A Photo Illicit Study of Black Women's Sense of Belonging at a Predominately White Institution

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Eastern Illinois University

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A Photo Illicit Study of Black Women's Sense of Belonging at a Predominately White Institution

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BY

Kayla Alexandria Slusher

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF Masters of Science in College Student Affairs

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

2018

YEAR

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study sought to examine how Black women define and create their sense of belonging while attending a predominately White institution using a photovoice approach. The women took photographs of spaces that they frequently occupy and then engaged in a face-to-face interview to discuss the photographs. The researcher also investigated four Black women, ranging from junior to graduate level, to identify how they developed a sense of belonging at the research site institution. Results of the study showed that a feeling of comfort was most important when identifying belongingness in a space. The participants were able to create a sense of belonging on- and off-campus with the assistance of three key factors: creating a home, using spaces for its intended use, and having people invested in them.

Keywords: sense of belonging, photovoice, women, Black identity
DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to all the Black women that read this. Know that someone cared enough to ask your opinion, LISTEN to your voice, and document your experience.

If you are reading my thesis to learn how to better support Black women at a predominately White institution, I say, “Thank you.” Thank you for taking the time to educate yourself but do not let it stop here. Take the information you learn and the insight you gain and spread the knowledge. If we all work together, we can make a change and create a true community for ALL minority students attending predominately White institutions.

To every first-generation college student who is afraid of the unknown, just trust God and let Him guide your steps. Set goals, surround yourself with positive, like-minded people, and stay focused.

“Courage doesn’t mean you don’t get afraid. Courage means you don’t let fear stop you.”
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, giving honor to God for without him none of this would have been possible. This achievement of obtaining a master’s degree was something that seemed impossible but with the constant reassurance that He would not give me more than I can bear kept me going. The drive He instilled in me when others doubted me, and my capabilities is one that I will continue to carry with me as I achieve every goal I set my mind to. The support system that He placed in my life has been nothing less than amazing and for them I am forever indebted.

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To my support system: Dar, Carolyn, Rishawnda, Bri, Ari, Cappy, Darian, Kia, Cappy, and my beautiful Feds, thank you for always pushing me to finish, for listening to my complaining, being there through the ups and downs, for the random calls of encouragement, and allowing me to grow into the woman that I am today. Do not think that the long nights in the library, the 24-hour lounge, and at the kitchen table, the laughter, the study tables, and the constant check-ins have gone in vain. I will cherish the memories fve-ever. I love yall!

To my family, thank you for always supporting me emotionally, financially, and spiritually. Your constant support and encouragement has been the biggest factor in my success. I did this for us. I pray I continue to make you proud.

And last but certainly not least, to my beautiful mother. Thank you for all the guidance you have provided me throughout my entire life. You have always pushed me to be the best me possible and I thank you for never letting me settle for less. Your strength, perseverance, and resiliency are all characteristics that I pray I possess and are able to pass on to my future children. I know you claim that “you ain’t one of my lil friends” but you are literally the best best friend and part-i-ner that I could ever ask for. I love you more than words can express but you already know what’s understood doesn’t need to be explained.

Hey granny, all of this is for you. I love you and miss you more and more each day. Keep watching over us.
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Black students at white universities in the first half of the twentieth century, though few in number, protested the treatment they received on their campuses (Williamson, 2003). At many predominately White colleges and universities, Black students have been excluded longer than they have been afforded opportunities to attend (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009). A connection to a college campus begins with the first day. “Integration into the college environment is an emergent process that is largely a function of formal and informal interactions into the academic and social systems of the institution at the center of the attrition process” (Fischer, 2007, p. 126). Renn and Reason (2013) reference Astin’s theory of involvement as meaningful engagement in college increases cognitive complexity, leading to learning and development (2013). Involvement is key in acclimation to college campus and keeping students coming back to campus.

“The nationwide college graduation rate for Black students stands at an appallingly low rate of 42 percent. This figure is 20 percentage points below the 62 percent rate for White students” (http://www.jbhe.com/features/50_blackstudent_gradrates.html). Researchers have asserted that the academic success, adjustment, and retention of Black students is influenced by factors such as precollege preparation, individual responses to psychological stressors, and type of college environment (Fleming, 1984; Hughes, 1987). When Black students transition into postsecondary education they tend to struggle with understanding their racial identity. The concept of identity is a complex one, shaped by
individual characteristics, family dynamics, historical factors, and social and political contexts (Tatum, 1997). According to Tatum (1997) understanding who you are depends greatly on who the world around you says you are, like parents, peers, the media and cultural images.

For Black students at Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) alike, completion of college is both directly and indirectly related to a blend of individual, environmental and racial experiences which, speculatively, may be affected by interventions designed to reduce Black student drop-out rates (Hamilton, 2009). Although the primary focus of postsecondary education is to graduate with a baccalaureate, this goal is hindered when students of a microculture do not feel like they belong on the campus where they are pursuing their education. Challenges for Black students also encompassed institutionally related factors such as campus-wide internalized oppression, negative classroom experiences, and underdeveloped support systems (Glenn & Johnson, 2012). Historically, Black people have valued the role of education, with the continued rise of Black women’s enrollment reflecting its significance among the Black population. (Hannon, Woodside, Pollard, & Roman, 2016). This is a key reason why ensuring the comfort of the Black student is essential to their success. When looking at the Black woman and the PWI college experience, “Researchers cited the importance of understanding how race, gender, and collegiate settings influence the college experiences of this population” (Hannon et al., 2016).
Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate sense of belonging of Black women at a predominantly White institution to understand their sense of belonging and where on campus this occurred through the use of photography and personal interviews. The use of photography provides clear documentation of spaces where this population identifies their belongingness in addition to the conversations that were had in the interviews. This method is known as Photovoice. "Photovoice is a process by which people can identify, represent, and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique" (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 369). This process will allow for students to use their photos to record their experience and act as catalysts for change (Wang & Burris, 1997).

The secondary purpose of this study was to understand the relationship between involvement in college and the impact it has on sense of belonging. This study is helpful in understanding what resources Black women use to create their sense of belonging and what physical locations they occupy to feel accepted at the PWI. This study provides insight to campus administrators toward providing a more intentional experience for this population.

Research Questions

This study sought to understand the relationship between Black women's involvement on campus and the way it coincided with their sense of belonging at a PWI by answering the following questions:

RQ1: Where are Black female students creating their space?

RQ2: In what ways are Black female students involved on the college campus?
RQ3: How do Black female students describe their sense of belonging in college?

**Significance of the Study**

This topic is significant to me because I directly identify with the population I researched. As a Black female who attended a PWI for my undergraduate career, I heard a variety of experiences that were similar and different from mine. Conducting this study allowed me to document the stories that were shared and supply visuals to allow the Black woman's voice to be heard. While in my undergraduate career, I took my first semester of my freshman year to get a feel of campus and classes. Through the people that I met in class and around campus, I noticed that they all had one central connection; they were all involved. When I began to get involved in student organizations and working on campus I felt the most connected to campus. As I reflect on the experiences shared with me regarding Black women feeling like they do not belong at their college campus, many of these women were not involved within the campus. I got to hear more about and gained a better understanding of the other side of how Black women view their connection to campus through this study.

By understanding the relationship between involvement, space, and sense of belonging of Black women, administrators will be able to identify the importance of getting involved to provide a campus environment that is embraced by all populations. This study provides insight toward understanding how to properly support all students and providing the support services and spaces for them to thrive. This study shed light to the pressing issue of how and where students connect and belong, especially Black women on the college campus.
Limitations of Study

There were a few limiting factors to my study. One factor that limited the results of my study is that all my participants were from one institution. The size and location of this institution is not going to be an accurate depiction of how all Black women feel at other institutions of a similar make up but to gain an overall understanding I interviewed participants with different involvement on campus. Considering that the questions I asked allowed participants to share their opinion, I did not want the participants to answer the way they thought I wanted them to answer nor for my comprehension of their statements to be misconstrued. My solution to avoid bias was to submit a copy of the transcription to my thesis advisor to review and check for bias. Also, I asked the participants generalized open-ended questions during the interview to avoid leading them on and allow for maximum exposure based on level of comfort.

Since I am a Black woman and I attended the site of my study, that posed an additional limitation. To increase the objectivity of a population that I closely identify with, I chose to interview women whom I have no connection with and who are involved in different areas. To have an outlet to share my ideas, thoughts and feelings throughout this process, I kept a journal to free write about the responses I hear. This also assisted in allowing me to listen to other people who disagree with the way I feel about the location in study and remove my bias due to the close connection I feel with the campus.

Definition of Terms

Black student. A student of African or African-American descent who identifies their race as Black.
Double minority. The combined effects of practices which discriminate on the basis of race, and on the basis of sex (Dade, 2015).

Involvement. The amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience (Astin, 1999).

Sense of belonging. The extent to which students felt they would “fit”, both personally and socially, at a particular institution (Nora, 2004).

Summary

This study was conducted using a phenomenological qualitative approach to gain more insight to the factors that allow Black women to increase their sense of belonging at a PWI. The collected information is helpful to anyone working on a college campus. It can be utilized to better welcome Black women to the campus as well as to hear the voice of an underrepresented group of students. Chapter II contains a review of the literature that further relates to this study from past research that references sense of belonging, the history of Black students in higher education, impact of involvement and the identity development of Black students.
CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

This chapter encompasses a review of the research that has been collected on Black students in higher education, the role involvement plays on students' sense of belonging, and theoretical and conceptual frameworks. Through this chapter, understanding will be gained about the experiences that Black women have faced and are still facing in higher education at PWIs.

History of Black Students in Higher Education

"Get your education. it's the one thing they can't take away from you" (http://www.americanradioworks.org/segments/hbcu-history/). Minnesota Public Radio has a legacy project that they have developed with various podcasts related to the history of African Americans in the United States. This statement was made consistently to the family of Zach Hubert, a slave who was taught to read by the plantation owner's son. By the time Zach was freed by anti-slavery laws in Georgia, he and his wife had twelve children (Freemark, 2015). Zach saved enough money to buy his own land, set up a school and hired a teacher to teach his children, and when all of his children reached the appropriate age, they all went to college (Freemark, 2015). An act that was unthinkable for Black people this close to the beginning of the end of slavery. It was believed that Black men and women were incapable of succeeding as learners due to their race being the factor that made them inferior and unable to appreciate the benefits of college education (Albritton, 2012). In the South, primarily, as well as in other parts of the United States, state laws prohibited blacks from attending established historically White colleges and universities (Jackson & Nunn, 2003). During the early part of the 19th
century, a very small amount of predominately White colleges were accepting black applicants; with only three colleges that educated mostly Black students by the mid-1800s (Freemark, 2015). Northern philanthropists collaborated with middle-class businessmen and professional educators of the South to reform education in the Deep South (Brooks & Starks, 2011). Thus, the first Historically Black College and University (HBCU) The Institute of Colored Youth (later renamed Cheyney State University), was founded in 1837 during post-Civil War America (Redd, 1998, Albritton, 2012). At least 90% of all African Americans were illiterate and only 28% had received any college-or-university-level training from any American institution when the Civil War began in 1861 (Mbjaekwe, 2006). The Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 freed African Americans in rebel states, during the years after the [civil] war, Black and White teachers from the North and South, missionary organizations, churches and schools worked tirelessly to give the emancipated population the opportunity to learn (Reconstruction and its aftermath, 2008). HBCUs' curriculum was evolving from primarily elementary and high school level education to liberal arts and professional education (Jackson & Nunn, 2003). Lincoln University located in Pennsylvania, chartered on April 24, 1854, was the first HBCU to issue college degrees in America (Brooks and Starks, 2011).

HBCUs are defined as postsecondary institutions established specifically to educate African Americans (Jackson & Nunn, 2003). Marybeth Gasman, a historian at the University of Pennsylvania who studies HBCUs says, “They [HBCUs] started in church basements, they started in old schoolhouses, they started in people’s homes. [Former slaves] were hungry for learning...because of course, education had been kept from them” (http://www.americanradioworks.org/segments/hbcu-history/). In the 1890s
the second Morrill Land-Grant Act specified that states using federal higher education funds must provide an education to black students, either by opening the doors of their public universities to African Americans, or by establishing schools specifically to serve them (Freemark, 2015). Rather than integrate their public institutions, many Southern states created a separate set of institutions serving African Americans (Freemark, 2015). Cited by Jackson & Nunn (2003) Roebuck and Murty stated.

Public HBCUs were created by the southern state governments for three reasons:
to get millions of dollars in federal funds for the development of white land-grant universities, to limit black education to vocational training, and to prevent blacks from attending white land-grant colleges (p. 13).

Thus, were born many of the South’s public black colleges (Freemark, 2015). After the Civil War, more HBCUs were established to provide for the education of the newly freed slaves (Redd, 1998). The early college education provided to Blacks at HBCUs focused on basic reading and math education, as this population suffered from a majority illiterate population (Albritton, 2012). Though these post-secondary institutions, founded to educate and advance the status of “Negroes,” these institutions were being funded and supported by Northern abolitionists, missionaries, and other “white liberals” (McPherson, 1970, p. 1357). With Whites funding these institutions they were able to maintain some control of these institutions but as Blacks became more educated, they wanted to be in control and have more of a voice in how the school that influenced their future made decisions (Albritton, 2012). Northern teachers, many of whom were white women, traveled into the South to provide education and training for the newly freed population
BLACK WOMEN BELONGING AT A PWI

(Glimpses of the freed women. 2008). South Carolina lawyer and teacher D. Augustus Starker wrote, in 1883:

we are willing to return thanks to the many friends who have assisted us in educating ourselves thus far, but we have now reached the point where we desire to endeavor to educate ourselves, to build school houses, churches, colleges, and universities, by our own efforts...ere we sacrifice our manhood (as cited in McPherson, 1970, p. 1370).

This was a clear sign of seeing how many Blacks were appreciative of the support and assistance that was given by their allies but wanting the voice that they now have, to be used, heard and to matter. The difference in the roles of HBCUs and historically white institutions in higher education in the United States is not in the roles themselves but the nature of the students who are served, how they are served, and the purpose for serving them (Jackson & Nunn, 2003).

At a meeting in 1930, Marion Cuthbert, dean of women at Talladega College, explained the importance of her role as dean at a school established to educate Black students: “The dean in the Negro school must help students to fit into a world where they are neither socially welcomed nor economically secure” (as cited by Wolf-Wendel, Twombly, Tuttle, Ward. & Gaston-Gayles. 2004, p. 3-4). A statement like that of Cuthbert was important because just a few years prior The University of Kansas was playing close to the line of “separate but equal” doctrine that was instilled in the Plessy v. Ferguson U.S. Supreme Court case of 1896. Though University of Kansas had never restricted African American students from the classroom, its racial climate in the 1920s was dismal: African American students were barred from dormitories, the swimming
pool. athletics. musical groups. debate. the Men's Student Council. and even the YWCA and YMCA (Wolf-Wendel, et al., 2004). The case that came to be known as Brown v. Board of Education was the name given to four separate cases that were heard by the U.S. Supreme Court concerning the issue of segregation in public schools (Jackson & Nunn, 2003). Thurgood Marshall, who handled these cases along with the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund. argued before the Supreme Court that the separate school systems for Blacks and Whites were inherently unequal, and thus violated the "equal protection clause" of the Fourteenth Amendment (Jackson & Nunn, 2003, p. 97). After rehearing this case the justices ruled that though Blacks were provided separate education facilities, the support systems for Blacks' education was not equal in quality or quantity to that of Whites (Jackson & Nunn, 2003).

In 1900, only 55 percent of the black population was literate, and approximately 2,600 had postsecondary degrees (Jackson & Nunn, 2003). Forty years later institutes of higher education were still struggling with the concept of desegregation in public schools. Though the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in 1954 in the Brown v. Board of Education case overturned the separate but equal doctrine in public education (U.S. Department of Education, 1991), it failed in fully desegregating public education in the U.S. but it did put the Constitution on the side of racial equality (McBride, 2006).

Today we have 30,026 4-year colleges in the United States with 101 being HBCUs spread across the United States and the U.S. Virgin Islands, which is down from the 121 institutions in the 1930s (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Though Black schools represent a tiny percentage of American colleges, approximately three percent, they produce 24 percent of Black STEM (Science, Technology,
Engineering, and Mathematics) graduates and confer almost 35 percent of all Bachelor’s
degrees earned by Black graduates in astronomy, biology, chemistry, math, and physics.
75 percent of all PhDs, 46 percent of all business executives, 50 percent of all Black
engineers, 80 percent of all Black federal judges, 50 percent of all Black doctors, and 50
percent of all Black attorneys (Brooks & Starks, 2011). For over 100 years HBCUs were
the avenue to education access and social and economic advancement for Blacks
(Jackson & Nunn, 2003). The numbers of HBCUs has declined slightly, the enrollment
numbers from 1980 to 2015 has increased from 234,000 to 293,000 (National Center for
Education Statistics, n.d.). The decrease of HBCUs is also attributed to the merging of
HBCUs with PWIs, which accounts for the increased enrollment of Blacks at PWIs
(Boland & Gasman, 2014, p. 5). “There has been a substantial increase in the number of
Black students enrolled at PWIs over the last 60 years” (Dade, 2015, p. 15). Black men
represent less than 5% of all undergraduates in the nation, outnumbering these Black men
slightly more than 2 to 1 is Black women (Strayhorn, 2010). Unfortunately, the proper
resources and support structures that were needed for the success of Black students at
PWIs were not provided as this new population was integrated in to the PWI college
(Benton, 2007). Institutions are not providing the resources necessary to support Black
students enrolled in higher education which contributes to the dropout rate of this
population (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). Many Black students experienced stress due to a
sense of alienation and a lack of social support (Hamilton, 2009). Here we are sixty-one
years later and professionals at PWIs are still on the pursuit of identifying how to best
support Black students (Strayhorn, 2012). Strayhorn (2013) gives his perception on how
these environments [PWIs] are still maintaining the unwelcoming and isolating environment experienced by some Black students by highlighting the history of PWIs.

PWIs tend to have much longer institutional histories of exclusion and elitism than diversity and inclusion. And this historical legacy of *de jure* segregation, unapologetic exclusion, and overt discrimination on the basis of race continues to affect campus climates today, which in turn may reinforce policies and programs that foster students' expectations about facing racism on campus (Strayhorn, 2013, p. 125).

Research was done on the white male experience since they were the only people going to college, it then expanded to ethnic minority students at PWIs being studied collectively as a whole in higher education and continues to expand today (Thompson, 1999). Often Black men and women are lumped into one homogeneous static group (Winkle-Wagner, 2015). Various studies, such as that by Livingston and Steward in 1987 and Malaney and Shively in 1995, stress the importance of studying ethnic minority groups at PWIs individually due to the variety of experiences and reactions they experience on campus (as cited by Thompson, 1999). Because of the lack of research and connection Black feminists have defended the equality of Black women and men: connected theory, practice and politics; and consciously engaged in feminist praxis (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016).

**Women in Higher Education**

"Public and educational policy have played a crucial role in determining the fate of women of all races, classes, sexual orientation, and abilities in the postsecondary academy" (Adair, 2002, p. 205). As higher education began in the United States, the
unspoken yet implemented rule was that only White men “of good character” had the right to an education (Kates, 2001, p. 3). It took more than 200 years after the opening of Harvard for that “rule” to be changed and the first cohort of women was admitted to a U.S. college (Adair, 2002). Oberlin College and Antioch College both opened their doors to women in 1837 and 1853 respectively but utilized a very limiting basis on entry (Adair, 2002). According to Gordon (1990), women attending Oberlin were required to study the “ladies course,” they were prohibited from delivering any type of public speeches, and they were required to learn about and complete domestic tasks. The requirements were similar at Antioch but they also required that the students were to stay with their own gender, unless they were in the classroom (Chamberlin, 1988). Antioch and Oberlin opened the gateway to women’s access to higher education. By the mid-nineteenth century coeducation in higher education was accepted but the support for women attending still lacked (Gordon, 1990). The passing of the Morrill Land Grant Act in 1862, provided public institution’s funding with no prohibition on women students but women were still only relevant when looking at the social aspects of higher education (Adair. 2002). With no clear policies in place to protect and ensure the equality of women in higher education to be granted the same rights as men. higher education continued to solely serve privileged White men (Kates, 2001).

“Despite discriminatory policy and practices, by 1880 there were about 56,000 women in attendance at colleges and universities in the United States. The number increased to 85,000 by 1900” (Adair, 2002, p. 206). Adair (2002) stated that these women primarily attended women’s colleges which began opening rapidly in the late nineteenth century. Women were allotted access into state universities after legislators
and board of regents were petitioned by parents and women's organizations to provide vocational preparation for the daughters of taxpayers (Adair, 2002). During this time, women of color and poor women were “multiply disenfranchised” (Adair, 2002, p. 206). “Legislative, social, and legal policy worked with academic policy to prohibit those who were considered ‘unfit’ for college and university work and life from entering educational institutions” (Adair, 2002, p. 206). “Policy restricted educational opportunities for students of color, the poor, and the disabled throughout the United States, and studies by scientists gave academic gatekeepers empirical proof to keep racist, sexist, classist, and able-ist admission policies in place” (Adair, 2002, p. 206-207, Kates, 2001).

From 1900 to 1930 the percentage of women pursuing degrees from higher education institutions increased from 19 percent to 40 percent (Newcomer, 1959). “Nevertheless, by the fall of 1957, the number of women enrolled in American colleges exceeded 1 million for the first time” (Chamberlain, 1988). Women became the majority on college campuses by 1979 then in 1982 they outnumbered the number of men being awarded a bachelor degree (Adair, 2002). The National Center for Education Statistics (2002) used a table to show that from 1999 to 2000 58 percent of master's degrees and 44 percent of professional degrees and Ph. D’s were attained by women. However, “women of color, poor women, and women with disabilities remain vastly underrepresented in this celebratory figure” (Adair. 2002. p. 208).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2016) the percentages for White, Black, and Hispanic women 18 to 24 years old enrolled in a 2- or 4-year college were 44.5, 39.4, and 43.6 respectively. Women still outnumber men when looking at enrollment in higher education but “women faculty are underrepresented on
many college and university campuses” (Adair, 2002, p. 210). In 2015, female faculty totaled 368,243 compared to a total of 438,789 male faculty (National Center for Education Statistics). “As full-time faculty, the higher the rank, the more women are underrepresented” (Adair, 2002). The National Center for Education Statistics from 2015 supports that statement as it shows the decrease in numbers of females as the rank increases. Women outnumber men as lecturers, instructors, and assistant professors but then men come out on top as associate professors and professors by more than 15,000 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). A tactic that can be seen to maintain a fair balance of men and women in education is affirmative action implementation.

“Affirmative action is an outcome of the 1960’s Civil Rights Movement, intended to provide equal opportunities for members of minority groups and women in education and employment” (http://www.ncsl.org/research/education/affirmative-action-overview.aspx). The guidelines for affirmative action in colleges and universities require “a written affirmative action plan that is publicly available to all applicants and employees, a labor force analysis, and goals and timetables for correcting any imbalances by gender and ethnicity” (Somers, 2002, p. 212). Somers (2002) addresses those opposed to the use of affirmative action as they perceive that “much more qualified white males are passed over in favor of much less qualified women and minorities for hiring and promotion” (Somers, 2002, p. 212). But due to the skewed hiring tactics used prior to the enforcement of affirmative action, now there is more accountability for supervisors/companies and ultimately higher education institutions to alleviate possible misunderstandings.
Hall and Sandler (1982) introduced the labels “classroom climate” and “chilly climate” in a report written to follow-up on investigations done in various levels of education. Their research focused on gender and the impact of curriculum and class structure. After the publishing of this report many faculty members saw their error in unconsciously contributing to the forming of a “chilly climate” for the students they served. These errors included calling on men more than women, using stereotypes in class examples (i.e. calling the teacher “she” and the doctor “he”), increase of nonverbal cues when men speak, and more. Aligning with the issues of higher education for all women, African American women experiences have recently become the focus of conversation as they were “assumed to be identical or less important than those of African American males, ignoring the ‘double burden’ of race and gender prejudices that African American women must confront in their daily lives” (Woods, 2002, p. 265).

Harvey (2001) stated that when comparing the completion of four or more years of college for African American women to African American men age twenty-five and older, the percentage for the women was 15.4 where men were at 13.9 percent. However, “Black women’s lower rates of tenure and promotion and their lower income returns than men with comparable education levels, reveal that African American men fare better than women in some respects” (Woods, 2002, p. 265).

In an essay written by Molina (2008), she addresses the multiple ways that women are excluded in higher education. Her essay adds to the perspective of marginalization of women in higher education, by stating the frequent theme of feelings of being silenced or tokenized (Molina, 2008). In 1992, there were less than four women serving as president of colleges primarily serving African American students (Smith &
The percentage of women holding the top job at colleges and universities stood at 30 percent in 2016, up just four percentage points from 2011 (American College President Study 2017, 2017). In 2016, the number of minority presidents increased four percentages to total 17 percent (American College President Study 2017, 2017). The lack of Black/African American women holding positions of leadership in higher education puts minority students at a disadvantage of finding a sense of belonging at their institution and seeing themselves in these roles.

**Sense of Belonging – Theoretical Perspective**

Strayhorn (2012) defined sense of belonging as "a basic human need and motivation, sufficient to influence behavior. [A] sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group (e.g., campus community) or others on campus" (p. 3). Connecting to one's environment has been designated amongst the most powerful human motive due to people having the strong instinctive need to form bonds and maintain them (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Liz Thomas (2012) discussed how building student belonging and engagement for the purposes of retention and success has been at the forefront of higher education policy discourse. The concept of "meeting needs to drive behavior" can be explained best by Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, established in 1943. Maslow’s Hierarchy is depicted using a pyramid. It starts from the most basic needs for survival at the bottom and moves to the top identifying a hierarchy of needs to be met before reaching the top need: self-actualization.

The model starts with the most basic need for survival; physiological needs. These needs include food, water, warmth and rest (Maslow, 1943). Students living on a
college campus receive these needs through residence hall living, dining halls, and academic buildings. For students who live off-campus, these needs are expected to be met at their place of residence, but they also have the flexibility to utilize the residence halls, dining centers, and academic buildings. Next is the need for safety and security. This level is approached after physiological needs are met. It can be achieved through the presence of campus security and a connectedness to campus and those that populate the campus; the students, faculty, and staff. It may also involve how safe students feel walking across campus, the security of the buildings they are living in, and the way in which the campus and community police interact or treat the students on and off-campus.

Level three is one of the most important levels for college students and the one that I will be focusing on, the need for belongingness and love, where the need for intimate relationships and friends lay (Maslow, 1943). On a collegiate campus, this is seen when students are forming deeper relationships than that of a colleague or another student through group projects or joining hall council. Being involved heavily impacts this level by allowing for the establishment of long term relationships with others and the campus environment. If students are not living in facilities that are clean and feel unsafe on campus they may struggle to connect with others on the campus. However, if these needs are met, the individual moves up the pyramid to self-esteem needs with the feeling of accomplishment (Maslow, 1943). Self-esteem needs are attained as students have the basic need of stability with their physiological needs, they feel safe and secure in their environment, and they feel like they belong where they spend most of their time and through their involvement. Involvement brings achievements for the student.
achievements bring increased levels of self-esteem with acknowledgements of their hard work.

The final level in Maslow’s hierarchy is self-actualization. In referring to Maslow’s highest level, McLeod (2016) stated, “In self-actualization a person comes to find a meaning to life that is important to them” (https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html). As the student climbs through the different levels and they reach the peak of the pyramid, their self-actualization is measured through their experiences, where euphoria, joy, and wonder are achieved (Maslow, 1962). The main idea of this theory is that you cannot reach the next level of the hierarchy without the fulfillment of the needs from the previous level. Students will not fully evolve in their environment if their basic needs are not met.

Brower and Ketterhagen (2004) conducted a quantitative study with over 1070 students from six different universities to identify if Black student’s success at HBCUs has a positive correlation compared with that of Black students at PWIs. The students were broken down into three groups: Black students at HBCUs, Black students at PWIs and White students at PWIs. The success of these students was identified by seven life task areas that are important for first year students: 1) getting good grades, 2) making friends, 3) being on one’s own without family or friends, 4) establishing future goals, 5) establishing an identity, 6) managing time, and 7) maintaining one’s physical health and well-being (Brower & Ketterhagen, 2004). The study concluded that because different students have different paths to being successful in college they require different services and that is where the similarities and differences lie. For the Black students attending HBCUs and the White students attending PWIs there were several similarities for the
factors that contributed to their success and retention for their sophomore year. Similar themes included satisfaction with attaining their expected GPA, feeling that their present activities were helping them work towards their goals, spending more time working during the week, feeling that they were coping well with managing their time, finding a balance between being on their own, being with college friends, and negotiating family contacts and visits, and the number of hours “hanging out” with friends (Brower & Ketterhagen, 2004).

For Black students attending PWIs, the influences impacting sense of belonging looked different than the other two groups. The strong factors related to academics were the number of hours spent in class and fewer hours studying (Brower & Ketterhagen, 2004). Black students attending a HBCU were found to stay enrolled in school when their expectations set were realistic, where White students attending a PWI continued to stay enrolled when they set their GPA high and were satisfied with attaining a GPA half a grade lower than the expected goal (Brower & Ketterhagen, 2004). “Black students at PWIs seemed to use a ‘defensive pessimism’ strategy to set their academic expectations.” these students set to attain a lower GPA than they knew they could reach with the assumption that they would naturally earn a higher GPA (Brower & Ketterhagen, 2004). Most of the students did earn a higher GPA than they set but shared that they would not be satisfied if they achieved their “expected” GPA or anything lower (Brower & Ketterhagen, 2004). If a student knew that they could get a 3.0 GPA, they would set their expectation to get a 2.0 for the semester. When the end of the semester grades were published, their GPA would be higher than the 2.0 they set, which they were proud of but if it was any lower than the 3.0 they knew they could earn, the student would be upset.
Black students at PWIs appear not to be handling their college life task domains in stride; they instead seemed to have had to work harder to negotiate between academic demands and social demands and have had to work harder to determine how much time they spend alone or with others (Brower & Ketterhagen, 2004, p. 109).

What Brower and Ketterhagen also found was that the Black students at PWIs remained enrolled at a rate of about 90% which was comparable to their White peers. However, this rate was higher than Black students enrolled at HBCUs where they saw a rate of about 80% retention.

These same Black students attending PWIs also showed strong factors in non-academic activities like the number of hours spent alone, just hanging out, more hours exercising, fewer hours sleeping, more hours working, more hours on campus activities, fewer hours doing maintenance chores, and fewer hours on miscellaneous activities (Brower & Ketterhagen, 2004). Brower and Ketterhagen (2004) also found that Black students who remain enrolled at PWIs for another year did not have large social networks. On the other hand, Blacks attending HBCUs found a solid balance between being with friends, being alone, and family visiting/contact (Brower & Ketterhagen, 2004). Retention for White students enrolled in PWIs had strong influence in the social areas of the number of hours spent hanging out with friends from high school and family (Brower & Ketterhagen, 2004). Having a connection to campus is essential when looking to find comfort. The students who were attending an institution where they are the majority found more social interactions, whereas the Blacks at PWIs partook in activities that do not require consistent interaction with others.
In a study by Glenn and Johnson (2012), they identified that for Black students at PWIs sense of belonging comes with some challenges which include but are not limited to campus-wide internalized oppression, negative classroom experiences, and underdeveloped support systems. Hannon, Woodside, Pollard, and Roman (2016) conducted a phenomenological study where they explored the real-life experiences of African American women attending a PWI. They highlighted "the importance of understanding how race, gender, and collegiate settings influence the college experiences of this population" (Hannon, et al., 2016, p. 653). Using purposeful selection, the Tennessee model of phenomenological research, and a $20 gift card incentive, the researchers interviewed seven African American women. Concluding the study, five major themes were identified: 1. Multiple worlds, 2. Belonging, 3. Expectations, 4. Awareness of surroundings, and 5. Coping" (Hannon, et al., 2016, p. 657). African American women can find themselves living a world that is accepted and advertised by society and then a world that is highlighted and accepted by their peers. Belonging is seen within the group that they most identify with and the expectations are leveled. Students of color feel inadequate to their White counterparts when in academic settings as they look for comfort in similarities, it sends them into a culture shock (Winkle-Wagner, 2009). Awareness can be seen when realizing that there is a clear distinction that there is a minority and majority presence and people of color make up the majority of that minority. Coping with the awareness can be tough if a community presence is not felt but it can also be a positive experience when a niche is found on campus.

Supportive social relationships, academic achievement, and student engagement mutually influence each other in a loop of feedback (Hughes, Luo, Kwok, & Loyd,
2008). When one component of the loop is enhanced, it can ignite a cycle of repeated benefits (Hughes, et al., 2008). If a student gets involved, they will continue to stay involved and exhibit success in other areas (i.e. academics, socially, etc.). When a student is seeing positive results in their academics, it gives them the confidence to get involved which in turn enhances their relationship with their peers. The opposite is also true if a student experiences a negative result in an area of their life it is likely to impact other aspects as well. Kate Wegmann (2017) published an article about the impact on social support and school belonging for Black and White children in K-12. Though this study was implemented using young children, this early understanding gives foresight to how to continue support for students' post-high school. When looking at student's academic success, it can be influenced by that of a parent or caregiver, peers, and teacher (Wegmann, 2017). For children that are coming from low-socioeconomic status families it is important for them to have high levels of parent or caregiver support in elementary school to alleviate the potential negative impacts of factors like poverty on academic success (Malecki & Demaray, 2006). In college-aged students from low-socioeconomic families, that role may inadvertently change. It can be seen that students will begin to value working over their education to help send money home to their family or to pay for school. Speaking specifically of students of ethnic minorities, the role of family support in academic success may look different than traditional forms recognized by schools (Syed, Azmitia, & Cooper, 2011). Schools view traditional family support as dropping off and picking up students from school, attending school events, and being involved in school events (Brewster & Railsback, 2003). Whereas, for parents and guardians of
Peer support also has a direct impact on academic support (Estell & Perdue, 2013) through facilitating access to learning-related resources and activities (Wentzel & Wigfield, 1998) and building on the sense that the classroom is an emotionally safe space to take risks related to learning (Duke, Borowsky, & Pettingell, 2011). In all levels of education this is established when teachers and/or professors establish a safe learning environment where incorrect answers are learning opportunities. When that environment is set, peers are more inclined to aid students inside and outside the classroom. As aforementioned, teacher support is key to academic success in students where emotional and instructional support are sought out (Wegmann, 2017). If a student is coming from a home where their parents or guardians are not invested in their success but one of their teachers gives them the attention and guidance that they have been searching for, the student will perform better to please that person. The student now views this adult to be acting in loco parentis. “Teacher support not only directly affects student achievement, but also does so indirectly by promoting student engagement” (Wegmann, 2017, p. 583). Support from educators have shown to increase engagement, the type of school engagement that consists of focusing, persisting, and putting forth one’s best effort on a task (Hughes et al., 2008).

Alexander Astin’s (1999) theory of college student involvement defines involvement as “the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (p. 518). Astin’s theory is composed of five basic postulates which are described below. The first of Astin’s postulates is involvement
refers to the amount of energy put into in various aspects, whether it be academic or social. Black women who come to college academically prepared and ready to get involved will make a greater effort to be successful. The second of the postulates says, "involvement occurs along a continuum" (Astin, 1999, p. 519). That is the Black woman who joins a historical Black sorority early in her time in college is likely to become more involved with the organization during her undergraduate experience but may also at times put her energy toward her academics as needed. Astin's third postulate states that "involvement has both quantitative and qualitative features" (Astin, 1999, p. 519). The fourth postulate addresses that the level of involvement in an area aligns directly to the amount of development and learning the student experiences. The last postulate Effectiveness is directly related to the area/programs ability to increase involvement. Levels of involvement will vary on the individual but when the want to be involved is there and acted upon, individuals will see the areas that their area of involvement coincides with Astin's theory. "School belonging plays a key role in learning and academic performance by influencing cognitive processes, behaviors, and emotions" (Wegmann, 2017, p. 583). It is also a strong predictor of academic success for all ages and levels of education (Osterman, 2000). If a student has a strong connection to campus, then their basic needs are met and they can properly focus on their academic success in a new environment.

"Entering college requires youths to face multiple transitions, including changes in their living arrangements, academic environments, and friendship networks, while adapting to greater independence and responsibility in their personal and academic lives" (Pittman & Richmond, 2008, p. 344). For Black students, this transition can be
challenging at a PWI where they may be encountering a predominately White community for the first time without having the safety of returning to a Black family or community at the end of the day as they may have while growing up. Learning to navigate these new environments at the college will cause them to adapt to these areas and learn to navigate through them. Pittman and Richmond (2008), sought to examine freshmen’s “sense of university belonging, quality of friendships, and psychological adjustment” (p. 344). They had 79 first-year freshmen of various backgrounds; White (71%), Black (18%), Hispanic American (5%), Asian American (4%), Native American (1%), and Biracial (1%). Participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire at 2 points during their first year on campus and observed the changes in these defined areas were observed. What Pittman and Richmond found was that the students who had a positive change in friendship qualities, scholastic competence, social acceptance, and self-worth also had positive change in relation to university belonging which in turn decreased the participants internalizing negative behaviors. This study shows that after having time to adjust to campus a connection to campus can be formed and it can aid in properly addressing problem behaviors. Deeper than simply feeling welcomed on the institutions campus, sense of belonging leads to being committed to the institution, committed to work, and having abilities recognized (Smerdon. 2002).

Sense of belonging has a positive influence on academic achievement, retention, and persistence (Hausmann, Schofield. & Woods, 2007; Rhee, 2008). “To excel, students must feel a sense of belonging in school (or college), and therefore educators must work to create conditions that foster belongingness among students” (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 9). Sense of belonging will look different for each student; thus, institutions
should create a variety of different types of environments and opportunities to engage students. Students will function better in the context where their needs are satisfied and the belongingness factor is prevalent (Osterman, 2000). Institutions need to consider the various populations they serve and how they help students find ways to connect. If students integrate into the academic and social facets of their institution, they form a feeling of belonging, which in turn leads to success (Hausmann et al., 2007; Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, & Slaomone, 2002). For example, if a student feels the sense of belonging on their sports team but not in their math class, the student will function better within their team.

It has been suggested that having a positive identity is what drives members’ perceptions within groups and adds to the motive for self-esteem, to continue to fulfill this need members categorize other members into in-groups and outgroups (Ormiston, 2016). If you have a student who joins the Black Student Union (BSU) and is assigned a task and role within the organization they will begin to connect and feel that they have an identify within the organization and at the institution. “A sense of connection can emerge if the student has a relationship with just one key person within the territory institution and this relationship can significantly impact a students’ decision to remain in college” (O’Keeffe, 2013, p. 607-608). For many students joining an organization like the BSU can be intimidating, let alone stepping up to take a leadership position; however, if just one student reaches out and makes a connection to that student it could make a great deal of difference to that student’s experience. A sense of belonging in classrooms and on campus has been found to be associated with adaptive motivation for success (Freeman, Anderman, & Jensen, 2007). Walton and Cohen (2007) compare feeling a part of the
university as equal in importance to attaining passing scores for high academic achievement. When it specifically comes to Black students' sense of belonging, Woldoff, Wiggins, and Washington (2011) conducted a qualitative study of differences between the experiences of in-state and out-of-state Black students attending a rural PWI. Through the interviews the common theme identified was, "Black collegians need to feel valued, safe, and accepted in order to feel at home, thrive during their time in college, and further develop into academically and socially well-rounded individuals" (Woldoff, Wiggins, & Washington, 2011, p. 1048). Research by Astin (1993) and Pascarella and Terenzi (2005) indicated that though some minority students are under prepared academically when they begin college, what matters the most in determining success is the institutional environment they are a part of. If a student comes from an urban high school district where materials were limited, and the teachers were always on strike, they may not feel adequate to be in a classroom with their peers but if the campus climate is positive and they feel supported and have a sense of belonging, success can be attained.

An area that commonly gets overlooked is that finding membership within single gender groups plays a large role in the way Black students function within their college environment (Dade, 2015). Fleming (1984) did a comparative study on the role of HBCUs in contemporary society. After organizing the rocky history of education for Blacks she found differences in adjustments of Black students at PWIs based on gender in the favor of Black females adjusting better to the PWI they were attending than Black males. Fleming stated that this could be due to women becoming more self-reliant in finding satisfaction; whereas Black males look to authority figures to provide guidance to students – something more accessible at a HBCU than at a PWI. It was suggested by
Fleming that because of the adverse experiences that Black males, primarily, face on PWI campuses; such as lack of interaction with other races due to racial stereotypes and unjustified labeling (Strayhorn, 2008), females can turn that into independence and assertiveness but their male counterpart does not respond respectively.

Unfortunately, a common reality for many Black students is that they do not feel that they are a part of their universities. Often, students may feel as though their struggle is to fit in without compromising their own identity. Students can feel like a *visitor on campus* or *invisible on campus*. Finding any validation that they do not belong could suggest for students that they do not fit or are not ‘cut out’ for academics, and thus can affect the ways in which these students engage and connect with their environments, faculty, and peers (Dade, 2015, p. 33-34).

Keeping in mind that there is very little literature that focuses explicitly on the differences in sense of belonging, perceptions of campus climate, experiences with discrimination, and institutional satisfaction regarding Black males and Black females separately (Dade, 2015), the issues that Black women are facing in college are not new.

Black women make up the majority of Black students in post-secondary education, when compared to Black men, showing their enrollment has continued on a steady incline; however, they are still underrepresented within universities and colleges when compared to majority counterparts (Dade, 2015, p. 54).

Though Black females are more resilient with managing difficult experiences at PWIs than that of their Black male counterpart, a key area of focus for this population of women is enduring being seen as a *double minority* – “the combined effects of practices which discriminate on the basis of race, and on the basis of sex” (Dade, 2015, p. 55).
Mattering and Marginality – Theoretical Perspective

It has been expressed in previous studies that transitioning to college has been more challenging for underrepresented groups: this statement holds true to racially marginalized groups, particularly when attending a PWI (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; Littleton, 2003; Nelson-Laird, 2007; Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003). “The impact of the construct of mattering has been studied in identifying its relationship to retention, persistence, and success in college” (Tovar, Simon, & Lee, 2009, p. 157). Schlossberg’s (1989) Marginality and Mattering theory “provided new ways to explore transitioning college students’ involvement and perceptions of their experiences in higher education in the 20th century.” (p. #). The theory defines mattering using five aspects: to feel noticed (attention), to feel cared about (importance), to have someone empathize with them (ego-extension), to feel needed (dependence), and to feel appreciated (appreciation). If these feelings are lacking, this can cause an increase in feelings of marginalization. Take the high achieving Black high school senior who has three younger siblings wanting to be just like her. College was a dream to many people in her community but in her family, it was stressed that college was not an option, it was a requirement. She was top of her class and spent much of her time with the guidance counselor to prepare to go off to college, as she is the first in her family to go. She knew that this step would set the path for her younger siblings to follow in her footsteps. Her family is always encouraging her and doing all they can to show they are proud of her and appreciate her hard work she put in during high school. She is experiencing a high level of mattering, as all the aspects are being fueled. However, when she gets to college, she is no longer that high achieving student because the bar has been raised. The professors are not noticing that she is falling
behind in her work and she does not feel comfortable enough to ask for help because she does not want to be seen as less than capable than the other students. These feelings of mattering are missing and her grades begin to drop until she is put on academic probation. Finally, after talking to her RA, she finds the appropriate resources to get her back on track and her confidence is rebuilt along with the feeling of mattering. When adolescents feel they matter it in turns increases their sense of belonging.

Schlossberg (1989) states that, "Every time an individual changes roles or experiences a transition, the potential for feeling marginal arises" (p. #). This can be seen when a student enters college for the first time. Students go from being at the top of the food chain their senior year of high school to back at the bottom in college. For a Black female going to college at a PWI it could be the first time they experience life outside of their home community and without their family. The research that was conducted by Schlossberg (1989) drew the conclusion that the transition from high school to college can leave students uneasy about their abilities and their future roles at their new institution. This feeling of marginality can be permanent or temporary dependent on the person as "a sense of not fitting in can lead to self-consciousness, irritability, and depression"; this can be associated with "not fitting in academically and/or socially at their colleges and can result in feelings of worthlessness and increased self-consciousness" (Schlossberg, 1989, p. #).

A study completed by Greer and Chwalisz (2007) exploring the stress levels and mechanisms for coping of 203 undergraduate Black students from a Midwestern PWI and a HBCU on the central East coast identified that there were two primary influences in the life of Black students attending a PWI: campus climate and race relations. After
conducting this study, the results showed that Black students attending PWIs experienced more stress than their HBCU counterparts due to stressors related to their minority status, such as racism, racial tension, and discrimination (Greer and Chwalisz, 2007). Though these feelings were shared by the Black students of these institutions, the findings showed that the type of school the participants attended did not influence the overall perceived stress experience, but it was the strongest predictor of minority status stress (Greer & Chwalisz, 2007). Dade (2015) wrote about this study in her dissertation and concluded that, “These findings reinforce the importance of a diverse college campus environment, where students do not feel they are estranged from the racial and cultural composition of the institutional community” (p. 17). Dade’s conclusion attributes to Schlossberg’s marginality portion of the theory. During the time of Greer and Chwalisz’s study a longitudinal study was being conducted by Miller & Sujitparapitaya (2010) from 1994 to 2009. Determining if minority’s perceptions of campus climate change when the balance of minorities and white students change was the purpose of this study (Miller & Sujitparapitaya, 2010). By looking at a college in the California State University system over the course of twelve years, the two researchers observed the increase and decline of the racial groups on campus in comparison to the Student Needs and Priorities Survey (SNAPS) that was administered approximately every five years (Miller & Sujitparapitaya, 2010). The question that was most pertinent to this study asked on the survey was, “Indicate how often, during the past year, you have personally experienced or directly observed at this campus insensitive behavior and/or remarks directed at yourself or another based on each attribute.” It then followed the question with various attributes which included ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, learning disabilities.
religion, age, and non-English background (Miller & Sujitparapitaya, 2010). It was found that high levels of diversity minimize the racially insensitive behavior that can be experienced on a PWI campus. However, these findings did not have a strong correlation to that of one specific race or ethnicity. This study reiterated the findings of Greer and Chwalisz that as PWIs increased the diversity of their student body, there was a decline in the percentage of students who witnessed occasional or frequent racially insensitive behavior. Research has shown that when diversity increases, and students have more exposure to other races and cultures who bring different point of views, it enhances cognitive and identity development (Milem, Chang, and Antonio, 2005). When the majority sees the minority population grow, it allows room for open conversations to take place and opportunity for both parties to learn about each other.

“Influences such as faculty mentoring, institutional demographic profile, peer support, and psychosocial development all contribute to how college students define and subsequently experience academic success” (Bonner, 2010, p. 66). These influences increase the feeling of mattering on a college campus. The climate of the institution plays a large role in the way students of racial minorities respond and react. Rarely are the positive experiences of attending PWIs as a minority student documented (McCorkle, 2012). Higher education environments are often referred by women and students of color as chilly, inhospitable, and unwelcoming (Aguirre, 2000). Winkle-Wagner (2009) studied 30 women who identify as African American across a variety of years in college at a PWI documenting their experience of being an African American woman on a PWI's campus. When asked to describe what it means to be an African American woman at a PWI the reoccurring words used were “Isolation,” “alienation,” and navigating “culture
shock:” (Winkle-Wagner, 2009, p. 66). These words can lead to the presumption that these women speak for all Black women attending a PWI and that they all feel marginalized. Though these women expressed high levels of being outnumbered and feeling like they were walking in enemy territory while walking campus (Winkle-Wagner, 2009) this cannot be the experience of all Black women at PWIs. When students walk campus and faces of those that look like them are scarce, they may begin to wonder if they matter or if they will be heard but this could also be a stepping stone to form unity amongst the minorities. When students fall into the temporary state of marginalization, they begin to feel smaller than they are and less appreciated, and can lead them to think they do not matter. Temporary marginalization can also hinder the progression of Maslow’s Hierarchy.

**Black Identity Development Theory**

Black women represent two marginalized groups and because of that their needs are typically overlooked as they are lumped into the categories of either African American along with males or females along with other ethnicities by society (Malcom & Malcom, 2011). “Because both race and gender are important to the development of African American women, student affairs professionals need to understand the unique experiences of African American women within the context of the college environment” (Hannon, Woodside, Pollard, & Roman, 2016, p. 652). These women may experience feelings that can be understood through Cross’ Theory of Nigrescence (1991). “Nigrescence, the ‘process of becoming Black,’ and models on the psychology of nigrescence depicted the stages of the negro-to-Black identity transformation experienced by many Black adults in the Black Power period” (Cross, 1991, p. 157). The theory

Those going through the pre-encounter stage are in the stage that identifies the identity that needs to be changed (Cross, 1991, p. 158). Cross’ theory “implied that the average Negro American was ‘self-hating and deracinated,’ and thus very much in need of identity change” during this part of their journey (Cross, 1991, p. 158). A Black woman coming from a predominantly Black community starting college at a PWI, in stage one of Cross’ theory, will identify as Black but may not associate herself with the other Black students on campus. This student could suppress negative connotations about their race, heard from society or miseducation, which causes the disassociation and by not interacting with other Black people, there will not be any growth. Individuals here will be aware of the features that identify them as Black but not directly identify with their race, they will look more to a national label like American rather than a label that addresses their ethnicity (Worrell, Andretta, & Woodland, 2014). Constantly hearing comments about a race that are not uplifting will cause the individual to suppress their identity until further challenged, both intentionally and unintentionally.

The encounter stage is reached when an event occurs that was not anticipated and makes the person become vulnerable by temporarily stepping away from the pre-encounter stage (Cross, 1991). A turning point is usually prompted because of the unexpected situation. This can be seen when students attend college for the first-time and their ethnicity is highlighted and it leads to a forced start of acknowledging their self-identity. That brings on the search for knowledge about their culture and into the immersion/emersion stage.
Immersion is seen when a Black person immerses themselves in their culture to the point of creating a pro-Black identity (Cross, 1991). This person is usually seen attempting to prove that they are Black enough (Cross, 1991). A student may begin to join organizations that highlight or provide education about their culture such as the Black Student Union or the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and anything else that their institution offers. The student then becomes immersed in this identity and forms the identity of pro-black fully, often taking on an anti-white persona (Cross, 1991). Emersion is the time where an individual understands the true meaning of being Black and a more balanced standpoint is taken; where greater value is placed on the Black identity, but the individual also develops an awareness and appreciation for other identities as well (Cross, 1991).

Internalization and Internalization-Commitment are the final stages and represent when the person has transitioned into a more confident phase of their Blackness (Cross, 1991). At this point, there is no longer a need to prove the identity, the person is focusing on “Black pride, self-love, and a deep sense of Black communalism” (Cross, 1991, p. 159). Also, during this phase, the individual commits to advancing the community in a positive manner. The student moves out of the want to fight against anything that is non-Black and finding common ground to better aid their subpopulation. There is a possibility for back tracking while going through any of these phases due to events that may occur that can prolong the progression of this theory (as cited by Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016).

Fleming’s (1984) cross-comparison research on about 3,000 first year and senior year African American college student’s development across fifteen colleges; seven
HBCUs and eight PWIs. Using questionnaires, interviews, and cognitive tests Fleming found that Black women who attended HBCUs had a much stronger racial pride than Black women at PWIs but Black women at PWIs were found to have higher level of academic self-concept than their counterpart at HBCUs. Assisting university administrators, helping professionals, and student affairs workers in realizing that university environments produce different experiences for minority students may provide the necessary impetus for developing more culturally appropriate supports and interventions (Malcom & Malcom, 2011). Gossett, Cuyjet, and Crockriel (1996) conducted a study that addresses “building a supportive campus community, where students feel welcomed and respected.” is a necessary condition in promoting and forming student development and increase retention rates (p. 39). In addition to enhancing the campus environment feel for students, incorporating involvement experiences also attributes to student's sense of belonging. The findings of a study conducted by Brower and Ketterhagen (2004) suggested that all institutions, but specifically PWIs, strategically tie diversity into how campus operates and how it serves its student population. They specify that these institutions should focus on “thoughtful and planful ways to create integrated, multicultural educational environment” for the students (Brower & Ketterhagen, 2004, p. 114). This conclusion was also gathered by other studies prior to 2004. “integrating experiences” of involvement, engagement, and affiliation are central to students' development and their progress in college (Solorzano, Allen, & Carroll, 2002; Pace, 1984; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). “Black students who feel a sense of integration or affiliation to the university are more likely to feel as though they belong at the university and can contend with the rigorous expectations associated
with the post-secondary experience” (Dade, 2015, p. 32). Involvement can inspire or diminish how students acclimate to their campus environment (Strayhorn, 2012).

Students have begun to push for their campus to be “more accommodating for minorities” as they have expressed feelings of disconnect from their institutions (Green, 2016). “Student-activist groups nationwide issued demands to their universities seeking everything from mandatory sensitivity-and-racial-bias training to the development of safe spaces on campus for people of color” (Green, 2016). In 2016, to aid in the minimizing of marginalization and increase mattering, the National Association of School Psychologists offers suggestions to assist educators in understanding their minorities. These suggestions include but are not limited to educators understanding the effect of stressors and trauma on school functioning, equipping staff to provide trauma-sensitive responses and supports, access community resources, focus on student strengths and promote a sense of belonging (“Supporting Marginalized Students in Stressful Times”, 2016). With students advocating for themselves, campuses and educators need to listen, support, and implement their requests to show that consideration is being taken and their voices are being heard.

Summary

The research provided in chapter two expresses the various challenges experienced by Black women in higher education and at predominately White institutions. The literature addresses the challenges faced when this population lacks and is enhanced by a sense of belonging. The feelings of marginality play a role in the experience gained at predominately White institutions as does the feeling of mattering. Chapter III provides the methods I used to conduct my research.
CHAPTER III

Methods

This chapter explains how a qualitative Photovoice method of face-to-face interviews was used to research the way Black women describe their sense of belonging at a predominately White institution. To contribute to this research the following questions guided the collection of data: How do Black female students at predominately White institutions describe their experiences? In what ways are Black female students involved on the college campus? How do Black female students describe their sense of belonging in college? Where, on campus, are Black female students creating their space/sense of belonging?

Design of Study

A phenomenological qualitative approach was used to study the sense of belonging of Black women at a PWI with photography being a primary research tool. A phenomenological research study's goal is to allow for uninterrupted self-expression of the participant (Van Manen, 1990). Qualitative research is an opportunity for exploration and discovery (J. Park & M. Park, 2016; Silverman, 2009). Using participants with various connections to campus, the participants took pictures using their personal cellular device of physical locations that they occupy that best represent their sense of belonging. The researcher conducted interviews after receiving the photos to further understand how varying involvement aligns with connectedness to campus.

Participants

Four students who identify as Black and female and have completed at least four semesters of college-level courses were asked to participate in the study. This study was
not looking to generalize the student experience, instead it sought to shed light on four students experience and presenting their unique perspectives in a photo narrative. The researcher personally connected with faculty, staff, and graduate students on campus to develop a list of potential participants. From that list four students were randomly selected and received an email invite (Appendix B) explaining the purpose of the study and their responsibility if they agreed to participate. Because this study required action by the participant, an initial meeting with the participant took place where the instructions (Appendix C) for the study were provided. If the participants asked questions during this initial meeting they were answered but not recorded. During this conversation, the researcher took field notes. Prior to conducting interviews, each participant signed a letter of consent (Appendix D). They also signed a document detailing the protocol for taking photos for the research study (Appendix E).

Dijonay is a 21-year-old junior who started her educational career at the research site institution. She currently lives off-campus but is involved as a campus tour guide. holds an executive position in Project L.I.N.K., and volunteers her time when she can.

LaCienega is a 21-year-old senior that has only attended the research site institution. She is involved in TRiO and holds multiple jobs: one on campus and another off-campus. She also resides in off-campus housing.

Zoey is a 21-year-old senior that has only attended the research site institution. She is an active member in The National Association of Colored Women's Clubs, Inc. (NACWC), her on campus residence hall's hall council, the National Honor's Society and a volunteer group that goes to the local middle schools to discuss the topic of bullying.
Penny is a 23-year-old graduate student who completed her undergraduate career at the research site institution and continuing her education there. Her undergraduate involvement included serving as a resident assistant, a conference assistant, a summer employee for a bridge program, and Krimson Kourts Incorporated National Service Organization, which she now serves as the advisor.

Research Site

This research was completed at a four-year institution, located in a rural Midwest community where both the institution and the community are predominately White. This institution's total enrollment of undergraduate and graduate students at the start of the Fall 2016 school year was 7,415. Of the total population, 32% (2,343) of these students identified themselves as Black and approximately 60% (1,395) of the Black population identified as female.

Instruments

This qualitative research was conducted through individual interviews and Photovoice, in addition to the questions asked to verify the demographics of the participants. The first part was the collection of photographs, where the participants identified the physical spaces where they felt connected to campus. The participants used the camera on their cell phone to document these spaces. The participants were given specific instructions orally and in hard copy (Appendix B) regarding taking the photos and submitting them. With the purpose of the study being to identify spaces this population uses and how they view it, the participants were instructed to not capture people in their photos.
Four one-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted using Black female students, who have experienced a minimum of two years on campus, with varying involvement on-campus. The participants were asked to describe their experience, their involvement, their sense of belonging, and what space they use to create a sense of belonging at a PWI. Also, during the one-on-one interview, the participants were asked to explain the photos they took. The researcher posed questions to start the conversation with the participants about the photos, with the hope that the participant would carry on with detailed information.

Using the researcher as an instrument could allude to a bias if the researcher is a member of the group participating in the study (Mehra, 2002). Chenail (2011) noted that because researchers tend to investigate topics that they are passionate about and become invested in, it is stressed to not allow personal biases to sway the opinion or responses of the participants. As a member of the population researched, the researcher looked to understand the differing experiences of the participants regarding their fit on-campus. The researcher acknowledged that there could be potential influence on the participants due to the researcher’s position and connection to campus.

The researcher’s connection to this study is important because she has grown and developed into the woman that she is today because of the research site but acknowledges that there are other Black women that do not feel the same way about the research site.

**Data Collection**

When the participants were selected they were contacted via email to schedule a meeting time and date for the first meeting. The first meeting was for the participants to get a hard copy of their instructions which explained how to complete the photo portion.
of the study. The consent form was also shared at this time. A reminder/check-in email was sent halfway through the process. The email included a note for the participants to choose a date and time for the formal interview portion of the study. The interviews took place in an interview room at the research site where the interviewee felt comfortable.

When participants arrived at their interview the photos were printed off with codes to identify the photo to the participant, for the knowledge of the researcher, and to help with the transcription process. Following the audio recorded interview, a transcript was developed where the photos will be inserted as they are addressed in the interview. Each transcript was reviewed by the researcher and the thesis advisor.

Data Analysis

After the data was collected, the researcher transcribed the interviews in full, with the photos placed in to the transcript at the point in which they were discussed. The researcher then codes the data looking for common themes in the data (Saldana, 2012). The themes were established in relation to the research questions developed for this study. The researcher also analyzed the photos submitted by the participants to identify any commonalities in the locations and spaces. A journal was kept by the researcher to eliminate researcher bias by allowing an outlet to write down thoughts and perceptions of the completed interviews. The researcher’s thesis advisor also reviewed the transcripts to remove bias.

Treatment of Data

When the participants finished taking their photos, they sent them to the researcher through email. The researcher developed and coded the photos according to the participant using an assigned color and number. Interviews were not conducted until
the photos were back in the possession of the researcher. All data was preserved in accordance with IRB standards. The researcher used a personal laptop that is protected with a password only accessible to the researcher. The data attained was shared confidentially with the researcher's thesis advisor. Additional collected data such as video recordings, transcriptions, photos, and coding documents were kept in a private folder on the researcher's personal computer. This information was kept separate from all other documents on the researcher's personal computer. All participants' names were changed to pseudonyms to protect their privacy and all documents with identifiable information were kept in a locked drawer. Only the researcher had access to this drawer.

**Summary**

This chapter explained the steps that were taken to answer the research questions asked. To best answer these questions, the use of multiple media was elicited. Allowing the participants to use their personal device to take pictures of the locations and spaces they occupy allowed them to do it in private without drawing additional attention. Transcribing, member checking, and coding the interviews and photos aided in removing researcher bias and ensured proper distribution of information.
CHAPTER IV

Analysis

This chapter analyzes the data collected from interviews about the sense of belonging from four Black women who are of junior level standing in college. The purpose of this study was to investigate the sense of belonging of Black women at a predominantly White institution (PWI) to understand their sense of belonging and, by using photographs and one-on-one interviews, where on campus this occurred. This section addresses the common themes and experiences shared from the four women.

Describing College Experience

In this study, the participants were instructed to take photographs of the locations where they spent time in college. In the interview, they were asked to describe what happens in that space. In this section are the participants descriptions of how they spend their time in on and off-campus living spaces, work areas, academic buildings, and their various involvements.

Living Spaces. When asked to provide photos of spaces where they spend time all the participants in this study shared photos of their on-campus and off-campus living spaces and living spaces that they frequently occupy. Each of the participants interviewed provided photos of these personal living spaces as an area where they belong with one, LaCienega, referencing her on-campus housing space from her freshman year of college. They each spoke about and described how these were spaces they felt comfortable and free to be themselves in. All four participants also describe their living space as an area where they regroup and can express themselves.
Of the four participants interviewed, two of them: Dijonay and LaCienega, live off-campus and the other two, Penny and Zoey, live on-campus. Both off-campus participants shared pictures of common areas in their off-campus home, whereas the on-campus participants shared pictures of their on-campus bedroom. The participants expressed how that space is an area of comfort for them. Dijonay, a 21-year-old junior, took a picture of her living room in her off-campus apartment (Figure 4.1) and shared how she uses this space.

So, you told me to take pictures of where we feel comfortable and my voice is heard, right? A lot of shit...I'm sorry, a lot of stuff we talk about here in this room. You know our friends will get together, we'll talk about why [research site institution] got us messed up, professors, life, bills.

Figure 4.1. Dijonay, Living Room in Off Campus Home
For LaCienega, a 21-year-old college student who lives off-campus her kitchen area is a space in her house that she feels comfortable in (Figure 4.2).

Me and my roommate, like, sit at the little counter and that's where we'll like do our homework if both of us are home from work. And I still like to cook, so I like to cook in there. And I don't know, I just feel comfortable, definitely feel comfortable in my apartment. I have only been there for two years but I don't think time played that much of a role, but I feel comfortable there.

LaCienega also expresses her comfort when she is in her boyfriend's room (Figure 4.3). She chose this location because, "I spend a lot of my time here. I feel comfortable here, it's kind of like my room. I kind of use it as a substitute for my room because mine is a little junky." Whether she is with her boyfriend doing homework, watching movies, eating, or just enjoying each other's company, LaCienega is
comfortable. In his room, she says, “I can wear my bonnet, like [I don’t have to] be all dressed up, how I feel like sometimes I [have to] be in public. Like I can just be in my pajamas or my bonnet and just comfortable.”

Figure 4.3, LaCienega, Boyfriend’s Room

Penny, a 23-year-old, first-year graduate student at the research institution lives in one of the universities on-campus apartments. She provided a photo of her bedroom at her on-campus apartment, which she refers to as her cave (Figure 4.4) and described her belonging. Penny shared her love for her room and heated mattress pad, and adds, “I just love to relax and feel that sense of relaxing in my bed, under two comforters, all my pillows; it’s just wonderful!” She says, “If I can’t belong here, I can’t belong anywhere. This is my safe space. I close the door. I’m free as a bird.”

Penny talks about an off-campus location where she frequently visits, the fraternity house of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. (Figure 4.5). “I may not be in this
room but I kind of meant it to signify like the overall feel of the house in general. You know lots of parties, just hanging out, having fun. BBQ’s or whatever, cooking food.”

Though she does not live here, Penny still says, “I feel like this is my house.”

Figure 4.4, Penny, On-Campus Bedroom
Zoey, a 21-year-old senior who also lives on-campus, took a picture of the view from her bed (Figure 4.6) describing this as the space where she describes being most comfortable. She says,

That's me in my bed. I would have to rate that as a 10 because I love to take naps. I feel like I belong here because honestly, this is where I find my inner zen. So, I'll sit at my desk, I'll play some music; and it'll be soft music, it won't be trap music, it'll be soft music. Sometimes I'll probably play classical music while I read, and I read in my bed, and I'll have my water aroma little thing going, and it just sets the mood for me to study or just to get locked in on the week. And I
usually do my homework in my bed because I feel like I get a lot more done in my bed because I can spread it all out. I can sit how I want to and when I'm finished or want to take a break, I just lay my head down.

Figure 4.6. Zoey. On-Campus Bedroom

Out of Zoey's ten pictures, six of them were of spaces related to her residence hall. She lives in an on-campus all-female residence hall and took a picture of the outside of the building (Figure 4.7) and a few spaces inside. In addition to taking a picture of the outside of her building, Zoey also took a picture of the door that she uses to enter and exit her residence hall (Figure 4.8). She mentions the freedom that she possesses with not having to check in or out with anyone before she leaves to go where she pleases.
LaCienega found it strange that as a senior in college she had to reach back to her room freshman year as a space where she spent most of her time (Figure 4.9 and Figure 4.10). She said she chose this location because,

I spent a lot of time there. That's where I did my homework, slept, did everything really. Like freshman year, I really stayed to myself, I spent a lot of time in my own area. I just liked being by myself. I used to do all my work there at that desk, like a lot of my work. And if I was being lazy, I used to watch TV in that little chair too...I could do whatever I wanted, it was my room. I could look
however I wanted, do whatever I wanted so I just felt comfortable I could just be myself and be me.

Figure 4.8. Zoey. Door to Residence Hall
Figure 4.9. LaCienega, On Campus Bedroom View 1
Common Living Space. Participants also provided photos and spoke about common living spaces where they reside as places they identify as belonging. Zoey, spoke about the bathroom in her residence hall (Figure 4.11).

So this is where I spend most of my mornings and most of my nights. I love being in the bathroom because there is no sibling to say, "Hey, come out the bathroom!" There is no water bill, so you can take a shower as long as you want... I belong here because I go to the same bathroom every morning, every day. If it's being used, I'll wait. If it's still being used, low key will go without, come back later in the day and take a shower in the same bathroom.
Zoey also took a picture of one of the on-campus dining centers at the research site institution (Figure 4.12). Unlike many of the other photographs, this is a space that Zoey avoids as much as possible. "I don't belong here because I can't stand it. I only eat there when I have to as my last resort; when I don't want to pay any money, when I'm absolutely hungry." She adds that, "I don't like this space, like at all. The dining hall, I don't...I go there for my last resort for food. I don't like to eat dining hall food period."
**Vehicles.** The majority of the participants took a photograph representing their one particular space they occupy: their car. The participants shared reasons why they chose to identify their vehicle as a space that they occupy and identify belonging. Dijonay does not live in her car (Figure 4.13) it is a space she photographed and shared that she occupies frequently and considers a safe spot. “Like we’re not on-campus. No one can kind of get to us.” She and her boyfriend, and her friends will take long drives when someone has a problem they want to discuss. “Whenever somebody’s in our group chat, they’ll text like, ‘SOS. Grab the tissues. we need to take a drive.’ We normally go and drive to the lake or something or to [town nearby].”
Zoey took a picture of her car (Figure 4.14) because it is a space that she occupies as a mode of transportation and sometimes as a "just because" space.

What happens here is when I drive to class or I'm driving anywhere else, I start my car, because I have remote start y'all; so, I start my car then I just sit in there and I just get everything adjusted. I like put the phone on aux, hook my phone up, put my seatbelt on, adjust my mirrors and get ready for my day, I guess. And the times where I don't drive, sometimes I'll literally just sit in my car, just because. But that's why I took this picture, because a lot of times I just do sit there. Even when I go to the store and come back, I sit there for the longest. I'm pretty sure people do it all the time, but you just scroll through your phone just because. The car is warm, it's cozy, you don't want to get out yet. That's literally what I was doing.
In Penny's car, whom she refers to as Fannie (Figure 4.15), that she uses to get to and from various locations. She decided to include this space because depending on the company that is with her in this space she uses it as a place to debrief or start her day. In her car, Penny says her belonging also depends on who is with her.

Well I belong obviously because it's my car but as far as like...I don't know as far as comfortability, it depends on who else is in the car with me. Because if I'm not as comfortable, like if I gave a friend of a friend a ride home, I don't like, I don't know you as well as my friend. It depends on who's there with me, what
we're doing, because if me and my sisters and we're singing a song, I'm feeling comfortable because I'm like belting out the words of the song.

Figure 4.15, Penny, Penny's Car, "Fannie"

**Work.** Work space was photographed and discussed in each participants' interview. All four of the participants have employment on-campus, however LaCienega has an additional job off-campus. Her off-campus job requires her to work at multiple locations and she has grown a bond with those she works with at both locations. The first picture (Figure 4.16) is of the living room at one of the houses she works at, here she watches television with some of the clients.

A lot of times, I sit right there on that couch and I watch *Criminal Minds* or *Law and Order* with one of the clients because it's his favorite show. And then sometimes, I watch racecars with another client. And it's just like once they come
home from work, we watch TV while somebody else cooks the dinner or just like after we eat dinner. Just spend time with them.

Figure 4.17 is of the kitchen at a different house LaCienega works at. She cooks for the occupants here and gets to practice new food dishes she has learned to make, and they make her feel good about her dishes.

I just started, like, learning so I be really eager to cook and stuff. So, I feel like I'm always there again and they make me feel good about my cooking. So, I just like to cook there and I'm comfortable there, like this is one of the houses I'm always at so I'm definitely comfortable and I'm comfortable with the clients there and I'm doing something that I like to do so I definitely feel like I belong.

Figure 4.16. LaCienega. Living Room of Off-Campus Job
LaCienega's other job (Figure 4.18) is on-campus in an office where she has worked for three years. Here she assists visitors, helps students change their major, sets up appointments with people who need to speak to the Dean of the office, and other administrative work.

I've been working there since 2015...Fall semester 2015, so I spend a lot of time there. I'm used to everyone there, all the staff. It's just a real familiar place that I feel comfortable in. I feel like I belong here because I have been here for a while. And then my supervisor and the other staff I work with, they do a good job of making me feel comfortable and welcomed.
Dijonay speaks of her on-campus job as a place where she simply goes (Figure 4.19). "I just come, do my job, and leave. That's it." She also speaks to being one of three Black student workers in this office, "I try not to speak up too much because I don't know...when you're outnumbered, like already as men-to-women then Black-to-White, you just kind of stay in your spot." Zoey works at the front desk of the residence hall complex that she lives in (Figure 4.20). Though she does not feel a strong sense of belonging here, she is at the site often. She shared that due to not seeing eye-to-eye with her new supervisor, it makes her sense of belonging less than desirable.

We're under new management, which it's hard to adapt to. Our new management has different roles and ideas for us in our positions and it's really hard to understand because we've been under one management for two years. So, to have someone else come in and switch it up and just lay down the law it's hard to adapt
to because first of all, we’re college students and this is not for real. But I mean it’s okay, I don’t mind it, it’s easy money, I literally just sit there.

Zoey attributes her lack of belonging at her place of employment to the way she is chastised because she does not wear the proper apparel or her name tag. She states that the reason she does not wear the expected apparel is because:

I don’t own that many shirts, hoodies, pants, none of that because what for?

Where am I going? I know I go to [research site institution]. So, if it didn’t come free to me, I’m not about to go out and buy it. And then another reason, sometimes my manager...well my supervisor gets on me about not wearing my nametag. A) I don’t want everybody to know my name. B) sometimes it pokes a small hole in the shirt I’m wearing, then the hole gets bigger and my shirt is ruined. So, I really don’t like to wear a name tag and going back to ‘A’ I don’t like to wear a nametag because I work with a lot of immature boys and once they see the name, it’s just like they just say it all the time, like I know them, and I don’t.

Penny also works on-campus as a graduate assistant in a technology center at the institution she attends (Figure 4.21). Here at her job, this is, “Where we brainstorm ideas for snapchat, we hold our snapchat interviews for anyone doing a takeover...So, it’s a workspace but it’s also fun and creative. It’s good.” Keeping a healthy and fun environment Penny explained this leads to a strong sense of belonging but on a professional level.
Figure 4.19. Dijonay. On-Campus Job

Figure 4.20. Zoey. On-Campus Job
Academics. When asked to take photos of areas where they spend their time, most of the participants took pictures of spaces used for academics. Some of these spaces were described as areas for instruction and others where learning occurred individually.

In Class. The majority of the participants shared their experience in a classroom setting with varied perspectives. Dijonay spoke on how the three people who aided in her transition to the institution she attends came from an academic relationship. She spoke very highly of her advisor and shouted him out during the interview. "He was great. He was so great with helping me come back. He was there every step of the way." Dijonay left school upon hearing that her brother, a police officer, had been shot in the line of
duty. Her advisor helped her take the necessary steps needed to regain admission into the institution. One of the teachers she had during her freshman year helped her into the job she holds currently because of her work ethic and personality. Lastly, she spoke to the assistance received from a professor who also advises a group that she is a part of.

Zoey took a picture of the room she is in for two academic classes (Figure 4.22) but she spoke of the class she was in at the time she took the picture, which was a biology class. "So, I have two classes in this room, uh what happens here. I guess just learning; taking exams, quizzes, studying, the usual." She says how she does not feel like she belongs here because of the difficulty of the classes but she does her best to understand.

Figure 4.22. Zoey. Inside of Classroom
Penny also took a picture of an academic building in reference to the biology courses she takes here. She now has all her classes in this building (Figure 4.23), meaning she spends a great deal of time here.

This is where I pretend to learn. I spent all...well most of my four years in this building and a year for my grad work. Yea. I mean my professors, some classes I have I like more than others, some of the professors I have I like more than others.

But this is just like I was kind of happy when I got into my major. so I'm in one building. I don't have to travel all over the world for a class.

Penny speaks to the comfortability she has within the building and her classes because of her professors,

I feel comfortable especially with the professors. I've more than likely had them a few times before, so they know me. I know them. So, as far as that goes, I'm comfortable with the professors. Students, there are few that I haven't had classes with. few that I have had classes with; so, it's kind of a mix, it depends on what class it is. But I feel comfortable. I may not always speak out and speak up in class, but I feel pretty comfortable there.
Out of Class. Learning is not confined to the classroom and the participants addressed that in their interview. They each shared at least one location outside of the classroom where they are either studying individually or with other people. Dijonay and LaCienega spoke about the research study institution’s library (Figure 4.24). LaCienega and Penny spoke about the institution’s 24-hour commuter lounge (Figure 4.25), and LaCienega and Zoey talked about getting their homework done in their living space. Dijonay said that she finds herself in the library every day and it is a space where she does her studying and crying. She is usually on her own in the library when she studies. LaCienega views the library as a space she belongs because of the environment it fosters.
I'm mostly like spending time with myself. I'll have my music in doing my work.

So. I definitely feel like I belong. I feel like the library environment is just like work related so. everybody there is for the most part doing their work.

Since she spends most of her studying time in the library, LaCienega does not spend much time in the research study institution's 24-hour lounge as she did the previous semester or when she lived on campus.

Because last semester when I got off of work at 12 or something, and you know the library close at 1. so I don't really see the need to go to the library for like an hour. So. if I don't want to do my homework at home or if I couldn't focus at work or something then I'll just come here and be able to get my work done.

She is usually alone but is occasionally accompanied by her roommate or boyfriend.

Penny took a picture of the 24-hour lounge because,

This is where I spent most of my time before class if I had a test and it wasn't enough time to go home. well it didn't make any sense to go home and then come back. This is where I'd be when I need to study for this test and really, really focus... This is where I spent most of my time cramming or whatever before a test trying to get those last-minute details in.

She invites her classmates to study and prepare for class to this location and a couple people will join her.
Figure 4.24. LaCienega, Research Site Institution’s Library

Figure 4.25. LaCienega, 24-Hour Commuter Lounge
College Involvement. When it comes to involvement, only two of the participants took pictures of the space(s) they occupy due to their involvement in an organization. Dijonay is involved in a service-based group on her campus that meets in an academic building (Figure 4.26). She describes what the group does and talks about in this space, saying:

I come here once every other week. This is where my group, ‘Just A Little Bit’ meets. So, we're a group of Black women here at [research site institution], we get together, and we work on, not only doing service projects. so like I said our last one "Point. Blank. Period." was the care packages. But we also share stories, talk about our days, try to empower each other. Get us through all of whatever life throws at you.

Dijonay shared some of the unspoken rules of the group; “So, it is one of those ‘whatever is said in this room, stays in this room.’ We talk about any problems we have: boys, family, life, school...It's just like a safe space for us.” Dijonay also took a photograph of an academic classroom (Figure 4.27) that is used by organizations to hold meetings and events.

...a lot of like clubs. right? Like your club (NACWC). Greek l life they hold events in here. Like little sex ed. talks or “Battle of the Sexes’ or like a “Getting to Know the Greeks” or a “Getting to Be Informed about this, that, and the third”...It’s one of those, your voice gets heard when you're in this room.

Because her and her roommate often have conversations that align with the topics of the events, they tend to go to these events together.
Figure 4.26. Dijonay, Academic Building Sign

Figure 4.27. Dijonay, Academic Classroom
Penny, though a graduate student, is actively involved in the service organization that she joined the senior year of her undergraduate career: Krimson Kourts Incorporated National Service Organization (KKI) (Figure 4.28). “I call this the “Sunken Place” just because once you get there, it’s kind of hard for me to leave because there’s always something going on or just like hanging out or something.” Both women denote the highest number on the scale of belonging in these places and are surrounded by women with the drive to serve the community and support each other. The other two participants spoke about their involvement but did not take any pictures that signify those organizations or the spaces they occupy.

Figure 4.28. Penny, Organization Meeting Space
These Black women all expressed varying levels of involvement during their higher education career. The involvement discussed includes on-campus involvement and organizations or clubs these women want to see at the PWI they attend.

**Opportunities for Involvement**

The institution where the research was conducted offers over 200 registered student organizations (RSOs) and when the participants were asked, how they felt about options for involvement at the college the views were split evenly. Two participants talked about how there are not enough for the Black community and the other two looked more personally at how the organizations available have impacted their college career thus far.

Dijonay starts by saying, “I think it's a lot. I think it's tons of things out there. Like we say, we got over 200 organizations and...it's a lot.” With a generalized statement, she followed up by saying:

I wish...I don't know see...we got Black Student Union, okay. We have, you know, ASA. But that, that's kind of it. And if you didn't start in those groups, you know? And so. I didn't start...remember my freshman year, a lot of it was gone. So. when I came in, it felt like everybody was already cliqued up and our Black community is already so small as is.

LaCienega responded to the same question.

I feel like they're kind of scarce for African Americans. I'll definitely say I feel like it's mainly when you think of activities on-campus that's geared to or that really make African Americans feel welcomed. you really think about like Greek Life. But not everyone wants to be Greek. so that's why I feel like it's kind of
scarce. And there are some organizations that are not Greek that’s geared to
African Americans but it’s not very many. So, I feel like it could be more, more
of a variety.

The two on-campus participants based their responses on their personal
experience with the organizations that the campus has to offer. Zoey expressed.

I feel like it’s an abundant amount of options, they’re really just hidden. You can
always see on [research site institution] webpage the RSOs they have on-campus
but what’s an RSO on a screen when I can’t see who’s involved in it or what
they’re doing. So, I would have to say, there’s so many things out there but you
really do have to explore it.

Penny states.

We have a lot of different organizations, but me personally, I don’t feel like any
have called out to me. Because I’ve always been like, as far as potentially joining
a Greek organization, I’ve always been like, “if it happens, it happens: if it
doesn’t, it doesn’t.” I’ve never been one to push it, you know, you go home like.
“Are you going to do this? Are you going to do that?” I was like, “I don’t know.
if it happens, it happens.” So, as far as my organization. that’s kind of what
happened. I don’t see currently any organization that I’m like, “Oh my gosh. I
want to be a part of that. I need to... how do I do this: how do I do that?”

**Involvement.** Each of the participants were able to find one or more
organizations where they were able to get involved. Dijonay shared her on-campus
involvement. one of which she was recommended to be a part of.
...I am in Project L.I.N.K.. I'm in this club. we're still trying to start off, it's called Just A Little Bit; it's one of my pictures (see Figure 4.26), but it's like uh a service based something. We just did a project trying to build, it's like care packages for homeless women though...Uhm I did volunteering, I'm on and off with them so I do them more in the spring when I got some time.

Her involvement does not stop with simply being a member, she talked about leadership positions she holds in two of her three organizations. She is the secretary for Project L.I.N.K and holds an executive board position for Just a Little Bit but she did not specify which position.

LaCienega, as a senior, is solely involved in the institution's TRiO program. Although she did not provide any photos related to her TRiO experiences she spoke about how her focus coming into this program was finding something that would benefit her academically and she found that in TRiO. For her, the path to getting involved with this program was through word of mouth from her freshman year roommate. LaCienega talked about support that she received from this organization and how it helped her reach this point.

Freshman year, I had a TRiO advisor and she was my advisor freshman and sophomore year. So, she was really helpful. She pretty much helped me out, get used to all my classes, giving me tips and strategies. she used. things that are still beneficial to me now as a senior. Like financial aid tips and stuff to make sure I stay on top of my grades, so I wouldn't have to take a lot of courses over and they take back my financial aid and stuff like that. Like she was really helpful.

Zoey lists her large variety of involvement.
I'm involved in NACWC. I did [residence hall] council. Eta Sigma Gamma for my major. a [volunteer organization] where you'll go to [the local middle school] and talk about how important bullying is and how it needs to stop. And the National Honor's Society. and that's it.

Penny, being a graduate student, was able to share her list of undergraduate involvement and the organization that she continues her involvement in during graduate school.

I am currently involved in Krimson Kourts Incorporated, National Service Organization. Previously I was in housing as an RA, Conference Services. I was a conference assistant. I was also a Peer Learning Assistant helping I don't know if it was students with low GPAs and high ACTs or vice-versa, helping them transition into [research site institution]. I was secretary of The National Residence Hall Honorary. Currently, I have a GA (graduate assistantship) in [a technical support center at the research site institution]. I should probably know the name of the office I work in, but I caption videos. So, I transcribe and put the little captions on YouTube; I also do the university's snapchat, so I go around and snapchat events for the school. But yea, I consciously made the decision not to be involved my graduate career, just because I feel like I was so involved in undergrad as far as RAing and other activities. I'm like, 'I don't want to do anything. I wanna go to class and go home.'

With finding their niche in various organizations, the participants still identified the need for more options at their institution. Dijonay said that she wants to see more organizations for the Black community and for more equality in the ones that are on-campus.
Like I said, I wish we had a...the complete Divine 9, even though Greek Life is not my decision anymore. I still do wish we had that...We don't get a lot of events and stuff. And when we do get to host events, we're either pushed down in [lower level of Union] or we got to fight for the Union. when we do get it. so...nahn but I mean, you got the other organizations who can be [in] Doudna, they got all the quads. they got Honor's College, you feel me?

LaCienega suggested that the campus would benefit from an increase in support organizations.

I think more. I don't really know what the title would be, but it's more like support organizations. Whether it's in different schools or majors, just more support organizations where you can just come in there and do some homework or just motivate each other.

Still wanting to see more on-campus, Penny expressed wanting a more therapeutic organization option to join.

My artsy side would like a pottery class. There might be a pottery club. I don't know but like I just want to do the little wheel and mess with the clay. I feel like that would be therapeutic, that's something I would want because I'm interested.

On the other hand, Zoey nearing the end of her undergraduate career found that she has joined the organizations that she has sought out and even some she had not.

With so many areas of involvement, the participants each spoke about their journey into these organizations. They all shared that someone brought them to at least one of the organizations but they continued because of the impact it made.
Journey to Joining Organizations. These four Black women all shared the different organizations that they are involved in as well as their path into joining. Zoey stated that there are many options for involvement on-campus, but it is up to the students to search for them.

The majority of Dijonay’s involvement came from a referral by people who saw potential in her. She identified that she is involved in being an admission tour guide, a student ambassador, “Just A Little Bit”, and the institution’s volunteer program. When asked how she found these groups or organizations, she said,

Just A Little Bit. the professor found me. Yea. she was like you should come here. For tour guides, again, that was another professor. He, again, sought me out for that one and I think Student Ambassador came because of Tour Guide, I believe. And then. what else did I throw out there, Project L.I.N.K. I met the founder through Tour Guide and she started that so.

Her reasoning behind staying active in these organizations was because she was helping people, though she did not share how she become involved in volunteering. “Except for tour guide. Tour guide I was going to be making money.” Additionally, due to having to prioritize her time and finances, there are a few organizations that Dijonay has not joined but wishes that she could have, however she is getting better with both and is making the move to join those organizations.

LaCienega spoke of how her involvement in the TRiO program started from hearing about it from the sister of her roommate her freshman year.

My roommate. freshman year. her sister had recommended it to me. She was like it's kind of good. they'll assist you, because I'm a first-generation college student.
Well, my parents didn’t go to college, but my sister did. So, it’s kind of like, I didn’t really...like once my sister went away to school it’s kind of like I didn’t really...I mean she helped me some, but it was like things that I didn’t know because I never experienced it. And it wasn’t like I could call her for everything and I couldn’t really ask my parents because of course, they didn’t know. So, she basically told me that it would have been helpful like it kind of tends to be students like me and it would be really helpful. So, I decided to join.

The suggestion received from her roommate’s sister allowed her to be involved with this organization all four years of her undergraduate career. LaCienega spoke about a few organizations that she wished she could join and has not yet but added that she is in the process of joining two of them currently.

Penny spoke about how she started in this particular organization she found out about through word of mouth during the senior year of her undergraduate career and carried it through to her graduate career and is now the graduate advisor.

So, Krimson Kourts, I saw a flyer...well I didn’t see it, my other friend did, she told me about it and so we went. Then I was like, ‘Oh, my mom did this back in the day.’ So, I went to the informational and they were just very open and honest and genuine with each other and their interactions. So I really liked their vibe, so I stuck with them. I mean like I said, they were just genuine, open, and honest and they were like real down-to-Earth people. They would invite us over to their apartment just to hang out and get to know us and we got to know them and the organization and stuff.
When asked about organizations that she wished she would have joined, Penny stated that there were organizations that she wanted to join but there were a few things in the way; I used to say that I wanted to join, I should probably know the name of the organization I possibly wanted to join, Black Student Union because I think their meetings were on Mondays at 6:00 and I either had a meeting or I was on duty, so I didn’t, well I wasn’t able to join that. I remember at [Orientation Involvement Fair], I went up to a Greek table and they weren’t really inviting or like, “Hey, how are you?” They were like (looks side-to-side and rolls eyes). So, I was like, “No one’s going to greet me, help me, guide me, say anything to me.” Zoey shared her extensive involvement and her various methods of learning about these organizations and why she decided to carry on being involved in each one. For [the volunteer organization], my Gateway advisor, she pulled a couple of people from Gateway and she said, “We can cut down your hours if you do this.” So, we participated, and it was actually something that I really enjoyed so I just stuck with that. For the National Honor Society, it’s just when you have a certain GPA, they invite you. You get initiated and it’s something else to put on your resume. Eta Sigma Gamma, it’s kind of the same thing, but for Eta Sigma Gamma in our department you actually have to put the time in to be invited. They don’t just invite anybody. So, if you go to the blood drives, if you promote health promotion on-campus, you’ll get invited. Plus, the certain GPA you have to have to get invited, so, I got initiated into that. And then NACWC, I really wanted to build a bond and sisterhood with different girls so that I could actually have something to come back to at this institution. And that’s about it.
Offering over 200 opportunities for student involvement, each of the participants identified they had found an organization that contributed to their collegiate experience and their sense of belongingness at their institution.

**Sense of Belonging**

During the individual interview process, the participants were asked to define belonging in their own words then apply it to the research site institution. They also self-reported their level of belonging using a scale of one to ten, one being the least and ten being the most, in each space photographed. Their definitions and ratings will be addressed here.

**Personal Definitions.** To understand the participants descriptions of belonging through their photos and verbal explanations it was necessary to ask them to describe what the word meant to each of them. When asked to explain belonging, Dijonay responded saying, “Comfortable. It is… I don’t know just saying ‘I have somewhere to be.’ Where I’m wanted, and I want them.” LaCienega describes belonging as,

Me being comfortable. Me being able to be myself, without thinking of how others would see me or how others would judge me. Me just feeling I don’t have to cover up who I am. Just being completely me. I feel like once you get to that point and you are just really comfortable then that’s when I feel like I belong.

Penny describes her belonging as.

Somewhere where you’re comfortable, where you don’t have to try as hard. I think. Where you can be yourself and they accept you for who you are. You’re happy when you go to this place, you don’t have to... like they’re happy to see you, you’re happy to see them: there’s something that’s calming and relaxing.
Zoey's description of belonging aligns with how she feels about the institution she is attending but moved away from using the word comfortable. She defined it as, "To have a place that you hold down."

**Belonging at the Institution.** After sharing their personal definition of belonging, the participants applied their definition to the research study institution. Dijonay identified herself and said her friends would agree that she would be considered a "safe Black" because of her various connections to the campus comparing her experience to that of her roommate, another Black woman, stating, "I will always be "okay" but my roommate who's not in anything, you know, she's just a student here."

Dijonay went on to speak about her roommate's position,

She doesn't feel like she belongs. Doesn't feel like anything is, not necessarily 'tailored for her' or people like her, people who look like her. It's either you're Greek Life or you're an athlete. And even then, athlete you are still playing their game and then Greek Life we...what? What they give us? Because our Greeks work pretty hard at what they already got and we don't even have them all here.

We got to sit there and do events...they get all of you know [campus gym] right, for their...their sing week and their dances and everything but our probates are on the steps. you feel me? It is what it is.

Holding this outlook on her personal experience and sharing the feelings of her roommate, Dijonay states that, "The few RSOs we do have; the Black Student Unions and stuff, the NACWCs of the world" are all that the campus offers that makes her feel included.
LaCienega, in describing belonging, talked about being comfortable and when asked whether she felt that she belonged at the institution based on her definition she said, "...I don't feel like I have that feeling here at this school at all." The only response given when asked to share what campus offers that makes her feel included is, "The TRiO program. I feel included when I participate in the workshops, go on the trips; I definitely feel included. But that's probably about it."

Zoey compared her belonging amongst her siblings to that of her belonging at the research study institution.

...I have siblings and sometimes I feel like I don't belong because we're so different in age group; like they've already done what I'm doing and they're doing something that I can't even put my hands around. So, I would have to say sometimes I don't feel like I belong because I'm so young and I'm the youngest but places like [research site institution], I do feel like I belong. Because I feel like I can talk to about anyone regardless of if you're yellow, blue, green, black, white, ya know? So, I feel like I do belong at [research site institution] because there hasn't been a time that I've had a dislike with someone and we couldn't talk about it.

Zoey then shared that the free resources that are offered by the campus have aided in helping her feel included, such as,

Organizations, RSO's. Campus offers a friendly community, I'll have to say. I mean I haven't run into anyone or to a professor that was just flat out mean for no reason. So, they offer a lot of guidance, there's always tutoring. You just really have to utilize it because it's there, it's just not advertised like it should be.
advertised. So, I've had a great experience because I like things free so whatever I can get for free, that's what I go for.

Penny relates her sense of belonging at the institution she attends to her organization that she is involved in currently during her graduate school career initially, then moves to the photographs she took. She says,

Definitely my organization, I feel like I feel the most comfortable with them as far as socially. I don't know, I'm like jumbling twenty-five (25) questions but I guess all these places, I feel comfortable in all these places. I don't feel like people are awkwardly staring at me in my face. I can... I know I can be myself and just do what I have to do in situations in these places.

Following these applications to the research institution, the participants answered questions about the photographs they took and applied a rating to each one.

**Photograph Ratings**

After discussing each photograph, the participants were asked to use a scale of one to ten and rate how they feel they belong in each location, one being the least and ten being the most. This section will discuss the on-campus and off-campus locations the participants photographed.

**On-Campus Living Spaces.** When it comes to on-campus living spaces, the participants all had high ratings. LaCienega and Zoey both took pictures of their on-campus residence hall rooms (Figure 4.9, Figure 4.12, and Figure 4.13). Penny took a picture of her bedroom in her on-campus apartment (Figure 4.4), and Zoey took a picture of the bathroom in her residence hall (Figure 4.14). When LaCienega spoke about belonging in her residence hall room she lived in her freshman year, she rated her level of
belonging as a ten. In that space she is comfortable because of the environment she created there. LaCienga enjoyed her time in this space because she could look however she wanted and she could be herself. When Zoey begins to talk about her bedroom, one of the first things she speaks about is her bed. Aside from taking naps in her bed, Zoey does her homework and finds her inner zen in her bed. Regarding Penny’s on-campus bedroom, this is where she is comfortable and can relax.

…this is where when I come home from class and lately, I’ve been in like a mood or in a funk, so I’m like I don’t want to be here any longer than I need to be. I just want to go home and take my pants off.

Zoey also took a picture of her favorite bathroom in her building where she spends a lot of time in the shower.

I love being in the bathroom because the water pressure is A1. There is no sibling to say, “Hey come out the bathroom.” There is no water bill, so you can take a shower as long as you want to. Bop in, bop out. There’s a whole full body mirror right there, another mirror when you come out. It’s a nice bathroom to be in a residence hall to be honest. I enjoy going in the bathroom and I live right next to it!

All three of the participants rate these on-campus spaces a ten due to their comfort and enjoyment in this space.

Zoey shared two unique pictures of her on-campus experience of the door of her residence hall (Figure 4.8) and one of the dining centers (Figure 4.12). The door that she uses for her residence hall is significant to her because she does not have to answer to anyone about her whereabouts.
Belonging... I guess you could say this is a good representation of “belonging” because you can see that I can come and go as I please, I don’t have to ask like, “Hey mom, I’m going out. Be back at 8,” nah I just come and go as I please. That can be a good representation of belonging because of that.

Because of that ease of access, Zoey rates this location a ten in her book. On the other hand, when she referenced the dining center she talked about the lack of options available for different dietary restrictions and the quality of food.

I remember when I tried to be a vegan, that was awful because you don’t have choices in the dining hall. You could literally get a salad, but a salad isn’t filling. You need protein, I don’t even think they have tofu in Charleston, to be honest. But, you just wish you had a bigger variety. Yeah, they have Mexican night, Chinese night but that’s not real... So, it’s like an Americanized Chinese food and they’re really gross in the dining hall. And honestly, I just feel like they serve low-budget meals to their students. Like we pay all this money for room and board, but we can’t even get a decent meal. So, I’m not a fan of this place.

The dining hall’s purpose is to serve students food, but Zoey does not benefit from this service because she does not enjoy the choices available. This hinders her belonging when her basic need is not being met here. In this space, Zoey speaks to a level of satisfaction in the research site institutions dining hall, however with her basic need of survival (food, water, etc.) not being met, her sense of belonging is hindered. She is unable to look past the food options to focus on belonging in this space. This location received the lowest score from Zoey, a negative four, but that goes outside the range of the scale, so it is counted as a one.
On-Campus Academic Spaces. The academic spaces on-campus received various ratings based on the use of the space. Participants took pictures of academic classrooms which held additional uses than what is expected. Zoey provided a picture of the classroom that her biology class is held in (Figure 4.22).

I'll have to say I don't belong in this space because I am not a BIO major and taking these difficult classes without any prior biology or chemistry knowledge it's going to be tough because you never know the next person's level, like how much BIO they've had. If the whole class is on one accord but you're the one that doesn't know it's kind of hard for the professor to balance out what they should spit out and how fast they should go, so that's my only concern about this class. I'm mad that I waited so long to take it, but I was always nervous that I wouldn't do well because I'm not really good with biology.

Though this class is more challenging for her and she identifies feeling less confident, but she does her best. "I try to stay ahead of the readings, I ask questions, I'll stay after class, I try to be on time, I try to be attentive." When asked to rate the level of belonging in this space on a scale of one to ten, one being the least and ten being the most, Zoey rated her belonging in this class a five because of the effort being put into understanding the material presented. Penny also took a picture of the outside of the building where her biology classes are held (Figure 4.23). She gives the rating of a five for her belonging in this space based on her familiarity with her professors.

Dijonay also provided pictures of two academic areas; the outside of an academic building (Figure 4.26) and the inside of an academic classroom (Figure 4.27). However, the use of these academic spaces is for recreational purposes of organizations at the
research site institution. In the academic building where Dijonay meets with her service-based group she rates her belonging at a ten because of the safe environment that was established by the women in the group. She gives the ranged rating of an eight or nine to an academic classroom that she is not in often but occupies when organizations host events. “I feel like I belong. I, because that’s the whole point, right? Like they host these events to have people come out to talk about things.” Because of the opportunity that these events provide for students to speak freely, Dijonay’s sense of belonging is high.

Penny photographed an on-campus location that is not for academic use but has become an “on-campus home away from home”, the KKI meeting space (Figure 4.28) also known as “The Sunken Place.” She chose this space because,

I’m there, probably more than I should be, like I said it’s the Sunken Place. So, this is where me and all my sisters kinda just hang out and stuff and once you get there, it’s hard to leave and the later and later it gets, it’s like, “Okay, I’m about to leave”, and then someone will come in and you’re like, “Ayeee! Opa!” So, I mean it’s a lot of fun and we all just hang out. We had a nacho night, we watch movies together, and stuff, so this is like a home away from home, an on-campus type of home.

Her belonging here is high and being comfortable is not an issue for Penny in this space.

I’m definitely comfortable here, like I said when you just want to take your pants off, I’ve done that here multiple times. Like I definitely feel comfortable here and I know that the people in this house like, because like one of my sisters, she had to get surgery and we came here and this was like her recoup area. so I know that
if ever in the event that I'm in that situation or something happens to me or whatever, I know that I'm welcomed here. I feel comfortable like I go in their refrigerator, I take their juice, I take their food like I'm home away from home.

With her basic needs being met of safety, food, and security being pair with being around people that she knows will be there for her, she easily rates this space a ten.

The on-campus spaces photographed included the library and the 24-hour commuter lounge, which three of the participants use for study purposes. Dijonay describes her use of the library as the space where she gets her thoughts together, studies, and cries. She spends her time in the library alone using the building for its intended purpose: to study and focus. When asked to define her belonging in this space she said.

It's the library. I guess like a seven or eight. I mean if they had maybe like a suggestion box or something like, "Hey, how can we make this better?" Take down the Harry Potter stuff. I don't know.

LaCienega also provided a picture of the library at the research site institution because she is there often.

I spend a lot of my time...like if I'm not in, like, the little computer lab then I'm like downstairs in between the books. Like just doing homework, like if I feel like I can't do it or I can't focus at home, I just come to the library and just focus. I spend a decent amount of time there, I definitely spent. when I lived on campus and last year, I spent more time there but it's like now since I have two jobs and stuff, I really just try to do my homework whenever I can. But when I have time, I definitely still go to the library.
She goes to the library to get her work done. So while she is completing this task her feeling of belonging in this space is at a ten since she is using it for its intended purpose. I’m mostly spending time with myself. I’ll have my music in doing my work. So, I definitely feel like I belong. I feel like the library environment is just work related so everybody there is for the most part doing their work. So, I definitely feel like I belong.

LaCienega also took a picture of the 24-hour commuter lounge (Figure 4.25) because of its convenience of accessibility with her work schedule last semester. Last semester when I got off of work at 12 or something, and you know the library close at 1 so I don’t really see the need to go to the library for like an hour. So, if I don’t want to do my homework at home or if I couldn’t focus at work or something then I’ll just come here and be able to get my work done.

She does not use this space as often as she did when she lived on-campus but she still has a high level of belonging in this space. She rates this space an eight on the given scale. I’m doing like work related stuff, like school related stuff, and of course I’m like interested so it’s like I feel comfortable while I’m doing my work. It’s like a quiet place and yea, that’s why I feel like I kind of belong there. And it’s familiar, like I said last semester I spent a lot of time there; and freshman year I spent a lot of time there and sophomore year too because I was living on campus.

Penny shared a different view of the 24-hour commuter lounge (Figure 4.25) that she infrequently inhabits for the sole purpose of studying. This is where I spent most of my time before class if I had a test and it wasn’t enough time to, like, go home. Well it didn’t make any sense to go home and then
come back. This is where I’d be when I need to study for this test and really, really focus. I tried to go to [another on-campus study location] but they were locked. This is where I spent most of my time cramming or whatever before a test trying to get those last-minute details in.

Sometimes other people, usually classmates, will join her here to study but as far as belonging in this space, Penny says that she only belongs to the area that she is occupying at the time. She adds,

Like this room, this room is not my room. This is just a community campus thing, so I don’t feel like I would belong as much here as the other pictures just because it’s not a controlled setting like I can’t control who comes in.

Because of this, she rates this area a one.

**On-Campus Work Spaces.** The participants all have a place of work at the research site institution and based on their experience, their supervisor(s), and coworkers they rated their experiences accordingly. Dijonay works in the Admission Office (Figure 4.19) at the institution she attends where she rates her belonging a four. She is here just about three times a week but says, “I still got people in the office who don’t know my name.” She mentions that with minimal people that look like her she tends to sit back and stay in her place. Zoey says that she took the picture of her residence hall front desk (Figure 4.20) because, “It’s where I spend most of my time. If I’m not studying, if I’m not doing other organization’s activities, if I’m not sleep, I’ll be there.” She tries not to go to work often because she does not enjoy the management or her coworkers but because, “I have to be there to get paid”, she rates this location a five.
Penny and LaCieng points shared more positive positions at their on-campus jobs.

Penny’s job is the first place that she goes to when she arrives to campus if she does not have class first. When describing her belonging at her place of employment (Figure 4.21), she said,

I feel like professionally I belong. Some people feel like they [coworkers] belong more than I do just because I’m like, “Oh my gosh.” I mean like we’re comfortable with each other but like, “You can’t say that where I work.” So, I feel like professionally I weaseled my way in and I feel comfortable and I feel like I can be myself to a certain extent, professionally.

With the separation of belonging in a professional setting in comparison to a personal setting, Penny rates her belonging a seven at work. LaCienega also gave her work location (Figure 4.18) a seven on the scale of one to ten because of her comfort with her staff and supervisors, and due to her extensive time working here.

Off-Campus Living Spaces. LaCienega and Dijonay both live off-campus and have a strong level of belonging in their homes. LaCienega shared a picture of the kitchen in her apartment (Figure 4.2). She expresses her belonging in this space as being comfortable. “I’m definitely comfortable here, like I just wear whatever I want and I can have my bonnet on, my pajamas. I don’t really have the need to not be myself, so I definitely feel like I belong there.” Another space that LaCienega shares that is like home to her is her boyfriend’s room. The same comfortability felt in the kitchen of her apartment with her roommate is what she feels with her boyfriend. In both spaces, LaCienega rates her belonging a nine. Dijonay rates the living room in her off-campus
apartment a ten with no hesitation. In this space she and her friends have the ability to freely discuss topics of their choice with no worry of consequences or judgement.

Penny took a picture of one off-campus locations that she has a very high sense of belonging but is occupied often by other people: the house of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. At the fraternity house (Figure 4.5), she is there often enough to where she feels like, "...this is my house. I will go in, go in the refrigerator, I will find a cup, I will take your juice. I probably, again, overly comfortable in this house." In the fraternity house, she has a strong sense of belonging because she is comfortable here but it is not her personal space. This leads to the rating of a nine for this location.

**Off-Campus Vehicles.** A common space that majority of the participants took pictures of is their car. Dijonay rates her car (Figure 4.13) a ten because it provides an escape for her and her friends where they can express themselves and no one is bothering them. Zoey speaks to her love and appreciation for her car using a picture of her daily view (Figure 4.14). She rated her car a ten with no second thought.

Actually, I feel like I belong...no, this car belongs to me! This is my vehicle. I saved up for a very long time to purchase it. I know it's kinda weird to have a car fetish for a car, but I literally take care of this little car like it's my dog or something. You know, like last night we had a snowstorm and my windshield. I put this frost shield on, so my window wouldn't be frozen instead of leaving it like it was and I pulled my wipers up, so they wouldn't get froze, and stuff like that. So, I really take care of my vehicle because I put so much time and effort into it and so much time to get it. That's why I said I feel like my car belongs to me. It fits me.
In her car, she has the ability to move about from place to place as she pleases and with the added benefit of knowing that she worked hard to obtain her car. Dijonay and Zoey focus on the freedom they possess while in their car. Lastly, Penny, who is surprised by her rating of a nine for her car, Fannie (Figure 4.15) says, “It’s weird because this is my car but...that’s really weird. Uhm I would say a nine. That’s weird, it should be a ten, that’s my car.” Her belonging level varies based on the company with her in the car. If it is someone she is not comfortable with she acts differently than if she is with her KKI sisters.

**Off-Campus Locales.** Along with having the freedom to travel wherever they want, Dijonay often travels to a few local places as needed with her friends and boyfriend. One location that she travels to daily is Wal-Mart. This is not her favorite location but she says, “…it’s all we got in [city of research site]. So, is Wal-Mart my favorite? No, but if you want groceries, if you want clothes...anything you need it’s either there or you don’t have it.” She rates this location as a five on the scale, she says, The only reason I belong here is because I go to [research site institution]. That is it. I walk in and they know I’m already a [research site institution] student because you can look at the community and tell it is old and White. So, yea, do I belong there? No, but they also know we’re the reason that they’re open.

She also travels to two local eateries: (Figure 4.29), where she gives the rating of a two, and (Figure 4.30) which received a rating of a five.
You can see this picture. This picture is packed. It was crazy busy and there is not a Black face in sight but this shoulder of my friend. So, I don't belong, that's like a two if we doing the one to ten.

This seasonal location is a place that Dijonay and her friends go to because "It's cheap and it's in walking distance." When asked what happens at this location, the response followed was, "We get our ice cream and we go. Yea, we don't too much eat there." That response coincides with the reasoning behind the rating of five. "I don't too much like venturing off of campus. I don't feel too welcomed. But they like my business so...a live." In these three locations, Dijonay speaks to the lack of comfort and want felt by those who occupy these spaces. Two of the key words which she stated is how she defines belonging in a space. Though she goes to these locations, it is because they are local and fulfill a need.
Dijonay also travels to the city's lake (Figure 4.31) usually with her best friend. They can be found relaxing, working out, or simply watching the sun rise or set. This is a space where they created their own belonging.

We made it a ten. Like don't get me wrong the lake is normally full of a bunch of White people and they're either fishing or running or whatever but we made this ours. [ou] not [going to]...and yea we get the looks but you not running us out from the lake.
Like her feeling when she gets in her car with her friends, at the lake Dijonay says, "...it's somewhere off campus where we can get away from everything [and] everyone. Nobody's in our business and it's calm."

Figure 4.31. Dijonay, Lake

The people that occupy these spaces with Dijonay are what impact her ratings.

LaCienega shares the same impact at her two off-campus job sites.

In one of the houses that she works in she has gotten accustomed to being with her clients doing relaxed tasks such as watching TV and helping them as needed (Figure 4.16). With the amount of time spent here and ease of duties she has grown more comfortable with them and the environment. She gives this location an eight. The other
house that she works in (Figure 4.17), her focus was on her enjoyment of cooking. She just started learning how to cook but the clients make her feel good about her dishes. She attributes her comfort to the people that she works with in these spaces to place a rating of a seven to the second house. The ability to rate these spaces gives a better insight to how the participants feel about the spaces they occupy and if the intended purpose is being utilized.

**Summary**

Using the participant’s photos, narratives, and ratings, they could provide their descriptions of what belonging means to them and how that applies to the physical spaces they occupy on campus. The participants shared the locations that they occupy on a regular basis and paired it with the effect the people they surround themselves with have on their sense of belonging. The participants took pictures of similar areas, but the primary impact came from how they described their definition of belonging based on their comfort, intended use of space, and the people that occupy the spaces with them.
CHAPTER V

Discussion

This qualitative photovoice study was conducted for two purposes; to explore Black women's sense of belonging at a predominantly White institution through the use of photographs and face-to-face interviews. The photographs were used to document on- and off-campus spaces where the participants occupy the majority of their time and paired with personal interviews to identify sense of belonging in those spaces. This chapter will summarize the findings and highlight the experience of the participants sense of belonging at a PWI. McCorkle (2012) shared that the positive experiences of minority students attending a PWI are rarely documented. Implications and recommendations for student affairs professionals, pre-professionals, and educators will be provided to assist in gaining insight into how some members of this population express their belonging at this institution and how to provide support for a minoritized population. Also included are suggestions for future research. Three research questions were used to guide this study:

1. Where are Black female students creating their space?
2. In what ways are Black female students involved on the college campus?
3. How do Black female students describe their sense of belonging in college?

Discussion

Reviewing the responses from the individual interviews to answer the identified research questions, several themes were identified. The participants of the study shared their experiences in college through pictures and individual interviews. They were asked to talk about the various organizations they are involved in and the impact that had on their college experience. They were also asked for their personal definition of sense of
belonging to describe their personal sense of belonging as it pertains to the spaces they photographed. After compiling all data gathered from the participants, it appears that the participants interpreted having a "sense of belonging" in a space as the space being a "safe space." These two phrases can be interchangeable because if a student does not feel like they belong in a space they would not consider that a space where they are safe, and vice versa. The definition for sense of belonging used for this study talks about fit, however the participants used the word "comfort." Listening to the participants and comparing this with the pre-determined definition one can see the similarities in the participants' definition.

Creating Space. Merriam-Webster (2018) defines being at home as "relaxed and comfortable: at ease." Each of the participants reference feeling "at home" in a space where they are comfortable, when using a space for its intended use, and when they describe people in these spaces with them. A common theme found in a study conducted by Woldoff, Wiggins, and Washington in 2011, "Black collegians need to feel valued, safe. and accepted in order to feel at home..." (p. 1048). These three themes arose at the end of the study and drew the conclusion that these three factors are important when Black women are creating their space.

Home. Three of the four participants took more pictures of off-campus locations than on-campus locations but they all took pictures of their living spaces. Aguirre (2000) said that women and students of color often refer to the environment of higher education as chilly, inhospitable, and unwelcoming. The findings of this study support this reference, all of the participants gave their own definition of belonging and based on their personal definition their feelings about the research site institution are not positive. The
women in the study all speak about how in their personal space they are able to be themselves and they are comfortable, a feeling not experienced on the campus of the research site institution. But they all talked about creating a space that is their home where they get to freely express themselves, with a couple drawing on their on-campus residences. Being at home and having a safe and comfortable space is an important aspect for these women and all students when they are away from their home with their family.

In their living space, on- or off-campus, these locations are significant to each participant because it fulfills the most basic need for survival, according to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943): physiological needs. Each of the participants homes meet the needs of providing food, water, warmth, and rest (Maslow, 1943). With this being the most basic need to be met, if the students are not in an area where they are cared for they cannot advance successfully. The second need to be met is safety and security which is important to form a connection to campus. Keeping in mind that being a part of the campus community also puts the students attending the institution in the surrounding community, increasing the need to have a connection to both communities. Zoey, living on-campus, shares how her belongingness to the institution’s dining hall is hindered due to her strong dislike of the items served. Dijonay addresses being active in the community through local eateries and shopping centers but still lacking feelings of connectedness. Without fulfillment of the needs expressed in previous levels, this connection to spaces they occupy regularly cannot be obtained; which is the main idea of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (1943).
Each of the participants found resources at the research study site that progressed their success: TRiO, the campus library, the 24-hour commuter lounge, advisors, and supportive organizations. The experiences shared negate the finding of the study by Giffrida and Douthit (2010) that Black students are not being provided the proper resources of support in higher education which leads to this populations high dropout rate. Three of the four participants are on track to graduate and one has already graduated with one degree, preparing to graduate with a second and they attribute their success to these resources. Brower and Ketterhagen (2004) conducted a study comparing the success of Black students at PWIs to that of Black student's success at HBCUs and concluded that different services are required for different students because they identify and obtain success in different ways. One necessary service is intentional on-campus spaces for the diverse populations the research institution site services.

**Intended Use.** The participants took pictures of spaces that they occupy on a regular basis for its intended purpose. Dijonay and LaCienega both took pictures of the research site's institution's library because it is a location that they go to study and get homework done. They both expressed that while in this location, their sense of belonging is high because they are there using it for its purpose. All the participants took a picture of their on-campus work location with varying levels of belonging based on the relationships they possess with those they work with/for. Nevertheless, they all identify that the reason they occupy that space is because they are there to complete a task: work.

Dijonay, Zoey, and Penny took pictures of classrooms found on-campus but Dijonay's reasoning differed than that of Zoey's and Penny's. Zoey and Penny took a picture of the spaces because they are there to be taught and learn, even if, as Penny
stated, she is pretending. On the other hand, Dijonay took a picture of a classroom and a building’s sign, not because she has classes there but because of the events that are held in that space. She says the organizations create a space where voices are heard and opinions are taken into consideration. The people in these organizations look like her and can relate to the experiences she experienced, another theme addressed in this study.

**People with Them.** Most of the participants mentioned someone who assisted them throughout some point of their college career. “Women faculty are underrepresented on many college and university campuses” (Adair, 2002, p. 210), Dijonay speaks to this point during her interview when she mentions a mentor of hers who is a woman of color but states that she is one of the few. They also talk about being with others in those spaces which impact how they feel in and about the space. Penny shared that it is the people that makes her feel included on campus.

...like campus could be like an empty shell but the people that’s in it that make you feel comfortable. Like at work, I could be working with the worst people but, you know that’s on campus. but my boss and my coworkers. they make me feel comfortable and welcomed and invited; so, I don’t feel like it’s campus. I feel like it’s more the people.

Penny and Dijonay enjoy the time they spend in on-campus areas for events and meetings with people who accept them for who they are and where they feel completely comfortable. LaCienega attributes her comfort at her off-campus residential facilities that she works at to the clients that she works with because she has been with them for a while and they make her feel comfortable.
Dijonay spoke about her friends being with her at the city’s lake and though they get the feeling that they are not welcomed there by the other people that occupy the lake, because they have each other they have made that space somewhere where they do belong. She has this same feeling when she is in the community of the research site institution. When she visits Wal-Mart and two local eateries, the other people that use these spaces make her feel out of place. However, she is usually with her friends or boyfriend in these spaces and that makes Dijonay feel like she belongs a little more. Zoey speaks about her belonging being hindered at her on-campus job because of the rules of a new supervisor, a lack of connection with her coworkers, and the lack of maturity of the people that she serves.

**College Involvement.** All four of the participants are involved on campus, they are involved in social organizations, academic groups, and in jobs at the institution. With the various organizations that the participants have identified, the awareness of the other opportunities for involvement on campus has increased the longer they were at the institution. As the students spent more time at the institution they also spoke about how few opportunities there actually were for Black students, especially women to become involved in where they could freely express themselves and feel comfortable. The participants are involved on-campus in three key ways: in organizations, at work, and with people who are invested in their success.

When asked how or why the participants became involved on campus they all spoke about how they were encouraged by friends, coworkers and supervisors, and faculty to become more involved. The participants spoke about how they struggled to find places to become involved because most of the organizations didn’t have people who
looked like them. Without referrals from people around them or invitations by peers to join groups they would not have become more involved. They also spoke about how joining certain groups also helped them feel like they had a space and that others really cared about them and wanted them to be successful.

The main organizations that participants spoke about included TRiO, NACWC, KKI, and Just a Little Bit; these are groups that primarily support Black women. These women have found areas on the PWIs campus where they are the majority to combat feelings of marginalization. In these organizations the participants are involved and feel connected because of the support system created there for them. They also identify that there are not enough organizations like this on the campus. There are only a couple of historically Black sororities on campus, and very few other student organizations they can join that are geared for Black students or provide a space for them to freely express the issues they are facing on and off campus.

All the participants have jobs on the campus and within their space of work they interact with the campus in different ways. Dijonay works in the institution's Admission Office as a campus tour guide. Being a campus tour guide her job is showing the campus to perspective students. Her position allows her to be viewed as a leader to the rest of campus. LaCienega and Zoey work at the front desk of their on-campus jobs where they are the first stop for anyone that needs to be serviced. Penny's place of work is in a technical location on-campus where she oversees the Snapchat page and applying captions to the videos posted. Through these positions each participant is engaged in the institution's community and by encountering a variety of people it allows them to learn about other opportunities they may not have been aware of before.
Describing Sense of Belonging. When describing belonging these women all identify that they want a space that is comfortable and where they can be themselves. They want to feel at home. College presents itself as a student’s home away from home but for some that may not be the case. Aguirre (2000) said that women and students of color often refer to the environment of higher education as chilly, inhospitable, and unwelcoming. The findings of this study do not support this reference. all the participants gave their own definition of belonging and though they did describe some spaces as unwelcoming, the spaces they identified as home were ranked very high. No feelings of a space being inhospitable or chilly was referenced. Baumeister and Leary (1995) say that the most powerful human motive for people to feel the need to form and maintain bonds is being connected to the environment. With the participants rating most of their photographs a five or higher and continuing their education at the research site institution beyond two years, one can see that they have a bond being maintained to the institution.

The participants, collectively, addressed the five postulates of Astin’s (1999) Theory of Involvement indirectly in their interview. They are all involved academically because they are enrolled in classes and socially through their organizations. The continuum of involvement is seen through the various areas of involvement. All of the participants are involved in on-campus organizations, they work on-campus, and have lived on-campus at some point. These are key points that all students are encouraged to do to get better acclimated to campus. The ways that the participants are involved can be defined as the amount of involvement (quantitative) and description of involvement (qualitative) as it was in this study. The participants shared high levels of belonging in areas that they are growing and learning things of interest. Primarily, the participants
shared this when referencing organizations, they are in, whether they are learning from their peers or someone facilitating their conversation. When the participant is in a space that they can discuss topics and actively engage, they will find those spaces effective. Dijonay expressed this when she described her use of the academic classroom. The space was effective for the purpose of providing an area for conversation to flow freely within the organization. The high impact of involvement lead to a high level of belonging.

The pictures shared of the personal home spaces of the participants is a signal that these women have taken it upon themselves to define belonging in a space where they have the control: they can determine who occupies it, what happens in the space, and the topics are of common interests. In the 2004 study completed by Brower and Keterhagen the experiences of Black students at PWIs were compared to the Black students at a HBCU. The researchers found that Black students attending PWIs had a high rate of partaking in non-academic activities such as an increase in the number of hours spent alone, hanging out with others, more hours working, and more hours spent involved in on-campus activities. LaCienga and Zoey both shared their enjoyment of spending time alone and relaxing in their personal spaces. Whereas, all the participants take pride in all the time spent with the organizations they are a part of. These students are searching for spaces where their definition of belonging in a space matches their lived experience and spaces that they can make their own.

This defining is aided through the people that students encounter that take an interest past their academic success. Each of the participants applied higher rankings to spaces that are accommodated by people who are invested in them. Whereas, when a physical structure was discussed the rating was lower. like that of the dining center.
Wegmann (2017) said, "Teacher support not only directly affects student achievement, but also does so indirectly by promoting student engagement" (p. 583). Dijonay mentions how her counselor assisted her during her first year and during a hard time after her brother was shot and she was going through the process of reenrolling into the research site institution. LaCienega talked about how the TRiO program has helped her prepare to transition out of college by providing life skills. These mentors and programs that took additional interest in the lives of these women will be what they remember when they graduate and what they will reflect on when they think of the highlight of their college career. That connection resulted in higher ratings for the photographs that represented this support.

Their peers also had a very influential role in how these participants expressed their sense of belonging. The spaces they occupy with their friends were rated the highest regarding their sense of belonging. The participants spoke about what they do with their friends in those spaces and several spoke about sharing their frustrations with things that happen to them in college and in the community in those spaces. Those opportunities to be heard and comforted or validated by their peers are described as helping them find a safe space where they belong.

**Recommendations for College Student Affairs Professionals**

There are several ways student affairs professionals can impact the experience of their students. When considering how to create positive experiences for Black women there are several recommendations from this study that can be made. These recommendations can help create spaces that will help students get the most out of their experience.
Acknowledge the impact of the surrounding community. Student affairs professionals need to acknowledge that their students are a part of many different subcommunities while they attend their institution. The community that the institution is placed in affects the way students feel about the institution just as much as the immediate campus community. Establish a connection within both so that students feel more welcomed to freely live in the spaces they occupy. This may also include providing training or information to the community to create greater understanding and acceptance within the off-campus environment. Also taking into consideration that as students move into housing options in the community, if that experience is negative students pass that along to other students. That leads to a disconnect between the students and the community.

Provide a welcoming space. As students enter the institution they have many people who will welcome them and let them know that they are available to help the student, however student affairs professionals need to do more. Instead of assuming all students will feel welcomed and comfortable seeking you out as a professional, go out of your way to get to know the students and what they are going through. Get to know the students, especially those from underrepresented populations like those in this study. Be present in their experiences as they join organizations and get jobs on campus, express through your actions that you care about them and their experiences. Create a welcoming space for controversial conversations to occur and opinions to be supported. role model this and engage in it. By doing so it will form a genuine community where all feel valued and supported.
Mentoring. This study shows us that the students benefit greatly from having a mentor as they each spoke about faculty, supervisors, and peers that influenced them during their undergraduate experience. Ideally, this population would benefit from having other Black females who serve mentors, but with a limited number of Black female professionals in higher education. It is important to continue to recruit a diverse staff and faculty into the institution. Then, it is imperative for those working at the institution to look for opportunities to make connections with the students to serve as role models. Additionally, student affairs professionals can also create peer mentoring opportunities with upperclassmen and incoming students. The mentorship can be a laxed system of meetings and outings, but something put in place to show this population that they are not alone. This is also assistive in directing students to a resource when they need assistance and meeting other Black students on the campus.

Additional programming to fit interests of population. Instead of pushing activities out for the purpose of having something for the campus to do, make intentional opportunities for different interests to be highlighted. Work with student organizations to assist them in collaborating to host an event so they have a buy in such as an all-Black movie night or a taste around the world for cultural organizations to prepare native food for the campus community. If an organization puts their time into an event they will be invested and encourage others to come out to support. This will also build community within organizations to build friendships and future collaborations. Finally, if a group of students, especially those from underrepresented populations, come forward to start a new group that may or may not be population specific, work with them to develop the organization because it will add to your institution.
Keep recruiting in underrepresented areas. Making the campus feel like home is important for the success of students and one way to do it is to enroll students that look like them. To better serve underrepresented students, colleges must continue to enroll and serve them. The more visibility of diversity on campus, the better the claim of providing a diverse experience is received. This does not end with the recruiting of students, it also applies to recruiting diverse faculty and staff. The importance of having people in professional positions that look like these minority students is high when students need to reach out.

Allow for students to create open spaces for single populations. Student affairs professionals need to allow for students to occupy and create spaces where they can freely express themselves. In some cases, this means that single populations have that space where they can share with one another things they are experiencing and be comforted and supported through those experiences. Often times we see those in higher education looking for ways to bring groups together rather than accepting the need for individuals to have people they can speak to who look like them in judgement free zones. With diversity being a big issue at predominately White institutions if student affairs professionals and faculty put themselves out there to get involved or support minority organizations that will show these minoritized populations that someone cares and that they are supported.

Recommendations for Future Research

The recommendations below provide suggestions for future research based on the results of this study:
1. Allow for the participants to have more time to reflect on picture locations prior to signing the instructions. Have the student brainstorm a short list of locations they are thinking about taking pictures of before leaving the initial meeting.

2. Conduct this study at a historically Black college.

3. Open the opportunity to participate in study to all minority women to obtain a broader perspective on a specific gender.

4. Utilize more participants in the study.

5. A quantitative study conducted on the correlation between retention and sense of belonging.

6. Focus stronger on sense of belonging by defining it for the participant and have that be the basis for questions.

7. Survey students level of satisfaction as it relates to institutional fit.

8. Identify students sense of self-efficacy at the institution.

Conclusion

This qualitative study was conducted to identify where Black women are creating spaces where they belong and how their sense of belonging is defined and applied to their college experience. Through this study, four Black women attending a predominately White institution shared their experiences and how they feel in the spaces they occupy. The study concluded with the participants using the word “comfortable” to describe how they define belonging in a space. They are creating comfortable spaces in on-campus living and academic spaces and in the off-campus environment, through involvement in organizations, and surrounding themselves with people who are invested in their success.
The participants utilize similar spaces for various reasons but the most importantly they want to feel at home like the majority population. The predominately Black organizations that they are involved in play a large role in providing a home away from home feeling which aided in their belonging at the institution. Institutions providing intentional spaces for minority populations will be imperative in showing the importance of their belonging on campus and provide a space for growth and security.
References


Benton, M. A. (2007). *Challenges African American students face at predominately White institutions.* Retrieved from


Hamilton, T. (2009). Understanding the Black college student experience: The relationships between racial identity, social support, general campus, academic, and racial climate, and GPA. *Seton Hall University Dissertations and Theses*.


APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introductory Questions

Provide the participant with informed consent. Go through the informed consent with the participant and answer any questions that she might have.

1. Do I have your permission to take a video and audio recording of this interview?

The following questions are being asked to gather demographic information about all participants in my study. This information will not be used to identify you.

a. What is your first and last name? This is solely to ensure accuracy.

b. How old are you?

c. What is your class standing?

d. Did you start your college career here at this institution or did you transfer here?

   If you did transfer, where did you transfer from?

General and Introductory Questions

a. Thinking back to your college search, how did you make the decision to attend this institution?

b. What were your influences?

c. Did you go on a campus visit, how many? Where?

d. Tell me about your impressions of this institution?

e. What was your initial reaction to this project?

Experience at EIU Questions

a. Tell me about your time here at this institution so far.
b. Tell me about the people who helped you transition to college, specifically this institution?

c. Who are they to you?

d. How have they helped you?

e. What drew you to them?

f. Have you ever wished that you went to a different school?

g. What school or what type of school?

h. How do you think your experience there would be different than the one here?

**Involvement Questions**

a. What groups/organizations are you involved in?

b. How did you find these groups/organizations?

c. Why did you choose to join that/those organization(s)?

d. Do you hold any leadership positions in the organization(s)?

e. How do you feel about the options available for involvement on campus?

f. Are there any organizations that you wish we had?

g. What organization(s)? Why?

h. Are there any organizations that you wish you could join but have not joined?

i. Why haven’t you joined?

**Sense of Belonging Questions**

a. What does “belonging” mean to you? (i.e. Belonging at college, belonging in a friend group, etc.)

b. Using your definition, describe your sense of belonging here at this institution.

c. What does campus offer that makes you feel included?
d. What was your overall reaction to taking the photos?

**Photo Questions. These questions will be repeated for each photo. Select the 10 photos you would like to talk about today.**

a. Tell me about this photo.

b. When did you take this photo?

c. Do you come here often?

d. Why did you choose this location?

e. Tell me about what happens here?

f. Who is usually here with you?

g. Tell me about belonging, as you defined it, in this space?

h. On a scale of 1-10, 1 being the least and 10 being the most, rate how you feel you belong here.

**Next, the researcher will lay out all of the participant’s photos out in front of them.**

a. Choose your three favorite photos.

b. Why did you choose these?

c. Choose your three least favorite photos.

d. Why did you choose these?

e. Tell me about these photos you did not select.

**Closing**

a. Now that you have completed the study, what is your overall reaction?

b. Is it what you expected? Why or why not?

c. Is there anything that you would like me to know that I did not ask you?
Hello,

My name is Kayla Slusher and I am a graduate student in the College Student Affairs masters' program at Eastern Illinois University. I am conducting a research study to better understand the sense of belonging for Black women at a predominately White institution (PWI). I am emailing because you were recommended to me by a staff or faculty member as a great candidate in my research. Participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. All information obtained through this study will be completely anonymous.

The Purpose of the Study

The goal of this study is to investigate the sense of belonging of Black women at a PWI. I am also seeking to understand where on or off-campus this population identifies as a space they belong in. This study will be conducted through the use of photography and personal interviews. Participants will be able to visually document spaces they feel they belong in then expound on their experience at EIU through a personal interview.

If you are interested, please respond to this email with the best way to contact you to set up an interview time.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at kaslusher@eiu.edu or (773) 512-9641.

Thank you for both your time and consideration.

Kayla Slusher
Master's Candidate in CSA
Eastern Illinois University
Email: kaslusher@eiu.edu
APPENDIX C

INSTRUCTIONS FOR RESEARCH

Hello.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. I appreciate your time and the information you will provide. I hope that during this time you will find out more about yourself through intentional focus. The purpose of this study is to identify how Black women identify belonging at a predominately White institution and what space they occupy at the institution. To do this, you will use the camera on your personal cellphone to take photos of the spaces on and off campus that you use regularly and spend your time in. These spaces can have a positive or negative impact on your sense of belonging in college. Using photographs will allow for a creative take on a regular research study and will allow you, the participant, to think of the spaces you occupy. Allow me to learn about you through your photos.

Step 1: Take some time and think about the spaces and places where you spend your time. Go to those spaces and take photos. Your photos can be of buildings, your room, a classroom, residence hall lounges, your favorite study spot, the quads, etc., the only limitation is please DO NOT TAKE PHOTOS OF PEOPLE (where they can be identified, blur faces if necessary).

Step 2: When you have completed taking at least 10 photos of different spaces, send me an email at kaspers@eiu.edu with your photos attached. Please have the photos taken within 3-5 days of receiving this document.

Step 3: After receiving your photos, we will coordinate a time to meet for your one-on-one interview to talk about your experience at EIU and taking the photos. This interview will be voice recorded.

Most importantly, have fun! As you take your pictures think about the various experiences you have had in these locations and take a moment to reflect on the way those experiences have made you the woman you are now.
APPENDIX D

LETTER OF CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled Sense of Belonging of Black Women at a Predominately White Institution conducted by graduate student, Kayla Slusher, and faculty sponsor, Dr. Dianne Timm, from the Counseling and Student Development Department at Eastern Illinois University. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

You have been asked to participate in this study because you are a third-year undergraduate student at EIU.

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this study is to investigate the sense of belonging and occupied space that impacts sense of belonging from the perspective of Black women and their experience at EIU.

Procedures
If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to:
1. Take photos of places that connect you to your college career.
2. Participate in a 30 to 45-minute voice recorded interview after submitting your photos.

Potential Risks and Discomforts
There are no known risks to participating in this study. When asked to expound more on experience(s) towards topic. some discomfort may occur.

Potential Benefits to Subjects and/or to Society
Participants will not directly benefit from this study. The university will benefit from this study and the feedback provided to gain additional knowledge on how this population identifies the campus.

Confidentiality
Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of coding, that only the researcher will be able to identify. Only the researcher, Kayla Slusher, will know the name and identity of the participant. All names will be changed to unidentifiable names to protect participant’s identity. All information collected will be destroyed 3 years after completion of the study.
Participation and Withdrawal

Participation in this research study is voluntary and not a requirement or a condition for being the recipient of benefits or services from Eastern Illinois University or any other organization sponsoring the research project. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits or services to which you are otherwise entitled. There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

Identification of Investigators

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact:
  Kayla Slusher (Investigator) – kaslusher@eiu.edu 773-512-9641
  Dr. Dianne Timm (Faculty Sponsor) – dtimm@eiu.edu 217-581-5327

Rights of Research Subjects

If you have any questions or concerns about the treatment of human participants in this study, you may call or write:

Institutional Review Board
Eastern Illinois University
600 Lincoln Ave.
Charleston, IL 61920
Telephone: (217) 581-8576
E-mail: eiuirb@www.eiu.edu

You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with EIU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time. I have been given a copy of this form.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant  Date

I, the undersigned, have defined and fully explained the investigation to the above subject.

Signature of Investigator  Date
APPENDIX E

Photo Protocol

Photo Agreement Form

Participant's Name: ______________________

With your participation in this research study, you will take 10 photos of spaces that identify your connection to campus.

Please read the following statements and sign your initials next to each statement to confirm that you have read and understand each statement.

_____ I will not intrude into an individual’s personal space both publicly and privately.

_____ I will do my best to not incorporate individuals in my photographs.

_____ I will not reveal the name(s) of any subject(s) in my photographs and will not use them when discussing or writing about my photographs.

Signing this agreement form means that you have read, understand and respect the ethics and privacy concerns involved in this research study.

If you fail to follow these principles you may be asked to remove yourself from this study.

_____________________  _______________________
Sign Your Name Here       Today’s Date