins (2000) states, "reclaiming Black women's ideas also involves discovering, reinterpreting, and analyzing the ideas of subgroups within the larger collectivity of U.S. Black women who have been silenced" (p. 13). Based on that statement, she argues that the process of discovering ideas and redefining the self-definitions of Black women should continue to be the work of other Black women (Collins, 2000). Additionally, research by Vakalahi, Sermon, Richardson, Dillard, and Moncrief (2014) agrees with Collins (2000) by stating,

conceptualizing the experiences of female students of color in the context of feminism and the womanist and strengths perspectives is important for future research, theory, and practice. Embracing the strengths perspective as a lens through which to view the unique contributions of women of color to the feminist movement is critical to the progress of all women, especially the next generation (p. 425).

Therefore, this critical social theory will help Black researchers further understand how Black female students view their involvement in Black student

organizations as being a contributor to their academic success. Refraining from singling out an individual based on socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, religion, or country of origin, the use of the BFT framework will allow study participants the opportunity to express their experiences in their own words.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

In this chapter, I present an overview of the research methods used for this dissertation study. More specifically, I will discuss the following: purpose of the study, rationale for a selecting qualitative case study design, site description, participant description, data collection, data analysis, role of the researcher, trustworthiness process, and limitations of the methodology.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain a better insight of the extracurricular experiences of Black undergraduate women who are involved in a Black student organization at a public, predominantly White institution beyond the freshman year. Understanding their experiences as members, the meaning they make of their involvement, how they manage extracurricular activities and academic responsibilities simultaneously, and their perceptions regarding the role extracurricular involvement in a Black student organization plays in their persistence and academic outcomes is essential to providing them with support that will help reduce barriers to persistence and degree completion. Below, are the research questions that guided this study:

1. How do Black undergraduate women describe their experience as members of a Black student organization on a predominantly White campus?
2. How do Black undergraduate women make meaning of their extracurricular involvement in a Black student organization on a predominantly White campus?
3. How do Black undergraduate women simultaneously manage their extracurricular involvement and academic responsibilities while trying to reduce barriers to college retention?

4. What perception do Black undergraduate women have regarding the role extracurricular involvement in a Black student organization plays if any, in their persistence and academic outcomes?

Design of the study

A qualitative research design was selected for this dissertation study. Qualitative research is useful when trying to understand multiple realities in an in-depth way (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Although there are many variations of the definition of qualitative research, Creswell (2013) states,

Qualitative research begins with the assumptions and the use of interpretive theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to the social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and placed under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or a call for change (p. 44).

A qualitative research design was selected for this dissertation because there are social matters that require further critical exploration, specifically around how Black women detail and manage their membership experience within a Black student organization at a predominantly White institution (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, a qualitative research approach allowed me the opportunity to explore the meaning this specific group of students make as it relates to their extracurricular involvement in college. Due to the impact of certain issues on minority students who attend universities where they are outnumbered by the majority student population, a qualitative research

design was best for highlighting what is currently happening within Black centered spaces within a predominantly White institution.

Further justification for the use of a qualitative inquiry evolved from the need to magnify the voices of people who are often silenced (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Collins, 2000). In this case, I wanted to bring forth the voices of Black college women who have historically had both their perspectives suppressed and experiences watered down by folks who are not of the same race and gender (Winkle-Wagner, 2015). As noted in my problem statement presented in Chapter One, the challenges that Black women face while attending predominantly White institutions informed my decision to select a research topic that would help myself and other researchers gain a more detailed understanding of these challenges from the mouths of the women who are experiencing the problems firsthand.

Qualitative and quantitative research are both known to have very rigorous and time-consuming procedures that require a great attention to detail and a prolonged commitment to collecting and analyzing data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However, they both have unique benefits for different purposes. A qualitative study aims to present and interpret the detailed personal descriptions, stories, and perspectives of participants who have experienced a phenomenon while in a specific setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Conversely, a quantitative study is less about gathering the meaning or interpretations regarding participant experiences and it is more about the researcher collecting data to later present a report of cause-and-effect results regarding hypotheses. Ultimately, a qualitative study design was best suited for this dissertation because the goal of this study was to understand the experiences of the participants from their own perspectives as

opposed to using quantitative methods to find statistically significant findings based on a combination of student grades, GPAs, or an array of other additional variables (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The lack of qualitative research on the specific extracurricular experiences of Black female students involved in a Black student organization made the use of quantitative methods less beneficial to the study's purpose.

Case Study Approach

This qualitative study used a multiple case study approach to guide the study's research design, implementation, and analysis of findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A case study design was appropriate for this study because it can help researchers understand and describe an event or issue from the perspective of several participants who are currently interacting within a specific setting bounded by a time constraint (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Utilizing this approach helped me to explore how Black women are similar and different when it comes to involvement, meaning making and adjustment.

Pre-study Procedures

Through an official submission process, permission to do the study was requested by the Institutional Review Board Office at Temple University. I also met with my chair, additional committee members, and two lead administrators in Student Affairs prior to the start of the study to receive further feedback and approval. Another part of the preparation for the study required me to create a consent form that aligned with the recommended IRB Informed Consent document (HRP-802). The CITI training certifications of all researchers involved are on file at Temple University. At the time of this study, I as the researcher was knowledgeable of the privacy and confidentiality policies and procedures.

Participation in this dissertation study posed minimal to no risks. For example, if there was an interview question that made a participant feel hesitant to share, they were given the opportunity to take a break from questions or pass on any topics that may cause them anxiety or discomfort. Participation in this study was completely voluntary. Refusal to participate or discontinue participation at any time involved no penalty. The participants had the potential to benefit from this study because they will be a part of the scholarly literature that advances the knowledge about what is known regarding Black women experiences in higher education and Black student involvement in various Black student organizations.

Site of the Study

Grace University (pseudonym) is an urban research university located in a city in eastern Pennsylvania. I selected the university for the site of this study for multiple reasons. One, by Fall 2019, there were over 550 student organizations on campus and of that number, approximately 150 were categorized as cultural, and about 25 were specifically centered around supporting and engaging Black or African American students in campus life. Two, the location of Grace University was easily accessible and convenient for me to travel to, which is important as I needed to travel there several times a month to meet with my faculty chair and the participants. Three, since there was a limited amount of scholarly research on Black Female students' involvement in Black student organizations at large research universities, the selection was appropriate and justified. Four, based on the Fall enrollment data of the last five years, data show that Black women have consistently increased their enrollment at Grace University which

means that there was a good amount of Black undergraduate women on campus that I could consider for the study.

According to the 2019 university profile that included enrollment data by race and ethnicity: 22 (0.1%) students identified as American Indian/Alaska Native; 3,506 (12.1%) students identified as Asian; 3,713 (12.8%) students identified as African American; 2,214 (7.7%) students identified as Hispanic/Latino; 24 (0.1%) students identified as Pacific Islander; 15,922 (55.1%) students identified as White; 1,064 (3.7%) students identified as two or more races; 1,633 (5.7%) students were categorized as international; and 789 (2.7%) students had their race recorded as unknown or other.

Additionally, based on Fall enrollment data reported to the National Center for Education Statistics, Black undergraduate women have consistently had a higher college enrollment than most first time bachelor's degree seeking men and women at Grace University (NCES 2015-2019). For example, over the past five years, Black women have enrolled at higher rates than Black men, and men from other races and ethnicities; that is except for White men (NCES 2015-2019). Further, Fall enrollment data of the last 5 years also show that Black undergraduate women have had a higher enrollment in bachelor level programs than all women from various races and ethnicities, that is except for White women. In general, White men and women have continued to have higher enrollment at Grace university and at other predominantly White colleges and universities in the United States. Nevertheless, as previously mentioned, it is important to note that the enrollment of Black undergraduate women at Grace University has increased each year for the last five years. For example, their undergraduate enrollment

numbers by year are: 2,435 (2019); 2,415 (2018); 2,389 (2017); 2,354 (2016) and 2,364 (2015).

Considering the enrollment trends, it is imperative that researchers investigate their unique academic and social experiences. Thus, conducting this current study has the potential to help student affairs and enrollment management personnel understand Black women's perceptions of the role organizational involvement plays in their academic outcomes and reason to remain enrolled in the institution. By understanding the unique experiences of Black undergraduate women, administrators will be able to create and adjust programs and organizational programming to better support and serve these students during their college enrollment. Though ethnicity and gender data have been provided for various student groups, this current research study focused primarily on the college experiences of Black or African American undergraduate women at Grace University.

Participant Recruitment

Recruitment began Fall of 2019. During the recruitment process I reached out to various Black student organizations for this study. Prior to reaching out to students, I met with two lead administrators within the Department of Student Activities to discuss the best way to communicate with student organizations on campus. With their approval I contacted Black student organizations leaders via their public student organization email address on the Grace University website. I found them by visiting an online student organization portal to find organizations that met my criteria. It proved to be the quickest and best method for non-department personnel to contact student groups.

I sent out a recruitment email that stated the purpose of the research study, informed recipients of potential risks, provided my contact information, and prompted potential participants to contact me if they had any additional questions or met the recruitment criteria of the study. [Appendix A RECRUITMENT EMAIL]. Additionally, the email included a prompt for individuals to share and forward the study details with other members who were currently enrolled at Grace University. Recruitment flyers went out to over 100 students. Through my initial email communication to organizations, I met with the organization leaders to ask if they would share the study with active members of the organization [Appendix B RECRUITMENT FLIER]. I also posted flyers around campus in approved posting areas. This was a good way to catch Black student organization members who may not have seen the email communications through their organization's email blast.

Students who showed interest in joining the study were emailed a demographic survey to help with the screening of potential participants [Appendix C DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY]. Participants were recruited using purposeful sampling. This style of sampling helped to ensure that I was selecting participants who closely met the recruitment criteria for the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Using this style of sampling decreases sampling bias and helps select participants that have all the criterion characteristics related to the phenomenon being studied. Black undergraduate women were intentionally sought out because the study focused on the experiences of Black women. Further, participants were also selected if they met the following criterion were currently a member of a Black student organization, spoke and understood the English language, and were a current undergraduate student at Grace University.

As noted in a study by Hannon, Woodside, Pollard, and Roman (2016), selecting participants who are in their sophomore, junior, or senior year will mean that they should have had enough experiences navigating and interacting within the campus environment. To avoid recruiting students from only one class level or type of Black Student Organization, some students were excluded from the study. The limited literature on both Black undergraduate women and their extracurricular involvement at the PWIs, further informed my decision to select the study's participants. Black undergraduate women are understudied despite experiencing unique challenges at PWIs due to racism and sexism (Winkle-Wagner, 2015). Thus, this study fills a gap in the higher education literature while providing a safe space for Black undergraduate women to share their stories about their level of involvement in Black student organizations.

Six participants were recruited for the study. The recommended number of participants for a qualitative study can vary (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The total number of participants is appropriate as it is consistent with what is needed to conduct a case study design.

Data Collection

Consistent with qualitative procedures presented in Creswell and Poth (2018), multiple sources of information were collected to strengthen the analysis process. This data collection included interviews, observation notes, a demographic survey, and various documents. Prior to conducting the study, I met with a Black undergraduate woman who was a member of a Black student organization on campus. The pilot study provided me with a good opportunity to strengthen my research questions as well as practice my

interview skills. Below, you will find more information related to the data collection procedures followed during the study.

Interviews

Three 60 minute, one on one recorded interviews were scheduled with each participant. There was a total of 18 interviews for the study. Semi-structured interviews were used to gain insight and further understanding about the unique experience of Black undergraduate women who are involved in a Black student organization. To assure that all interviewees were asked similar questions, all interviews were recorded, and an interview protocol was used to guide the interview [Appendix D INTERVIEW PROTOCOL]. This process helped me as the researcher stay consistent and standardized throughout the data collection period (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interview questions that concerned why and how were incorporated into the interview protocol, as those types of open-ended questions allow the participant to tell their story in a way. The interview questions were formatted to prompt the participants to tell their stories about their experiences as members in a Black student organization.

Each interview had different themes. The first interview focused on their reason for becoming a member of the organization, what they liked or did not like about the organization's programming and mission, and lastly, the relationships that they had with their peers and the faculty and staff that helped support their student organizations. The second interview focused on the meaning they made of their involvement, what it was like to be a woman in the organization, the role they took on as a member within the organization, and their perceptions of the impact the organization had on them. Lastly, the third interview focused on how they managed their involvement, the strategies and

resources that they used to manage their involvement, as well as their thoughts and perceptions around whether their involvement in the organization helped them to persist. I used the saturation strategy of collecting data to identify when there was little to no new information evolving from the data.

The setting for each interview was in a conference room or private office within the College of Education at Grace University. Prior to the start of an interview, all participants were given a consent form to read and sign. After the participant read the consent form, I asked if they had any questions or concerns. Once each participant agreed to the conditions of participating in the research study, I had them sign the form. Potential participants who chose not to sign a consent form, who did not want to be recorded, or who did not speak or understand the English language, were excluded from the study.

With participant consent, each interview was transcribed. A \$50 Amazon gift card was given to participants who completed all three interviews. Immediately after the last interview, the participants were handed the gift card. There was no additional wait time for the exchange. I handled all participants' compensation fees. The PI was not responsible for any compensation for student participation in this study. After all individual interviews were conducted, there was a follow-up meeting or phone call with the participants to reflect on the information I collected.

Observations

In addition to conducting the interviews, I was able to observe three of the six participants at an organized event during the months of December 2019 and February 2020 [Appendix E OBSERVATION PROTOCOL]. Having the opportunity to observe some of the participants at an organizational event or meeting was beneficial to helping

me see how they navigated and interacted with other members in the setting. While at the observations, I took on the role as a nonparticipant also known as the observer as a participant (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This means that I was seen by organizational members, but I did not interact or engage with them in any way. Doing an observation was important as it provided me with the opportunity to make my own assumptions based on what I witnessed.

Documents Review

The documents that I collected and reviewed were related to the student's academic schedule, their organization's mission and bylaws, as well as the organization's programming and event content. It was important to collect the data as it was used to further inform me of the type of programming, events, and classes these students took and how often they were expected to engage in both academic and social activities.

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

To strengthen the validity of my data collection and analysis process, I wrote up post interview memos to reflect on what was shared. I also followed up with each participant to give them a chance to read my memos and clarify any discrepancies. To challenge my bias throughout the data collection and analyses process I met with peer researchers to share my memos and findings. I was encouraged to utilize fellow peer researchers to help review the evolution of my codes. All reviewers were researchers and educators who worked and studied in the field of higher education. Their commitment to giving honest feedback was helpful in helping me to keep an open mind about the meaning of certain codes and categories. I updated a few codes and categories once I went to review the data.

Once the data was transcribed, I engaged in a quality check to assure the accuracy of my researcher notes by referring to the recorded interviews. I then engaged in “epoche”, which is the process of removing biases and preconceived judgments that may hinder the evaluation and mental process of the data that participants submit to the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Once a review of the transcripts had been concluded, data was sorted and analyzed using Microsoft Word, Excel, and Dedoose which is a qualitative data analysis software. Using a combination of Microsoft Word, Excel, a qualitative data analysis software was appropriate as it provided me with systematic ways to store and organize data, locate and sort text, and document and manage codes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). During the data analysis process, I engaged in three rounds of open coding to highlight and track key recurring subjects and themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Below is an example of the coding process, in **Table 3.1**.

Table 3.1

Codebook Example

Code	Definition	Response
Level of involvement in organization	example of membership role and responsibilities	I take on the responsibilities of managing 11 Executive Board members and that is on top of also making sure that our rooms are reserved, all of our behind-the-scenes administrative stuff is kept up to date, and that we just maintain a positive light and university community. (Deena)
Meaning of involvement	reflection of what being a member means	To me, it means to be that example that I wanted when I came into college. Just to see like, oh, there's like a black girl doing that up there. Like, maybe I can be in her position next year, just to keep it as like generations you know? Like, I can do this, I can do that and also have a sense of family in the community. (Nicole)
Black women success at PWI	example of what it takes to be successful at a predominantly White institution	I think it takes definitely having a community of people who understand what you are going through, and who you can lean on for support because even in your spaces that are predominantly black, most of the university is still very white and sometimes you'll be the only black person in the room. So, being able to mentally deal with it can be really frustrating. So yeah, having people as a good support system is a really important thing to have in order to be successful. (Summer)
Management of academic and organization involvement	reflection of how the participant simultaneously manages time	It is a balancing act for sure. Knowing how much of my time and energy I can expend in what I want, versus what I am obligated to do. However, I don't usually trade my involvement and my academic work. I can't afford to compromise my academia for any of the other areas of my life that I've invested in. However, when I made the commitment to attend a meeting at PMC, I also made sure that I was still allotting time to work on personal development, and academic development in the process. It's not easy, but nothing in college is really easy. So, it's just about, like having my priorities in order. (Jonna)

(Table continued)

Benefits of having a Black Student Organization	reflection of the importance of having a Black student organization on campus	It is great to have an org like BSU that's encouraging students to feel comfortable in their identity as a black person especially since we are not the dominant person in society or at school. It feels good having that space to talk about how we feel and to have a sense of unity that you don't really find elsewhere as much. (Nina)
Relationship with peer in the organization	example of the type of relationship the participant has with peer members	I really try to have a sisterhood. So, I'm really close to all of them because we all have this strong sense of responsibility to owe it as women and women of color specifically to create and have this space for us. So, we're all pretty close. (Betty)

As explained in Creswell and Poth (2018), I used a case study analysis approach to analyze the data.

This process consists of the researcher, describing personal experiences with the study, constructing a list of significant statements from the participant data, grouping the lists into broader units of information, creating a description of what the participant experienced, drafting a detailed description of how the experiences happened, and writing a composite description of the phenomenon (p. 201).

Further, as I reviewed the descriptions from the analyzed data, I utilized parts of the Black Feminist Thought and Student Involvement Theory to help conceptualize and make meaning of the study's results. The specific Black Feminist Thought tenants that helped ground this study were: Black women oppression, self-definition, and controlling images. The tenants provided a strong background to my analysis. Some things that I was looking for when applying BFT was: whether participants felt oppressed or suppressed during their experiences as members, how they would make meaning of their experience, and how they would control the narrative and definition about what it means to be Black undergraduate women who are both successful students and active members of a Black Student Organization.

After initial codes and themes were assigned, I engaged in member checking by sharing my interview summaries and observation notes with participants. The member checking process helped to improve the accuracy, credibility, and transferability of the current research study. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), “member checking” and sharing my data help confirm and challenge some of the notes and perceptions I have as a researcher.

Data collected for the study was de-identified and all participants were assigned an ID number. No identifiable information was shared or published. All data will remain password protected and safely stored in a location accessible only to the primary researchers.

Role of the Researcher and Positionality

As described in Creswell and Poth (2018), it is essential that a researcher position themselves within the writing of the study to gain “understanding about the biases, values, and experiences that they will add to the research study” (p. 229). Creswell refers to this process as “reflexivity” which requires the researcher to state their experience with and position regarding a phenomena and how previous experiences will affect the data collection, data analysis, and overall interpretation of the topic being studied. As I engaged with participants, I informed them of my background and connection to the research study in order to further gain their trust and to show that I was transparent in my intentions to conduct this research. As a Black woman, it was important that I engaged in research that will positively impact other Black women who have some shared experiences related to navigating a predominantly White institution while being connected to a Black student organization (Collins, 2000).

As a Black lead administrator and a retired college athlete of a PWI, I recognize that those characteristics are linked to my past and current experiences working and going to school at a PWI. These experiences have shaped my biases and perceptions around race, gender, and how those intersections impact how I have and continue to navigate PWIs. For example, during my undergraduate years at a predominantly White institution in New York, I had the opportunity to participate in an extracurricular activity. This activity was women's basketball. My experience as a scholarship athlete was exciting yet sheltered in terms of how much time I was allotted to be involved in extracurricular activities outside of my athletics subgroup.

I was aware that seeing other Black students on campus was rare, that is unless they were connected to an athletic team. I often would hear of Black student events and activities that were geared towards students of color, but I never had the opportunity to be involved as a member due to athletic commitments. However, during the basketball off-season, I was able to be more of a casual spectator to those events. It is important to note that my excitement to attend grew from knowing that there would be culturally familiar food and music that I was used to because of my race and upbringing. Nevertheless, I never fully understood who put on these events nor did I have the background knowledge of how they came together to become a Black student organization on a White campus. Conducting this study challenged my personal bias that was constructed from past and present experiences.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Within this section you will find demographic background information and a descriptive summary of each participant's membership experiences at Grace University. The study consisted of six undergraduate women who were enrolled at Grace University. All profile information was gathered from a combination of the sources that included: a demographic survey, semi-structured interviews, observations, and submitted documents. The purpose of this study was to gain a better insight of the experiences of Black undergraduate women who are involved in a Black student organization at a public predominantly White institution beyond the first year. Grace University offers a large variety of student organizations on campus; however, at the time of the study there was no available institutional data detailing students' experiences within such groups. This study focused on understanding how these students are involved, the meaning they make of their participation, how they manage extracurricular activities with academics, their perceptions of the role involvement plays in their academic outcomes, and how they reduce barriers to persistence and degree completion.

Demographic Survey Data

All participants identified as African American. Each participant was an official member in at least one university approved student organization at the start of the study and during the data collection process. Please review the demographic profile **Table 4.1** for further review of the descriptive information.

Table 4.1

List of Participant Demographics

Participants	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Age	Academic Status	Major
Summer	African American	Female	21	Senior	Psychology
Deena	African American	Female	21	Senior	African American Studies
Nicole	African American	Female	21	Senior	Psychology
Betty	African American	Female	20	Junior	Art History
Nina	African American	Female	21	Senior	Communications and Media
Jonna	African American	Female	21	Senior	Theater

All participants were women who identified as Black and/or African American. Their ages ranged from 20 to 21. Five of the participants were seniors and one was a junior. Students were registered in one of the following majors: African Studies, Communications, Film, Psychology, and Theater. **Table 4.2** highlights information related to each participant’s organization, role within the organization, and the number of years as a member in the organization. Please note that although students joined organizations as general body members, some students were also interested in taking on leadership roles. Within these roles they helped curate and create programming as a way to help keep Black students engaged in the organization. Holding a leadership role was not a requirement for the study.

Table 4.2

Organization Information

Participants	Student Organization	Role Held Within the Organization	Years in the Organization
Summer	Psychology Majors of Color	Founder and President	2
Deena	Black Student Union	President	4
Nicole	Black Student Union	Vice President	3
Betty	Women Of Color Creatives Collective	President and Founder	2
Nina	Black Student Union	Vice President	4
Jonna	Psychology Majors of Color	General Body Member	2

In the next section, you will find a case profile for each participant. The profiles are based on information from the interviews, demographic surveys, observations, and documents. Each summary will include information pertaining to their academic and membership background, membership experiences, role with the organization, the meaning they make of their involvement, their management of extracurricular activities and academics, and lastly, their perceptions of the role that their involvement plays in their quest to persist, to succeed and to overcome barriers to college persistence while attending a predominantly White institution.

Participant Case Profiles

Deena

I just want to involve myself in more roles and things that allow me to learn about black success, black struggles, and black rights. I think being a part of this organization has allowed me to open myself up a lot more than then when I came into college.

Academic Background

Deena was born and raised in Darby, PA. Prior to going to college, she attended a high school that had a predominantly Black student population. She enrolled in Grace University as a freshman and was on pace to graduate with an African American Studies major by Spring 2020. Deena was a senior when interviewed. Based on her academic experiences and senior year GPA she considered herself a “B student” who was doing fairly well. However, she also recounted that she had some challenges with managing stress which then would lead to procrastination. When asked to describe how much time and effort she put into academics, she shared that she spent 15 hours or more a week on her academics. In general, she considered herself a big procrastinator who needed to be organized because she noticed that a lot of her effort went into trying to finish things at the last minute. When asked to describe what she thought it takes for a Black woman to be successful at predominantly White institution, she explained:

I think, for us to be successful, we just have to stand our ground. A lot of times I second guess myself when I shouldn't have and that's just something that I have to live with. So, I think it takes standing our ground, being true in our words, and just not letting anybody make us feel bad for how we feel.

Membership Background

Deena was an active member of the Black Student Union during her entire four years of college. She was one of 75 members in the organization at the time of the study. To maintain membership, she and others were required to pay membership dues and attend at least two organization meetings and/or events per semester. On average Deena would spend 20 hours or more a week on things related to the Black Student Union. When asked what drew her to join the organization and her perceptions of the kind of programming and events they hosted, she shared that she enjoyed the events and appreciated the opportunity to connect with other Black peers on campus. The Black Student Union hosted a lot of events. The programming included topics about current events, Black identity, self-care, Black history, serving the Black community and other culture related activities. In her own words, she expressed:

I thought the programming was pretty decent. They talked about a lot of things that I didn't know existed. I remember one topic specifically being about appropriation and assimilation. That interested me a lot. They also had really fun events. Some of the events were thrown just to bring more black people together, because I know I didn't see a lot of black people at first, on campus before I switched my major [to African American Studies].

The programming of the organization was centered around the Black experience. More specifically, it was about building a sense of community and coming together to advocate for change. When asked to describe what the organization's mission was about, in her own words, she stated:

To just build a community, to serve the community, and to help us unite the outside community as well as the University community. We also just want to provide a space for black students and students of color to come and just talk about things that affect the black community, and how we can move forward and find a solution.

A description of the Black Student Union's mission can be found in Appendix F.

Membership Role

As a freshman, Deena joined the Black Student Union as a general body member but by the end of her first year she sought out information on how to be considered for a leadership position on the board. From sophomore to senior year, Deena held the role of President of the organization. In her role as President, she expressed that she takes on a very active and vocal role at all meetings and events which sometimes can be overwhelming yet rewarding. More specifically, she shared:

I take on the responsibilities of managing 11 Executive Board members and that is on top of also making sure that our rooms are reserved, all of our behind-the-scenes administrative stuff is kept up to date, and that we just maintain a positive light and university community.

When asked to describe whether she is expected to take on a lot of responsibilities within the organization, she shared:

Yeah, well, I heavily identify with what it's like to be a black woman, or like black womanhood, and I know that being a black woman means for you to be like a matriarch and for you to be, like the center of how everything gets done. So, I definitely think that a lot of what I should be doing is assumed and a lot of what I do is like things that people would expect me to do. I know one of my board members called me a mom, not too long ago and I was like, "Okay!"

Document Contributions

Each participant supplied documents that related to their experience within their organization. These documents ranged from flyers, organization bylaws, event presentations, and the organization's social media page. Deena was heavily involved in the creation of flyers, social media posts, presentations, and all content that was affiliated with the Black Student Union. All messaging and

announcements were centered around Black culture and resources to help the Black community. Themes and descriptions of the content from the documents were included during the data analysis.

Membership Relationship Experiences

During every interview, it was clear that Deena's experience as a member of the Black Student Union had been positive, empowering, meaningful, and sometimes overwhelmingly tense and hard to manage. For example, when asked about her experiences related to her relationships with other members, she expressed that she has a good relationship with most of the members and that she tries to make everyone feel comfortable but sometimes there's conflict when she tries to hold others accountable. She also felt as though she had to be aware of how much space she took up because some men seemed intimidated by her. In her own words, she shared:

I have a really decent relationship with most of the women on my board. They are all black women, of course. And we tend to understand each other, and we want to also understand the men in the group. However, three of the men have left because it became a matter of me holding them accountable but them thinking that I'm attacking them. So, it tends to be more tense with some of the men who are not used to dealing with my type of woman.... I would say it's hard having to recognize how much space I take up because I know that sometimes some men don't talk to me, or like they won't talk to me about certain things because I've taken up too much space, or I've made them feel like the answer I'm giving is the only answer provided. So, there's a level of intimidation or like a level of I don't necessarily want to have this battle with this person, or just even understanding the role of working with each other. I think that while it is obvious that black men are supposed to be leaders of the group, I think it's too much to force.

When asked to elaborate on what she meant by "my type of woman" she expressed how some of the men in the group tended to be more disengaged and less active in the organization, yet they would also be very resistant and argumentative at

times. One other important thing that came up in the interview was that Deena and her six sisters were raised by her mother who had given them vital life skills. For example, as a child, she was taught how to stand her ground, take the lead, and reassert herself when needed. Nevertheless, she described the negative encounters with the men as being nothing more than “a battle of respect.”

The Meaning of Membership and Involvement

Throughout our interviews it was clear that being a member of the Black Student Union on a White campus meant a lot especially when it came to connecting with her Black identity and socializing with other Black students who could relate to the struggle of being Black. When specifically asked to describe what being a member in such a group meant, she shared:

It definitely means a lot to me, I know that. For me, the last four years have just been a journey to location. My major is African American Studies, and I just want to involve myself in more roles and things that allow me to learn about black success, black struggles, and black rights. I think being a part of this organization has allowed me to open myself up a lot more than then when I came into college. I was really shy, and I didn't want to talk to anybody, and I didn't really want to be vocal in fear that I'll be wrong. So, I think being a part of these organizations allows you to put a lot more trust into yourself because you're also providing information to people who don't have that information. I think it's a very big thing to be a part of the black organization. It's almost like you're not known unless you're participating because there's this idea that we exist within a White university and Black university, and you always want to be both visible in White spaces of the university and also in the Black spaces within the university. So, I think that although I don't necessarily want to be visible all the time, I definitely understand how to make myself visible.

When asked what it means to be a female member in a Black student organization, she shared, “I don't know if it necessarily means anything simply because there's little male presence as it's mostly female seeking membership or leadership roles,

from what I've seen in my years that I've been here.” When asked to describe what the organization’s mission meant to her, she shared:

It means a lot to me. I plan to do nonprofit work and teach black culture and black studies when I leave school. So, it means a lot to me, especially because I know, within our mission, we've taken it to the streets and literally just participated in communities that we've never seen before, and I think it's allowed me to be a lot more well-rounded in my experience of being a black person and dealing with other black people. It's also definitely allowed me to put my studies to work, when it comes to just understanding the roles that we have been placed in and the roles that we definitely are destined to be in. So, I think the mission has really propelled into my life and helped me to catapult myself.

Further, when asked to describe what the programming meant to her, she shared:

“It has a lot of meaning because I feel like a lot of the programming actually applies to my life being that I am black and a black woman.” Additionally, when asked to describe what her role within the organization meant to her, she shared:

Honestly, I don't even know if I have let that sink all the way in yet. I always feel weird about promoting the fact that I'm the president because I don't want to seem like I'm too big headed, because I'm just not an ego-based person. So, a lot of times, I tend to like, draw back on my title, because I don't want anybody else to feel small. So, I don't necessarily know. It's allowed me to be more reliant in my role as the guardian of the black community. I feel like black women are just like the center of a lot of things, including this community. So, I think it's allowed me to step more into the guardian role because I don't want other people to feel intimidated.

Management of Extracurricular Activities and Academics

Deena was an active member of the Black Student Union who attended meetings and programs between two to three times a week depending on the organization’s calendar and needs. Although she was a dedicated member, she quickly understood that how she managed the time spent on extracurricular activities and academics would impact her mental health and academic outcomes. In fact, she shared that she used to

think about limiting and cutting back on her involvement in the organization to focus on academics and also to take an emotional break due to feeling exhausted and unappreciated. One thing that helped her manage being a member of a student organization while also focusing on academics was that she could rely heavily on her fellow board members to help when she needed to focus more on her academics. Below, reflects a time that she found it hard to focus on academics due to her membership responsibilities and involvement in the Black Student Union. In her own words, she shared:

I'm in the process of filling out applications for a job, but I had to put it aside because the men that I put in charge of the black men's program failed to get it done. So, I had to finish that along with the other women on my board. In general, I think that people always come to me with questions. So, a lot of the time I have to stop what I'm doing to figure something out for them or to help them. So, I definitely think my academics have taken a back seat sometimes.

Lastly, when asked to reflect on whether she felt her membership and involvement in a Black student organization contributed to your persistence, she shared:

I think it definitely does. There was a time in my college career where I didn't have my financial aid together and I was trying to figure out a way to stay at this school. And one of my main thoughts was like, I have to be here because I want to be a part of BSU and I want to be able to finish out what I started. I think it just makes me continue to want to do better. So, when I think about us being a Black student organization, we already know that we're not being looked at as an actual asset to the university. So, it always just drives us to be better, so that we're more recognized, more visible, and so that more people will actually come to the university and carry out the legacy that we have set in place for the Black student organization.

Summary of Deena's Profile

In general, Deena described herself as a very nurturing and meticulous person who was very hands on and over involved in the organization. During the interviews and

observations, it was clear that she was passionate about connecting with fellow members and elevating the programming of the Black Student Union. However, she often felt exhausted and unappreciated for her work and contributions to the organization. Nevertheless, she persisted and valued the opportunity to be a part of a Black centered organization while at a predominantly White institution because she felt it was a necessary space that helped create a sense of community and safe space for Black students to learn about new things while sharing racial experiences. As she prepared for graduation, she was adamant about making sure that she left the organization with all the resources it needed to continue progress and be successful

Nicole

We don't see each other in our classes and stuff, so, it's like a breath of fresh air to see people that look like you and talk about related experiences and stuff like that.

Academic Background

Nicole was born and raised in Queens, NY. She enrolled in Grace University as a freshman and was on pace to graduate with a Psychology major by Spring 2020. She was a senior at the time of her interview. Based on her academic experiences and senior year GPA she considered herself a B student who was serious about submitting assignments on time. When asked to describe how much time and effort she put into academics, she shared that she spent 2 hours a day and a total of 10 hours a week on homework. When asked to reflect on what it takes for a Black woman to be successful at a predominantly White institution, she expressed:

I think it takes knowing yourself, like knowing who you are as a person, and not letting the institution institutionalize you. So, like, just keeping knowledge of who you are and how you identify and go about moving in spaces that aren't for you.

Throughout our interactions, it was clear that Nicole had a strong will and planned to be academically successful. Whenever Nicole encountered a barrier that had the potential to impact her success, she shared that she never gave up and that her mother helped her get through everything. Having a strong support system was beneficial to her success in college.

Membership Background

Nicole was an active member of the Black Student Union for three years. She was one of 75 members at the time of the study. To maintain membership, she and others were responsible for paying dues, maintaining a professional manner, and attending a few events each semester. On average, Nicole would spend 6 hours or more a week meeting up and engaging with the members of the Black Student Union. When asked what drew her to join the organization and her perceptions of the kind of programming and events they hosted, she shared that she enjoyed the events and appreciated the opportunity to connect with other Black peers on campus. In her own words she expressed: “I like the programming a lot, because of the topics they would have. They would have serious topics where they talked about politics and African American people.” The programming of the organization was centered around the Black experience but more specifically about building a sense of community and coming together to advocate for change.

Nevertheless, when asked to describe what the organization’s mission was about, in her own words, she stated:

The mission is to create a safe space for Black and African American students to come to and be a part of our meetings. You know, because we attend a PWI, we don't see each other in our classes and stuff. So, it's like a breath of fresh air to see people that look like you and talk about related experiences and stuff like that.

When asked to describe her perception of the organization’s activities and programming, she shared:

When I first came in, I saw it as my time to see the people that I'm not usually seeing in my classes and stuff. You know, like seeing people that look like me and people that talk about things that I'm interested in or sharing and talking about resources on campus that they know about, that I didn't.

A description of the Black Student Union's mission can be found in Appendix F.

Membership Role

Nicole became a member of the Black Student Union during her sophomore year. At the start of her membership, she held the role of secretary, and then by Junior year she became the vice president and the treasurer. In further discussing her roles, she shared that she was vocal when she needed to be, and she really accepted her role as second in command to the president. Nicole was very mindful about not overstepping her leadership boundaries. A list of some of her responsibilities as vice president included: to manage projects, to delegate tasks, and to oversee the budget. In her own words, she shared:

So as vice president, I delegate tasks, and I make sure everybody is doing their job. Also, I'm treasurer for the Black Student Union, I had to pick up another position, because we had a role vacancy and so, I also make sure our funds are right. I create budget sheets and stuff like that. And I stay on top of us with community service and stuff like that.

Document Contributions

Each participant supplied documents that related to their experience within their organization. These documents ranged from flyers, organization bylaws, event presentations, and the organization's social media page. Nicole was heavily involved in the creation of flyers, social media posts, presentations, and all content that was affiliated with the Black Student Union. All messaging and announcements were centered around Black culture and resources to help the Black community. Themes and descriptions of the content from the documents were included during the data analysis.

Membership Relationships

It is important to note that a lot of Nicole's experiences as a member of the Black Student Union have been related to her leadership role on the executive board. Nicole had a lot of positive experiences with members of the organization but there were a few times that she and the other women felt like they had to defend themselves against some of the male members. Despite these experiences, she mostly felt very close to members regardless of their gender, and she did her best to let all members know that she would be there for them as someone that they can relate to and rely on. In her own words, she shared:

They definitely reminded me of like a little family because it's like, they come to meetings and like, they come and talk to us after. Like, we try to be as personable as possible, because we're all the same and like college and doing stuff like that. And also, when I see them outside of the meetings and stuff, I'll speak to them, and just let them know, "Hey, if you ever need anything you can reach out to me."

Nicole was really connected to the organization. She saw members within the organization on a regular basis so her familiarity with them was natural. When asked to describe how connected she was to the organization, she expressed:

I feel very connected to them, over the years it's really felt like a literal family. I feel like I can talk to them about my issues at home, school, and other stuff like that without having to be scared of what they have to say, or worried about their judgment, because, they're going through the same stuff I'm going through. So, I do feel connected in the sense where it's very relatable, between all of us.

To maintain those positive relationships, Nicole made a conscious effort to talk and engage with other members whenever they crossed paths or attended the same organization activities. When asked if she could remember having any other negative

experience as a member within the organization, she shared that outside of a few tense moments with some of the men in the group, she didn't personally have any. However, she did recall a negative experience that some other members had while selling merchandise at their organization's table in the student center. In her own words, she shared:

Um, me personally, no not many outside of a few tense moments with some of the men in the group, but like, I've heard about the time when we had these shirts that said, "for us by us" that were for our BSU week, and we had a white student come to our table and say, "it would be funny if I were to wear this right?" and they were just looking at him like, "ugh!"

When asked to describe if she has ever felt like the organization wasn't a good fit she said, "no", and proceeded to describe members of the organization as, "They're like your home away from home." In general, her experiences within the group have been mostly beneficial to her college experience and personal development. Lastly, Nicole reported that she had not experienced any barriers to being involved in the Black Student Union and she in fact feels like she benefited from it by becoming a better student leader and public speaker.

The Meaning of Membership and Involvement

Throughout our interviews it was clear that Nicole was proud to be a member of the Black Student Union. Representation and being there to connect with her peers were both meaningful and important to her. When specifically asked to describe what being a member in such a group meant to her, she shared:

To me, it means to be that example that I wanted when I came into college. Just to see like, oh, there's like a black girl doing that up there. Like, maybe I can be in her position next year, just to keep it going across generations, you know? Like, I can do this, I can do that and also have a sense of family in the community.

Additionally, when asked to describe what it meant to be a Black woman within a Black Student Organization, Nicole expressed that it gets exhausting to constantly have to defend who she is as a woman and what she believes in. One encounter that she shared involved a Black male member verbally attacking the women about an alleged claim that Black women do not support the Black man. Below, is a reflection of that encounter:

So, all of our programs may have mainly the view of the female and not really one of the males. So, we kind of encourage the males to speak up and stuff like that. So, we actually had a program like two weeks ago on the black man, and this man came out and was like, how the black woman doesn't support the black man and all of this other stuff and so the other women in the room were taken aback because it's like, "We are like your mothers! So, how are you saying we don't support you, when we literally brought you up, supported you through life?" So, it's a constant exhaustion of having to always defend ourselves, but then we also defend everybody else in a sense.

Management of Extracurricular Activities and Academics

Managing extracurricular activities with academics can be challenging for some students. As an active member of the Black Student Union, Nicole would attend meetings and programs that would take up about 6 or more hours a week depending on the organization's calendar and needs. In comparison, when it came to her academics, she would spend 2 hours a day but no more than 10 hours a week on studying and homework. If you factor in going to class, personal appointments, and other academic or social responsibilities it is important that students prepare and plan effectively to have an increased chance to have positive academic and social outcomes. When asked to reflect on a time when she found it hard to focus on academics due to her membership responsibilities and involvement in the Black Student Union, she explained that being a part of the organization actually helped her focus on academics because she was always around folks who were also thinking about schoolwork while in a social setting.

Strategies to Cope and Manage Extracurricular Involvement and Academics

Nicole considered herself a person that was organized and serious about planning to succeed. When asked whether she had experienced any academic challenges due to her involvement, she explained that she had little to no academic challenges because she valued the idea of planning properly by incorporating study resources like a planner. One thing that helped Nicole prioritize her academic responsibilities was her loyal team members who often helped her carry the load of managing an organization. Being able to share the organization's administrative and programming responsibilities with other members was beneficial to her involvement. When asked whether she felt her involvement played a role in her decision to persist, she shared:

I think it does. For me, it keeps me motivated and it's helped me to become better at time management and organizing. And it also gives me something that I'm passionate about. It's just like another layer of why I'm persisting and keeping focused on being in school.

Further, when asked to reflect on whether she felt her membership and involvement in a Black student organization contributed to your persistence she shared,

Being in my organization makes me feel encouraged to remain persistent in school. The organization's atmosphere and the people it provides helps me persist and have equal opportunities which I wouldn't have if I didn't have this organization at this university.

Summary of Nicole's Profile

In general, Nicole considered herself a very passionate and engaging person who was very hands on and impactful behind the scenes of the organization. During the observation and every interview it was clear that she was passionate about connecting with fellow members and elevating the programming of the Black Student Union. There were no self-reports of her struggling academically while being involved in the

organization. As she prepared for graduation, she was proud of the work she had done in the organization and hoped that she left a good example for others of how to lead and serve. Nicole hoped that her track record of being a successful student and active member of a Black Student Organization could inspire other young Black girls and adult women to follow in her footsteps. When asked how the organization had changed her, if at all, she shared: “I will say it's made me more vocal. I know a lot of people are going through what I'm going through, so to speak up in certain situations could be helping somebody else that was once like me.”

Summer

To me, it means actually making your own space that is specifically for you.

Academic Background

Summer was born and raised in Sleepy Hollow, NY. Prior to going to college, she attended a high school that had a majority White and Latinx student population. She enrolled in Grace University as a freshman and was on pace to graduate with a Psychology degree by Spring 2020. She was a senior at the time of her interview. Based on her academic experiences and senior year GPA, she was an honors student who considered herself an A student who did not have academic challenges. She presented as someone who was very serious about her academics. When asked to describe how much time and effort she put into academics, she shared that she spent 5-10 hours a week on homework, but the time could fluctuate depending on the week. Throughout our interactions it was clear that Summer had felt effective communication and time management helped her stay focused on the things that mattered most. When asked to reflect on what it takes for a Black woman to be successful student at a predominantly White institution she expressed:

I think it takes definitely having a community of people who understand what you are going through, and who you can lean on for support, because even in your spaces that are predominantly black, most of the university is still very white and sometimes you'll be the only black person in the room. So, being able to mentally deal with it can be really frustrating.

Membership Background

Summer was the co-founder and President of the Psychology Majors of Color Organization. She was one of 56 members. The organization was newly created in 2018 and operating in its second year at the time of her interviews. Summer was an active

member since the start of the organization at Grace University. To maintain membership, she and others were responsible for paying dues and attending at least three meetings or events each semester. When asked about what drew her to create the organization, and also about what her perceptions were of the kind of programming and events they curated and hosted, she shared that she enjoyed the events and appreciated the opportunity to connect with other Black peers on campus. In her own words, she expressed:

Well, we wanted to make sure that we were doing things that were fun, because the other professional development type of things that happen in psychology orgs were kind of bland and so we wanted to make something more interactive and have people be engaged. And we also wanted to talk about mental health issues and like other social commentaries.

Further, when asked to describe what the organization's mission was about in her own words she stated:

We want to help psychology students of color and others within this general genre of studies to have a sense of community on campus, because before our org existed, we did not have a space for us to meet and come together. So, the mission is to build a sense of community, also to give resources regarding professional development, and/or the space to talk about mental health issues within our communities.

Most of the events that they put on had a theme related to topics like mental health, how to be a successful psychology major, and professional development. A description of the Psychology Majors of Color Organization's mission can be found in Appendix G.

Membership Role

As mentioned, Summer was the co-founder and President of the Psychology Majors of Color Organization. In her role as President, she oversaw all programming and events which came with the responsibility of creating content, marketing the organization, doing outreach, and hosting and staffing events. When asked to describe

what her role meant to her, she shared: “I’m the co-founder and the President, so this organization is like my baby. So, I take a lot of pride in everything we do, like I have my hands in basically all of the organizational stuff. I love this work.”

Document Contributions

Each participant supplied documents that related to their experience within their organization. These documents ranged from flyers, organization bylaws, event presentations, and the organization’s social media page. Summer was heavily involved in the creation of flyers, social media posts, presentations, and all content that was affiliated with the Psychology Majors of Color organization. All messaging and announcements centered around affinity, mental health, and professional development. Themes and descriptions of the content from the documents were included during the data analysis.

Membership Relationships

Summer reported that she had had nothing but positive experiences when interacting with members of the organization. To maintain those positive relationships, she made a conscious effort to acknowledge and engage with other members whenever they crossed paths or attended the same organization activities. When asked if she could remember having any negative experiences with other members within the organization, she shared that she hadn’t had any negative encounters with other members. In her own words she shared information about her relationships with members:

I’d say me and my executive board members have a really good relationship because we meet more frequently. Also, we are in contact with each other even outside of meetings. So, I’d say we’re pretty cohesive. And then when we meet in general body meetings, our relationship with our general body members are really good. They’re usually like receptive to the stuff that we have.

As the interviews went on it was evident that Summer was really connected to the organization. She saw members within the organization on a regular basis so her familiarity with them felt exciting. When asked to talk more about how connected she was to the organization she mentioned that she was deeply connected because she created the organization's mission and really cared about supporting its members. When asked to describe if she had ever felt like the organization was not a good fit, she said that she had never felt that way. In general, her experiences within the group have been mostly beneficial to her college experience and professional development. Summer reported that she had not experienced any personal or academic barriers to being involved in the organization. Her one challenge was related to trying to recruit members and getting the word out about the existence of such an organization.

The Meaning of Membership and Involvement

Throughout our interviews it was clear that Summer was proud to be a member and the co-founder of the Psychology Majors of Color Organization. Having a Black space that exists to help talk to Black students and other students of color about mental health and professional opportunities within the field of Psychology was very meaningful and important to her. When specifically asked to describe what being a member of such a group meant to her, she shared:

To me, it means actually making your own space that is specifically for you. Especially within the psych department where it's a lot of women. There's representation for us as women in that respect, but it's still very white space. So, actually having a space that is specifically for us, is refreshing, especially because I like co-founded the org. Creating that space was really enjoyable and yeah, it just means a lot to be able to have that here.

Additionally, when asked to describe what it meant to be a woman within her organization, she expressed that it didn't mean much because the students in the major were mostly women. However, she did express that being a Black woman running the organization was meaningful. In her own words she shared:

Well, within Psych, it is a mostly a female dominated field. So, being a woman isn't really like a big deal. Instead, I'd say it does feel nice to be a Black woman running an org because it's like a position of power. And usually, we don't always have those. So, thinking of it from that aspect, I'd say it feels good. But just like in general, I'd say it's not that uncommon.

When asked to describe what the mission and programming meant to her, she shared:

It means a lot, because I have a part in the curating and I try to make sure the programming is the best it can be when it comes to having a message to it, and also like, making sure our members take something away from it so that it's not just centered around them sitting in a classroom. It also means not having it feel like they are in class part two. Instead, the programming becomes more meaningful and impactful in someone's day.

Management of Extracurricular Activities and Academics

Managing extracurricular activities with academics can be challenging for some students but Summer seemed to have had a firm idea of how to manage. As an active member of the Psychology Majors of Color, Summer would attend meetings and programs that would take up to four or more hours a week depending on the organization's calendar and needs. In comparison, when it came to her academics, she would spend 5-10 hours a week between studying and homework. If you factor in going to class, personal appointments, and other academic or social responsibilities it is important that students prepare and plan effectively to have an increased chance to have positive academic and social outcomes.

Strategies to Cope and Manage Extracurricular Involvement and Academics

Through our interviews, Summer presented as a person that was a self-starter who was organized and not afraid to ask for help if needed. When asked whether she had experienced any academic challenges due to her involvement she explained that she had little to no issue managing academics and membership because she was good at time management. One other thing that kept Summer organized and focused was a support system and the collaborative efforts of her board members. She also shared in her own words:

Yeah, I would say it takes definitely like time management and effective communication, and like being able to ask for help when you need it. Especially because like us black women, we tend to just take things on, like, “Okay, well, I got it, I got it.” But like, it takes a village to like get these kinds of things done and done well.

Further, when asked to reflect on whether she felt her membership and involvement in a Black student organization contributed to your persistence she shared, “I’m not sure it really impacted my decision to stay in college. Dropping out was never an option, so I would’ve been in college with or without doing PMC.”

Summary of Summer’s Profile

In general, I could tell that Summer was a very motivated, passionate, and engaging person who had her hands on all aspects of the organization. During every interview it was clear that she was eager to connect with fellow members and elevate the programming of the organization. There were no self-reports of her struggling academically while being involved in the organization. As she prepared for graduation, she remained proud of the organization she created. When asked how the organization

had changed her, if at all, she shared that it made her feel more aware of the differences between her organization and others, because she was involved in the process of having this space. She also shared:

I would say it kind of heightened my awareness of just how white certain spaces are and how white like, certain student org spaces are because PMC collaborated with other orgs like Psychology major Association and overall, their events had more like a white attendance and so I've just really noticed the difference between our org having students of color, and mostly Black students

Jonna

The organization has made me recognize that I'm not as alone as I feel all the time and it inspired me to advocate more in the ways that I can for the groups that I can.

Academic Background

Jonna was born and raised in Brooklyn, NY. Prior to going to college, she attended a high school that had a diverse student population. Jonna enrolled in Grace University as a freshman and was on pace to graduate with a Theater major by Spring 2020. She was a senior during the time of her interviews. Jonna considered herself a B student who had a few academic challenges during her freshman and sophomore years due to a host of personal reasons that she did not want to include in the interviews. She did, however, say that the academic challenges were unrelated to her membership of the organization she talked about during the interview. Nevertheless, Jonna presented herself as someone who was resilient and aware of when she needed to get her priorities together to improve academically. When asked to describe how much time and effort she put into academics, she shared that she spent 15-20 hours a week on homework, but that the time could fluctuate depending on the week. Throughout our interactions it was clear that Jonna had often felt like learning to manage things in college was like a balancing act. When asked to reflect on what it takes for a Black woman to be successful student at a predominantly White institution she expressed:

To seek out education and research outside of what is being taught to you and your courses, staying educated on the subject that, you know, will support you in advocating for yourself in the spaces that college demands and having a diverse enough friend group so that you are not caught off guard by culture shock.

Membership Background

Jonna was a general body member of the Psychology Majors of Color Organization. She was one of 56 members. The organization evolved in 2018. The organization was newly created and operating in its second year during the time of her interviews. Jonna had been a moderately active member in the organization since its start. To maintain membership, she and others were responsible for promoting and attending at least two or three meetings or events throughout the year. When asked what drew her to join the organization and her perceptions of the kind of programming and events their organization offered, she shared that she enjoyed the events and appreciated the opportunity to connect with other Black peers on campus who shared similar experiences. The space made her feel comfortable. In her own words she expressed:

I was excited to see that there was something being done for and by people of color who had concerns about the mental health and wellness of students of color at the university. And I thought that the formality of it created a safe space, but also a brave space, too, I guess. The two contradict each other at times but generally speaking, like it's a space where students can ask questions that they might not be comfortable asking in their classrooms, because often participants or attendees at PMC meetings share their experience of being the only person of color in their other classes.

Further, when asked to describe what the organization's mission was about in her own words she stated:

The mission as far as my participation goes, is to create visibility and safe space for black and POC students at the university to discuss lots of subjects that come up in psychology classes, but also just in our lives psychologically. We also discuss the effects of the institution on students of color.

Most of the events that they put on had a theme related to topics like mental health, self-care, and professional development. A description of the Psychology Majors of Color Organization's mission can be found in Appendix G.

Membership Role

Jonna was a general body member of the Psychology Majors of Color Organization. She was a moderately active member of the organization. In her role as general body member, she helped promote the events a few times a year. In her own words she explained:

We show up and participate in workshops. Some are more interactive than others and sometimes, they are lecture based so you can just sit, watch, and listen. And other times they are more engaged, and you have the option to hold out and withhold participation

Document Contributions

Each participant supplied documents that related to their experience within their organization. These documents ranged from flyers, organization bylaws, event presentations, and the organization's social media page. Since Jonna was a general body member, she was not heavily involved in the creation of content for the Psychology Majors of Color organization. She did however share examples of flyers that included messaging and graphics that centered mental health resources and professional development opportunities. Themes and descriptions of the shared content from the documents were included during the data analysis.

Membership Relationships

Jonna reported that although folks in the organization were sometimes "clicky," she had mostly positive experiences when she would attend meetings and events. She felt like the organization was mindful about making space to hear about other people's

experiences. To maintain positive relationships within the group, she shared that the organization's leaders did a good job of taking accountability. They did this by checking in to ask if everyone's still comfortable with the subject matter at a meeting. And if they are not, then asking what people need, "as opposed to assuming is what I think helps us maintain positive relationships." When asked if she could remember having any negative experiences with other members within the organization, she shared that she has had some challenges, but she would not call it a negative encounter. In her own words she shared information about her relationships with members:

Not negative but challenging. For example, it's hard for people to speak up when we're having sexual violence and awareness conversations or culture conversations. Sometimes, it's not comfortable for everyone to share. So, it's not a bad experience at all. It's just important to make sure that people feel accounted for.

When asked to talk more about how connected she was to the organization she mentioned that she was deeply connected because she enjoyed being around Black students and she really related to coming together to contribute to the progression of Black people. When asked to describe if she had ever felt like the organization was not a good fit, she said no. In general, her experiences within the group have been mostly beneficial to her identity and personal development. She reported that the only barrier to her involvement was that she felt the organization could get "clicky". In her words she shared:

Generally speaking, the orgs can get clicky. There's an 11% black population and so when you whittle that down to like, who's black and who's a woman on campus? There's a handful of us and so what often ends up happening is that you are either in or you're out. And it's awesome to be in when you are and then sometimes it feels a little bit ostracizing when you're out. But that's the extent of the negative experiences. Like there's no actual like harm done. There's just sometimes the undertone of like, do I belong? You're not? Because it's hard to break the ice sometimes.

The Meaning of Membership and Involvement

Throughout our interviews it was clear that Jonna felt it was necessary to be affiliated with a Black student organization like the Psychology Majors of Color Organization because it gave her space to connect with others that were going through the same things as her. Having a Black space where Black students could talk about everyday things that affected them was very meaningful and important to her. When specifically asked to describe what being a member of such a group at a PWI meant to her, she shared:

I think very little can be accomplished, the farther out we're stretched from people who share the same identity as us. And I'm not saying that it's a requirement, and people have done it without support of folks from their own community. But it's tremendously helpful to be able to air out concerns and have those concerns be validated by folks who are going through a shared experience. So, since the institution doesn't make it a priority to garner spaces for POC to commune consistently, it means I have to seek black organizations like this out so that I and the people that I know, who are in need of recognition, can fight the system.

Additionally, when asked to describe what it meant to be a woman within her organization, she expressed that it meant a lot to have a majority women membership because she felt as though the university's sport programs and sub communities were geared toward men. In her own words she shared:

Since the university is a big sports school a lot of the communities that are designed and that exist are for POC who are often male, heavy, and led by a lot of men. So, it's meaningful to have an organization that is primarily female identifying folks on a regular basis. Because a lot gets lost in translation when you're trying to balance the energy of conversations centered around blackness, gender, and gender performance. Mansplaining still happens in black spaces.

When asked to describe what the mission and programming meant to her, she shared:

It means that people are listening, that I'm not just talking at a wall, which is often how it feels to be black and woman at this university. That means that like, what I share is implemented into further facilitation. For example, I help create surveys that are conducted so that the issues, concerns, and needs of the community are upheld to the best of everyone's ability.

Management of Extracurricular Activities and Academics

Jonna was a moderately active member of the Psychology Majors of Color. She would attend meetings 3 hours a month and events 2-3 times a year depending on her course load. When it came to her academics, she shared that she would spend 15-20 hours a week between studying and homework. If you factor in going to class, personal appointments, and other academic or social responsibilities it is important that students prepare and plan effectively to have an increased chance to have positive academic and social outcomes.

Jonna shared that in her senior year she tried her best to plan and be available for the things that are more of a strong commitment or priority. When asked to describe whether she ever had to choose between academics and involvement she said:

It is a balancing act for sure. Knowing how much of my time and energy I can expend in what I want, versus what I am obligated to do. However, I don't usually trade my involvement and my academic work. I can't afford to compromise my academia for any of the other areas of my life that I've invested in. However, when I make the commitment to attend a meeting at PMC, I also made sure that I was still allotting time to work on personal development, and academic development in the process. It's not easy, but nothing in college is really easy. So, it's just about, like having my priorities in order. I think about the times that I had earlier when I was less organized and failed at time management. For example, the times when I've decided to go to a PMC meeting over like, finishing a project.

When asked to describe whether she had ever considered limiting or cutting back on her involvement to focus on her academics she said:

Yeah, I have to consider all the time and fortunately, [with] PMC the setup is flexible enough that even if you miss a meeting, you can catch the next one. And their email lists updates are pretty thorough. So [you] know what you missed, and you want to know what's coming up to so you can weigh in and like I said, prioritize what is possible for you, and what's not. Also [it's] helpful to have One of my closest friends is the president. So, it makes [up] for what I miss, like, I get recaps, in our social time, so that I don't feel super left out. But at times, I definitely have to put my schoolwork over my extracurricular involvement. There weren't enough hours in a week.

To stay on top of things, Jonna shared that she would often use a calendar and limit her time on campus or with the organization. Lastly, when asked to reflect on whether she felt her membership and involvement in a Black student organization contributed to your persistence she shared:

Um, I think it's super helpful. However, I don't and I wouldn't necessarily call it a necessity because I've seen people succeed and do it without involvement in a Black student organization but the challenges are just different. You know, like, there are different challenges that arise with the commitment to a student org, than there are to a commitment to self so I won't say that it's like a make or break thing for whether or not you persist or succeed as a PWI but it can be incredibly helpful.

Summary of Jonna's Profile

In general, Jonna considered herself a supporter of Black student organizations. During every interview it was clear that she was passionate about connecting with fellow members. She showed her commitment to the organization by showing up when she could to contribute and participate in the programming that was specifically for the progression of Black students on a majority White campus. As she prepared for graduation, she remained a proud member of the organization's mission and its impact. It was evident that she saw her membership as a way to advocate for the needs of Black people on campus. When asked how the organization had changed her, if at all, she shared that it made her feel good and somewhat more powerful, because she was

involved in supporting the process of having this space. She also shared: “The organization has made me recognize that I'm not as alone as I feel all the time and it inspired me to advocate more in the ways that I can for the groups that I can.” Lastly, Joanna was very resilient in the way that she had the courage to bounce back after some academic challenges. Staying connected with the organization helped her grow and learn new things.

Nina

It feels good having that space to talk about how we feel and to have a sense of unity that you don't really find elsewhere as much.

Academic Background

Nina was born and raised in Bridgeport, CT. Prior to going to college, she attended a high school that had a diverse student population. She enrolled in Grace University as a freshman and was on pace to graduate with a Media and Communications major by Spring 2020. She was a senior at the time of her interview. Although she sometimes felt stressed about assignments, she did not consider that to be an academic challenge. Based on her academic experiences and senior year GPA she considered herself a B student. When asked to describe how much time and effort she put into academics, she shared that she spent 5 to 8 hours a week depending on the week. In general Nina knew that having personal dedication mixed with a tailored support system would be beneficial to her success. She further shared:

I think it takes a strong dedication towards both your academics and involvement in social spheres like the Black Student Union. I also think it's important to make sure that you have a support system that helps you throughout your experiences in school so that they can help you both academically and personally, because they both coincide.

Membership Background

Nina was an active member of the Black Student Union for four years. She joined the group as a freshman and by sophomore year she became a member of the board. Nina was one of two vice presidents on the board of the Black Student Union. At the time of the study, the organization had 75 members. To maintain membership in the organization, she and others were responsible for paying dues and attending a few

meetings and events each semester. On average, Nina would spend 3 hours or more a week meeting up and engaging with the members of the Black Student Union. When asked what drew her to join the organization and her perceptions of the kind of programming and events they hosted, she shared that the space felt welcoming and comforting and she had learned more about the organization during her freshman year as a general body member. In her own words, she expressed:

I knew about the programs that they threw because during my freshman year, I started going to meetings and different events. So yeah, that's how I kind of grew to, actually be interested in joining. I liked what they did and wanted to like to expand and be a part of that.

When asked to describe how vocal she was at events she shared that she was very active and vocal. She explained that she participated in discussions and always tried to give feedback about the events and programming so that the organization could continue to grow. Further, when asked to describe her perception of the organization's mission she stated:

My initial perception was just that they're very welcoming and that it's kind of similar to how I feel now that I'm a part of it. It is great to have an org like BSU that's encouraging students to feel comfortable in their identity as a black person especially since we are not the dominant person in society or at school. It feels good having that space to talk about how we feel and to have a sense of unity that you don't really find elsewhere as much.

A description of the Black Student Union's mission can be found in Appendix F. Lastly, when asked to describe what her role meant she shared that having a leadership role in the group provided an essential platform for her to help serve and connect with other Black students.

Membership Relationships

Nina reported that she had mostly positive relationships with the members. However, she also mentioned that it was difficult to bond with some of the new members as a senior because she studied abroad during her junior year. In her own words, she shared:

In the organization, I feel like, I have a pretty good relationship with everyone. I would say I'm closer to my co-vice president and my president, just because we've known each other longer. And like starting off last year, when I was studying abroad, I kind of didn't really have as much of an opportunity to bond as much as the new members, but I feel like we're all in like good terms. Like we feel comfortable like talking to each other.

When asked to talk more about how connected she was to the organization, she mentioned that she was deeply connected because she enjoyed being around Black students because it was a space where they could relate on things that they were going through as members of the same race. In her own words, she shared:

I also feel connected because we're all students who would like to have a space to come and discuss the stress of having assignments due and stuff like that. And it's also nice to have a space to discuss personal issues and issues that we all know exist in the black community.

Document Contributions

Each participant supplied documents that related to their experience within their organization. These documents ranged from flyers, organization bylaws, event presentations, and the organization's social media page. Nina was heavily involved in the creation of flyers, social media posts, presentations, and all content that was affiliated with the Black Student Union. All messaging and announcements were centered around Black culture and resources to help the

Black community. Themes and descriptions of the content from the documents were included during the data analysis.

The Meaning of Membership and Involvement

Throughout our interviews it was clear that Nina felt it was meaningful and fulfilling to be affiliated with a Black student organization like the Black Student Union because it gave her space to connect with others that were going through the same things as her. When specifically asked to describe what being a member of such a group at a PWI meant to her, she shared:

For me, it means like, it's just important for me to have, this kind of platform. I think that it really stems down to like our mission as an organization just having and being like a space for students to come together. I think that's so important, especially just because of like the daily stress that you face as like a black student. I think it's like, so important to just be involved with a group that cares about that. And that wants to bring about like, positivity

When asked to describe what it means to be a Black woman in the organization, she shared that it meant that she would have to deal with some of the stress that comes with being both female and Black. Lastly, when asked what the mission and programming meant to her, she shared: “It means a lot to me because we as all different people have come together and organized around this thing that is so important yet it's also fun.”

Management of Extracurricular Activities and Academics

Nina considered herself an active member of the Black Student Union. During the year, she would spend 3 hours or more a week meeting up and engaging with the members of the Black Student Union. When it came to her academics, she shared that she spent 5 to 8 hours a week depending on the week. If you factor in going to class, personal

appointments, and other academic or social responsibilities, it is important that students prepare and plan effectively to have an increased chance to have positive academic and social outcomes. Nina believed that it took dedication to manage the role of student and member.

When reflecting on how she strives for success while juggling academic and organization commitments, she stressed the importance of time management and clear communication. In her own words, she shared:

I would say exercising good time management and really making sure that you set aside time for each obligation or commitment that you have. Also, staying organized and motivated, and keeping positive people around you definitely creates the space for managing everything to be easier for you to stay on top and remain committed...Also, I would say just keeping clear communication with the other members, making sure that you're doing your part, whatever that might be attending, like events and just keeping, your participation up as well as your understanding of what's going on? and what our goals are as an organization.

When asked to describe whether she had ever considered quitting or cutting back on her involvement to focus on her academics, she shared, “No, I haven't. Because I feel like it hasn't gotten to a point where I felt that overwhelmed to need to think about quitting.” Further, when asked to reflect on whether she felt her membership and involvement in a Black student organization contributed to your persistence, she shared:

I think it does. For me, it keeps me motivated and it's helped me to become better at like time management and organizing. And it's because it's like something that I'm passionate about. It's just like another layer of why I'm persisting and keeping, you know, focused on being in school.

Summary of Nina's Profile

In general, Nina had a meaningful experience within the organization. During every interview, it was clear that she was passionate about connecting with fellow members while learning about her own identity. As she prepared for graduation, she

remained a proud member of the organization and she encouraged others to join. When asked how the organization had changed her if at all, she shared that it made her feel more in tune with what it means to be a Black person. In her own words she shared:

I feel like it's made me more in tune with my identity as a black person, and just like knowing more about my history, and the issues that we face now. So yeah, really like taking the time to delve into that and think about how important it is to speak about issues like that. And also, being more comfortable myself, because I was always comfortable in expressing being black.

Betty

Sometimes, when you're in white spaces, you can feel like you don't have a space and I think that when you start creating organizations or being a part of a collective that is predominantly black, you feel like you then have a space or that you are creating space that wasn't there before.

Academic Background

Betty was born and raised in Lanham, MD. Prior to going to college, she attended a high school that had a majority White population. She transferred to Grace University as a sophomore. She was a junior during the time of her interviews. Based on her academic experiences and junior year GPA she considered herself an A- student who encountered some academic challenges when she first transferred to Grace University. Despite those initial challenges, she presented as someone who was very serious about her academics. When asked to describe how much time and effort she put into academics, she shared that she spent 15-20 hours a week, but the time could fluctuate depending on the week. Throughout our interactions, it was clear that Betty knew that it takes a lot of mental strength and perseverance to stay focused while matriculating through college.

When asked to reflect on what it takes for a Black woman to be a successful student at a predominantly White institution, she expressed:

I think it takes a lot of strength and perseverance, because I feel like it's already a challenge being a black person specifically at a PWI. But like, as a black woman, there's already stereotypes that come from your gender, as well as your race. And I think like, being a black woman, you just kind of have to persevere through especially at a PWI. Especially, because of there being so many different types of people you don't know. Also, some people are international, and they've never seen a black person. So, it's just that I think it takes a lot of work to interact.

Membership Background

Betty was the founder and President of the Woman of Color Creatives Collectives. She was one of 25 members. The organization was newly created and operating in its second year during the study. Betty was an active member since the evolution of the student organization at Grace University. To maintain membership, she and others were responsible for paying dues and attending at least three meetings or events each semester. When asked what drew her to start the organization and her perceptions of the kind of programming and events they curated and hosted, she shared that she enjoyed the events and appreciated the opportunity to connect with other Black peers on campus. In her own words she expressed:

Well, it really kind of all started with just like an idea. I'm a transfer student and when I got here, I was tired of looking for my tribe and looking for people who I could connect with. And I couldn't find them. And I was like, all the spaces that I feel like I could fit into as a creative black woman, or just as a creative in general, are predominantly white, or if they weren't predominately white, they were predominately male leadership and it didn't really feel like an inviting space for me, and I didn't really see what I wanted happening. So, what I really wanted to have happen was it to be an organization that was for women of color that was creative that was focusing on like the development of your craft and focusing on networking opportunities.

Further, when asked to describe what the organization's mission was about, in her own words, she stated:

We really seek to be an empowering group for women of color. And we also seek networking opportunities. So, something that's really important to me is to have speakers come so we can have like a representation that we want to see reflected that we don't really see in school. Okay, like I'm, I'm an art history major, and I've don't think I've ever encountered a black art history professor.

Most of the events that they put on related to being creative, having a successful career post-graduation, socializing, and embracing who you are as a woman. A description of the Woman of Color Creatives Collectives mission can be found in Appendix H.

Membership Role

Betty was the founder and President of Woman of Color Creatives Collectives. Betty was an active member since the creation of the student organization at Grace University. In her role as President, she took on a lot of responsibilities. For example, she oversaw all programming and events which came with the responsibility of creating content, finding speakers, networking, and hosting events. When asked to describe what her membership role meant to her, she shared:

I feel like as the president, and also as a founder, it kind of just feels very heavy because it's just a lot of responsibility and I know that I'm going to leave eventually, and I don't want the organization to fall off because it's so important to me. So yeah, I think like a mission of mine is to get as many freshmen and underclassmen as possible to really be involved in this organization because I don't want them to feel like they could just drop off and then all this hard work that I've done, just goes nowhere.

Document Contributions

Each participant supplied documents that related to their experience within their organization. These documents ranged from flyers, organization bylaws, event presentations, and the organization's social media page. Betty was heavily involved in the creation of flyers, social media posts, presentations, and all content that was affiliated with the Woman of Color Creatives Collectives. All messaging and announcements centered around empowering Black women, the Arts and Entertainment field, professional development, and networking. Themes

and descriptions of the content from the documents were included during the data analysis.

Membership Relationships

Betty reported that she always had positive experiences when interacting with members of the organization. In her own words, she shared information about her relationships with members:

I really try to have a sisterhood. So, I'm really close to all of them because we all have this strong sense of responsibility to owe it as women and women of color specifically to create and have this space for us. So, we're all pretty close.

To maintain those positive relationships, she made a conscious effort to try to be honest and open by listening to and caring for members so that they stay connected to the organization. For example, she shared:

I always check in. For example, it's midterms week for us and this was also our first major meeting, but we've been meeting and planning heavily by having board meetings every Saturday, and I knew that this was like a lot for them to do. And I was just like, thank you guys for sticking your neck out for me. So, I just try being really nice to them because it is them helping me make this organization what it is. And I didn't want it to feel like um, I don't know like a like I didn't appreciate them. So, I try to make it known that I appreciate what they do and check in with them about anything that is going on.

When asked if she could remember having any negative experiences with other members within the organization, she shared that she once had an incident with another undergraduate female board member. More specifically, she expressed that she was met with resistance when trying to develop and push the women into a higher leadership position. The young woman was not ready to do so and felt that Betty was putting too much pressure on her. In the end, they resolved the misunderstanding, and it did not evolve to be anything negative. However, she does remember having a difference in

opinions with a Black male student of another organization who felt like her organization was not needed because his organization had already been doing similar things. More specifically she explained:

So, when I first started coming up with this concept for the organization, I tried to approach someone who had a similar kind of mission as me and he basically told me that my organization was not needed, and he was a black man. So, I was just like, okay. His standpoint was that people in his organization were already predominantly women. So, he felt like they didn't need my organization. But I was like, I don't really need your permission to create an organization that's mine. So, it kind of became that and we didn't end up collaborating. Although there is a new point of leadership now, I just don't really seek to collaborate with them anymore, just because I feel like that undertone of disrespect was there. And they still do have male leadership.

The Meaning of Membership and Involvement

Throughout our interviews it was clear that Betty was proud to be a founder and president of the Woman of Color Creatives Collectives. Having a Black space that exists to help talk to Black students and other students of color about their creativity and professional opportunities within the field of the Arts and beyond was very meaningful and important to her. When specifically asked to describe what being a member of such a group meant to her, she shared:

I think that it's kind of dope. I feel like it's very empowering because, I mean, sometimes when you're in white spaces, you can feel like you don't have a space and I think that when you start creating organizations or being a part of a collective that is predominantly black, you feel like you then have a space or that you are creating space that wasn't there before

Additionally, when asked to describe what it meant to be a woman within her organization, she expressed that it was extremely important because she benefited from being able to connect with women who were in the same major and going through the same thing as her on a white campus. In her own words she shared:

I think that's even more important because I'm kind of like a double minority. For example, I am a woman and an artist so, it's kind of like the odds are already against me. And I think being in that type of environment with other women of color who are in a similar situation just makes you feel like you can keep going. Because sometimes I feel like being in a predominately white space does take a toll on you mentally. In fact, I've heard a lot of people talk about imposter syndrome.

When asked to describe what the mission and programming mean to her, she shared: “It meant that there was an opportunity to constantly empower women to focus on their craft and their development as a creative person.”

Management of Extracurricular Activities and Academics

Managing extracurricular activities with academics can be challenging for some students but Betty seemed to have had a promising idea of how to prioritize her academics and organizational duties. As an active member of the Woman of Color Creatives Collective, she would attend weekly meetings that would take up 3-5 hours of her time a week depending on the organization’s calendar and needs. In comparison, when it came to her academics, she would spend 15 hours a week between studying and homework. When asked to describe a time, if any, that she thought about quitting or limited her involvement in the organization, she explained that she once quit another organization because it was time consuming. Further, she shared that the organization expected people to give too much of their time. Despite that incident, she never quit because it was affecting her academics, instead, she stepped back because she felt that she did not have the capacity to devote more of her time. Nevertheless, when it came to organization that she created, she expressed that she had never thought about quitting Woman of Color Creatives Collective because she had direct control over the time needed to meet the expectations of the organization. Lastly, when asked if she

experienced any academic challenges while being involved in the Black student organization she shared:

Yeah, I had academic challenges at the beginning of the semester because I underestimated my workload. And I was a part of two black organizations. One was this organization and the other one was a dance organization. The issue became that I started to have scheduling conflicts.

Strategies to Cope and Manage Extracurricular Involvement and Academics

Betty considered herself a person that relied on time management and prioritization as a way to be successful in college. When asked whether she had experienced any academic challenges due to her involvement, she explained that she did because she initially underestimated what it took to manage her coursework. One other thing that kept Betty organized and focused was a support system and the collaborative efforts of her board members. Lastly, she mentioned that she was aware of her priorities and limitations which in return helped her to stay organized. She shared in her own words:

I know my limitations and I would say time management can really be a thing that I try to implement really hard when I feel like, but I don't become overwhelmed with like, being a part of organizations, because I am very involved. But if I don't have time to be at practice or go to this discussion, I don't go.

Further, when asked to reflect on whether she felt her membership and involvement in a Black student organization contributed to your persistence, she shared: “I believe that my Black student organization has motivated me to persist and to become the best version of myself and that includes remaining enrolled in school through graduation.”

Summary of Betty's Profile

In general, Betty considered herself a very passionate and engaging person who had her hands in all aspects of the organization. During every interview, it was clear that she was passionate about connecting with fellow members and elevating the programming of the organization to help empower women. Although she struggled with managing her coursework when she first came to the University, she quickly became better at organization as time went on. As the year started to end, she remained proud of the organization she created. When asked how the organization had changed her, if at all, she shared that it made more socially aware of the issues that need solutions. More specifically, she shared:

Um, I feel like it's just made me want to be more socially aware. Because like I said before, I think sometimes we think of issues as like your problem or their problem. But I feel like it's our problem. And if you're not talking about it, then you're just an ally of the problem.

Summary of Case Profiles

This chapter provided a descriptive profile on each participant from the study. The details in each profile highlight both similarities and differences as it relates to a participant's organizational membership experience at a predominantly White institution. The information was gathered from the demographic survey, semi-structured interviews, submitted documents, and the institutional database. The participants described detailed information about their identity, academic background, membership background, and overall involvement. Further, I provided descriptions of each participant's organization mission and programming focus. A detailed discussion of the findings and theoretical framework can be found in the next chapter. The findings will include a cross case analysis of the participant stories and overall membership experiences.

Observations

I conducted two, 90-minute observations of three participants of the study. While at the observations, I took on the role as a nonparticipant, also known as the observer as a participant (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This means that I was seen by organizational members, but I did not interact or engage with them in any way. Doing an observation was important as it provided me with the opportunity to draw my own conclusions based on what I witnessed. Below, I have summarized the experience and the key findings of the observations. One observation was held in December of 2019 with Deena and Nicole and the other was completed in February of 2020 with Summer.

Observation One

In December of 2019, I observed Deena and Nya at a Black Student Union event titled the evolution of music. The programming was centered around the influence of older music on the new generation of children and young adults. This event took place in a large classroom located in one of the academic buildings on campus. When I arrived at the classroom where the event was happening, I immediately sat by myself because I was a bit early and wanted to get a good seat that was positioned off to the side. As time grew closer to the start time, I noticed that as students started to enter and take their seats they began to socialize in small groups. It appeared that most people knew each other. However, there were a few students who sat alone as they waited for the programming to begin. There were about 25 people who were present at the meeting. All students appeared to be Black.

Deena, Nicole, and another board member took turns facilitating the program and PowerPoint presentation. Before the start of the program, Deena went over the rules of

engagement which they refer to as Brave Space Agreement. Please see the statement below:

Brave Space Agreement:1.) Combat ideas not people. Respect everyone's viewpoint even if you do not agree, 2.) Self-care is important! If you need to leave the room, feel free to step out 3.) One Mic! Listen up and respect the speaker. 4. Call & Response: Ago - Are you listening / Can you hear me? and Ame - I can Hear You/ I am listening.

In total, the programming included a greeting with a reading of the Brave Space Agreement, future event announcements, an ice breaker, a Q&A discussion on music, and one interactive game of music trivia using an app called Kahoot. The programming was organized, fun, and engaging. All students participated which made the event a success. There were however times that the Deena and Nicole projected their voices to regain the attention of the members who were engaging in small side conversation. Other than that, my overall findings from the observation indicate that the programming was culturally relevant Black-centered, and educational. Additionally, based on my own observation, Black women were the majority gender present in the general body and on the board. Although there were a few male students present, women were more vocal during the discussions. The discussion was very respectful and there was no sign of tension between any members. Further, my observations reaffirm that Deena and Nicole took on leadership roles within the organization that required them to be vocal and active at the event. They did a great job sharing the responsibilities of hosting the members of the organization. Consistent with the interviews data, the organizational event appeared to provide a safe space for Black students to come together, socialize, engage in conversations or interactive programming that related to Black culture and the Black experience.

Observation Two

In February of 2020, I had the opportunity to observe Summer while she was at a Psychology Majors of Color information booth in the lobby of the campus student center. The main goal of the observation was to see how Summer interacted with both members and other individuals who approached the table. When I arrived at the Student Center, both Summer and another board member were setting up their organization's table. On the table was heart themed baked goods and candy for sale. They also had a banner and stack of fliers with their organization's name on it. In addition to that, there was a sign that explained that all profits would go towards supporting their organization.

At the time of the observation, there were other student organizations positioned alongside Summer's booth with a booth of their own. Throughout the duration of the observation, I observed students from various ethnicities coming over to inquire about the baked goods. As I stared on, I witnessed the students exchange money for cupcakes while simultaneously holding a conversation about the organization and its mission. Most of the students that approached them, however, appeared to either be Black or a person of color. All exchanges seemed pleasant and engaging. Summer was very vocal and welcoming to all that stopped by to learn more about the organization. As the time went on Summer would tidy up the booth and stand up to try to invite more folks to come and learn about the organization. In sum, my observation shows that Summer was an active representative and member of the organization. She had no problem being involved in the set-up and discussion with anyone who came to inquire about the organization.

Cross Case Analysis

I engaged in cross-case analysis to address each of the research questions. The purpose of this study was to gain a better insight of the membership experiences of Black undergraduate women who are involved in a Black student organization at a public, predominantly White institution beyond the freshman year. Understanding their experiences as members, the meaning they make of their involvement, how they manage extracurricular activities and academic responsibilities simultaneously, and their perceptions regarding the role extracurricular involvement in a Black student organization plays in their persistence and academic outcomes is essential to providing them with support that will help reduce barriers to persistence and degree completion.

Below, is a list of research questions that guided this study:

1. How do Black undergraduate women describe their experience as members of a Black student organization on a predominantly White campus?
2. How do Black undergraduate women make meaning of their extracurricular involvement in a Black student organization on a predominantly White campus?
3. How do Black undergraduate women simultaneously manage their extracurricular involvement and academic responsibilities while trying to reduce barriers to college retention
4. What perceptions do Black undergraduate women have regarding the role extracurricular involvement in a Black student organization plays in their persistence and academic outcomes?

How do Black undergraduate women describe their experience as members of a Black student organization on a predominantly White campus?

Culturally Relevant Experiences

All the participants in the study explained how important it was for them to be a part of the Black student organization. Findings from the study show that the participants were lacking a sense of community on campus which in return drove them to seek out or create opportunities to be in affinity with other Black students on campus. More specifically they were looking to have a safe space where they could discuss and share culturally relevant experiences. Here are few quotes from the participants: Nicole: shared: “Being a part of this community is very important because you may find yourself lost and afraid to seek peer help from classmates that don’t look like you. Further, Deena share, “Having these organizations provide safe spaces for Black students to connect with one another while which is important as they do not get to do so in their classes.”

Additionally, Betty shared:

To me it’s important to have access to Black orgs because being at a PWI sometimes can make you feel like you’re losing your culture as you assimilate to college life, and I think staying involved in Black orgs you get to hold on to and be around people that understand the Black experience because not everyone at a PWI will.

Lastly, Summer shared: “I think having organizations for Black students at a PWI is very important in order to create a sense of community on campus and to feel less alone.”

Leadership Experiences

Holding a leadership role was not a requirement of the student. However, 5 of the 6 participants that I interviewed reflected on their experiences as leaders within their

Black student organizations. When asked to describe what led them to take on leadership roles within the organization, they all described that they saw a need to serve Black students in the community by creating a space that provided programming and resources centered around Black culture and Black Identity Development. They ultimately felt they could not wait for the university to provide these spaces they need to help create and maintain them themselves. Further, they were aware that Black women did not hold many of the leadership roles on campus, yet Black women have historically been the leader and source behind a lot of powerful movements. When asked to elaborate on why they felt Black women did not have the opportunity to hold various types of leadership roles one participant expressed that she felt like Black women are always last in line to be considered. In her own words she Summer shared:

We're usually just lower on the chain. For example, white men are at the top, then it's white woman. And then it's men of color, and then it's women of color. But I feel like black women are always like, the last to be seen as like people who can actually be in positions of power, which is kind of strange, because black women are and were usually the forces behind big movements, like the civil rights era and the Black Power movement. Like, a lot of black women were behind the scenes doing all that coordinating, but they don't always get like the spotlight on them. So, I'd say people just don't like us and people just sleep on us.

Professional Development Experiences

Besides seeking out affinity experiences on campus, some of their experiences in the groups were centered around networking and receiving professional development resources that were relevant to their major. The programming of Psychology Majors of Color and Woman of Color Creatives Collectives would frequently include professional development resources tailored to their major and career interest. In fact, 3 of the 6

participants shared that they maintained their membership within an organization because the mission of the organization was aligned with their future goals.

For example, Betty shared:

I think that my organization prepares me professionally because I intend to also have a leadership role once on my career path. So, it gives me a lot of what I'm looking for and I guess it gives me an opportunity to be in a leadership role. Also, professional development is also a huge section or like aspect of my organization's overall mission because it's all about networking and building connections for women of color who are creatively inclined and can therefore create the representation that they want to see.

Summer also shared:

Um, I'd say being in the group helps me professionally because it's good for future researchers to have the opportunity to become a student leader, because then it shows your potential to also be a leader once you get into the field. And your role allows you to be more comfortable with advocating for certain issues. So, I'd also say that it's definitely helped me improve my communication skills and being able to get things across to different groups of people.

Relationships with Peers

The experiences that participants had within their organization varied based on the relationship and social interactions with other members as well as with the Student Activities Staff who oversaw all student organizations on campus. All members reported that they had mostly positive interactions with other members. However, half of the participants did mention that they had a negative interaction with either a fellow member or with someone from the Student Activities Staff member. For example, Summer and Nicole who were members of the Black Student Union expressed that there was an unprovoked tension between them and some of the Black male members. They were taken back by the tension because they felt like they have been welcoming and supportive of Black men.

Further, they felt like they constantly had to demand respect and speak up for themselves to **control the narratives and definitions** related to how Black men perceived Black women to be. Although the participants could not fully understand the reason for why there was tension with some of the men, they pinpointed that the strained relationship could have been related to how Black women are expected to be in society. Further, they expressed that they always had to take note of how much space they were taking up because it seemed that their position of leadership may have made the male members uncomfortable. Since this study focused on Black women, men were not interviewed about their experiences or interactions within the student organization. Nina, who was also a member of the student organization, did not report negative interactions with male members.

Regardless of how the men defined Black women, the participants held string self-definition of what who they are as Black women. Below, are self-definitions from a few of the women in the study. Nicole shared: “I would say I would define Black women and myself as strong, independent, hardworking, and interpersonal, very interpersonal!”

Additionally, Deena shared:

I feel like I’m patient but I’m direct. I feel like I’m understanding and accommodating. But I also understand when I need to stand my ground as a black woman, And honestly, I just think that being a black woman has to do with limiting yourself and loving yourself and understanding that you hold a divinity and just a power that other people can’t hold. And there’s a strength to you that you always will have. I think that if anything, my definition of black woman is just the immense level of strength that comes with being a black woman.

Moreover, Betty shared:

I define myself as a black woman through my constant voice and speaking up for what I believe in. I feel like I try my hardest to talk about things that go on in the black community, especially that affect black women. I do not

silence myself, and I will probably never allow myself to be silenced in spaces that I feel like I need to discuss things. And yeah, I feel like that's how I define being a black woman.

In addition to their experiences and interactions with fellow members, students were asked to reflect on their relationships with the Student Activities and the faculty advisor of the organization.

Interactions with Student Activities Staff

To start, 4 of the 6 participants felt that the organization's faculty advisor was pleasant and helpful when contacted. However, the participants yearned for more support. One reason that they wanted more assistance was because whenever their organization would contact the Student Activities Office regarding a room reservation, event table, promotion, organization policies, or other administrative things they remembered being met with resistance and made to feel like they were not a priority. The four women shared that having someone to back them up would help decrease some of the administrative challenges they experience when communicating with staff of the Student Activities Office. Below is an example of a few of the challenges Deena remembered having:

A lot of times, students who are in black organizations are pushed out of the focal points on campus. I know within my last couple of years while on the eboard, we've always had problems reserving rooms, simply because they were already booked for the white sorority and fraternity, and no one told us. So, we just got denied of all our rooms and we had to be pushed further into campus into classrooms.

It is important to note that Jonna who was a general body member at the time admitted that she had not had much interaction with the Student Activities staff or faculty advisor, but she did feel like Black organizations did not get as much promotion or visibility as other organizations on campus. One difference in the findings in this section

is that Summer, who was the co-founder and president of Psychology Majors of Color, shared that she did not feel that the Student Activities treated organization differently. Her opinion was that the office treats and promotes all organizations equally. One way that they tracked activities was by using a policies and procedure checklist that gave organization points when they complete certain tasks. Once a task was completed then organizations would gain more access to benefits as an organization.

How do Black female undergraduate women make meaning of their extracurricular involvement in a Black student organization on a predominantly White campus?

The findings indicate that Black undergraduate women who were a part of the study found their involvement meaningful for various reasons. One, they knew that their association meant that they would have access to an affinity space within the larger university. They often refer to the organization as a “safe space”, “family”, or “haven”. Having a community was meaningful because they remembered the times that they had to seek out, create, and help maintain culturally relevant communities on campus because there were none on campus. Within these spaces they reflected on how meaningful it was to be able to vent and be vulnerable. Further they were often comforted and “validated” by folks who could relate to their “shared experience” as a Black person.

Having this community gave them access to social capital and benefits. Additionally, it helped them manage and cope with stress while trying to decrease the barriers to persistence. Some of the benefits that they have mentioned in our interviews include having a support system, having a space to talk about the black experience, having a platform to provide students with what they need, and lastly, having a space

where they were provided resources that helped them socially, academically, and mentally.

As the participants started to talk about what it meant to be Black women involved in a Black organization, they each were very aware of how their race, and gender impacted their experience with the organization. Some things to note across each case are: They all took pride in knowing that Black women were the main people working hard behind the scenes and at forefront to make sure that all Black students were being well taken care of. Additionally, five out of six of the participants understood that there was an extra weight that they carried around due to the double stress of Black and female. This topic of stress was noted when some of the leaders spoke about how the women were the main ones handling all the work to put on events and programs. It was very evident that most of the women in the study knew that the work was taxing but still took it on because they held an idea that they were required or expected too. For example, Betty shard, “I think that oftentimes, black women end up taking care of the things that people don’t want to and being looked to as the person who has to solve the problem.”

Further, Jonna shared:

As a Black woman I take on far too much to a great extent. Now, again, it’s not true for everyone but for myself, and for many of the black women in my life, it’s been the reality that we take on too much, because we’re one expected to, and have proven it to be possible time and time again that we can handle the load and so it kind of becomes our saving grace, being dependable, and being, like, forthcoming and committed, when other people have the privilege to sit back and watch us do the work. However, we are the first to suffer if the work doesn’t get done. So, it’s kind of like this unspoken obligation that if everybody else is going to tap out, then they there’s no other choice but to step up.

Further, they noted how some of the male members would challenge them or their work but would not consistently show up to program or lend hand to take the lead on programming for the organization.

Additionally, another thing that was touched on a few times by three of the participants was they were often called or referred to as a mother, a superhuman, a heroic figure, or a person that could do anything despite their workload or the barriers they face. Further, they were also aware of the expectations put on them from men and women in society. In general, most of the participants understood that as a Black woman they would need to take the lead on things regardless of whether men were present or not to assist. Five of the six participants alluded to the annoyance of always having to defend themselves and their work. Lastly, they reflected on how being a double minority affected their mental health. Having to exist as a Black woman in a majority White university was overwhelming which is why they felt it was meaningful to have a race specific affinity group and a space specifically centered around Black women.

How do Black undergraduate women simultaneously manage their extracurricular involvement and academic responsibilities while trying to reduce barriers to college retention?

Use of Executive Function Skills

The findings from the study show that all participants were using or knew that they needed to use executive function skills and organization supplies to manage their priorities and responsibilities. The students shared that they often gravitated toward using a planner or prioritization method to stay on track of their academics and extracurricular responsibilities.

Support Systems

All six participants expressed that they relied on a support system while attending college. The support systems that were utilized by the participants were made up of fellow peer members of the organization, a member of their family, or an external mentor. Following is an example of Summer's thoughts related to support systems. She shared,

having people as a good support system is a really important thing to have in order to be successful. Also, try not to get discouraged when you feel like you are the only black person in the room, and or especially if you are the only black woman in the room. Also, trying to never let others' preconceived notions stop you from advocating for yourself

Further, the students who held executive board roles shared that they often expressed gratitude for their team for sharing the responsibilities of maintaining a Black student organization while focusing on academics.

Awareness of Level of Involvement

Some of the findings from the study suggest the need for monitoring how involved students become in various social activities on campus. More specifically, four of the participants who were leaders would often become over involved to the point that it was affecting their academics and mental health. All the participants understood the need for being aware of the time and effort they were putting into the organization versus their academics. However, only Deena, Nicole, and Jonna mentioned almost quitting or limiting their time in the organization because they were becoming over involved and too distracted. Nevertheless, Jonna expressed that she understood she knew how much she sacrificed and knew that managing her time better help her prioritize school over her social commitments. More specifically, Jonna shared,

I would say I balance my social and academic responsibilities fairly well during my time in college. Whenever I would struggle with time management, I would remind myself of how much was sacrificed so that I could get this far, and then I would proceed chose to prioritize my schoolwork over my social commitments.

What perceptions do Black undergraduate women have regarding the role extracurricular involvement in a Black student organization plays in their persistence and academic outcomes?

All the participants were asked about the role their involvement played in their willingness to persist and the findings indicate that four out of six of the participants felt that being involved in the Black student organization kept them motivated, committed, and encouraged to persist. Jonna and Summer were the only two participants that shared that they felt being involved was beneficial, but it was not required or necessary to help them persist. Nevertheless, below is a quote from one of the participants that found their involvement in a Black student organization helped them persist and stay committed to both school and the organization. Betty shared:

As a dedicated member in my organization, we strongly believe in commitment, and I'm committed to achieving graduation status at the University and I hope to walk across the stage with my Black student org's ribbon proudly because they helped me discover how my persistence and consistency pays off.

Summary

There were similarities and differences across all cases. In general, all the women experienced oppression that was related to their identity while engaging in with the larger university and subgroups of their specific's student organizations. In the case of Betty, she created a completely new organization that specifically sought to serve Black women and women of color who aspired to have careers in the creative field. At the time of the study, there were no other Black student organizations geared towards just Black women

and women of color who had creative majors or interests. Her experience illuminated some of the challenges Black students face when trying to create affinity spaces. More specifically, the university was not supportive of her desire create an organization that was set-up to exclusively Black women and women of color.

In the cases of Deena, Nicole, Nina, they all joined and held leadership roles within an already established Black student organization. The Black Student Union, which was formally known at the Back Student League was formed in 1966 to support Black students who were being affected by racism and other forms of discrimination on campus. Deena, Nicole, and Nina's primary role for joining the organization was to help them find a culturally relevant community of Black students who shared similar racialized experiences. Further, they wanted to help unite and serve the Black community within the university as well as within the surrounding neighborhoods.

In the case of Summer, she created a completely new organization that specifically sought to serve Black students and students of color who were matriculating as Psychology Majors. At the time of the study, there were no other Black student organizations geared towards Psychology Major of Color. Further, she shared that it was common for most of the members of the organization to be women as the Psychology field tends to have more women than men. Nevertheless, the Psychology department was predominantly White, so Summer felt there was a direct need to create an organization that served and supported individuals of color. Jonna on the other hand was a general body member who supported the mission and events because she too saw a need to be affiliated with student organization that was culturally and academically relevant. Her participation increased the chances of the organization to have more representatives and visibility on campus.

Emerging Themes

In this section, I present 5 of the main five themes that emerged from the data. The themes were not based solely on the frequency that they appeared in the data. Instead, the themes were selected based on select tenants of Black Feminist Thought and Student Involvement Theory and the research questions that guided this study. The themes highlight the participant's experiences and perceptions, supported by demographic data, observations, and document analysis. The main emerging themes of the study are creating culturally relevant experiences, taking on leadership roles, strategies to manage academic and extracurricular activities, Benefits of Involvement, controlling narratives and definitions. Below, **Table 4.3** shows the research questions, categories, and each of the themes.

Table 4.3

Organization of Questions, Categories, and Themes

Research Question	Categories of Data	Emergent Theme
How do Black undergraduate women describe their experience as members of a Black student organization on a predominantly White campus?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Culturally relevant Experiences 2. Leadership Experiences 3. Professional Development Experiences 4. Relationships with the Organization 5. Interactions with Student Activities Staff 	<p>Creating culturally relevant experiences</p> <p>Controlling narratives and definitions</p>

(Table continued)

<p>How do Black undergraduate women make meaning of their extracurricular involvement in a Black student organization on a predominantly White campus?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Taking on leadership roles within the organization 2. Representation and visibility 3. Participation as a form advocacy and support 4. Participation as a form of activism 	<p>Making meaning by taking on leadership roles</p>
<p>How do Black undergraduate women simultaneously manage their extracurricular involvement and academic responsibilities while trying to reduce barriers to college retention?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support systems 2. Executive Function Skills 3. Awareness of Level of Involvement 4. Monitoring level of involvement 	<p>Utilizing strategies to manage academic and extracurricular activities</p>
<p>What perceptions do Black undergraduate women have regarding the role extracurricular involvement in a Black student organization plays in their persistence and academic outcomes?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Awareness of the benefits and detriments of involvement 2. Awareness of the role of involvement on academics 3. Awareness of the role of involvement on the decision to persist 	<p>Benefits of Involvement</p>

Culturally Relevant Experiences

The participants in the study were asked to describe various aspects of their experience as members of a Black student organization. Much of what was described related to the types of events and programming they attended. All programming and events were centered around Black culture and current events that impact Black people. Additionally, they described their experiences with the peers who were also members in the groups. Much of the experience involved them coming together to connect with other

Black students who were going through some of the same situations. Since the university had a majority White student population, the students enhanced their college experience by seeking out opportunities to be in affinity with other Black students on campus as they made them feel a sense of belonging.

Taking on Leadership Roles

Although holding a leadership role was not a requirement of a participant's involvement in a Black student organization, five of the participants felt compelled to step up to create or help maintain an organization for students who needed a space that was tailor made just for them. They expressed that they sought out these roles to give back and serve the people who looked like them because they believed that through leadership, they could build a tight knit community. Additionally, they believed that as leaders they had a platform that would enhance their ability to be noticed and heard while advocating for things on behalf of Black students. Advocates. Within their leadership roles they took on various responsibilities which include content creation, event planning, administrative paperwork, and updating organization policies and programming to help keep students engaged. They also made it a point to recruit new board members as they wanted to keep the organizations operating after they moved on to graduation. In general, having these roles made them feel like a role model for the next generation of men and women coming up at the university.

Strategies to Managing Academic and Extracurricular Activities

The participants in the study were asked to share how they managed their academics and involvement in a Black student organization. Much of what they shared relates to how they relied on a support system and a list of executive function skills to

help them stay motivated and organized. The support system included family and friends outside of the university as well as peers and faculty on campus. Although some participants were better at managing both their academics and involvement, some still struggled with doing so. Regardless, the thing that stood out on this topic was that they were aware of the need to seek out and equip themselves with resources that would help them progress and succeed. They did this even if it meant limiting their involvement or taking mental breaks.

Benefits of Involvement

During the study, participants shared several benefits of being involved in a Black student organization. Some of the benefits that they shared were having a support groups and sense of community, having a safe space that they could vent, discuss issues, and be validated, having networking and professional opportunities, having access to culturally relevant programming and events, having a space that helped them stay motivated, and having a space to develop as leaders and content creators.

Controlling Narratives & Definitions

The women in this study often spoke about what it meant to be a Black woman, and how their gender shaped how they interacted with and were perceived by other members within the organization. For example, the women who held leadership roles felt at odds with some of the men in the group, and so they began to be very cognizant of how vocal they were as well as how much space they took up when mingling within the organization. Most of the women disclosed that they had had to stand their ground, demand respect, and speak up for themselves to control the narratives and definitions related to how Black men perceived Black women to be.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Below, I present a discussion of the key findings, the theoretical connections, the limitations, and the recommendations for future research and practice. Overall, the findings from this study indicate that there are both benefits and detriments to the experience that Black undergraduate women have as members of a Black student organization on predominantly White campuses. The order in which I present the findings does not indicate its level of importance.

Black women have continued to increase their enrollment at predominantly White institutions, yet the research about their involvement in Black student organizations and special interest clubs and groups on campus is limited except for the extensive research that exists on their involvement in Greek-life. Black women participate in various types of student organizations, clubs, and groups on campus; thus, the purpose of this study was to gain a better insight into the membership experiences of Black undergraduate women who are involved in a Black student organization at a public, predominantly White institution. Understanding their experiences as members, the meaning they make of their involvement, how they simultaneously manage extracurricular activities and academic responsibilities, and their perceptions regarding the role their involvement in a Black student organization plays in their persistence and academic outcomes is essential to providing them with support that will help reduce barriers to persistence and degree completion.

The first theme shows that a lack of **culturally relevant experiences** at Grace University propelled six Black undergraduate women to seek out opportunities and join organizations that create natural opportunities for affinity with other Black students on

campus. More specifically, the Black women in this study explained that they yearned for a safe space to discuss, celebrate, and share experiences that impact Black culture. Additionally, the participants emphasized that having these spaces provided Black women and men with a sense of belonging, a space to develop their Black identity, a support system, and access to resources and opportunities for networking and professional development. The findings indicate that culturally relevant experiences within these groups could be meaningful and beneficial to Black undergraduate women and their academic, social, and personal outcomes. Additionally, the findings indicate that while membership is not a requirement for success, having access to culturally relevant experiences could play a positive role in motivating, supporting, and engaging Black undergraduate women as they persist. These findings are in alignment with the previous research and studies on Black student involvement in Black centered spaces like Black Student Organizations and Black Culture Centers as well as some of the literature on the strategies for improving minority student retention (Guiffrida, 2004; Patton, 2006).

The second theme relates to **the meaning Black women make of their membership** experience and involvement in Black Student Organizations. More specifically, five out of six of the women explained that they made meaning through their leadership roles. Within their roles, they became instrumental in helping to serve, nurture, and support other Black students within the organization and campus community. The women felt a sense of urgency and responsibility for taking on the challenges associated with creating and maintaining Black centered spaces despite the additional work it required on top of their academic and other commitments. In general, their roles within the organizations were meaningful to them because they were creating and maintaining

necessary, yet meaningful spaces for Black students on campus. The findings show that Black student organizations are beneficial to providing Black students with valuable leadership experiences that follow them beyond their undergraduate years. Their willingness to initiate, create, maintain, and support Black student organizations indicate these Black students understand the importance of coming together to lead, create, and implement the changes they want to see. Additionally, the need and expectation for Black women to take on additional work and responsibilities to serve, nurture, and advocate for others despite the challenges further indicates the historical patterns that involve the additional labor of Black women. In sum, these patterns create an additional burden.

Although these Black women's leadership experiences are impactful and satisfying, they also create an additional workload and stressor to contend with while also focusing on their academic studies and jobs outside of school. The findings align with the literature on Black college women (Chambers & Sharpe, 2012; Henry, Butler, & West 2011; Howard-Vital, 1989; Patton, Haynes, & Croom, 2017; Winkle-Wagner, 2015). More specifically, this relates directly to the literature on Black Feminist Thought that explains how Black women shoulder the burden of the work needed to support the Black community and keep the organizations that serve Black folks functional, much like a woman doing housework after a long day of work (Collins, 2000). Thus, their intersecting identities of being both Black and a Woman have a compounding impact on their identity, mental health, and overall wellness (Collins, 2000; Hotckins, 2017).

The third theme from the study show that all participants were utilizing and depending on a combination of **strategies and resources to help them manage their involvement with their academics**. More specifically, the participants shared that they

relied on executive functioning skills and supporters to not let their involvement in an organization take priority over their academics. The findings also show that the Black women are aware of the importance of monitoring their level of involvement as they try to decrease the barriers to academic success and persistence. Further, the participants shared stories of having to be mindful of becoming over involved to the point that it was affecting their academics and mental health. All the participants understood the need for being aware of the time and effort they were putting into the organization versus their academics. However, only four of the participants mentioned toying with the idea of quitting or limiting their time in the organization because they were becoming too stressed, distracted, and unorganized due their constant involvement in a Black student organization.

Additionally, the participants that held executive board roles shared the load of responsibilities that came with maintaining a Black student organization while focusing on academics. These findings indicate there are various strategies and resources to consider when trying to help students succeed and manage their academic and extracurricular involvement. These findings align with some of the literature on student involvement, student success, and student persistence (Giuffrida 2004, 2006; Seidman, 2005; Tinto, 2012).

The fourth group of major findings of the study show that five of the participants felt that there were challenges when **interacting with Student Activities staff**. More specifically, although the advisors were pleasant and helpful when contacted, the participants yearned for more support, especially as it pertained to matters of requesting room reservations, event tables, promotional material, or other administrative things. One

difference in the findings in this section is that only one participant shared that her interactions with staff were positive and helpful. Nevertheless, most participants felt that they were given the runaround and met with resistance when they would interact with the staff which in return left them feeling like their organization was not a priority. These findings align with the literature that highlight the issues Black women and men have with faculty and staff on campus. The interactions that students have with the faculty and staff will have an impact on their college experiences. Thus, strengthening these relationships could change the negative perceptions that Black college women have about interactions with faculty and staff on campus.

Lastly, the group of findings show that the participants felt like they constantly had to demand respect and speak up for themselves to **control the narratives and definitions** related to how Black men perceived Black women to be. Although the participants could not fully understand the reason for why there was tension with some of the men, they pinpointed that the strained relationship could have been related to how Black women are expected to be in society. More specifically, Black men often expected Black women to take on subordinate roles over assertive and leadership roles. These findings further affirm that due to the perpetuated stereotypes that come with their race and gender, Black women experience multiple types of oppression and microaggressions (Lewis, Mendenhall, Harword, & Hunt, 2016).

Additionally, these findings relate directly to the literature on Black Feminist Thought that explains how Black women must work to expand, control, and protect the narratives and definitions of what it means to be a Black woman in society (Collins, 2000; Hooks 1981; 2000). Thus, their intersecting identities of being both Black and a

woman have a compounding impact on their identity and interactions with men (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw 1989; 1991).

Theoretical Framework Contributions

Student Involvement

The use of Astin's Student Involvement theory provided a theoretical and methodological blueprint to understand and explain the various levels of student involvement and how they relate to a student's academic performance beyond the first year of college. However, it is important to note that the findings of Guiffrida's (2004) study regarding how involvement supports or hinders the academic success of Black students refutes Astin's theory of involvement. More specifically, Guiffrida (2004) concluded that the more involved a Black student became in campus life, the higher the chances were for them to become over involved which will have resulted in them failing and leaving college. However, it is essential to note that Guiffrida's research questions heavily focused on the extent to which involvement became an asset or liability. He did not specifically and purposely seek participants' perceptions regarding their exact hours spent involved in a student organization during a semester.

Although his findings do not reflect Astin's suggestion that more involvement equals more learning, this current study will add to the literature by constructing and utilizing research questions regarding student perceptions of their level of involvement. It was appropriate to use this theory as both Guiffrida (2004) and Astin (1984) suggested that future researchers focus on a student's level of involvement (i.e., hours spent) when measuring various academic or social outcomes. Further, as the third postulate states in the theory of involvement, "Involvement has quantitative and qualitative features" (p.

519). Thus, in this study, the extent of a student's involvement was explored qualitatively by asking the participants how they perceive their involvement in student organizations affect their academic performance and persistence, if at all.

Since Student Involvement Theory has not always considered the persistence and retention outcomes related to Black students who are actively involved in Black student organizations (Guiffrida, 2004; Harper & Quaye, 2009), use of Black Feminist Thought helped magnify the voices of Black undergraduate women who described what they used to persist while simultaneously managing their extracurricular involvement and academic responsibilities. Further, it is imperative that researchers continue to investigate student behaviors in addition to what is going on psychosocially or within the environment (Museus, Yi, & Saelua, 2017). The findings from the study contribute to the expansion of the Student Involvement Theory to focus on the involvement of Black students in Black student organizations at predominantly White institutions.

If I were to replicate this study, I would apply the Culturally Engaging Campus Environments Model which measures external and individual influences that impact student outcomes and their relationships. The Culturally Engaging Campus Environments Model specifically focuses on cultural relevance and cultural responsiveness in conjunction with individual influences such as a sense of belonging, academic depositions, and academic performance, as they pertain to college success outcomes (Museus, Yi, & Saelua, 2017). Using this model would help further our understanding of the experiences of Black women at predominantly White institutions.

Black Feminist Thought

The use Black Feminist Thought provided a theoretical and methodological blueprint to understand and explain the unique experiences that Black undergraduate women have while at predominantly White institutions as well as within the Black student organizations on campus. Further, use of the theory helped highlight how the intersection of race, gender, and role within the group shaped the experiences of the six Black women that shared their stories. The following paragraphs highlight three strong connections between the theoretical framework and the findings of the study.

One, the findings show that Black women took on a maternal role within the organization because they found their role and work to be necessary and empowering. Collins (2000) refers to the maternal roles as “othermothers” (p. 205) which describes how Black women have stepped in to help others who need support and guidance. Most of the women in the student organization accepted the role as well as the additional labor of work to support the Black students in the campus community even though the work was taxing and time consuming. They did so because they felt it was a Black women’s responsibility to do so. More specifically, Collins (2000) explains:

U.S. Black women’s experiences as othermothers provide a foundation for conceptualizing Black women’s political activism. Experiences both of being nurtured and as children and being held responsible for siblings and fictive kin within kin networks can simulate a more generalized ethic of caring and personal accountability among African American women. These women not only feel accountable to their own kin, they experience a bond with all of the Black community (p. 206).

Using Black Feminist Thought was beneficial as it helped examine the role of Black women in family and work. The findings align with the theory as it reaffirms and highlights the challenges faced by Black women who are doubly oppressed and expected

to take on the burden of building and protecting community while studying, working, and matriculating through school.

Two, the findings show that even though Black women are putting in the time and energy to make conditions better for others, they often must work extra to control the narrative and definitions of what it means to be a Black woman. For example, the women in the study shared that as Black women, they sometimes felt dismissed and challenged by men because of their gender and leadership position within the group. In *Black Feminist Thought*, Collins (2000) describes how Black woman have to constantly challenge and fight the conventional ideas and images of what it means to be a Black woman as a response to the stereotypical images and expectations that were brought about by slave owners, the dominant group in society, and mainstream media as a way to control and “manipulate ideas about Black womanhood” (p. 76).

For example, as explains in Collins (2000), “the first controlling image applied to U.S. Black women is that of the mammy-the faithful, obedient, domestics servant” (p. 80). She further explains that controlling images were used as a way to keep Black woman in subordinate roles as then by doing so would somehow justify the economic exploitation of Black women. In sum, *Black Feminist Thought* provided a good lens to help explain and challenge the controlling images that keep Black women oppressed in various settings. Despite how far Black woman have progressed in their ability to gain identity while succeeding in their education and career, the stereotypical images still make it twice as hard for them to persist and gain respect. Nevertheless, “despite this suppression, U.S. Black women have managed to do intellectual work, and to have our ideas matter” (Collins, 2000, p. 5).

Third, the findings show that Black women join Black student organizations as a form of activism. Creating and joining such organizations help Black women survive and advocate for themselves and others. Moreover, Collins, (2000) explains that Black women join such groups as a way to help change rules that are racist and discriminatory. Collins explains, that “Black women’s style of activism also reflects a belief that teaching people how to be self-reliant fosters more empowerment than teaching them how to follow” (p. 235). Overall, the use of Black Feminist Thought helped me further understand the experiences of Black undergraduate women who are members of a Black student organization at Grace University.

Directions for Future Research and Practice

Although there are various types of student organizations offered at research colleges and universities, many studies have primarily focused on the Greek letter organization membership experience. Investigating the Black student experience in various organizations will elevate the voices of students who frequent race specific organizations that fall into the following categories: professional, religious, political, athletics, art, music, dance, culture, recreation, service, and others. Because of this, I give several recommendations for future research and practice.

One, researchers should continue to expand on the topic of Black college women and their experiences within several types of Black student organizations on predominantly White campuses. Understanding their unique experiences will help document how to better support Black college women while they matriculate through to graduation. Further, researchers and administrators should continue to use qualitative

research methods when collecting and documenting the experiences of Black college women as Collins (2000) maintains:

For most African American women those individuals who have lived through the experiences about which they claim to be experts are more believable and credible than those who have merely read or thought about such experiences. Thus, lived experiences as a criterion for credibility frequently invoked by U.S. Black women when making knowledge claims (p. 276).

Two, researchers should conduct studies to help investigate how ethnic student organizations are engaging Black students and students of color. Understanding the type of programs, events, and resources they offer within the organizations will help institutions stay informed about what Black students and students of color need, value, and enjoy during the college journey.

Three, researchers should investigate the leadership roles that Black women take on within student organizations at predominantly White institutions. Understanding the complexities and responsibilities of their roles will help institutions create resources that will help educate Black women and all students about the benefits of prioritization and time management. For example, institutions can create and distribute a level of involvement memo and self-assessment tool that helps students understand the importance of monitoring how much time they are putting into student organizations versus academics.

Four, institutions should distribute surveys so that the findings will be documented and used as rationale for increased funding that will expand resources for student organizations. Five, to increase transparency, communication, and trust between students and the Student Activities Department, the President and the Student Government Association should require the department to produce an annual outcomes

report that outlines how they investigated and addressed student complaints. Six, to assess the needs of an organization, the Student Activities Department should host town hall meetings on campus each semester to investigate student perceptions around the type of organizations they like and, also about what is lacking within the current organizations they offer. By doing so, they will find out whether there are issues and concerns that need to be addressed. This will also help university officials gain insight into why new Black student organizations are being created in addition to the ones that already exist.

Seven, to better understand the experiences of members in student organizations, there should also be a focus on observing the faculty advisors and Student Affairs professionals who manage and support these groups. Understanding their level of involvement and commitment to such organizations will help provide institutions with the necessary information to provide feedback and professional development training. Holding these individuals accountable will make their roles more valuable to the organization and its members. Eight, I recommend that bias and cultural competency training is offered and made mandatory for the Student Activities professionals and faculty advisors who serve the members of Black student organizations. They cannot serve Black students and students of color in an equitable manner if they are not culturally aware of behaviors, policies, and procedures that perpetuate racism and discrimination.

Study Limitations

As with any research study, there are limitations to acknowledge. One limitation is that the findings were based on the experiences of six students who were affiliated with one of the three organizations mentioned in the study. Those organization were: the Black

Student Union, Psychology Majors of Color, and the Women of Color Creative Collective. My initial plan was to have participants from different organizations. However, due to personal reasons and the pandemic, a few participants who were a part of unique Black student organizations dropped out of the study. Another limitation to this qualitative study is that the findings are not generalizable to others beyond the unique population being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Despite this, the current study offers transferability, as it offers an in-depth insight about Black undergraduate women within the context of their university and Black student organization that can be applied to similar settings.

Although the findings have limited use beyond the university, they have the potential to inform administrators about the experience of Black undergraduate women who are involved within a specific community. Additionally, although the time spent interacting with everyone was valuable and insightful, the study could have produced more insights had I had the opportunity to observe all members in an organizational setting during both the Spring and Fall semesters. As mentioned above, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the university and state where the study took place shut down before I was able to observe all six participants. I notified my chair of the impact and received permission to continue with the study without the remaining observations due to the unforeseen challenges brought on by the pandemic. Additionally, for the safety of myself and the participants, some of the interviews had to be conducted via zoom or phone which impacted my ability to note their body language during the questioning.

Further, it is important to express that since this study sought to explore the experiences of Black undergraduate women in one specific organization, I did not report

on any other organizations or extracurricular activities that they may have been involved in beyond the ones discussed in the study. So, it is unclear whether their experiences in other organizations had any impact on the encounters or stories they described in the study.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to add to the research related to the membership experiences of Black undergraduate women who are involved in a Black student organization at a public, predominantly White institution beyond the freshman year. Additionally, the study explored how Black undergraduate women simultaneously manage their involvement in Black student organizations and academics. The emerging themes of the study are creating culturally relevant experiences, taking on leadership roles, strategies to manage academic and extracurricular activities, Benefits of Involvement, controlling narratives and definitions. The results of this study support prior research on the value and benefits of involvement in black spaces like Black student organizations. There are both commonalities and differences in the findings. The findings indicate that Black women are not a monolith despite some of their shared experiences as members of a Black student organization.

Further, the study filled several gaps. One it furthered what we know about the social experiences of Black college women who are members of Black student organizations with predominantly White institutions. Two it adds to the literature on Black student involvement trends. Three, it illuminates what is currently known about Black women and the role they play in various types of Black student organizations at PWIs. Four, it highlights how Black undergraduate women manage their extracurricular

involvement and academics. Five, it sheds light on how Black college women continue to adjust and succeed despite oppression. As Collins (2000) states,

As women of the subordinate group, Black women cannot afford to be fools of any type, for our objection as the Other denies us of the protections that White skin, maleness, and wealth confer. This distinction between knowledge and wisdom, and the use of experience as the cutting edge dividing them, has been key to Black women's survival. In the context of intersecting oppressions, the distinction is essential. Knowledge without wisdom is adequate for the powerful, but wisdom is essential to the survival of the subordinate (p. 276).

To conclude, we must continue to support Black women on predominantly White college campuses so that they can have a sense of belonging and more positive experiences as they strive to mitigate the barriers to persistence. Black women should not have to struggle be heard and supported. If institutions want to increase the college retention of Black women, they must first listen to Black women to know what they need. Further, they must value their lived experiences and contributions. Ultimately, the universities must make it a priority to collaborate with the most marginalized population if they want to make changes.

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APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT EMAIL FOR PARTICIPANTS

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in my dissertation research study at Grace University. This work is being done as a requirement for the Higher Education Ed.D. program within the College of Education. The purpose of my dissertation study is to explore how Black undergraduate female students make meaning of their involvement in Black Student Organizations at a public predominantly White institution. I am most interested in understanding your membership experience and your perceptions of how factors of your involvement contribute to your persistence through to degree completion. The criteria to participate in the study requires that all participants be an upperclassman (e.g. sophomore, junior, or senior), self-identify as Black or African American, and be an active member of at least one Black Student Organization at Grace University. If you meet the above criteria your participation would be greatly appreciated.

As a participant you will be provided a consent form to sign, asked to participate in three interviews lasting about 60 each, and provide the researcher with permission to observe you for one hour during one organizational event or activity. All interviews and observations will be held on campus. The interviews will happen within 2 weeks of each other, and the observation will be scheduled during our first interview session. During our face-to-face meeting, I will use an interview protocol to help assist me in asking questions related to your organizational involvement and perceptions about factors that contribute to your persistence at Grace University. All interviews will be voice recorded for research purposes only. To stay consistent with IRB policies and procedures, all data will be secured and locked up. All data that is collected will be de-identified and you will also be given a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality throughout the study. All research data will be discarded after 10 years.

If you are interested in participating in this dissertation study, please complete the eligibility survey or contact me at tug51946@temple.edu . I need your help adding to the scholarly literature that presents narratives regarding the Black female undergraduate experience at predominantly White institutions. My project advisor is Dr. James Earl Davis, his email is jedavis@temple.edu .

Onward and Upward,
Tiffany J. Davis
Ed.D. Candidate, Higher Education
College of Education
Temple University

APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT FLIER FOR PARTICIPANTS

IT'S LEVELS TO THIS: A Dissertation Research Study

The purpose of this dissertation study is to explore how Black undergraduate female students describe and make meaning of their involvement in Black Student Organizations at a public predominantly White institution. Why me? Are you an undergraduate female student that identifies as a Black or African American? Are you an upperclassman? (Sophomore, junior, or senior). Are you an active member of a Black Student Organization at Grace University? If so, please consider participating in a study that explores the unique experiences of Black and African American undergraduate female students who are involved in Black Student Organization at a predominantly White institution? What will be asked of me?

As a participant you will be asked to participate in three interviews lasting 60 minutes. All individual interviews will include questions regarding your experience as a Black female undergraduate student involved in a Black Student Organization at a predominantly White institution. All interviews will be held on campus. Participation is voluntary and if you decide to change your mind and withdraw from the study you can do it at any time. All data is kept confidential and will be discarded upon your request to withdraw. There are no risks for participating in this study.

Where can I receive more details about the research study?

Tiffany J. Davis

Ed.D. Candidate, Higher Education

College of Education

Temple University

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Dr. James E. Davis

Chair, Professor of Higher Education

College of Education

Temple University

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APPENDIX C

DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

1. Name: (Print First and Last Name) _____
2. Age: _____
3. Gender: _____
4. Country of Birth: _____
5. Are you an international student? (Yes or No) If Yes, Explain?
6. Grade Level: (Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, Senior)
7. Major: _____

8. Do you self-identify as Black or African American? (circle best fit) (African American) (Black American) (if multi-racial please specify _____) (I prefer not to respond) (Other: _____)
9. Have you ever been a part of a Black Student Organization in High School?
10. Did you attend a predominantly White or Black High School?
11. How many formal Black student organizations are you currently a member of at Grace University? (Please list them all. Please also list the number of years involved in each organization and your role within the organization)

Name of Organization	Years Involved	Your Role

12. Which of the student organizations you have listed above are considered Black, African American, or Students of Color organizations?
13. Are you a member of any informal or non-university registered student organizations on campus? (Please list them all. Please also list the number of years involved in each organization and your role within the organization)

Name of Organization	Years Involved	Your Role

14. How many hours or days a week do/did you spend within the organization? Explain?
15. How many hours do you spend on academics outside of the classroom?
16. Which organization will you be talking about for this study?

17. For the purposes of this study please select a pseudonym (first name) that you would like to use that is not associated with your real name. If you do not pick one, a name will be selected for up by the researcher. **NAME:** _____

If you meet the criteria for eligibility to partake in this study the researcher will be in contact with you. Thank You!

APPENDIX D
INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

First Interview

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to talk to me about your experience as a member of a Black student organization. I'm a graduate student in the College of Education, and this interview is for my dissertation study that I am doing to better understand the experiences of Black female students who have been involved in Black student organizations. I have never participated in a Black student organization, and I look forward to learning about your experience. This interview will last between 60-90 minutes. I'd like to ask you a few questions about your experience. All data will be stored securely. Whatever you choose to share in this interview will be kept confidential, and nothing you say will be attributed to you in any report we put together for this project. In fact, you will be given the opportunity to select a pseudonym. You can also choose not to answer any question or stop the interview at any time. I would like to take notes and record our conversation. Is that, ok? I have a consent form that highlights all of this information, but I'll give you a few minutes to read it over. I will need your signature before we can proceed. Let me know if you have any questions.

Topics: Social Experience in a Black student organization

Q1. How do Black female undergraduates describe their social experiences as a member of a Black Student Organization?

Note: The below questions will be used to guide today's interview. However, it should be noted that new questions may arise that are not listed below.

Start of Interview:

1. Looking back, when you initially decided to join this particular Black student organization on campus what was your initial perception of the organization's mission?

2. When you decided to join the organization what was your initial impression of its programming and events?
3. Given your experience how easy is it to be involved in the organization?
4. What has it been like for you socially as a member of a Black Student at a predominantly White institution?
5. What responsibilities do you take on as a member of the organization?
6. What types of activities and events have you been involved in?
7. How often do you attend meetings, events, and activities held by the organization?
8. Describe your relationships with other members, both in and outside of the formal organization events and activities?
9. What types of things do you do to maintain good relationships with fellow members?
10. Have you ever had a negative encounter within the organization due to your social identity? (class/gender/grade level) Please describe?
11. Have you ever had a negative social encounter with students and staff of the university due to your affiliation with a Black student organization?
12. Have you ever felt like the organization what not the best place for you?
13. Based on your experiences, what are the barriers to being a member of a Black student organization?
14. What strategies have you used to socially navigate this particular Black student organization?
15. What advice would you give Student Affairs Administrators regarding how to better support students who are members of Black student organization?
16. Is there anything about your experience that you would like to share that we have not covered?

Closing:

Thank you so much for your sharing your experience with me. Those are all the questions I have for you today. Over the next week, I will be analyzing the information you have provided. If I have any follow-up questions, would it be okay for me to email you? Ok, before we go let's schedule your next interview and the one observation. Thank you again for your time!

Second Interview

Introduction:

Thank you for taking the time to talk to me about your experience as a member of a Black student organization. Today, we will talk about how you make meaning of your participation in Black student organizations. The interview will last between 60-90 minutes. All data will be stored securely. Whatever you choose to share in this interview will be kept confidential, and nothing you say will be attributed to you in any report we put together for this project.

Topics: meaning of involvement, meaning of role in organization

Q2. How do Black female undergraduates make meaning of their participation in Black Student Organizations?

Note: The below questions will be used to guide today's interview. However, it should be noted that new questions may arise that are not listed below.

Start of the Interview:

1. What does it mean to be a member of the Black student organization at a predominantly White institution?
2. What does it mean to be a female member in the organization?
3. How has being a part of a Black student organization changed you?
4. What does your role within the group mean to you?
5. What does the organization's mission and programming mean to you?
6. In what ways do you feel connected to the organization?
7. Describe a time when you felt that your participation in this Black student organization was connected to institutional change?
8. Is there anything about your experience that you would like to share that we have not covered?

Closing:

Thank you so much for your sharing your experience with me. Those are all the questions I have for you today. Over the next week, I will be analyzing the information you have provided. If I have any follow-up questions, would it be okay

for me to email you? Ok, before we go let's schedule your next interview. Thank you again for your time!

Third Interview

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to talk to me about your experience as a member of a Black student organization. Today, we will talk about how you manage both your involvement in Black student organizations and your academic responsibilities simultaneously. The interview will last between 60-90 minutes. All data will be stored securely. Whatever you choose to share in this interview will be kept confidential, and nothing you say will be attributed to you in any report we put together for this project.

Topics: management of involvement, strategies and resources for students involved in Black student organizations, benefit/detriments to involvement

Q3. How do Black female undergraduates manage both their involvement in Black student organizations and their academic responsibilities simultaneously to reduce barriers to college persistence?

Note: The below questions will be used to guide today's interview. However, it should be noted that new questions may arise that are not listed below.

Start of the Interview:

1. Reflecting back on the time you spend on academic and social responsibilities have you ever found it hard to focus on academics' due to your extracurricular involvement in a Black student organization?
2. Describe how much time and effort you devote to extracurricular activities on campus?
3. Describe how much time and effort you spend on academics?
4. Have you ever thought about quitting or limiting your involvement in an organization to focus on academics?
5. What strategies have you used to manage the time and energy you spend on academic and social responsibilities?
6. Have you had any institutional support around strategies to better navigate student organizations while focusing on academic responsibilities?
7. Have you had any inner organizational support around strategies to better navigate student organizations while focusing on academic responsibilities?

8. Based on your experiences, what do you think it takes to be successful in your role as a college student and also as a member of a Black student organization?
9. What strategies do you use to make sure that you do not become over involved in the organization to the point that it becomes a detriment to your academics?
10. What aspects of the organization's programming do you feel has been put in place to help support members academically? (i.e. resources/communications)
11. As a member of a Black student organization what aspects of its programming has been most beneficial to you academically?
12. As a member of a Black student organization what aspects of its programming has been most detrimental to you academically?
13. Have you experienced any academic challenges to being involved in the organization?
14. Is there anything about your experience that you would like to share that we have not covered?

Closing:

Thank you so much for your sharing your experience with me. Those are all the questions I have for you today. Over the next week, I will be analyzing the information you have provided. If I have any follow-up questions, would it be okay for me to email you? Thank you again for your time!

APPENDIX E

OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Purpose of the Informal Observation: The goal of the informal observation is to observe participants in a natural setting. By doing so I will gain a better understanding of the settings they participate in. This setting will be an event or activity put on by a Black Student Organization.

Role of the Researcher: I will observe each participant at an organized Black student organization event. Observing them will allow me to see how they navigate and interact within the setting. Utilizing the observation options from Creswell (2018) I will take on the role as a nonparticipant also known as the observer as a participant. This means I will be seen by members, but I will not interact or engage with them in any way. Doing an observation is important as it provides the researcher with the opportunity to make their own assumptions based on what they witnessed. Additionally, observation provides the opportunity for the researcher to collect rich descriptive data on the participants and the setting they are in.

Categories for Field Notes

- Observations Related to the Research Questions
- Observations Related to the Setting and Environment
- Observations Related to the Observed Interactions
- Researcher's Reactions

Setting:		
Descriptive Notes	Interpretive Notes	Reflective Notes

Adapted from Creswell (2018)

APPENDIX F

BLACK STUDENT UNION ORGANIZATION PROFILE



Black Student Union

About:

Originally, we were registered as an organization in 1966 (as the Black Student League). The creation of the Black Student Union at the University provides students who were, and still are, affected by hate and discrimination, a place to discuss solutions to the problem. Our organization strives to build and unite the student body at the University and in the North Philadelphia community in an effort to educate through programs, events, community services, and cultural experiences. We help to provide an environment for students to strive for excellence by understanding our past, improving the present, and securing our future. In doing so, we have been able to make a huge impact on campus, and hope to continue that for years to come.

Membership Details:

- Does your organization have specific membership requirements? Yes
- What, if any, are your organization's membership requirements? Membership Dues
- Does your organization charge membership dues? Yes
- If yes, how much are your organization's dues?
- \$20 for the year, \$15 for the semester
- Is your organization affiliated with any local, regional, or national organization? No
- If yes, what is the address, phone, e-mail address, and contact person associated with your organization's local, regional, or national affiliation? No Response

APPENDIX G

PSYCHOLOGY MAJORS OF COLOR ORGANIZATION PROFILE



About

Psychology Majors of Color bridges the gap between psychology students of color (and other related fields) by providing a common place to convene to create a sense of community. We touch upon mental wellness issues within communities of color as well as making sure that our members are able to thrive within their career paths post college by providing them with the necessary skill sets. By creating this common space, we provide a supportive environment for our members to uplift each other's professional goals. We do so through:

- Professional Development Workshops/Events
- Community Service and Donation Drives
- Academic Workshops/Events

Contact Information

Membership Details:

- Does your organization have specific membership requirements? Yes
- What, if any, are your organization's membership requirements? Must attend 3 meetings per semester
- Does your organization charge membership dues? No
- If yes, how much are your organization's dues? No Response
- Is your organization affiliated with any local, regional, or national organization?
No
- If yes, what is the address, phone, e-mail address, and contact person associated with your organization's local, regional, or national affiliation? No Response

APPENDIX H

WOMEN OF COLOR CREATIVES ORGANIZATION PROFILE



About:

In Women of Color Creatives, our mission is to empower and build connections for women of color that have artistic passions or creative goals through networking discussions and events geared towards our creative aspirations at the University. We are a collective that is dedicated to being a safe space that represents diversity, inclusivity, as well as freedom of expression. We focus on topics that surround women of color in art, music, literature, dance, and other creative fields. Most of all we are a sisterhood dedicated to build, achieve, and inspire each other!

- We create a safe space for women of color interested in creative, artistic fields or have creative passions from all over the Grace campus and provide an empowering and inclusive environment to have discussions about topics that relate to us.
- We provide workshop discussions about goals setting and networking.
- We continuously aim to offer scholarship and grant opportunities through our membership newsletters/ social media
- We invite and connect with women of color in creative fields to partner with so that we see the representation we want to have. As well as collaborate with creative professionals for networking opportunities for members.
- Creative critics for constructive criticism (this is a voluntary thing during every discussion)
- We offer spotlight shoutouts for Creative of the Week segment on our social media to promote the creative talents of our members
- We host a monthly Sunday Brunch for members to connect as well as de-stress!
- We are a collective that works within the college community as well as in the local Philly area.

Overall, we are a community of creative women that empower and uplift each other and create opportunities for one another!

Lastly, we are a judgment free space that appreciates all of our members, providing space

Membership Details:

- Does your organization have specific membership requirements? Yes
- What, if any, are your organization's membership requirements?
- Membership requirements include being a woman of color
- Does your organization charge membership dues? No
- If yes, how much are your organization's dues? No Response
- Is your organization affiliated with any local, regional, or national organization?
No
- If yes, what is the address, phone, e-mail address, and contact person associated with your organization's local, regional, or national affiliation? No Response

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1-Codebook Example

Code	Definition	Response
Level of involvement in organization	example of membership role and responsibilities	I take on the responsibilities of managing 11 Executive Board members and that is on top of also making sure that our rooms are reserved, all of our behind-the-scenes administrative stuff is kept up to date, and that we just maintain a positive light and university community. (Deena)
Meaning of involvement	reflection of what being a member means	To me, it means to be that example that I wanted when I came into college. Just to see like, oh, there's like a black girl doing that up there. Like, maybe I can be in her position next year, just to keep it as like generations you know? Like, I can do this, I can do that and also have a sense of family in the community. (Nicole)
Black women success at PWI	example of what it takes to be successful at a predominantly White institution	I think it takes definitely having a community of people who understand what you are going through, and who you can lean on for support because even in your spaces that are predominantly black, most of the university is still very white and sometimes you'll be the only black person in the room. So, being able to mentally deal with it can be really frustrating. So yeah, having people as a good support system is a really important thing to have in order to be successful. (Summer)

(Table continued)

<p>Management of academic and organization involvement</p>	<p>reflection of how the participant simultaneously manages time</p>	<p>It is a balancing act for sure. Knowing how much of my time and energy I can expend in what I want, versus what I am obligated to do. However, I don't usually trade my involvement and my academic work. I can't afford to compromise my academia for any of the other areas of my life that I've invested in. However, when I made the commitment to attend a meeting at PMC, I also made sure that I was still allotting time to work on personal development, and academic development in the process. It's not easy, but nothing in college is really easy. So, it's just about, like having my priorities in order. (Jonna)</p>
<p>Benefits of having a Black Student Organization</p>	<p>reflection of the importance of having a Black student organization on campus</p>	<p>It is great to have an org like BSU that's encouraging students to feel comfortable in their identity as a black person especially since we are not the dominant person in society or at school. It feels good having that space to talk about how we feel and to have a sense of unity that you don't really find elsewhere as much. (Nina)</p>
<p>Relationship with peer in the organization</p>	<p>example of the type of relationship the participant has with peer members</p>	<p>I really try to have a sisterhood. So, I'm really close to all of them because we all have this strong sense of responsibility to owe it as women and women of color specifically to create and have this space for us. So, we're all pretty close. (Betty)</p>

LIST OF PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Table 4.1

Participant Demographics

Participants	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Age	Academic Status	Major
Summer	African American	Female	21	Senior	Psychology
Deena	African American	Female	21	Senior	African American Studies
Nicole	African American	Female	21	Senior	Psychology
Betty	African American	Female	20	Junior	Art History
Nina	African American	Female	21	Senior	Communications and Media
Jonna	African American	Female	21	Senior	Theater

LIST OF PARTICIPANT ORGANIZATION INFORMATION

Table 4.2

Organization Information

Participants	Student Organization	Role held within the organization	Years in the organization
Summer	Psychology Majors of Color	Founder and President	2
Deena	Black Student Union	President	4
Nicole	Black Student Union	Vice President	3
Betty	Women Of Color Creatives Collective	President and Founder	2
Nina	Black Student Union	Vice President	4
Jonna	Psychology Majors of Color	General Body Member	2

Table 4.3

Organization of Questions, Categories, and Themes

Research Question	Categories of Data	Emergent Theme
How do Black undergraduate women describe their experience as members of a Black student organization on a predominantly White campus?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Culturally relevant Experiences 2. Leadership Experiences 3. Professional Development Experiences 4. Relationships with the Organization 5. Interactions with Student Activities Staff 	<p>Creating culturally relevant experiences</p> <p>Controlling narratives and definitions</p>
How do Black undergraduate women make meaning of their extracurricular involvement in a Black student organization on a predominantly White campus?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Taking on leadership roles within the organization 2. Representation and visibility 3. Participation as a form advocacy and support 4. Participation as a form of activism 	Making meaning by taking on leadership roles
How do Black undergraduate women simultaneously manage their extracurricular involvement and academic responsibilities while trying to reduce barriers to college retention?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support systems 2. Executive Function Skills 3. Awareness of Level of Involvement 4. Monitoring level of involvement 	Utilizing strategies to manage academic and extracurricular activities
What perceptions do Black undergraduate women have regarding the role extracurricular involvement in a Black student organization plays in their persistence and academic outcomes?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Awareness of the benefits and detriments of involvement 2. Awareness of the role of involvement on academics 3. Awareness of the role of involvement on the decision to persist 	Benefits of Involvement