#BLACKONCAMPUS: A Critical Examination of Racial and Gender Performances of Black College Women on Social Media

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#BLACKONCAMPUS: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF RACIAL AND GENDER PERFORMANCES OF BLACK COLLEGE WOMEN ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Dissertation

BY

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ABSTRACT

More than 98 percent of college-aged students use social media and social media usage has increased nationally by almost 1000 percent since 2007 (Griffin, 2015). College students' social media profiles can be understood as cultural performances and narratives of identity that possess aspects of both fiction and real life (Martínez Alemán & Wartmann, 2008). According to Dalton & Crosby (2013), social media have and will continue to transform the experiences and objectives of colleges and universities and the ways in which students choose to share components of their experience and identity must be examined.

This dissertation uses a critical race theory framework to examine how African American college women perform race and gender on social media. This dissertation addresses the following questions:

- How do black college women construct identity on social media?
- How do black college women perform race and gender on social media?

15 participants from three predominately white institutions (Oxford, Cambridge, Kings College) engaged in individual interviews, participant observations, artifact collection and focus groups as a part of this study.

The findings suggest that in person experiences inform what is presented and performed on social media and social media experiences enhance participants lives as college students on their campuses. Black women respond to and are affected by the

campus environment in which they routinely encounter racial stress and stereotypes and choose to share some of these experiences on social media.

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Four years ago I embarked on this academic journey towards a Ph.D. I was intimidated, overwhelmed and terrified of what it would be to undertake research and subsequently write a dissertation. As this journey concludes and I reflect on the process, I am proud of the individual I have become: a more dedicated and reflective thinker committed to work which makes the experiences of the students I work with better. I dedicate this work to the 15 women who participated in my study. Thank you for sharing your stories, for your willingness to be vulnerable, and your dedication to making your campuses better. You are strong, resilient, and powerful women.

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1.0 CHAPTER 1

Identity as described by James Marcia (1980) is a self-structure, "an internal self-constructed, dynamic organization of drives, abilities, beliefs and individual history" (p. 159). Erikson (1968) described the formation of a sense of identity as the primary developmental task of the adolescent years. According to Erikson, identity reflects a variety of chosen commitments but is also integrally tied to one's ascribed characteristics such as race and gender. Building on Erikson's proposition that defining one's identity constitutes the central crisis in adolescence, Marcia (1980, 1993) reasoned that what is important about identity in adolescence is that it is the most critical time that physical development, cognitive skills and societal expectations coincide to enable young persons to sort through and synthesize their childhood identifications in order to construct a viable pathway toward their adulthood. Marcia argues that a well-developed identity structure is flexible and open to both changes in relationship as well as society. This flexibility provides that identity is dynamic not static and does not happen neatly (Marcia, 1980). These theories lay the groundwork for understanding the experiences facing late adolescents entering college. For many students, college initiates a time in which meaning making about one's identity takes place.

In everyday life, people consciously and unconsciously work to define the way they are perceived, hoping to engender positive impressions of themselves. Goffman (1959) used the term "performance" to refer to all the activity of a given individual on a given occasion, which serves to influence the other individuals. He went on to assert that individuals perform identities for others to be seen as acceptable and to ensure social relationships are comfortable and positive. According to Butler (1995) gender is a

stylized repetition of acts, which are internally discontinuous so that the appearance of substance is a constructed identity, and the actors themselves come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief.

The past few decades have discredited the dominant perspective that social categories of race reflect inherent biological differences (Obasogie, 2010). Racial categories and the meaning of race are given concrete expression by the specific social relations and historical context in which they are embedded. These categories and meanings have varied over time and between different societies (Omi & Winant, 1994). These rules of engagement between different races (i.e. how to act, what to say) and what not to say allow the distinctions between races to take on center stage in how various people are treated based on how they are visually perceived (Obasogie, 2010). Omi and Winant (1994) encourage an understanding of race as an unstable and decentered complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle. Brock (2009) argues that racial identity is a performance that has more to do with social and cultural resources than with skin color. The manner in which an individual dresses, styles his or her hair and speaks all highlight performance of identity. According to Stewart (2015), studying race as a performance refutes the attempts to connect racial identity simply to a set of behaviors that have been dictated and socially constructed. Winkle-Wagner (2015) argues that the sociological approach to studying race in the collegiate experience places more emphasis on the environment and larger sociostructural issues that might influence experience for students of color. Race instead becomes a way of behaving, a place to be entered and exited, and a garment to be put on and taken off at calculated and chosen times (Stewart, 2015). Obsaogie (2010) finds that our

understanding of race is visual and stems from social practices that train people (including blind people) to think about race visually. For black students attending predominately white institutions, the effects of whiteness as a cultural norm and product resonate into how and to whom they perform their racial identity (Brunsma, Placia, & Brown, 2012). In Stewart's (2015) study of black college students' racial identity and performance, she found that race and appropriate racial performances significantly shaped participants' experiences in college. Racial socialization ascribed blackness to the performance of particular mannerisms, forms of speech, and cultural displays perceived both within and outside of black social groups to be appropriate and expected for black people. The performances of students in the study were deliberately chosen and delivered for the benefit of multiple audiences including black peers and white society. Some students in the study were judged for "acting too white" by their black peers and felt the pressure to code switch as a way to hide or accentuate their black racial identity depending on the audience (Stewart, 2015). Consequently, the view of performance and how students of color enact performance within different environments is crucial to understanding the experience of black students in higher education. As the mechanisms for digital engagement and communication continue to expand for young people, examining identity and performance on social media is an important component within our understanding of college student development.

1.1 DIGITAL IDENTITY AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Young people spend much of their lives today in an unrelenting electronic world, which demands a great deal of their time and attention (Dalton & Crosby, 2013). Stoller (2012) brands a new dimension of personal identity development as "digital identity,"

which is the composite of images that individuals vet, present, share, and promote for themselves in the digital domain. No longer is a young person's digital identity seen as separate from "real life" but instead it is intricately connected to their overall identity (Stoller, 2012). College students' social media profiles can be understood as cultural performances and narratives of identity that possess aspects of both fiction and real life (Martínez Alemán & Wartmann, 2008). The ability of social media users to create their own profiles provides choice in how they will present themselves on the platform. People are able and socialized to present a highly selective version themselves for others to consume (Papacharissi, 2010). Performance is easily identifiable as users are consciously portraying a particular version of themselves for audiences to consume.

The college experience can be identified as a prominent site for considerations of racial identity as a part of the construction of self. As Beverly Tatum (1997) notes, answering the question "Who am I?" depends in largely in part on who the world around us says we are. She further posits,

> What message is reflected back to me in the faces and voices of my teachers, my neighbors, store clerks? What do I learn from the media about myself? How am I represented in the cultural images around me? Or am I missing from the picture altogether? (p.18)

The advent of the Internet provides new opportunities for the investigation of identity and performance in spaces beyond the physical environment (Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008). As technology continues to adapt and college students utilize mediums for peer-to-peer connection, the ways in which identity is understood and performed within the

context of technology particularly social media must be examined in connecting student development and technology.

Social networking sites (SNS) have become an extensively used communication tool among youth, particularly college students. Boyd and Ellison (2007) define SNS as web-services featuring profiles, lists of social connections, and the capability to view and navigate profiles, connections, and user-generated content. These sites allow users to create public and private profiles and form networks of "friends" with whom they can interact. SNS users can also post user generated content, which often elicit comments and result in further interaction. More than 98 percent of college-aged students use social media and social media usage has increased nationally by almost 1000 percent since 2007 (Griffin, 2015). With the creation of social networking sites, the locations for the development of relationships on campus, especially peer-to peer, have expanded from physical spaces to the online world as an increasing number of users' flock to these sites (Tynes & Markoe, 2010). "Social networking sites are arguably the 'social glue' used to help students settle into the university" (Tynes & Markoe, p. 2). Through the connections made on social networking sites, individuals may feel more of a connection to the campus environment (Tynes & Markoe, 2010). Facebook is the most widely known and used SNS with 1.4 billion users in 2015 (Statistics Portal, 2015). While Facebook may be the most widely known and used SNS there is growing use and popularity of other interfaces such as Twitter, particularly among African Americans. In 2014, the Pew Internet and American Life Project released a report highlighting that 22 percent of online African Americans used Twitter compared with 16 percent of whites (Smith, 2014). Black users are most visible in "trending topics" which is a real time list

of the most tweeted about subjects. The activity of prominent black Twitter users has also generated the term "Black Twitter" as an aggregation of tweets surrounding black popular culture, celebrity gossip as well as the experience of navigating U.S. culture as a racialized subject (Brock, 2012). Through the utilization of social media, students engage in self-discovery and self-presentation within a public context. In this self-presentation, young people bring their race and ethnicity into these digital contexts and therefore, further examination of race and ethnicity in the context of identity development within social media is necessary (Subrahmanyam & Šmahel, 2011).

Today's student development theories have yet to incorporate the ways in which young people are utilizing social media for meaning making surrounding their identity. Junco (2014) argues that many identity development models mainly focus on identity development within the offline world, meaning "the expression of and interaction within a community that leads to changes and movement along a developmental path" (p.105). He argues, however, that the emergence of online social spaces provides opportunities for youth to explore their identities in ways not previously possible (Junco, 2014). Youth use social media to engage in identity development. Through online exploration of identity students are also able to engage in healthy development of aspects of their identity. The emergence of online social spaces has allowed students to explore aspects of their identities in ways not previously possible, nor explained or defined by traditional identity development models. Building strong connections on social media helps students develop greater social capital and a supportive network of peers when they need assistance. Researchers found that social media users engage in status updates and tweets as forms of self-presentation and social validations to a mass public, as well as forms of

self-disclosure and self-expression to specific intimate users (Cisneros & Nakayama, 2015). Understanding how students are exploring their identities in online social spaces allows student affairs professionals to move away from only utilizing only traditional modes of understanding student development, and instead identify the benefits of using technology for positive psychological growth. Identity formation is enhanced through online interactions on social media and, for black women, exploring identity online is important in developing a sense of self that is often separate from the majority culture that dominates their campus environment.

1.2 RESEARCH AIMS

Many of America's revered colleges and universities were soaked in the sweat, tears, and even blood of people of color (Wilder, 2013). These institutions have historical relationships with slavery and enslaved people as the slave economy and higher education grew up together each nurturing the other. Slavery funded colleges, built campuses, and paid the wages of professors and academic leaders aggressively courted the support of slave owners and slave traders. Today, these college and universities have campus buildings named after racist slave owning, slavery complicit and men and women and are environments full of racial politics with traditions of racist parties, and overall hostile spaces for African American students (Ross, 2015; Wilder, 2013). Black students encounter a collegiate environment that is often dismissive of racially inappropriate or insensitive comments and practices by students, faculty and staff (Ross, 2015). African American women tend to encounter higher incidences of negative race based stereotypes, more frequent questioning of their credibility, knowledge, and authority (Thomas, Love, Roan-Belle, Tyler, Brown & Garriott, 2009). African American women enter institutions

of higher education that are characterized by barriers constructed according to race, sex, and class. These assaults on the identity and experience of black women can affect the ways in which black students see themselves as members of their campus community and what they chose to present of themselves online.

African American college women present themselves on social media in a variety of ways. Presentation of one's identity can come through pictures or text, dependent on the medium selected by the user. Text can provide implicit readings of one's identity surrounding race and gender. A particular example of this can be found through Khadijah Lynch, a black college woman. In December 2014, during her junior year, she posted the following tweet on her Twitter profile: "I have no sympathy for the NYPD Officers who were murdered today*"* (Twitter, 2014). The tweet was in response to the killings of two New York City police officers in Brooklyn on December 20, 2014. While sitting in their patrol car, the officers were killed by an individual angered by the deaths of Eric Garner and Michael Brown, two black men killed by white police officers. The shooter traveled from Baltimore and made statements on social media suggesting that he planned to kill officers (Baker & Mueller, 2014). The tweet by Lynch was later deleted however it sparked a furious debate in higher education about outspoken views, civility and free speech on Twitter (Jaschik, 2014). Many called for Lynch to be expelled from the college she attended. University officials issued a statement criticizing Lynch's tweet, but did not include how the tweet could be understood as a reflection of Lynch's developmental position and how the tweet speaks to her racial identity development. In an interview in January 2015 with the *Boston Globe*, Lynch stood by her tweet and stated, "I don't want to live in a country where police can get away with murdering black

children and black people and not be held accountable" (Rocheleau, 2015 p. 15). She shared that her statements reflected raw anger and emotion following the fatal shooting of 12 year-old Tamir Rice in Cleveland and grand jury decisions not to indict white police officers responsible for killing unarmed black men in Missouri and New York (Rocheleau, 2015). While a considerable amount of research has been done on how identity is formed and established in college, there is still much to be learned about identity in online spaces, specifically how identity is curated on social media environment, especially for students of color.

This study seeks to examine how African American college women perform race and gender on social media. In a social media context, where race can be hidden by the user, the act of performing race constitutes an important mode of resistance to marginalization and erasure (Nakamura, 2008). For many, race is one of the key organizing concepts that structures offline worlds. Thus, understanding the ways in which the significance of race takes shape for black women within social media is important (Florini, 2013). When the body and the corporeal signifiers of race can be obscured, the social and cultural markers of race take great importance (Florini, 2013). One's race and gender can be an important way for a user to navigate social media related to the content they seek out and what they choose to display to followers and others or it can be elided for when people want to lurk and pass. Social media are an environment in which not only do individuals perform curated components of their identity but also in which one's audience is able to comment and respond to what has been shared with relative impunity. Capturing and understanding the components of the online experience

for black women is important and will provide insight to the distinctiveness of social media in racial identity development.

1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

Student development theory has been used to make sense of attitudes, behaviors, norms and outcomes among college students since the 1970s. While many of these theories contribute to the higher education research landscape, they are limited in their use of language about race and the roles of racism in students' development and learning (Patton, McEwen & Rendon, 2007). Seminal student development theories do not directly discuss race and racism and how they may influence identity development. Racial identity development has been considered primarily from a psychological perspective; however, studying identity as a social performance emphasizes its socially constructed nature (Stewart, 2015).

Digital media studies often overlook users of color and the dynamics of race and racial identity online. Nelson and colleagues (2001) argued, that when users of color do receive scholarly attention related to digital media, most often they are cast as victims with limited technological access and resources. Scholarly focus on the digital divide too often frames people of color as technological outsiders and has obscured the many people of color who are online. Black Internet use has become increasingly visible due to the many ways in which social media have entered into everyday communication and now provides increased ways for black people to test, expand or affirm aspects of racial identity. Oldenburg (1991) highlighted the Internet as a sort of "third space" for public discussions among African Americans that were once limited to black-owned barber shops and beauty salons. The substantial black presence on Twitter displays the ways in

which black users utilize the platform, but may also provide insight into the intersection of cultural identity, social media, and performance.

Lorde (2007) wrote, "Somewhere on the edge of consciousness, there is what I call a mythical norm which each one of us within our hearts knows that is not me" (p.16). Harris and Khanna (2010) argued that in the United States, this norm is based in whiteness and when black Americans compare themselves to this mythical norm, they come up short and are automatically positioned as outsiders in a white dominated society. Historically, black women have been viewed as outsiders in the realm of higher education (Harris & Pitt, 2015). Harris-Perry (2011) argued that the problem for marginalized and stigmatized groups such as black women is that they face fundamental and continuing threats to their opportunity for accurate representation: "An individual who is primarily seen as a part of a despised group loses the opportunity to experience public recognition for which humans strive" (p. 38). Crenshaw (1993) further highlighted that black women sit in two subordinated groups that frequently pursue conflicting political agendas and leave them in a state where neither of the discourses and more centrally, the codified avenues to charge discrimination (i.e., race or gender) are adequate in highlighting the full dimension of their oppression. Holding membership in both marginalized identities (i.e., black and female) can lead to an invisibility of presence and a lack of voice for black women (Zamani, 2003). According to Dill and Zambrana (2009), "individual identity exists within and draws from a web of socially defined statuses some of which may be more salient than others in specific situations or specific historical moments" (p.4). Winkle-Wagner (2015) found that black women experience multiple conflicting notions of identity that at times disallow them from developing their identity in the ways

they would prefer. These conflicting notions of identity that black women must contend with shape their awareness and understanding of their identity and may speak to how they perform identity within social media.

According to Dalton and Crosby (2013), social media have and will continue to transform the experiences and objectives of colleges and universities of students. As those working in higher education begin to understand identity development in the age of technology we must continue to examine the ways in which students choose to share components of their experience and their identity on social media.

This research endeavors to consider the following questions:

1. How do black college women construct identity on social media?
    a. What are black college women's perceptions of their race and gender performance?
    b. What are black college women's perceptions of their construction of their racial and gender identity on social media?
2. How do black college women perform race and gender on social media?

The college experience and success of black women remains underexplored as much of the research done examines academic failure, particularly for black men as compared to black women (Winkle-Wagner, 2015). Note that in this dissertation study the terms Black and African American are both used, reflecting the language used by participants and by authors of cited studies. Black women are a significant sub-group within the larger population of college students of color, yet they are not heavily represented within historical or current literature on identity development (Porter & Dean, 2015). Insights are lacking surrounding how African American women's

experiences in higher education may be uniquely racialized and gendered, and this lack of focus on the experiences of African American women hinders the efficiency of institutional policies geared to enhancing the college experience of these students (Winkle-Wagner, 2015).

2.0 CHAPTER 2

According to Abes and Jones (2013) an understanding of identity is necessary if one is to understand college students and their experiences in higher education contexts. Black women must develop an identity that integrates a healthy sense of both blackness and femaleness (Shorter-Gooden & Washington, 1996). Being a black female in the United States poses particular challenges. Young black women must contend with adolescent developmental tasks, but they must do this in the context of a society that devalues blacks and women (Hooks, 1981; Shorter-Gooden & Washington, 1996). Theorists assert that in order for African American women to be healthy, they have to recognize the prevalence and reality of racism and that identity development occurs in light of racism and sexism (Shorter-Gooden & Washington, 1996).

This chapter explores the various components of identity development affecting black women. The following sections provide an overview of racial identity development as well as gendered racial identity development and identity performance. The intersection of race and gender and its effect on the experiences of black college women is discussed and finally, an overview of critical race theory as an important analytical framework grounding this dissertation study is provided. Examining identity processes specifically relevant to black women may lead to advancing knowledge about their marginalized experiences (Anglin & Wade, 2007).

2.1 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF BLACKNESS

2.1.1 Black Identity Development

Jackson (2001) suggests that living in a racist society as well as growing up in and living in a society as a member of an ethnic and racial group with its own culture

influences one's racial identity. His creation of the Black Identity Development (BID) model establishes the existence and nature of stages of Black identity development. According to Jackson (2001) to better understand and appreciate the BID process there must be a fuller appreciation and examination of the culture of race and the ethnic cultures that contribute to the culture of race. The BID model provides a focus on the importance of black culture as a major influence in four of the five stages thus promoting an understanding of racial identity development that is constructed not solely as a consequence of racism but rather as an interweaving of both the effects of racism and elements that are a part of a heritage of black culture that exists independently to varying degrees of the primary influence of racism. The snapshots of the process found in the BID model describe different junctures in the developmental process.

As BID expanded as a tool to understand development, the model expanded to include discussion of what happens when one is changing stages. While stages are the snapshots of a moving picture, it is the stage transitions that provide action. Stages and stage transitions are experienced differently and have a different effect on the individual who is experiencing them. The overlap of exiting phase of one stage, filled with sadness, anxiety, and reluctance to leave the comfort of a worldview that one has become used to, and the entry phase, filled with expectation and fear of the unknown, can be extremely disconcerting for the individual and those interacting with that person (Wijeyesinghe & Jackson, 2001). The BID model and its emphasis on stage transition and connection to oppression and systemic oppression highlight the continuing need for modifications to existing racial identity models in order to assist in understanding individuals and social group dynamics as well as the dynamics between social identity groups to accommodate

changing perspectives and experiences. To understand the BID process, there must be a fuller appreciation and examination of the culture of race and ethnic cultures and the notion that racism has had a significant impact on black identity development.

Naïve	The point within early childhood development where there is little or no conscious social awareness of race. Children become aware of the physical differences and cultural differences between themselves and others.
Acceptance (U/C)*	Represents the internalization, conscious or unconscious of an ideology of racial dominance and subordination, which touches all facets of one's private and public life.
Resistance (U/C)*	Individuals become painfully aware of the numerous ways in which covert as well as overt racism impacts them daily as black people.
Redefinition	The black individual is concerned with defining him or herself in terms that are independent of the perceived strengths and/or weaknesses of white people and the dominant white culture. The black person on developing primary contact and interacting with other blacks at the same stage of consciousness.
Internalization	Individuals no longer feel a need to explain, defend, or protect their black identity. Some will adopt a multicultural perspective, which brings together worldviews from as many compatible cultural perspectives as possible.

The stages of Acceptance and Resistance can manifest themselves in one of two ways, as passive (unconscious) or active (conscious).

Figure 1. Black Identity Development (Jackson, 2001)

2.1.2 Racial identity development

Race is often seen as a social category that is either objective or illusory. When viewed from an objective framework race is usually understood as rooted in biological differences including skin color and hair texture. Viewed as an illusion, race is understood as an ideological construct that masks material distinction including ethnicity, class and nation (Omni & Winant, 2014). Stuart Hall (1996) argued that race is a discursive construct and despite our understanding that biological race does not exist, racial thinking still exists and we are still challenged to grasp to his preternatural analyses. Hall (1996) argued that race works like a language in which differences exist in the world however what matters are the systems of thought we use to make sense of the difference. These differences acquire meaning when they are organized into categories

(Jally, 1997). Hall (1996) highlighted how the meanings of the signifiers of racial identity have changed depending on the time and place in which they were being interpreted. Although the signifiers of race are most often found on the body, there is nothing in the body that gives those signifiers meaning (Mitchell & Rosiek, 2006). Hall argues that racial signifiers take on the meaning in the context of social discourse that organizes individual and institutional behavior (Mitchell & Rosiek, 2006). Researchers including Hall recognize the socially constructed nature of racial identity and argue race and racial identity has significant material and psychic consequences on a global scale. Contemporary scholars, like Denise Ferreira da Silva, have taken up the work of Hall and W.E.B Du Bois' and grappled more thoroughly with understandings of global racial order. Ultimately race is a concept that signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies according to Omi and Winant (2014).

Helms and Cook (1999) caution that "information about a person's racial identity does not reveal anything about her or his cultural socialization, except perhaps how much the person values her or his socioracial group's traditional culture" (p. 98). Students may display aspects of identity without having a complete understanding of the overriding political and social dimensions that are "central to their survival" (Helms & Cook, 1999 p.98). Racial identity refers to a sense of group or collective identity based on one's perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group. Important to development of racial identity is the quality or manner of one's identification with the respective racial groups. Racial identity development models describe that an individual's identification with a larger racial group and aspects of that

group's culture affect his or her racial identity development (Wijeyesinghe & Jackson, 2001). The development of racial identity has been described as a characterized, developmental process that occurs over the lifetime of an individual. In the 1970's and 1980's a number of models of black racial identity were developed. William Cross's (1970) stage theory of Nigrescence has become the centerpiece for much of the subsequent research in this area. Cross theorized and found evidence for a Negro to Black transformation which depicts the process of racial identity formation in the late adolescent years. The model describes the process of accepting and affirming a black identity in an American context by moving from black self-hatred to black self-acceptance. Cross's work on black identity development has become an important foundation in understanding the developmental journey of black individuals throughout adolescence into adulthood. Similar to Cross, Helms (1990), and Phinney (1992) contribute to the literature and understanding of racial identity development. Phinney (1992) highlighted three aspects of ethnicity: culture, ethnic identity and minority status. Culture refers to adherence to values, beliefs, and behaviors and norms associated with one's cultural group. Ethnic identity refers to the extent to which one identifies with one's ethnic group. Finally, minority status highlights the extent to which one has the differential experiences and attitudes that are associated with minority group that is often the target of racist behaviors and prejudicial attitudes. It is important to note that Phinney and other researchers within the literature frequently use the terms "race" and "ethnicity" interchangeably. An understanding of African American identity must focus on an ethnic and cultural identity that is rooted in an Afro centric worldview paradigm that critically examines and affirms African cultural values as forming the foundation of African

American identity and culture (Wijeyesinghe & Jackson, 2001). Recognizing the steps of racial identity development can assist in our understanding of the variations in identity development of African American women during their college experience.

2.1.3 Construct of Blackness

In the late nineteenth century to be defined as black was to be socially and economically located in a matrix of relations that was shifting and open to change. While other marginalized ethnic groups (Irish, Italian) were able to negotiate and secure privileges of whiteness, renegotiation and change was not an available option for African Americans as their very definition and representation as "other" provided an anchor for the social construction of whiteness (Dines, 1994). Baracka (1966) describes that the lives and destinies of white Americans are bound up inextricably with those of the black American although blacks have been forced for hundreds of years to "inhabit the lonely country of black (p. 85). In his book *Black Skins White Masks* Frantz Fanon (1967) speaks to the interconnectedness of blackness to whiteness under the global order of oppression, when he states that the black man must not only be black he must be black in relation to the white man. One way to investigate the lived experience of black people is to consider what it is to be an "irreducibly disordering, deformational force while at the same time being absolutely indispensible to normative order, normative form?" (Moten, 2008 p.180).

Reaves and Campbell (1994) describe a component of blackness as a "spectacle of surveillance that is actively engaged in a representing authority, visualizing deviance, and publicizing common sense" (p.49). This surveillance has profound implications for the structuring, disciplining and experience of black people specifically within the United

States. In the wake of the victory of Barack Obama as President of the United States in 2008, the claim that the United States was now a "post racial" society enjoyed popular acceptance by many. "That a black man could be elected to the highest post in the land was cited as a stunning testament to how far the nation had come in moving beyond the discriminatory racial attitudes and exclusions of the past" (Omi & Winant, 2015 p.1). This also signaled the beginning of a retrenched white nativist movement, the movement that birthed the political life of 45th President Donald Trump. Our ability to interpret racial meanings depends on preconceived notions of a racialized social structure. The whole gamut of racial stereotypes testifies to the way a racialized social structure shapes racial experience and socializes racial meanings. As Hall (1981) noted there are no necessary correspondences between meanings and cultural symbols:

> The meaning of a cultural form and its place or position in the cultural field is not fixed once and forever… The meaning of a cultural symbol is given in part by the social field into which it is incorporated, the practices with which it articulates and is made to resonate. (p.235)

According to Omi and Winant (2015) the way we interpret our experience in racial terms shapes and reflects our relations to the institutions and organizations through which we are embedded in the social structure. We then expect racially coded human characteristics to explain social differences. The conflation and promotion of phenotypically and sociocultural characteristics as compelling evidence of the inferior status of the African American was crucial to the establishment of suggestive racial stereotypes (Andrews, 2001). Distinctions between "them" and "us" were thus enforced through the popular representation of the savage, bestial and uncivilized black African in

difference to the restrained, cerebral and civilized white European American. In this way a racial hierarchy was implemented that justified systemic slavery. The abolition of slavery did not result in the demise of this racist discourse but instead racist ideology was utilized in justifying the subjugation of people of color in a variety of environments particularly and most notably within science with the popularization of hierarchically organized genetic classifications of race (Omi & Winant, 1994). These ideologies were further disseminated in the 1960's and 1970's through politics and policy, which promoted what many people, believed were inherent racial pathologies that undermined the work ethic, self-reliance and moral fortitude of African Americans (Andrews, 2001). Mercer (1994) noted that the rigid and limited grid of representation through which black subjects become publicly visible continues to produce ideological fictions and psychic fixations about the nature of Otherness. The visible markers of race were displayed and often replayed with accompanying commentary. Popular representation of African Americans in media continued to communicate the separations conservative politicians identified as being threats to the American nation. Perry (2005) contends that all aspects of cultural production and practices can be viewed as text and can be related to structural aspects of law and racism to show how culture and structure reinforce one another. Racial difference confronts the white viewer as being strange unfamiliar and ominous and thus accentuated popular fears and anxieties about black Americans (Giroux, 1994). The examination of any racial discourse must be engaged within the contextually specific realms of culture and politics because they emerge as part of historically specific relation of oppression in order to justify the existence of that relationship (Andrews, 2001). Perry (2005) argues that reading social practices as text is a useful method for understanding

how values and messages are transmitted and reproduced and then shaped and influenced into the ideological underpinnings of law, which in turn shape and influence social practices.

There is something out there that we call and believe we know to be blackness even if it is with difficulty to say exactly what that is (Favor, 1999). African American history is complete with examples of struggle over the definition of black identity and its authenticity. The question of what constitutes blackness has to be continually rethought and reasserted making room for new redefinitions of racial identity in order to accurately represent the African American experience (Favor, 1999). By privileging certain African American identities, we stand to limit our understanding of authenticity of identity within the African American community.

2.2 INTERSECTIONALITY

While models of racial and gender identity have contributed to a better understanding of identity development, the focus on single identity factors fails to acknowledge the complexity of identity or the intersection of multiple identity factors. Furthermore, when identity factors are considered they are examined as separate phenomena. (Thomas, Hacker & Hoxha, 2011). The first writings on intersectionality came in the early 1900's with black suffragists such as Ida B. Wells. Wells wrapped her support of suffrage around the intersectional nature of racist patriarchy, framing the vote as a tool to empower their advocacy against lynching and other insults to black men and women (Crenshaw, 2008). Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) coined the term intersectionality within academic circles to denote the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of black women's employment experiences.

Intersectionality holds that the classical conceptualizations of oppression within society, such as racism, sexism, homophobia and religious based bigotry do not act independently of one another, instead these forms of oppression interrelate, creating a system or faces of oppression that reflect the multiple forms of discrimination (Crichlow, 2015). According to Collins (2000) these paradigms remind us that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type rather they work together in producing injustice.

Crenshaw (1989) distinguishes between what she terms structural and political intersectionality. Structural intersectionality focuses on the direct impact of inequalities and their intersections as experienced by individuals in society, disallowed to co-exist through the law, for example. Political intersectionality describes that women of color are situated within at least two subordinated groups that frequently pursue conflicting political agendas. The need to split one's political energies between two sometimes opposing political agendas is a dimension of intersectional disempowerment that men of color and white women seldom confront (Crenshaw, 1989). The problem according to Crenshaw (1989) is these discourses are often inadequate in articulating the full dimensions of racism and sexism. Intersectionality is another methodology for studying the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relationship and subject formations and offers a way of mediating the tension between assertions of multiple identities and the ongoing necessity of group politics (McCall, 2005).

2.2.1 Meaning making of multiple identities intersecting

Fuss (1989) argued that the failure to study identity as difference overlooks variations within identity including race and gender. Post modernists stress differences between and within groups as they acknowledge the influence of social, political, and

cultural power in people's lives. Jones and McEwen's (2000) model of multiple dimensions of identity offered a conceptual depiction of relationships among college students socially constructed identities recognizing that each dimension cannot be fully understood in isolation. The salience of each identity dimension to the core is fluid and depends on contextual influences. Abes, Jones and McEwen (2007) revisited the model and incorporated meaning making capacity into the model to depict the relationship between context and salience of identity dimensions. The reconceptualized model (Figure 2) portrays the interactive nature of the relationships between context and meaning making and identity perceptions. According to Abes, Jones and McEwen (2007) the implications of this model illustrate the importance of incorporating perspectives of fluidity, performativity and salience into our understanding of social identity development. Furthermore, student development theory has been slow in considering relationships between power structures and the fluidity of development. This model demonstrates the importance of developmental theories considering contextual influences and the dynamic development of socially constructed. Furthermore, it was found that students' incorporation of multiple aspects of identity was more common among black women than white women (Abes, Jones & McEwen, 2007). It is important to understand the complexities of identity development and incorporate the interaction and interface of multiple identities and influences throughout an individual's identity development. Considering technology and social media as a salient contextual influence affecting the development of black women is important and provides an additional identity dimension that must be examined when understanding identity development.

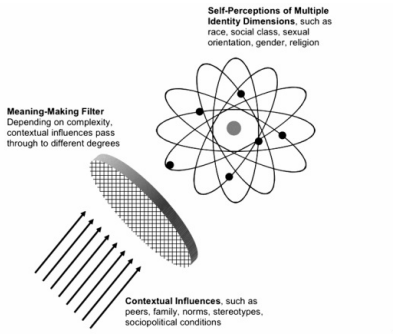

Figure 2. Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (Abe, Jones & McEwen, 2007)

2.2.2 Intersection of race and gender

While gender and race can be salient individually and collectively McCann and Kim (2002) argued that race and gender are experienced simultaneously as opposed to hierarchically and that the relationships between the identities should be explored. Because individuals are multidimensional and possess various social identities the construct of gendered racial identity development provides a different and unique explanation of the developmental process that occurs for African American women. African American women must negotiate multiple identities and recognize how those identities shape their interactions and relationships with others (Porter & Dean, 2015). An intersectional approach to race and gender provides considerations to the unique positions, which exist for people based on both identities and recognizes that both can be experienced simultaneously (Settles, 2006). While black women may have differing levels of salience to race and gender depending on context, using an intersectional approach to research allows for understanding how black women structure their experiences and how those experiences are structured in relationship to them.

The context in which black women in the United States develop identity is racist sexist and patriarchal. Intersecting oppressions of race and gender could not continue

without powerful ideological justifications for their existence. Stereotypical images of black womanhood take on special meaning because the authority to define societal values is a major instrument of power (Collins, 2000). These controlling images are designed to make racism and sexism and other forms of social injustice oppression appear to be natural, normal and inevitable parts of everyday life for black women. Therefore, black women's status as outsiders becomes the point from which other groups define their normality (Collins, 2000). Harris-Perry (2011) emphasizes three pervasive myths, which account for the most common forms of misrecognition of black women: sexual promiscuity, emasculating brashness and mammy-like devotion to white domestic concerns. These three ideas create a mythology and story with severe political implications to black women's citizenship. From media to politics, black women are forced to occupy these three definitions of their womanhood and identity. These tropes present narrow views of black women for consumption (Harris-Perry, 2011). Harris-Perry argues that the implications of this messaging manifest to narrow the political and social world of black women. Black women's relative economic and political weaknesses make them more vulnerable to state intervention (Harris-Perry, 2011). "These characterizations of black women's character through public consumption of media have infiltrated the nation's understanding of black women's character in ways that continue to resonate in America's cultural, social, and political fabric " (Harris-Perry, 2011 p. 69).

Black feminist thought provides an understanding of tension between the suppression of African American women's ideas and experiences and the intellectual activism in the face of that suppression. According to black feminist thought the

oppression faced by black women throughout history have encompassed three interdependent dimensions: exploitation of black women's labor, denial of rights for black women and the controlling of images applied to black women. Taken together the links of economy, politics and function come together as a system of social control designed to keep black women in an assigned subordinate place (Collins, 2000). Furthermore, this exclusion promotes the stereotypical images of black women within popular culture and public policy (Collins, 2000). Black feminist thought seeks to grapple with the central questions facing US black women as a collectivity that remains oppressed within the US context. Examining the intersection of race and gender for black women involves discovering, reinterpreting and analyzing the mechanisms, which allow race, gender and class to organize and produce social injustice. Assuming new angles of vision in which black women are examined provides opportunities to examine and clarify assumptions made about black women. Historically black women's group location in intersecting oppressions produced commonalities among individual black women. At the same time, it is important for black women to interpret their own experiences independent of their collectivity (Collins, 2000). As historical conditions change, so do the links among the types of experiences black women will have and any ensuing group consciousness concerning those experiences (Collins, 2000 p. 25).

2.3 IDENTITY PERFORMANCE

2.3.1 Construction of identity

Identity formation is an ongoing process that achieves special and central importance during the period of adolescence (Erikson, 1968). The process of constructing a whole and cohesive sense of self is a complex procedure, characterized by the progressive advancement toward a developed and integrative psyche. Identity serves as a construct, which functions to organize and harmonize the dynamic aspects of the self-esteem. Marcia (1966) classified ego identity in four discrete stages: diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and achievement. Diffusion describes a person lacking direction. Foreclosure indicates that an individual embraces a set of values, beliefs and goals articulated by another rather than adopting self-attained values, beliefs and goals. Moratorium characterizes a person experiencing crisis, seeking to form individual values beliefs and goals. Last, Achievement classifies an individual who has successfully passed through the moratorium stage and embraced self-derived values, beliefs and goals (Marcia, 1980). Under this framework, ego identity is derived from two broad cognitive categories ideological perspectives and interpersonal views. Researchers have acknowledged the important role of politics, religion and other aspects and have shown how these variables interact with identity development (Kroger, 1996). Ideological ego identity is measured by considering perspectives regarding religion; politics, philosophical life-style and occupation while, interpersonal views are based on friendship, dating, sex roles, and recreation (Marcia, 1966). Erikson (1968) suggested that an individual's identity development was located "in the course of his communal culture" (p. 22), however he only devoted one chapter to race and ethnicity in his book. While

much of the work of researchers like Erikson has been considered universal, these works fail to address important sociocultural influences (Carter, 1995).

According to Goffman (1959) we are all performing all of the time. While most people don't think of themselves as acting when they behave in ways that feel natural and normal, we are always behaving for an audience because we can never escape the presence of the social world (Goffman, 1959). Scholars of sex/gender systems have used the analogy of performance to examine and expose how much human behavior has been dictated by socially constructed roles rather than biologically determined roles (Willie, 2003). The work of Judith Butler (1990) focuses on the institution of heterosexuality and the ways in which the roles of sexuality are played out. Butler (1990) argues that gender is performative because gender "is always a doing" (p.25) however the subject is not solely or hugely agentically responsible for the doing. The body reproduces the messaging it receives and is therefore the medium on which cultural meaning is inscribed (Butler, 1990). Butler (1990) uses the example of the performance of gender to demonstrate the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed. She discusses three contingent dimensions of what she calls "significant corporeality" (p. 137). "In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself as well as its contingency" (p.137). One's anatomy may be distinct from the gender of the performer and therefore may be dissonance between not only sex and performance but also sex and gender. For Butler (1990) there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender. She argues that to approach permanence, performances must be repeated continually as sexual identity is continuously reinstituted and reinvented. According to Willie (2003) Butler should make

us question all performances as we all repeat the performances of our identities whether our identities are relatively stable or unstable and whether aspects of our identities increase or decrease our social status. The same principles found in gender performance can be applied to race and the manner in which individuals of color define and demonstrate their racial identity.

Sociological perspectives study identity as a social performance emphasizing its socially constructed nature and what that means for possibilities and wellness in society (Stewart, 2015). A person's own sense of racial identity may differ significantly from how other people see and categorize them. Dress, hairstyles, food, body language, language patterns, choices of preferred music and other 'projected' self-images are common ways in which identity is performed. Performance is the creation, presentation or affirmation of an identity (real or assumed) through action. It is an active ingredient in the maintenance, negotiation, or possible change of social and cultural norms (Clammer, 2015). Racial performance signals the historical repetition of acts, social relations, and power dynamics that mark racial difference and the expectedness of intra-racial community building (Alexander, 2012). Performing race can be seen as a way to actively resist or reinforce imposed categories (Omi & Winant, 2014). According to Willie (2003) Butler's appreciation of identity's fragility implies that changes in an actor's routine depend on the audience and that an uncertainty exists in the mind of the actor while performance has been used to analyze the ways in which sex and gender systems have been dictated by socially constructed rather than biologically constructed roles so too can race be examined in similar ways. "It is something that has to be acted out and constantly

reproduced in everyday life, particularly in circumstances where one is asserting an ethnic identity, not simply being 'assigned one'" (Clammer, 2015 p. 2159).

According to Willie (2003) treating race as a performance suggests that race is not solely phenotypic, nor an applied social category, but rather is a way of behaving and a place to be entered or exited. Socially encoded scripts of identity are formatted around race therefore make it a process and performance rather than a state of being (Munoz, 1999). It is claimed that culture to be manifested, must always be performed and therefore the boundaries of identity are not so much blurry as not fully known until performed (Clammer, 2015).

Alexander (2012) describes the performative sustainability of race referring to a collection of tactics that, through performance marginalized people seek to engage in the processes of reorganizing systems of knowing, reflexively locating positionality in society and community and seeking to recognize their center of power. Race does not work in isolation; it is interfused with other created social categories (gender, sexuality, ability) ideologies and social processes it is interfused with the confluence of geography, culture and language and works in the creation of racial identity, leading to a performance that strands at the borders of societal design that like all borders can always be redefined and renegotiated (Alexander, 2012). Giroux and McLauren (1994) reflect that the intersections play with borders of identity, culture, representation and power and politics. These borders are real, imagined, and constructed within lived experiences of those who are racialized and are borders marked by difference.

2.3.2 Identity Performance and the Internet

Investigating race in the age of the Internet means that one must critically examine how identity is deployed and received in an environment structured by its non-corporality. The presences of visual and aural markers of race regardless of accuracy prove that race is rarely as invisible offline as it is in cyberspace (Kolko, Nakamura & Rodman, 2000). Kolko et al. (2000) argue that race matters no less in cyberspace than it does in real life due to the idea that the binary opposition between cyberspace and the real world is not nearly as clean as it made to be. "Race matters in cyberspace because all of us who spend time online are already shaped by the ways in which race matters offline, and we can't help but bring our knowledge, experiences and values with us when we log on" (Kolko et al., 2000 p. 5).

Studies of racial virtual identity have largely emphasized the performative nature of life. Researchers have theorized this particular culture and identity formation via Homi Bhabha's (1990) conception of the third space, which is not a fixed location but an emerging set of disparate at times contradictory, experiences and narratives of hybridity. The term emphasizes that performing effective virtual identity authenticity means residing on a threshold or in a space in which one is simultaneously "betwixt and between" (Bhabha, 1994, p.309). Online users are unable to leave behind the very social categories that define them in the "real world" as subjects are powerfully shaped by the images and activities that take place for them online (Gonzalez, 2000). Examining the construction of "authentic" online identity and the manner in which this is shaped by the development of one's racial and gender identity development allows us to learn more about how women and color interpret and represent the everyday realities of blackness and womanhood and translate this onto social media.

Daniels (2013) argues "the visual culture of the Internet complicates race and racism in new ways that are still closely tied to a politics of representation with ties to colonialism" (p.699). The Internet makes the understanding of race and racism more complex. For racial identity to function in social media spaces, racialized users must make those identities visible online. Black users on social media often perform their identities through displays of cultural competence and the use of other noncorporal signifiers that rely on social and cultural resources (Brock 2009). The exposure of Spokane, Washington, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) President Rachel Dolezal as white woman pretending to be African American provided an example of the display of competence surrounding black culture. Twitter users took to their accounts to pose questions in the form of hashtag trivia titled "#AskRachel" which included pop culture staples including classic hip-hop or R&B lyrics, popular movie phrases and cultural knowledge known by many black people in America. Not only was "#askRachel" a trending topic but it served as an aggregator of black culture.

Verbal performance, linguistic resources and modes of interaction are key means through which black users perform their racial identities on social media (Florini, 2013). One example of the racial performance of black people on social media comes in the *signifyin'* an interactional framework that allows Black Twitter users to align themselves with black oral traditions, to index black cultural practices and to communicate shared knowledge and experiences. Signifyin' entails formal revision and an intentional act of will as it disrupts language thought to be fixed (Gates, 2009). It is a powerful resource for signaling racial identity by allowing black twitter users to perform their racial

identities 140 characters at a time (Florini, 2013). Signifyin' requires participants to possess certain forms of cultural knowledge and cultural competencies, which range from familiarity with black popular culture and celebrity gossip to experiential knowledge of navigating US culture as a racialized subject. Signifyin' provides space for users to connect on experiences of Black Americans as raced subjects but also provide a space to reexamine and critique mainstream constructs of blackness or black womanhood. Signifying is one important example of how black users not only reject the colorblind lens attached to the Internet and social media by actively performing their racial identities to connect with other black users while also carving out an online social space for collective black racial identities (Florini, 2013).

2.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The critical race theory movement is a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001). During the mid-1970's critical race theory (CRT) emerged from the early work of Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman who were discontent with the pace of racial reform in the United Stated. CRT originated from the legal studies movement which failed to address race and racism in the legal system. CRT analyzes the role of racism in perpetuating social disparities between dominant and marginalized racial groups. CRT acknowledges the endemic nature of racism in America and how it permeates every social system in this country whether political, legal, or educational (Patton, Harper & Harris, 2015). The purpose of the CRT framework is to expose what is taken for granted when analyzing race and privilege. Although CRT began as movement in the law, CRT was first used in 1994 as an analytical framework to assess inequity in education.

Education scholars have used CRT in analyzing issues related to the experiences of minoritized persons at all levels of education, however Patton et al. (2015) found CRT has not "assumed a firm intellectual space in higher education scholarship" (p. 193).

One of the main propositions of CRT is that racism is the ordinary, usual way society does business and the common everyday experience of most people of color in the United States (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001). Racism is deeply embedded in social, cultural and political structures making it difficult to recognize, expose, and address. Furthermore, race is socially constructed with historical interpretations that marginalize people of color however the voices and experiences of people of color are central, legitimate and relevant in contextualizing race and racial realities (Patton, McEwen, Rendon, & Howard-Hamilton, 2007). The acceptance of the idea of the permanence of racism involves acknowledging the dominant role that racism has played and continues to play in American society. Furthermore, this permanence of racism pervades into hierarchical structures that govern all political, economic, and social domains. These structures (including education) allocate the privileging of whites and the othering of people of color in all arenas (DeCuir Gunby & Dixson, 2004). CRT reinforces the historical perspective that African American participation in higher education cannot be assumed to be a privilege that has always existed or what Taylor (1999) describes as widespread historical illiteracy. For CRT scholars' racism extends to all systems including higher education and it is pervasive in both hidden and obvious forms on college campuses. Critical Race Theory challenges claims of meritocracy, colorblindness and objectivity found within college and university mission statements or strategic plans. The belief that the playing field is level for all those admitted into the walls of higher education are

challenged through the tenets of CRT (Patton et al., 2015). Furthermore, racism is pervasive both in covert and overt ways throughout higher education and therefore, an examination of higher education practices unveils discernable forms of racism (Patton, et al., 2015). CRT can assist in unmasking and exposing racism in its various permutations within education as it highlights that racism is not a random, isolated act of individuals behaving badly, but rather the normal order of things in US society (Ladson-Billings, 2013).

Harris (1993) argues, "due to the history of race and racism in the United States and the role that US jurisprudence has played in reifying conceptions of race, the notion of whiteness can be considered a property interest" (p. 280). She further posits whiteness is simultaneously created identity and a property interest it is something that can be experienced and deployed as a resource. Whiteness can move from being a passive characteristic to an active entity that like other types of property can be used to fulfill the will and to exercise power. Harris (1995) highlights that these functions and attributes of property historically have been used in establishing whiteness as a form of property. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) contend that the construction of whiteness as the ultimate property is what is most harmful to racial minorities. According to Harris (1993) property functions on four levels: (1) the rights of disposition, (2) the right to use and enjoyment, (3) reputation and status property, and (4) the absolute right to exclude. Rights of disposition and use and enjoyment describe the laws surrounding property transfer and the ability for whiteness to be shared and transferred to other white people in the form of wealth and access. Reputation and status property provide that white racial identity serves as a resource in defining those worthy of personhood. Finally, as

whiteness is a valuable commodity the absolute right to exclude provides that those who are white can determine who is not white. Whiteness as property also acknowledges that land once belonging to indigenous people are now where predominately white institutions of higher education stand and many of these institutions were built with the labor of people of color (Patton et al., 2007). Social benefits are placed in the hands of property owners and therefore the subscription to monocultural color-blind paradigms and the subjugation of knowledge created by indigenous people and people of color further demonstrate inequities within higher education institutions. While people of color and indigenous people were paramount to the construction of higher education their lack of presence speaks to the inequity at most higher education institutions (Patton et al., 2007). Patton et al., (2007) suggest that in education white property is legitimized when students are rewarded for conformity to white norms, such as speech patterns and behaviors. We see the actualization of this tenant in higher education through the overwhelming majority of college faculty, and senior academic administrators who are white. This translates a message that being white carries more status and power than being of color (Patton et al., 2007). Black women must navigate and negotiate an environment that is structured to attack the self and the selves at the population level while attempting to successfully resolve identity development processes both internally and as a member of multiple campus communities such as general student body often in a predominately white campus, black student community and other social identity spaces which may also be salient (Stewart, 2014).

Within CRT counter-storytelling is the notion of a unique voice of color. Minority status brings with it the ability to speak about race and racism. People of color may be

able to communicate to their white counterparts matters that whites are unlikely to know and apply their own unique perspectives to assess their experiences (Delgaldo & Stefanic, 2001). Counter-storytelling can be shared through the narrative, biographies and life histories. The sharing of knowledge and experiences by people of color provides a unique and authentic understanding of racism and oppression (Patton et al., 2015). When the experiences and knowledge of people of color are shared, the process allows a sense of liberation for those who attempt to tell their experiences in the midst of dominant narratives that dismiss every day acts of racism. Furthermore, these experiences expose the covert forms of racism, which tend to be deeply rooted and difficult recognize. Cultural centers provide a physical space for students of color to communicate and address their needs as racialized subjects. These centers on college campuses promote increased involvement, leadership and sense of belonging for students of color. When students of color are able to come together in these spaces their cultures and identities are reaffirmed and the positive connections they are able to make lead to their retention and ability to navigate institutional racism.

Bell (1999) forwarded the theory of interest convergence describing that white people will support racial concessions only when they understand and see that there is something in it for them. Bell asserted that the Supreme Court ended the doctrine of "separate but equal" in Brown v. Board of Education because it presents to the world and in particular the Communist Soviet Union that the United State supported civil and human rights. A recent example of interest convergence came from the University of Missouri football team. The players were striking against the deeply rooted racist atmosphere on campus and in doing so were standing in support of their fellow

classmates and risking their athletic scholarships (Zirin, 2015). The team refused to take the field for a scheduled football game in November of 2015 unless the university system president resigned and within 36 hours of their action, President Moor and the Chancellor resigned. Hawkins (2015) suggests that the activism of the thirty football players informs us of the political power that black student athletes in revenue generating sports command. This example informs us that black athletes can achieve their interests when their monetized interests of higher education institutions athletic departments depend on their athletic performance and is threatened with absences of the black athletic labor force (Hawkins, 2015).

2.5 ANALYTICAL LENS

The research process must be culturally responsive, less alienating, and more inclusive in nature allowing increased opportunities for people of color to co-create knowledge (López, Parker, Deyhle & Villenas, 2001). "The critical race agenda is linked to a desire to see higher education research expand in a way that explicitly addresses racism and other structural inequities the reproduce unjust behaviors and climates in post-secondary contexts" (Patton et al., 2015, p.210). CRT when properly used exposes issues of race neutrality and racelessness (Patton et al., 2015). The Internet and social media is a space worthy of investigation through the lens of CRT. This dissertation research will construct an understanding of the students' experiences with particular social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter & Instagram) and how African American women decide when and what is shared, and how they construct and interpret their identities on these platforms. This research utilized the tenents of critical race theory as an analytical framework to examine the racial and gender performance of African American college

women. Acknowledging Patton et al., (2015) nine principles in the creation and implementation of critical race research agenda, this dissertation study seeks to: (1) utilize a CRT agenda as it is framed by critical questions that foreground the experience of women of color and acknowledges the diversity of population with multiple experiences, (2) examine the confluence of racism, white supremacy and power as they emerge in all aspects of the research and finally (3) identify solutions and real world applications surrounding the support of African American women at predominately white institutions. CRT is an important tool to document different racialized histories that have been overseen, silenced or ignored in the research process (López, 2001).

3.0 CHAPTER 3

3.1 INTRODUCTION TO METHODS

This study sought to understand identity and performance through the lens of social media and technology for traditional age black college women. This research attempted to understand how black college women perform identity, particularly within a time period in the United States in which social media are increasingly utilized. This study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. How do black college women construct identity on social media?
    a. What are black college women's perceptions of their race and gender performance?
    b. What are black college women's perceptions of their construction of their racial and gender identity on social media?
2. How do black college women perform race and gender on social media?

The study examined how identities within this particular population of college students are constructed and presented on social media contexts that are frequently curated by the user. According to Knefelkamp (1978), if educators are to encourage development they must know what changes take place in students and what factors serve to challenge and support them. The landscape of development has changed and we now must include virtual environments into our understanding in order to inform how educators create and enact policy that support for black college women.

The following chapter provides an overview of the methodological and research design of this study. It begins with the operational definition of performance used in this research and follows with information about a pilot study that informs the present research design and the identification of the population sample. The research design is

then presented including the study's data gathering procedures, timeline, interview and observation methods and procedure, and methods of data analysis. Finally, this chapter concludes with discussions of researcher positionality as well as ethical considerations present within the study and its limitations.

3.1.1 Definition of Performance

According to Goffman (1959) when an individual appears before others, his actions will influence the definition of the situation. An individual projects a definition of a situation when he appears before others and in that dynamic and others despite how passive their roles may seem to be will project a definition of the situation by virtue of a response to the individual as well as the lines of action. There are two extremes in the reality of performance as an individual may be sincerely convinced that the impression of reality staged is the real reality while the performer may be cynical about it. While it is expected that there will be natural movement back and forth between sincerity and cynicism there is also a transitional point that can be sustained on the strength of little self-allusion and ending with a mixture of both. In this study, the term performance will be operationalized using Goffman's (1959) definition "as all of the activity of a given participant on a given occasion, which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants" (p.15). It is important to note that it is unclear if Goffman considered race or gender in his understanding of performance, however this definition is deemed relevant as it consonant with Judith Butler's (2002) understanding of the concept of performance and furthermore is central to the research question and will be continuously explored throughout this research study.

3.1.2 2015 Pilot Study

A pilot study investigating this research project was conducted in the summer of 2015. Thirty-minute individual interviews were conducted with five black college women attending a small selective predominately white institution in the Northeast. The study looked to examine and understand the impact of race and gender on participants' social media experience. The interview questions centered around the social media use as well as on the participants' experiences on social media through the lens of race and gender.

This pilot study assisted in highlighting important considerations that were taken into account in the design of the proposed study. First the pilot revealed the importance of taking an intersectional approach to all aspects of the study specifically the creation of the interview protocol. In the pilot participants were asked to think about their race and gender independently but not asked to discuss experiences related to the intersectionality of their identities through social media. As discussed in Chapter Two, using an intersectional approach in examining identity development is crucial in understanding the full range of one's identity and experience with oppression. Second, the pilot illuminated the importance of an information rich sample. The makeup of the sample included four first year students and one junior. While all participants were able to articulate their thoughts and experiences, the level of depth and self-reflection that came from the junior was far more mature and advanced then the younger participants. Finally all participants in the sample discussed their social media choices, which has assisted in understanding which platforms are being frequently utilized by college age students. Platforms such as Twitter, SnapChat, Instagram and Vine are being used more frequently than Facebook. This was useful in examining and understanding the platforms regularly utilized by

college students as well as the benefits and limitations of observing each platform for this research study. Facebook and Twitter were the primary platforms observed within the study due to their frequent usage by participants and the ability for observation of a participants regular usage unlike platforms like SnapChat in which user data is only shared for 24 hours.

3.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research conducted was an ethnographic study of the racial and gender performances of black college women on social media. The ability to view human action within a social and behavioral context is an important feature of ethnographic methods. Educational ethnographers formulate complex questions about education and frame these questions within a broad cultural context. The potential of ethnography for transforming education is even richer when the ethnographer sees ethnography as a social action that can influence the way communities change (Savage, 1988). Ethnographic studies operate from the assumption that a variety of forces combine to define any social situation and through the process of identifying and describing the interrelationship of these forces it is possible to understand and explain the social and cultural context of behavior (Muncey & McQuillan, n.d.).

Ethnographers studying contemporary social life should consider online spaces as another site where participants live. Online spaces no longer rest at the periphery of life, but are central to and have fundamentally transformed the ways people around the world go about their daily business. Online spaces have significant consequences for how people live and thus how researchers study social life. Studying a group should include their online habitat and researchers must consider how face-to-face interactions may

overlap with online interactions and take seriously the ways in which their participants live their lives online (Hallett & Barber, 2014). Institutions of higher education have witnessed increased student activism and protest surrounding the climate and campus experience for students of color. One example can be seen in the Twitter hashtag #BlackonCampus in which students from campuses across the United States share brief descriptions of the challenges of being a racial minority at a predominately white institution. Students of color are using social media as an outlet to publicize their experiences to the world including other black students on their campuses and beyond. By combining semi-structured interviews with observations of social media profiles, a multifaceted picture of the participants in this study was created. Mucey and McQuillan (n.d) provide that utilizing a variety of methods provides a richer portrait of data. This section provides the study's research design including population and sampling techniques, data gathering procedures and timeline, instruments and protocols and finally methods of data analysis. Women in the sample were enrolled in one of three selected predominately white colleges and universities- Cambridge College, Kings College and Oxford College (all pseudonyms). The three institutions identified in this study are located in the Northeast region of the United States and African American students comprise six percent or less of the undergraduate population of each institution.

During the 2014-2015 academic year, each institution experienced campus activism surrounding the experiences of black students on campus. The differences in the organizing and activism on each campus, spoke to the differences in campus culture and climate. The students at Cambridge College occupied an administration building for twelve days nodding to the institution's history of black students taking over campus

buildings, while the students at Oxford submitted demands privately to campus administrators and publicly revealed the demands on social media one week later. Campus administrators at Kings College referenced student conduct policies as a method to discourage students from organizing a protest similar to what was done at Cambridge. Students at Kings College instead submitted demands and created infographics about the racial composition of the institution that were widely circulated on social media. Despite the differences in methods of activism, students on all three campuses utilized social media specifically Twitter and Facebook to share the list of demands presented to the University administration, as well as posts, pictures and tweets from supporters ranging from peers, alumni, staff and faculty. Fig. 2 describes the demographics of each participating institution in the study. The three institutions in this study offer opportunities to examine how racial and gender performance is situated within an environment where students of color are sharing their experiences of marginalization and oppression they experience.

Institution & Type	**Campus Population**	**% of Black Students**	**Activism on Campus**
Cambridge College *Suburban liberal arts*	3,000	6%	Students organized a 12-day protest in an administration building.
Oxford College *Suburban women's college*	2,300	7%	Black student organizations submitted a list of demands to senior administrators.
Kings College *Urban religiously affiliated*	9,000	4%	Student group created infographic, submitted a list of demands, and organized student demonstration.

Figure 3. Institution Demographics

3.2.1 Sample

For this ethnography, a sample was drawn of traditional (18-22-year-old) current college aged black women who utilize social media in their daily lives. Fifteen women participated in the study with interviews beginning in April 2016 and concluding in September 2016. Participants in the study ranged in class year and college major and were regularly active on at least one of the following social media platforms: Twitter, Instagram or Facebook.

3.2.2 Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Institution	Year	Major	Hometown
Ava	Cambridge	2018	Women and Gender Studies & African and Afro-American Studies	Bristol, CT
Wallis	Cambridge	2016	African and Afro-American Studies	Philadelphia, PA
Cleo	Cambridge	2020	African and Afro-American Studies	Decatur, GA
Desiree	Cambridge	2019	International Global Studies & African and Afro-American Studies	Atlanta, GA
Katelyn	Cambridge	2019	Computer Science	Atlanta, GA
Nina	Cambridge	2016	African and Afro-American Studies	New Haven, CT
Lauren	Oxford	2018	Africana Studies &American Studies	Chicago, IL
Esther	Oxford	2018	Economics	Mombasa, Kenya
Stephanie	Oxford	2017	English Literature and Cinema & Media Studies	Atlanta, GA
Star	Oxford	2018	Peace & Justice Studies	Orangeburg, SC
Christina	Oxford	2018	Psychology & Pre Med	Berlin, NJ
Arya	Kings	2020	Sociology & Pre Med	Ghana
Kiara	Kings	2016	Communications	Miami, FL
Olivia	Kings	2020	International Studies	Baltimore, MD
Kaia	Kings	2020	International Studies	Boston, MA

Figure 4. Participant Demographics

3.2.3 Recruitment

This study utilized two recruitment methods to reach its target population. First emails were sent requesting the names of black women who would be interested in participating in the study to student affairs professionals (specifically student activities and residence life departments) and faculty in African American and Women and Gender Studies departments at each of the participating institutions. These specific departments were identified as spaces with increased involvement of black women and were thought to be starting points that would garner success in identifying students interested in participating in the study. Once interested students were identified an informational email describing the study and the study's consent forms were sent along with a request for an individual interview. The study, consent forms and protocols were submitted and approved by the Institutional Research Board of each participating institution. Prior to the individual interview, each participant reviewed and signed the consent form, which included information about the study, risks, benefits and procedures surrounding maintaining the confidentiality of participants in the study. Following the individual interview snowball sampling was also utilized to gather participants. Each participant was asked to identify one to two other black women who could be interested in participating in the study. Snowball sampling seeks to take advantage of the social networks identified respondents to provide the research with an ever-expanding set of potential contacts (Thomson, 1997). A main value of snowball sampling is obtaining respondents where some degree of trust is required to initiate contact. This method may also assist the researcher with characteristics associated with being an insider or group member, which can aid in entry to settings where conventional approaches may not be successful (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). Point of saturation, where additional data collection

yields no new theoretical formulations was yielded at 15 participants-six participants at Cambridge College, five participants at Oxford College and four participants at Kings College (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

3.3 DATA COLLECTION AND TIMELINE

3.3.1 Data Gathering Procedures

Several data collection strategies were employed throughout this study. Data was collected from April 2015-September 2015 through a sequential process with each participant undergoing an interview and observation as well as a focus group interview with participants at each site. First a 45-minute semi structured individual interview was conducted to gather rich detailed data about how participants view their worlds as well as their experiences on social media (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Following the individual interview, an observational interview was scheduled with each participant. Each observational interview took place no more than one week following the individual interview. This second interview was a 45-minute semi structured observation of each the social media platform most regularly used by each participant. Finally a focus group interview was scheduled at each institution based on the availability of all participants. All interviews took place on each participating institutions campus in either classrooms or meeting spaces in the Student Union. At the conclusion of the study each participant was compensated with a $10 gift card to the campus bookstore. Collected data was and will only be used for purposes of this study and any additional publications that arise from this study. Throughout this study a password-protected database housed all information related to this study including protocols, interview notes and memos,

transcriptions and findings. All identifying information was removed from any screen shots displayed in the findings chapter of this research study.

3.3.2 Protocol

Spradley (1979) identifies three main types of questions within ethnographic interviews, descriptive, structural and contrast. Descriptive questions allow the researcher to gather information about the participants' perspectives on their experiences, their daily activities and the objects and people their lives. Structural questions inquire about the basic units in that cultural knowledge and finally contrast questions elaborate on the meaning of various terms that participants use. Appendix B provides the research study interview protocol. The instrument provided broad interview questions designed to glean information about participants' experience with social media as well as its effect on them while also gaining insight on the topics and values important to participants both inside and outside of social media. The protocol for the observation interview is outlined in Appendix C. The protocol sought to provide a deeper understanding and holistic description of events and activities experienced by participants through the lens of social media. Questions within the protocol uncovered reoccurring patterns, relationships, and dynamics for participants both on and off campus and attempted to make connections to information and themes provided within the individual interview.

3.3.3 Individual Interviews

The ethnographic interviews conducted sought to uncover domains of understanding about race and gender and their intersections in the social media participation of the women in the study. Within ethnographic interviews the researcher has identified domains of experience in which she is interested and develops questions or

topical statements to elicit the participants understanding of those domains (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Individual interviews were conducted in comfortable quiet spaced selected by each participant. Prior to conducting the interview each participant reviewed and signed the Participant Consent Form found in Appendix A. A summary of the information shared in the individual interview was emailed to each participant following the individual interview to ensure that information captured was an accurate reflection of the thoughts, feelings and experiences of each participant. Each interview took place for 45 minutes and included IRB approved protocol questions (Appendix B) as well as follow-up questions which were guided by participants feedback and provided a better understanding of relationships and experiences embedded within cognitive structures.

3.3.4 Observation of Social Media Profiles

Martinez Alemán and Lynk Wartman (2009) state that students' explanation of text and images as well as their understanding of purposes and functions of social networking provides an extensive view of the significance that online social networking has for students' college experience. These accounts of online campus cultures are vetted through epistemological positions, which are informed by race and ethnicity and gender identification and illustrative of the ways in which online campus culture is developed. During ethnographic interviews Martinez Alemán and Lynk Wartman (2009) similarly asked participants to interpret and make meaning of what was observed on their Facebook profiles. In addition, the researchers did general observation of random Facebook profiles and online culture.

Following the observational interview participants emailed screen shots of their observed social media profiles, and instructions on creating screen shots were provided to

each participant. Fig. 5 displays the social media profiles reviewed in the observational interview conducted during the study. Data gathered from observational interviews were transcribed and coded with the same coding themes used for the individual interviews. Data from the observational interviews was further analyzed using the digital artifacts provided in the form of screen shots of the observed social media platform. Screen shots provided a visual representation of what was discussed during the observational interviews and allowed the researcher to compare how participants discussed their social media participation to how they enacted their performances on social media. The data gathered allowed the researcher to connect the personal reflections of each interview with the lived experiences captured on social media to gain a deeper understanding of each study participant.

Pseudonym	**Institution**	**Platform(s) Observed**
Ava	Cambridge	Facebook
Wallis	Cambridge	Facebook
Cleo	Cambridge	Facebook
Desiree	Cambridge	Tumblr
Katelyn	Cambridge	Facebook
Nina	Cambridge	Facebook
Lauren	Oxford	Facebook
Esther	Oxford	Facebook
Stephanie	Oxford	Facebook
Star	Oxford	Facebook
Christina	Oxford	Facebook
Arya	Kings	Twitter
Kiara	Kings	Facebook & Instagram
Olivia	Kings	Facebook
Kaia	Kings	Facebook

Figure 5. Social Media Platform Observation

3.3.5 Focus Groups

The key characteristic of focus groups allows the production of data and insights through the use of group interaction. These insights would be less accessible without the conversations that take place among participants and with the researcher. A frequent goal of focus groups is to conduct a group discussion that resembles a lively conversation amongst friends. Focus groups represent the best of both worlds: it allows access to interaction while also providing glimpse into the attitudes and experiences of participants. Furthermore they can produce additional results as analyses are either confirmed or complicated in the form of exchanges among group members. A focus group can show a researcher new territory and coupled with interviews can provide a more comprehensive examination of an issue.

Focus groups interviews were conducted with the participants of Cambridge College and Oxford College. Five participants attended the Cambridge focus group and four attended the Oxford focus group. A focus group was not conducted at Kings College due to scheduling conflicts and the loss of participants due to graduation from the university. Questions and prompts for the focus group protocol were informed from the data gathered during individual interviews. Using data from individual and observational interviews, the focus group sought to examine the lived experience of being a black woman on a predominately white campus. Themes surrounding the areas of identity and oppression that participants experienced were examined including: appearance, respectability politics, dynamics among black women and between black men was examined. Furthermore, specific social media practices consistently discussed by

participants were critically examined. The protocol for focus groups can be found in Appendix D.

3.4 LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

Due to the target population this study does not look to represent a broader population or experience. The selection of black college women as the target population was purposeful and meant to expand the research literature of African American women's construction of race and gender online. Specifically examining the convergence of race and gender oppression onto the experiences of black college women were the aims of this research as this oppression has shaped the relationships that black women have within education, their communities and among one another. A focus on race and gender provides necessary dialogue that grapples with many of the central questions facing black women a collectivity and a group that that remains oppressed.

Though other aspects of their identities are bound to inform their online performance of race and gender (e.g. sexuality), the aim of this study is to better understand race and gender of within the collegiate environment. It was left up to the participant to share identity intersectionality in the form of queer identities, class background and other components of identity. When shared by participants, these identities were examined furthered with follow up prompts and questions however in creating authentic relationships with participants that these identities were shared if and when each participant felt comfortable to reflect upon and deeply examine their experiences in comparing on campus experiences to social media experiences. If sharing of components of their identity including gender expression or sexuality was not something that was not done by a participant on social media or with their social circle on

campus, there was a fear that probing about these experiences would distance the participant from the researcher.

Snowball sampling also limited this study because of selection bias. Snowball samples will be biased towards the inclusion of individuals with interrelationships and therefore overemphasize cohesiveness in social networks (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). Through snowball sampling, the experiences of highly involved black women primarily involved in the studying of African American history as well diversity and social justice were captured at all three institutions. All of the participants in the study had an advanced knowledge of CRT components of power, privilege and oppression and approached their reflection of identity and social media participation guided by these principles. The study was not able to capture students who were not involved in activist efforts on each campus to round out the diversity of major and experience represented in the study. In this study snowball sampling did not assist in capturing a representation of queer identified women within the study. One participant identified as queer however all participants discussed participating in heterosexual relationships. The stories and experiences of women in same sex relationships and trans black women were not represented in this study. Future research should seek to expand the representation of queer women of color and their stories into the understanding of the black college woman experience on predominately white institutions.

3.4.1 Positionality

In approaching this research, it is important to acknowledge my own personal interest in this research as a woman of color and higher education professional. As an African American woman, my identity and experience influence my own perspectives of

the interview process, as well as the participants' perceptions of me. I experienced being a black woman at predominately white institution when I attended college and connected with many of the racialized experiences shared by participants. I found a deeper connection with the women of Cambridge College as I am an alumna of the institution and understood the campus terminology and student events that take place on the campus. In my interviews with the women at Cambridge I asked more clarifying and probing questions to ensure that I was not attributing the experiences of my time at the institution to what the women were currently experiencing. However my knowledge and understanding of campus dynamics enabled my ability to recruit participants as well as uncover campus cultures affecting the women in the study.

Many of the women commented on their appreciation of having a black woman probe about their racial and gender experiences and it compelled them to introspectively examine their experiences. Participants revealed their comfort in being authentic and honest in how they described their feelings and emotions related to microaggressions and racism they experienced. Being seen as an insider among the group I was studying provided strengths in uncovering insights from participants. However, it was also crucial that I actively work to interrupt the desire to hear some aspects of the participants identity reflection and decisions around performance more than other experiences. The decision to investigate race and gender was an intentional decision, to examine how racism and sexism are embedded in identity development and how social media is curated. Finding opportunities for participants to discuss the ways in which other identities intersect were carefully investigated in safe and supportive manner.

Finally as a higher education professional I have been complicit failing to name racism and oppressive policies and practices in the work of my colleagues and the departments I have worked in. Through this research, my aim is to expand the ways of knowing which will provide better opportunities to examine structures, policies and practices in student affairs and uncovering and removing those with harmful effects on students of color.

3.5 ANALYSIS AND RELIABILITY

3.5.1 Data Analysis

The research in this study sought to understand the balance of in person and social media experiences in the crafting and curating of identity online. Therefore data were coded to capture in person campus climate experiences as well as participants' social media participation and usage. Following the each interview (individual, observation, focus group), data were transcribed and coded. Themes and questions were gathered that would assist in guiding the observation of the participant's social media profiles. Finally data were further analyzed to uncover themes and trends that would be further reflected and discussed during focus group interview at each site. Saturation occurred when no new concepts and theories emerged from the data. That was achieved at 15 participants.

The study used an a-priori approach to coding to specifically examine how racism, challenging majoritarian narratives and social justice were embedded in the social media use of participants. Data was coded using HyperRESEARCH. Initial coding included keeping codes in the language of participants and identity areas in which language may suggest deeper meanings (Saldaña, 2015). The three tenets of CRT that guided emergent coding themes include (1) permanence of racism (2) whiteness as

property and (3) counterstorytelling. Coding data using these three initial themes connected the study to the historical relationships of predominately white institutions to slavery and racial politics. These general overarching themes also allowed for the creation of additional subthemes and allowed the researcher to glean salient data from both the individual and observational interviews with participants. The sub-themes that emerged from participant data included: perceptions of race, pervasiveness of racism, microaggressions, identity construction, perceptions of race and gender, racial and gender performances, social media and race and gender, identity construction, and campus climate and experience. These sub themes describe the lived experiences of participants in the study as well as participants meaning making about their performance as racialized and gendered beings.

The use of a constant comparative method in which data and analysis inform one another was used in the coding of data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Charmaz, 2006). Analytic memo writing was used to document and reflect on coding processing and coding choices as well as the utilization of the digital artifacts provided by participants. Digital artifacts served as illustrative proof of the data found within the sub themes. This process provided opportunities to reflect and uncover information, and compare on campus and virtual experiences of participants, which led to richer explanations of the setting, context and participants within the study (Saldana, 2015).

3.5.2 Validity

This study established validity using the several measures. Validity was established through the write up memos that were drafted following each individual interview and sent to each participant. At the start of each observational interview the

memo was referenced and participants were provided the opportunity to reflect on the individual interview and provide new or correct shared information from the individual interview. Furthermore the researcher coded for themes emerging from the data and subsequently these interpretations were reviewed and reflected on by participants in the study during the focus group interview in order for credibility of the information to be confirmed (Creswell and Miller, 2000). Another measure of validity came in the lens used by the researcher. Using the lens of individuals external to the study assists in establishing validity and credibility of an account (Cresswell & Miller, 2000). Validity was also established through the prolonged engagement with participants through multiple interviews and observations (Creswell and Miller, 2000). Finally an external researcher was utilized to coded one individual and observational interview to establish validity. A critical friend provides data to be examined through another lens and offers critique of one's work (Costa & Kallick, 1993).

4.0 CHAPTER 4

For the 15 women who participated in this study, their college experiences are rooted in the use of social media as a tool for news, dialogue and connections with other users. Social media has become a space where people of color feel empowered to discuss issues of police brutality, oppression, race and justice. As of November 2016, 195 black people were fatally shot by the police (Washington Post, 2016). Fig. 3 displays a chart of the higher profile police shootings of unarmed black people between April and September 2016 when data collection for this study took place. Platforms like Facebook and Twitter allow users the opportunity to highlight the structural and systemic oppression facing black citizens and also mobilize together for action (Day, 2015). Tweets can transcend geographical boundaries and times zones and link the emotions and experiences of individuals, while a shared post on Facebook can organize a protest on a college campus in a matter of minutes. From these tragedies hashtags often emerge as both reminders of the lives lost but also a mobilizing effort to protest and enact change.

July 5, 2016	Alton Sterling	Baton Rouge, LA
July 6, 2016	Philando Castile	St. Paul, MN
August 1, 2016	*Korryn Gaines**	Baltimore, MD
August 13, 2016	Sylville Smith	Milwaukee, WI
September 18	Keith Lamont Scott	Charlotte, NC
September 20	Terrance Crutcher	Tulsa, OK
September 30	Reginald Thomas, Jr.	Pasadena, CA

**Black woman*

Figure 6. Black citizens killed by police from April- September 2016

Over the years, college students have sought to drive social change in America and college campuses have been places where social issues are raised. The 2015-2016 academic year saw college students nationwide demand conversations and actions by their campus administrators surrounding racist events that regularly take place on their

campuses. Following the resignation of the University of Missouri president and chancellor in November 2015, student protestors organized at more than 100 colleges and universities nationwide and utilized Facebook pages and college websites to expose racism and microaggressions experienced on campuses. Black students specifically black women at each of the three campuses examined for this study, utilized activism in some form in an effort to highlight the blatant and subtle forms of racism experienced by non-white students on campus and sought to propose campus wide action plans for promoting diversity equity and inclusion.

4.1 INSTITUTIONAL ANALYSIS

4.1.1 CAMBRIDGE COLLEGE

In its mission Cambridge College highlights its commitment to the ideals of academic excellence and social justice. Founded as a model of "ethnic and religious pluralism", Cambridge College states one of its aims as fostering a just and inclusive campus culture that embraces diversity and seeks to recognize the need to analyze the ways in which social, cultural and economic inequalities affect power and privilege in the larger society. In 1969, 75 black students occupied an administration building on the Cambridge campus with a list of ten demands for senior campus leaders. From the protest came the creation of the African American Studies department and the recruitment of more black students and faculty to campus. Following the spirit of nationwide campus protests, as well as the spirit and history of protest on the Cambridge College campus, in November 2015 students organized a sit-in in the hallway of the president's office. During the protest, student activists created an action plan with a set of demands for the Cambridge College administration, board of trustees and president on

behalf of black students on campus. Some of the demands included increasing the amount of black faculty and staff employed by the college by ten percent, mandating diversity and inclusion workshops for faculty and the appointment of a vice president of diversity and inclusion. The protest drew support from other student groups on campus as well as the African and Afro-American Studies Department and the Graduate School for Social Policy. On the 12th day of the protest, senior administrators presented an implementation plan to meet all demands of the student activists. In the summer of 2016 Cambridge College welcomed a new president and while in his inauguration speech he spoke of Cambridge College expanding educational opportunities "to gifted students that have long faced prejudice in American society and ensure an environment in which all students feel respected and supported in their educational pursuits," the institution has yet to announce any new initiatives or programs connected to any of the student demands.

4.1.2 OXFORD COLLEGE

Oxford College seeks to encourage students to try new ideas and interact authentically with others whose beliefs challenge their own. In December 2015 members of the Black Women's Ministry, African Student Association, Caribbean Student Association, Minority Association of Pre-med Students and the Black Student Association privately submitted a list of demands to senior administrators, designed to make Oxford a more welcoming environment and requested a response from the institution within a week's time following the submission of the letter. Following the review by campus administrators the demands were released to the entire college community via social media. The list of demands included increasing faculty of color specifically black faculty, increasing the matriculation of students of African descent, implementing sensitivity

training for all members of the Oxford community, and hiring of mental health professionals of African descent who specialize in the care of women of African descent. In their response to the demands, the Oxford administration espoused a commitment to achieving tangible results, acknowledged the proactive steps that had been taken to address many of the points raised and proposed a meeting with the leadership of the organizations who submitted the demands. In the fall of 2016, Oxford inaugurated its first black woman to be president of the college. Similar to Cambridge College, no new programs or initiatives have been announced regarding the demands submitted.

4.1.3 KINGS COLLEGE

Grounded in the ideals of the Jesuit faith, Kings College urges students to look inward while reaching out to use their mind and talents in service to others. In spring of 2014, a student group committed to eliminating racism on the Kings College campus was formed to discuss problems and solutions related to racism and oppression experienced by students. Organizers released infographics on how to address racism on campus and in November 2015 sent a list of demands to administrators. Some of the demands included appointing a diversity officer at every college to sit on a university-wide diversity council; reducing the Eurocentric focus in the classroom curricula; increasing the recruitment and retention of students, faculty, staff and board of trustee members of color and requiring diversity and anti-oppression training for the entire Kings College community. In addition to the submission of demands, students demonstrated on campus in an effort to encourage the campus administration to confront and work to resolve issues of institutional racism. Members of the Kings College administration later met with some of the students involved with the protest and warned that the protest was a

conduct violation because a permit had not been procured prior to the protest. The students were informed that further actions could result in consequences including suspension from the institution. Following the campus protests, the undergraduate student government set a January 19, 2016 deadline for the administration to release a plan to "create a more racially inclusive campus" however the Kings College administration missed the deadline and failed to release any statement as to when an action plan would be released.

Understanding the context of both the national and campus climates that the women in this study exist within informs how they move through the world as racialized beings. Some aspects of their identity and performance are similar despite being located at different campuses serving different populations of students, while there are others are specifically unique to the institution. This dissertation research study aimed to explore how black college women perform race and gender within the social media environment. It attempted to understand more about how they understand as well as construct their racial and gender identity through their use of social media and its connection to their undergraduate experience. The following chapter discusses the sample and reviews of major findings that resulted from analysis of the data. Data was collected, transcribed, coded and member checked resulting in the formulations found in this chapter. Three tenets of critical race theory were used as major themes for data coding: (1) permanence of racism (2) intersectionality and (3) counterstorytelling. From these major themes, sub themes emerged providing salient data that will be examined in this chapter. Using critical race theory as analytical lens allowed for examination of how the women in the study understand their racial and gender identity, how those identities are constructed and

the decisions that are made surrounding what they choose to post on social media related to their race and gender.

4.2 PERMANENCE OF RACISM

Racism is an integral, permanent and indestructible component of society (Bell, 1992). At the core of our understanding of critical race theory is the premise that race and racism is endemic, permanent and "a central rather than marginal factor in defining and explaining individual experiences" (Russell, 1992 pp. 762-763). Racism is seen as an inherent part of American civilization privileging white individuals over people of color in most areas of life including education (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; Delgado, 1995, Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Each institution examined in this study received demands that highlighted a need for education of students, faculty and staff to the racism faced by students of color on campus. Permanence of racism was the first major theme in which data was coded and in this theme three sub themes emerged from the data: (a) perceptions of race (b) pervasiveness of racism, and (c) microaggressions. The sub themes that emerged further illuminated the aspect of the higher education experiences that propel and reinforce racism and oppression for the study participants and the role of social media in these experiences.

4.2.1 Perceptions of Race

At each of the three institutions examined black students make up less than ten percent of the campus population. The women in the study contend with the questioning of their place and status on their campus by their non-black peers. Nina, a senior at Cambridge College served as its first black female student government president, and described that the way in which the institution dealt with race as "fantastical." She

explained that students of color were simultaneously experiencing the politics of hypervisibility and erasure. In her experience, Cambridge College ignored race and racial issues leaving black students and students of color to navigate experiences of isolation and hostility alone however, the College would use students of color to promote an agenda of inclusivity and diversity. Christina a junior at Oxford shared that when black students came together to discuss racial issues affecting the campus, she believed that many of her white peers were shocked at the sheer amount of black students that exist on the campus. Star a junior at Oxford shared, "I don't think they [white students] understand the differences between certain groups, but I think they do notice we have a house on campus." Black women on the Oxford campus have a dedicated space and office that provides, social, emotional and academic support to students of African descent at Oxford. While the house provides cultural activities to the general Oxford community, black women find this space to be a space of solace and become involved in the student organized connected to the house. All of the participants at Oxford discussed the importance of the space and the care that is taken to preserve the space. The space becomes a location of support that doesn't protect Oxford participants from experiencing microaggressions and racism, but offers an environment where dialogue and care can take place.

It was discussed that black students tend to be viewed by white peers as a monolithic group on all three campuses. Ava discussed how she believed black students were perceived on the Cambridge campus saying:

> Everyone so perceives us as all the same, just all of our politics are the same… I guess they really perceive a lot of unity among black women on campus, which is true, but we're so different, though. Just entirely different.

The single story attached to their identity by white students makes it difficult for the women to feel authentic and find their voices on each of them on campus. Christina is also a member of the predominately white track team and described that her team members are always surprised and impressed by her involvement on campus. She explained that many of her teammates have not spent a lot of time with other black people and through the relationships she has formed with them their perceptions have changed. Lauren a senior at Oxford shared that coming into her own and finding her voice as a black woman on her campus came with time. She shared that she didn't believe that simply being a student on her campus validated her experience and identity like it would for her white peers but instead she needed to slowly come out of her shell and come into the realization that her voice mattered. Esther another participant from Oxford College, is a junior and international student from Kenya and discussed feeling nervous and anxious about speaking in classes because of her accent. She discussed the struggle of being in the minority at Oxford:

> Being African I am from a place where everyone is black. Black wasn't the first thing that came to my mind every time. Here is it different you know. We look at you and we see you're black and we have something, I don't know, we have preconceived notions. Sometimes I am unsure of what the looks mean.

These experiences resonate for Esther both inside and outside of the class as she discussed:

> "Most of the time in class I'm the only black person. I have an accent. Professors will be like, 'I'm sorry, what did you say,' and then I just won't talk for the rest of the semester."

As a theater major Katelyn discussed the ways in which the perceptions of race play into the types of roles she is cast in shows. She discussed being type casted for roles and being offered parts as the prostitute, the sexy girl or the motherly figure. However, she discussed a positive experience of being directed by a white woman sharing:

> It's funny because she made the play about race, the white lady. She made our characters ... My character, I feel like, was supposed to be black because of the way that the script says stuff like, "Oh, you look transparent in the darkness." You know? She really paid attention to that a lot, and I really liked that. She cast my parents as a white woman and a black male. I felt it was a pretty good ... I thought she did really good paying attention to race and stuff like that.

For many of study participants the relationships they have with white students are superficial and come through participation in co-curricular activities. Ava a sophomore at Cambridge College shared that although she has white peers celebrating her on Facebook through the liking and supporting her statuses, those students would never invite her to dinner or a party on campus. Christina further discussed the dichotomy of what is seen on social media versus what is experienced face to face among her white peers saying:

> I do make a mental note and I'm like okay this person said this and just remember that next time they invite you to hang out just because I now know some of the things that they're posting [on social media], like some of their values, which is sometimes not the type of people I want to associate with.

Social media becomes another environment similar to the academic classroom in which participants observe the actions of their white peers to inform the relationships they form with white students.

4.2.2 Pervasiveness of racism

In her individual interview Cleo shared that while her white peers are allowed to be students who easily move through their college experience, black students consistently encounter racism and oppression but are expected to not let those experiences bother them during their time at the College. "To be black and to be a woman at a predominately white institution, it's expensive. A lot of times we're the causalities of the institution." Participants discussed the responsibility of having to advocate for racial uplift and having to educate campus administrators on their experience and struggle. They do this while experiencing racism and sexism from both white and non -white peers on campus. In addition to working for systemic change on their campuses, a participant discussed using social media to showcase racist incidents or offer support to students experiencing racism whether on their own campus or other campuses across the country. Many specifically used Facebook as their platform for advocating for issues that affect students of color. Beyond highlighting incidents taking place on college campuses, all of the women shared posts about issues affecting the black community specifically the violence against black bodies at the hands of the police. An example of post discussing the killing of unarmed black man Terrance Crutcher in Oklahoma participant is displayed in Fig. 7.

Figure 7. Facebook post, (Lauren, Oxford College)

Many of the women in the study shared that when having conversations about race and racism they felt more comfortable sharing thoughts and opinions on a social media space rather than having discussions with peers and classmates in person. Fear around safety and feeling attacked in conversation or physically scared many of the participants from initiating conversations with white peers. Conversations on social media are easier spaces for participants to walk away from when dialogue becomes tense and other users that affirm and support the arguments of participants can easily join conversations taking place. Ava described that many of the experiences of racism she contends come through social media rather than in person. In her individual interview she shared:

> I get super anxious when I'm in a situation where it's a bunch of white people all trying to talk to me about race at once, that I would definitely only would do it in a social media space where I know that my people can see and that I could be defended, which is most of the time, just because we're all friends on Facebook.

Ava also discussed that most of her "haters" on campus were people that she only interacted with on social media, particularly Facebook. Her fear is always that things will escalate to becoming physical from people that she argues with on social media about racism on her campus. Many of the women across institutions discussed that having heated discussions on social media felt safer even if the dialogue was aggressive, rather than having the same conversation in person individually or with a group of people.

Unlike on their campuses where participants are forced to experience racist attitudes and behaviors from members of their campus community, most participants discussed curating a social media environment that allowed the user to not see racist posts and comments. Participants do this to lessen the experiences of racism they have to endure on a daily basis but this also comes from the ways in which participants curate their social media audiences. The women discussed that it is rare for them to unfriend someone on a platform however they will unfollow people who share problematic viewpoints. In order to be unfriended, someone would have to share blatantly racist or oppressive commentary except if the user is a family member. The women in the study discussed using their social media profiles as a place to interrupt racist posts. They do so by commenting on the comments and posts and initiating debates and sometimes arguments the users that post or support the comments or articles. Cleo was not afraid to call out people on her campus who posted problematic articles and comments and debated them regularly on social media. She saw social media as a space that she could easily occupy and speak out about current events in the world as well as specific to the Cambridge campus. She shared the following:

> I owe it to black women who haven't been cited, men who are in prison, to call out systematic and fucking institutional racism that they can't see. I am not going to be silenced by white people.

Ava also discussed commenting on insensitive posts or comments made by her peers on Facebook:

> I usually comment, I've always, that's part of my issue on social media, is I can't not say something. I feel like I have to. I also feel like I have certain privileges that I do want to use, and so I want to use them to make the world a better place, so I usually do say something. 100%, yeah.

Yik Yak was the only platform that all participants felt was continuously and overtly racist. Most of the women in the study created accounts when the platform emerged but removed their accounts due to the racist posts consistently found on the platform. Several participants in the study from Cambridge College participated in the November 2015 campus protests and shared in the focus group interview that they witnessed offensive Yik Yak comments demanding that protestors "should be killed" or "go back to their country." The women discussed feeling scared and overwhelmed knowing that their peers "who commune with us whether voluntary or involuntary (Cleo, Oxford)" would post racist, violent and threatening comments on the platform. During the focus group interview Cleo shared:

> I feel like a lot of people removed Yik Yak from their phones at the time and just went off of social media at that time [the protest]. It was just too wild. We were going through stuff. It was so draining.

Desiree a freshman at Oxford also shared:

> I didn't have Yik Yak before especially during the movement. One of my friends told me to read some of the comments and some of the racist comments that are being made during the protest, so I kind of internalized what they said. I was like "I'm not ever going to have a Yik Yak.' I didn't have one before, now I'm definitely not going to get one because of these comments.

4.2.3 Microaggressions

Davis (1989) describes racial microagressions as automatic acts of disregard that stem from unconscious attitudes of white superiority and constitute a verification of inferiority (p. 1576). The participants of the study experience the description of subtle racism provided by Delgado and Stefancic (1992) where the victims become sensitized to its subtle nuances and code words- the body language, averted gazes, terms such as "you people" and "articulate" that whether intended or not convey racially charged meanings. Participants provided examples of microaggressions they faced both from their white peers and faculty. These microaggressions are many times related to their physical appearance as well as their intellectual abilities. Desiree shared:

> Someone really told me, 'hey I like the way you did your hair, you look professional,' if they [white people] do certain things they expect us not to say anything or not to retaliate, so when we do they often don't know how to adjust their language to suit us.

In her observational interview Esther was asked to reflect on what it means to be a black women at Oxford and describe her experience of moving through campus as a woman of color with dark skin. In her unpacking of her experience Esther highlighted what

Solórzano, Ceja & Yosso (2000) described as unconscious attitudes and verifications of inferiority in a story she recounted of an experience at a retreat during her first year at Oxford. During a sharing session during the retreat Esther two other black women listened to several Asian students in the group respond to the question of who have you been taught to hate. She shared:

> They were all like, black people. I was like, wow. At that time, I wasn't African anymore; I was someone with dark skin. At that moment, I was like, okay, I am dark skinned. I am African. I felt very attacked. That's how I walk around in Oxford. Oxford, not safe, not comfortable. Feeling like I have to survive. All the time, I have to prove that I'm not what they think they already know me as. That's I walk around in Oxford.

This was important for Esther as throughout her individual interview she reflected on her experiences as an international student from Africa being unique and different from the experiences of domestic African American students. She acknowledged her sometimes lack of in depth understanding of the experiences of black people in the United States and felt separate from the social issues affective black American citizens. However this experience highlighted the monolithic identity that is placed upon black women by their non-black peers. Esther's black skin strips her of her ability to be seen as an individual on her campus. Furthermore in her observational interview Esther discussed showing off pride in her Kenyan identity through the sharing of photos on Facebook of the Kenyan runner who won the 2016 Boston Marathon. While in Kenya she discussed that she would care less about who won a marathon in Boston and she would not care to post about anything related to Kenya if she were in the country, however being in America

aids in her pride of her nation. She stated, "I just want to let the whole world know that I am connected to Kenya. I am from Kenya, I am not African American, and I belong to where the winners are at." A feature of her identity that felt limiting in the academic environment was a source of pride for her and one that she wanted to share out to others on social media.

Other microaggressions described by the participants came in the form of assumptions about their character, presence and intelligence. In her role as student government president, Nina discussed experiences with administrators who would frequently comment on how impressed with her that she spoke well and maintained grace even under the most stressful situations. She shared "they [administrators] go about their day not seeing race and not understanding how that's also problematic." For the women in the study who were aware of microaggressions experienced they felt personally diminished by the interaction and these experiences contributed to them having a negative feeling about themselves and the institution overall.

Instead of using social media as space to call out the microagressions they experience regularly, participants instead use their platforms as a space to compliment themselves and other black women on their campuses. Katelyn identified (Fig. 8) an example of what was observed in many of the Facebook profiles of the women in the study:

> I especially post a lot of pictures of myself saying like "Black Girl Magic" "Black Girl Rocks" "Black Girls Joy." I do that all the time, literally. If I share something, it means I really really was like, "Yeah!" If it's about black girls, anything about black girls affirmative, I post those.

Desiree also discussed the sites about black women she tends to repost on Tumblr:

> On Tumblr there's a lot of 90s nostalgia going on. They talk about that and share it. There's also this page…I think it's "famous and fly girls,' all they repost are black women. Not just specifically black women who are also skinny, or also natural, but just black women who are trans, and black women who might have disabilities. Just a lot of things, which I really love.

In her observation it was noted that Desiree's Tumblr account was specifically curated to only feature posts and reshares of black people, specifically women. She discussed that she wanted her Tumblr to be pro black a space that promotes positive black images while also acknowledging issues affecting the black community. She further shared:

> I'm very critical about what I share and repost because I want to make sure the things I share are from people that are not objectifying black women and that we're being treated with respect.

Utilizing hashtags like "Melanin Monday" and "Black Queens" and others the women chose to look inward and celebrate who they were rather than dwell on the negative preconceived notions of inferiority that they experience from others on their campus.

Figure 8. Facebook Post, (Katelyn, Cambridge, College)

4.3 INTERSECTIONALITY

An intersectional perspective reveals that an individual's social identities profoundly influence one's beliefs about and experience of gender (Shields, 2008). For the participants in this study, race and gender were inextricably intertwined. However, for many women in the study it was not until the observational interview where realizations of the connections between their race and gender performances on social media surfaced and became meaningful. The sub themes highlighted within the theme of intersectionality included: identity construction, perceptions of race and gender, racial and gender performances and social media race and gender. The experiences of the participants surrounding how they make meaning of both their race and gender and how they display this on social media were uncovered and examined.

4.3.1 Identity construction

The experience of being a black woman on all three campuses was described as tough. All of the women discussed the importance of working to put forth a positive representation of black women. The complexity of being a black woman operating in a white space provides a myriad of emotions and the women spoke of maneuvering through the many experiences facing black women. In the Oxford focus group Stephanie shared:

> We can have fun but we can also mourn and we can protest and we can demonstrate. There is so much behind blackness, womanhood and being a part of a white space.

The announcement that Oxford's incoming President would be a black woman was both exciting and inspiring for the black women on campus and provided opportunities for the women to celebrate their blackness and womanhood. The women in the study all discussed their excitement and pride about the announcement and also reflected that their non-black peers recognized the importance of the announcement. On the day of the announcement the college organized a welcome ceremony and the women recounted seeing the first five rows of chairs at the venue were left open for black faculty staff and students to sit up close and together to hear the college's first black president speak. This act symbolized an understanding among non-black students, faculty and staff that this event was a special moment for black women at the institution. In her observational interview Esther described her feelings of pride that led her to re-share a post announcing the new Oxford president:

> At that moment, I felt black, not Kenyan, but I was a black person in America. At that point, I felt like they [being black and African] merged and I was celebrating being a black person in America, celebrating an excellent black woman being chosen to be a president of this institution. I thought of putting, "My president is black," but I just left as, "My president is ... Black." Yeah and I'm black.

She further described the experience saying:

> I think it shifted how we saw ourselves, and by we, I'm saying the black students in this campus, and how everybody else saw us like in that day and going forward from that day. I remember every black person that I'm friends with on Facebook shared this thing and we were all so excited. We were crazy just seeing

information on your Facebook page. Every time we see each other, we just like, I don't know, the shouting things. It was such an exciting day.

Having a black woman serve as the leader of the institution was monumental and provided a new layer of representation to what it would mean to be a black woman at the Oxford campus. The women in the study work hard to push against the assumptions placed on them about who are what they should be and having the leader of the college as someone that looks like them assists in widening the spectrum of understanding of who black women on the Oxford campus.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, the women at Cambridge College cited the student newspaper as an entity that frequently incorrectly highlights the experiences of black students. During the spring 2016 semester the student newspaper reviewed a production of the "The Wiz" and created anger, frustration and outrage among many black students on campus. The review written by a white student made references to characters "mumbling lines" and incorrectly referenced students of color to roles in the production. The women in the study shared frustrations of the reviewer and campus newspaper in their lack of due diligence in identifying the background and history of the show to assist readers in understanding the blackness which the show centers. In discussing the article Cleo articulates the basis of her frustration:

> The assertiveness that this white girl [the author of the article] felt she had over The Wiz. The show was a space that was a direct defiance of the white plays that Cambridge chooses to put up every year. It was a direct defiance against those things. We're going to put on this show, it's going to be black as hell, it's going to use black music, all the costumes are going to be made by black people. This

> isn't going to have anything white. The production was all people of color. But the way that this white girl felt it should have been her space. It wasn't your language because the play wasn't for you.

In observational interviews of their Facebook profiles all of the women at Cambridge reposted an open letter that Nina wrote on behalf of the actors of the play and black students on campus that was printed in the paper as well as online. She discussed the need for the open letter:

> On face value it was pent up frustration with the ways in which our campus newspapers have spoken about black theater that happens on campus. Completely ignoring the historical significance of having black theater period on this campus and then taking other jabs at the community within the reviews they have created. So this post was my pretty much I'm done with being silent about the bullshit you guys continuously put on to black theater and here's my letter to articulate that.

Not only did the Cambridge women reshare the post but they captioned their posts with words of encouragement and support for Nina including Katelyn who said: "I felt it was very strong, she's the president and I love her so much. I was like other people need to see this."

In R&B singer Erykah Badu's 2008 song "Master Teacher" she used the term "stay woke" to describe staying aware of experiences taking place around her. The term "stay woke" as well as the term "woke" became a part of a wider discussion on Twitter particularly with Black Twitter in 2014, as a way to describe those who are self aware, question the dominant paradigm and strive to make the lives of those who are oppressed better. The word "woke" became entwined with the Black Lives Matter movement and

became a word of action as activists strove to be woke and called on others to "stay woke." A majority of the women in the study considered themselves activists, and all acknowledged being woke. For each campus the participants viewed the varying levels of activism and awareness of members of the black community differently. At Kings College Olivia shared: "I think there's some [students] that definitely you see, but it's like the known faces and the known names that you see at all events, that are reposting the same articles and stuff. " The women of Cambridge described what they referred to as an "AAAS" cult. The group is primarily made up of black women majoring in African and African American Studies (AAAS) department, and at times seem to be at odds with black women not in the major, particularly those in the sciences. The dynamics of those inside and outside of the AAAS cult were heavily discussed throughout the Cambridge College focus group particularly as it relates to the dynamics of the community of black women on campus. Five out of the six participants in this research study major in AAAS with the sixth participant listing it as a minor as her majors are theater and computer science. The divide between those in the community that speak on issues of racial inequality, sexism, color-ism, class-ism and other forms of oppression and those who do not speaks to the spectrum of experience surrounding identity and interest in activism, however within the focus group there were times when the women were judgmental about their peers who choose not to speak up or participate in activism on campus. During the Cambridge focus group one participant shared related to being woke:

> I make that effort and I do feel like there are women on campus who aren't woke and who choose not to be. Another thing about our community though that I will say about the woke community personally as somebody who is not that woke,

> who is kind of on the fence, sometimes you feel like you have to be woke to fit in with the black girls on campus. Like if you're not woke, they going to talk shit and if they don't talk shit about you then you're like 'oh my god, dang, now I am forced to be woke.'

While activism does not specifically correlate to academic interests for the women at Oxford, the correlation does connect to involvement and participation in the house for black women on campus. This house has been a hub of support for Oxford students of African descent for over 30 years and for many is considered a home away from home. At Oxford, participation in the house may include activism but it more importantly provides support and inclusion. Lack of participation is viewed less contentiously than at Cambridge but instead lends itself to a loss of resources and support for the individual, which hearkens back to the question for many women of why not be connected and involved. One participant shared in the Oxford focus group:

> I feel like there is a group of black women that engage in these discussions in person… They're just more vocal. I'm not going to say… I don't want to break it down to those who associate and those who don't associate with the black community but I feel like if you are involved with black organizations, other black women on campus you naturally… maybe you're not as vocal on social media, but you're engaged in that discussion and when you're not, it seems like, on the outside, that you are actively choosing not to participate. I don't really know how to view that.

In the Oxford College focus group, it was discussed that it is noticed whether or not a black woman attends programming put on by the house or participates in the black

student organization on campus, but also when the point of entry has happened. For those women who find their way into involvement within black identified organizations any time after their first year at Oxford, there can be judgment and commentary surrounding lack of involvement. Lauren shared:

> I have a couple of friends who as juniors, have now decided to be involved in with the house and the different things we're doing now. I don't think it's necessarily that they're not welcome but I do think people make jokes about it 'like where you the last two years?' I think everyone's really accepting and I think everyone it takes time.

Participants use social media as a space to present what is happening within the co-curricular life of black students on each campus. These posts display the array of events that black students are involved within the various black student organizations on each campus in celebration of involvement and the community of black students. These posts also describe the connections that the women have with each other and the layers of support found with the circle of friendship for the women in the picture. Furthermore, these posts seek to be an invitation to black women who are not involved on campus to join black student organizations and participate in in the black community on each campus to increase social network and support (Fig. 9).

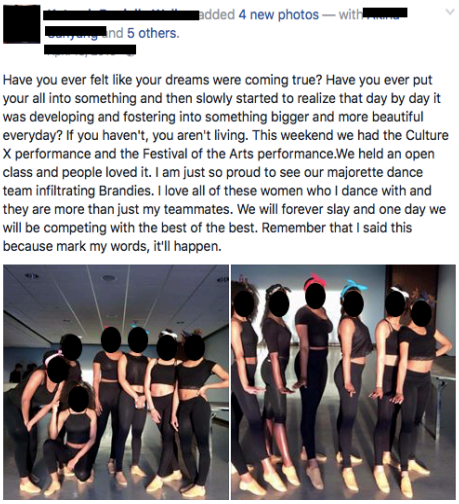

Figure 9. Facebook Post (Katelyn, Cambridge College)

4.3.2 Perceptions of race and gender

When asked about the experience of being a black woman on each of their campuses many of the women discussed multiple layers of the experiences ranging from pride of the community of women on campus to feelings of frustration and anger about the ways in which the general campus community stereotypes them. Lauren shared:

> Personally, I've had a really amazing time being an African-American woman on Oxford College's campus. There are definitely times of dissonance with the general public at Oxford, with certain students, where you really can't connect because they just don't understand me and what I've gone through and where I'm coming from, or my ideologies and why I think certain ways…. I have learned so much about blackness and what it means to be black, and how just because you don't like fried chicken, that doesn't make you any less of a black person, which is stupid, but some people actually believe that. I've come to terms with my blackness while at Oxford, even though it isn't a HBCU, that's surprising that I've come to terms with it. Being in a space where I'm a minority, and a lot of people

> who don't understand me surround me, I was kind of forced to come to terms with every single layer of my identity, and it was nice to have a bunch of strong, black women surrounding me to help me go through that process.

Racial identity development models discuss that the age in which students attend college as a pivotal time in which individuals learns and unpack meaning surrounding racial identity. Lauren's understanding of her racial identity is important to her experience at Oxford particularly the support she receives from other black women on campus. The communities of women that support her undergo similar experiences of what is to be a black woman at Oxford and therefore allow Lauren to be authentic in the experiences she shares and her reflection on how it feels to be a member of the Oxford campus community.

In their understanding of their blackness and womanhood, the women of Oxford don't contend with the day-to-day interactions of men in the same ways as the participants at Cambridge and Kings College. Nina summed up the experience of being a black woman at Cambridge College in the following way:

> It means that you are not good enough to be in the good old boys' club. If you want to be in that club, you have to elbow your way in, and even then, they're like ... This is people with power, usually white, at this institution. You're also just not good enough to be in anyone's relationship, but you're good enough to have sex with. Always. You're good enough to be fetishized. You're good enough to be this spectacular black woman who is transcending boundaries, but oh, she's too much.

Dating and relationships were discussed by all of the women in the study. Most of the women in the study referenced heterosexual relationships when discussing dating,

however two women in the study identified as queer specifically bisexual. In their experiences dating, many discussed feeling marginalized and forgotten. The women spoke of feeling ignored by black men on their campuses when it comes to dating, while they witness women from other races and ethnicities engage in relationships with black men. "Black men do not want to talk to black women. White men do not want to talk to black women. Nobody wants to talk to us " (Katelyn, Cambridge College). Katelyn went on to share further about the dynamics and relationships between black men and women at Cambridge:

> Black men do not look at us [black women] at all, and they don't acknowledge us. I was talking to one of my good friends and I was like 'Ryan why don't you like black girls?' He was like 'man the black girls they don't give me the time of day.' I was like 'well you've got to show them that you want to talk to them because unfortunately, there's a past for black women, when we're like okay we're not going to let nobody just come up in here and just do whatever they want to us and just leave.' It really bothered me so much and I feel like that's how a lot of black men on campus are, and they don't want to get in a relationship with a black woman. If they're talking to a black woman it's for sex. When she wants more, because that's what people want more from sexual relationships than just sex, she want too much. How dare you try to tap somebody's vagina and then just tell them that they're not worthy of your relationship?

The women at Cambridge discussed that men on their campuses only seek to have sexual relationships with them but rarely look to date black women. On her Facebook profile Katelyn reshared a post with the message "texting isn't courting" describing the

relationship dynamics experienced by participants at Cambridge (Fig.10). Some participants discussed their hesitancy in vocalizing the desire for having more than a sexual relationship with the men they are involved with for fear they will scare them off and end the sexual relationship but feel unfulfilled in having a relationship based on physical needs and desires. Issues of body image and queer identities surfaced in the discussion of relationships and interactions with black men at Cambridge. Black parties on the Cambridge campus are people dancing and having fun but it was mentioned, "no one is going to dance with the fat girl, and it's awkward to just sit there and dance on your own." Two of the women in the group expressed feeling like the "designated bag holder" at parties and Ava went on to share:

> Ya'll know I'm hella gay I don't want all these dudes always dancing on me. But it's a reminder that they do not even want to dance with me. Even though I probably wouldn't even want them.

Body image was the only theme that was openly discussed on social media. In a Facebook post (Fig. 11) Cleo reflects on her body image and it's meaning on how she is viewed on campus. In the focus group, Cleo discussed the lack of interest in men on campus dating her lead her to pursue online dating options like Tinder in order to meet men in the Boston area. While she has not been successful in her online dating experience she refuted the notion that if Cambridge men were not interested in dating her it meant that she did not date.

Figure 10. Facebook Post, (Katelyn, Cambridge College)

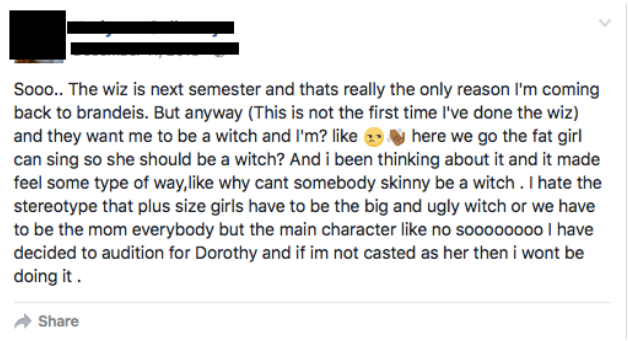

Figure 11. Facebook Post, (Cleo, Cambridge College)

The women at Oxford College discussed watching their non black peers get into relationships with black men at neighboring campuses and feeling frustrated that those men were not interested in the black women on the campus. During the focus group the participants at Oxford discussed interacting with men in the setting of mixers which are social events that Oxford societies will organize with men's organizations on local co-ed campuses as a way to network and meet students at other campuses. Star recounted an experience she had at a mixer where she was the only black woman attending:

> I can recall very well last year when I went to a mixer- one of the only mixers I went to, because I don't enjoy the mixers because they are so white, and that makes me very- I think about my race in those moments because I'm so used to hanging around with a lot of black people. I remember this one mixer I went to

> last year, everybody when we first came in, the guys were doing their own thing, very sectioned off. Then the girls were doing their own thing, and sectioned off. I was like, "You know what? I'm going to get this party started." Started talking to people, talking to the guys because I was like, I want this to be a legit mixer, and it's kind of sad that people are being so awkward. So I start making efforts to talk to people, and then the society girls start coming around me, and we're starting to engage people. I made an effort the entire night to really put myself out there, and to be having conversations with people, but by the end of the night, I felt like I really got nothing out of it. I felt like a lot of the men were very comfortable being with the white women in this space, and I was just the black girl again who was all alone.

In reflecting on that particular mixer experience she went on to share:

> If you know you're at the end of the totem pole [as a black woman], you're going to internalize that. You're going to think differently about yourself and how people view you. Sometimes it also influences the way you treat the women who are dating these black men, and the black men who are dating these women.

The women in the study strive to work to distance themselves from the tropes described by Harris-Perry specifically of being seen as hypersexualized beings whose bodies are only available for sexual consumption. Participants know themselves to be intelligent, socially aware citizens of the world who strive to make the experiences of black students on campus and those who come after better. They do not view themselves as less than other women on their campus however their experiences in dating make them feel inadequate and undeserving of relationships. Participants of agency on social media and

the pictures they post of themselves and the women in their community are a constant reminder of their worth and value despite their experiences in dating on their campuses. Whether in a relationship or not, the continued theme of representation and inclusion continues to be a theme central to the experience of black women on all three campuses.

In their relationships with black men, the women at Cambridge and Kings College discussed the role of black men in the activism movement on their campuses. Most of the women in the study shared their disappointment in the levels of involvement and activism of black men on their campus. They commented that while there are a handful of men that are out front and present in leadership positions on each of their campuses as a collective the women do not view black men as an entity of strength or a voice on their campuses. When asked if she believed that black men on the Cambridge campus were "woke" Katelyn shared:

> Depends on the black man. I know this one guy for sure, he's woke, and a lot of them who are in the AAAS department, but… a lot of the basketball players, a lot of other guys on campus who are like business majors, no. Not at all. Not at all. That bothers me so much.

Olivia a freshman at Kings College, noted that many of the black men attending Kings College are athletes and hold what she believed was a great deal of power in their position and could stand to do more to make their voices known and heard by the institution. She shared:

> In terms of the general African American male community on our campus, I don't think they're as united as the women. I just find that really interesting. Also, a lot of the males are athletes and so they ... I don't know if they don't have the time or

> if they don't know, but I just feel like they could do something and they have the power because they're making so much money for this campus. Especially last year, they could of said a lot of things that I feel the campus or the institution would have listened to them. I'm just like these issues not only affect the black women, but black men and everyone. I think it's just funny because we're trying so hard, yet it's not being reciprocated. I think in terms of police brutality, a lot of the people that we hear are male names, even though it also affects women, but you don't even see the black males coming out to ... It's interesting, because it's not just us that is not being represented, but they're not even representing themselves.

The women of the study shared that it was important that they be understood and empowered by black men and ultimately they wanted to be in community with them so that their voices were heard as a collective. The women on all the campuses struggled with feeling forgotten by black men when much of the work they do related to activism and speaking up on issues seeks to better the experiences of black men, particularly on social media. "It's like we're fighting for them [black men], and they're doing everything but fighting for us" (Stephanie, Oxford). Participants also shared that they keep these frustrations in house and do not publicly discuss their issues with black men among other students of color or on social media. Because much of their activism seeks to call out the physical assault and violence experienced by black men, participants did not feel it was appropriate or effective to the causes they take on to denigrate the black men on their campuses. There was a collective understanding that in their role as black female activists outwardly supporting and working to end the oppression experienced by

black men was paramount. The women in the study engaged in dialogue with the black men in their lives and constantly encouraged those men to take on activist roles both on and off campus.

4.3.3 Racial and gender performances

Physical appearance was another theme woven through the experiences of all three campuses. In discussing how she is perceived on the Cambridge Campus Ava shared:

> I'm black, I'm plus size and I'm queer and not always super feminine…there are moments when I'm really perceived as angry or scary so sometimes I do throw on a sundress and I smile a lot at white people.

She stated that she does all of this because it makes her feel self conscious to know that her peers are looking at her in a negative light. Olivia also discussed attempting against the stereotypes that her non-black peers may have of her:

> I think for me, I have to work ten times harder just so that I don't close myself off from people who aren't from the student of color community. If I see a white student, I'm not going to just completely shut them off. I'm going to definitely approach them and have conversations with them and interact with them, but it is hard at times.

The politics of hair and hairstyles inform elements of identity for many of the women in the study. For Kiara a senior at Kings College one component of understanding her identity as a black woman came through experimenting with her hair. From chemically relaxing, to experimenting with weaves, to cutting all of her hair off, she discussed her struggle with figuring out which performance would be best accepted

in her campus community. She discussed the experience of cutting off her hair during her senior year:

> I had also cut my hair. I was growing out my afro just trying to accept myself and realized in the process of doing that I didn't know what I was. Now I've come to the point where I don't really care. I'll take a picture of myself with my dark spots on my face like I'm not I'm not trying to please anybody and I'm not trying to conform. I'm not trying to be super pro black and I'm not trying to make people who are different than me feel bad about themselves. I'm just trying to be a good person.

In her individual interview Wallis talked about the conscious choices she makes about hairstyles depending on the environment:

> When it comes to student things I make sure my hair is out because you're going to see my natural hair and I know that's an intentional performance. When it's more so administrative tasks, sometimes I'll wear my hair out but most of the time it's usually in braids like a braid crown or pushed back into a bun or a high bun or something like that only because I know, I'm not the powerful one in that position. I understand power dynamics very clearly here. I know that for you to hear me I have to look like you in order for you to understand what's coming out of my mouth so you're not too distracted with what I look like.

Nina also discussed her performance of identity when entering meetings with senior administrators. The performance not only included her physical appearance but also the use of specific and particular academic language and vernacular. She talked of feeling frustrated that the performance was necessary but also for the response she received from

it when senior administrators would provide what they thought were compliments to her about how she handled herself in these meetings. For the women in the study the changes and adjustments necessary to feel included and successful in the campus community come from the individual who is perceived to be different rather the viewer. Whether through changing one's physical appearance by dressing up or wearing makeup or through the use of academic language in one's social media profile.

4.3.4 Social media and race and gender

> I feel like my white followers are looking for a performance of me even when I'm not on Facebook. When I'm in the dining hall, when I'm peeing. I'm actually learning that there are white people here who actually want to be me. When this girl ran up to me and was like, "Give me all your black knowledge and black wisdom," I was like, "Oh, that's how this is." What baffles me is how white people really want to be black and how there are so many dope ass black women at Cambridge right now. (Cleo, Cambridge College)

Social media allows the women in the study to be more aware of what others are thinking and to find a digital community in which they can immerse themselves within, in addition to the physical community they participate in. A majority of the women in the study utilize Facebook primarily as it is the social media platform used by students on each of the campuses. Facebook is a primary mode of communication on each campus for students, staff and academic departments. Many of the women commented that while Twitter is a space they observe and consume information on social issues the limitations of only being able to post a maximum of 140 characters feels restrictive and therefore

they are not apt to post. It is also not a space that is regularly utilized by members of each campus community or departments.

When asked about what they observed related to race, the women mainly discussed issues of state sanctioned violence against black men at the hands of the police. They discussed reading and sharing articles related to important racial issues on their social media accounts. However when asked to discuss the intersections of race and gender within what they witness on social media, the women described personal post and pictures about the successes of themselves and their friends as well the sisterhood they have with other women on their campus. Celebrating sisterhood among the black women on campus was displayed on Facebook, like the example seen in Fig. 12. The women in the study felt it important to outwardly showcase the community of support black women create on each campus. In their observational interviews it was shown that many of the women in the study share pictures of their families. Photos of siblings along with captions discussing feels of love, care and nostalgia provided small glimpses into the lives of the women in the study. These pictures not only felt authentic, there was never hesitation in the posting of them or the concern about the feedback that would be garnered from them. One participant in the Cambridge College focus discussed feeling her happiest when she was able to talk to her three best friends ("one black dude and two black girls) on Facebook in a group message.

Figure 12. Facebook Post (Lauren, Oxford College)

In both observation and discussion some of the larger topics of race and gender came through popular culture and through memes. A meme is an image, video, or piece of text that is copied and spread rapidly by Internet users. Memes are generally posted on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram and popular will be shared and disseminated over and over throughout the Internet. Many participants discussed not posting much about their gender or race and gender intersected without realizing that through the sharing or memes they were making statements about their feelings about race and gender. Several popular culture examples included the summer Olympics and the success of black women in the areas of swimming, track and field and gymnastics. In observing the profiles of many of the women in the study posts with pictures of gymnast Simone Biles and swimmer Simone Manuel with hashtags of "black excellence" or "black girl power" were littered across their social media pages with captions of excitement and pride of their noteworthy and historic success at the Olympics.

Another example cited frequently discussed the intersection of race, gender and colorism through comments made by Ayesha Curry, wife of Golden Star Warriors

basketball player Steph Curry, in which she commented on choosing to be "classy over trendy" in her personal clothing. Following her comments memes on Twitter and Facebook spotlighted Curry as a good woman that men should strive to be with highlighted notions of respectability politics as well as colorism as Ayesha is a lighter skinned black woman. When her comments surfaced many women in the study commented on seeing memes posted by black men praising and heralding Curry as the right type of woman to date and marry and discussed frustrations of having to engage in conversations that unpacked the problematic elements surrounding the memes. The women in this study discussed that black men fail to outwardly and publicly support black women and defend attacks on their image and character whether on campus or through posts on social media. Ava shared:

> There's just some people that I just am still friends with even though they're sexist. Especially the black men in my life. I just can't cut them off, because I love them, but they're really misogynistic, and they're not being misogynistic about a white girl, it's about black women, and so, yeah.

Seeing black men publicly support Curry reinforced the frustrating dynamics between black men and women at Kings and Oxford College. The women in the study experience a lack of support from black men while they work hard to speak on behalf issues affecting black men. This further harkened back to issues that many of the women in the study were experiencing surrounding black and their lack of support in advocacy on issues on campus and their lack of interest in romantic relationships.

Many of the women engage in commentary and discussion on posts and articles specific to race and gender shared by both people connected to them as well as strangers.

For most of the women, when they see offensive posts and comments on Facebook many engage in dialogue with the writer of the post or comment. Prior to commenting and engaging in dialogue all of the women in the study shared that they usually screenshot the offending post or comment and share it through a group text messages to other friends who are usually black women. These text messages are a therapeutic way for the women to vent and comment about the post in a safe space outside of social media. In addition, sometimes the dialogue found in the group text messages will include tips and feedback for how to engage and challenge the ignorant comments posted. These curated digital spaces offer a place of refuge for the women where an explanation of one's frustration related to experiencing racism online is not necessary and where they can test and craft their thoughts and ideas on how to engage in meaningful and effective dialogue on race and racism.

"Even with social media they get to see the authentic black feminist Cleo, but they don't really get to see the vulnerable, 'I'm lonely or depressed,' I really can't be that Cleo (Cleo, Cambridge College)." Finding the balance of being strong activists who shine light on issues of oppression facing those in their community while also feeling vulnerable and authentic in sharing their own personal emotions was difficult for all of the women in the study. One participant shared "There's an intersectional problem where it's like, Trayvon Martin died but I'm also lonely." Having to ride the waves of trends of issues on social media related to hot topics it becomes difficult to find points of entry to discuss one's own personal identity and struggles and challenges.

4.4 COUNTERSTORYTELLING

Counterstorytelling allows us to develop new theories that will help us better understand those who are at the margins of society. A critical race lens challenges the separate discourses on race; gender and class by showing how these elements intersect to affect the experiences of student of color. These experiences are sources of strength and can offer liberatory or transformative solutions to racial and gender subordination (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002). According to Banks (1993), Eurocentric versions of US history reveal race to be socially constructed, created to differentiate racial groups and to show the superiority or dominance of one race over another. Like the experiences discussed in the study, using a master narrative to represent a group is bound to provide a narrow depiction and wipes out the complexities and richness of a group's cultural life. Throughout their collegiate experiences the women in this study continuously experience and at times themselves tell the story the majoritarian stories of their campus, which generate from a legacy of racial and gender privilege and express the privilege of both men and whites. Personal stories or narratives recount and individual's experiences with various forms of racism and sexism. Through their social media experience the women in the study all highlight aspects of their identity that speak to who they are as individuals and beyond the work of education and activism. From theater, to travel, to the examination of the impact of drill music in Chicago, the women in the study sought to reverse the expected narratives of what it means to be a black woman on their campus and beyond. Social media is utilized a vessel for telling their stories and promoting their interests.

4.4.1 Campus climate and experience

For the women discussion surrounding campus involvement opportunities on all three campuses spoke to their continuous attempts to push against the expectations placed upon them by the campus. On each campus, black women are highly involved with leadership opportunities ranging from student clubs and organizations to orientation and student government. Wallis a senior at Cambridge College shared that a majority of the black clubs on the Cambridge campus are run by women with the exception of the men of color alliance and if they could women would run that organization as well. Not only are they involved in existing organizations they are seeking to create new organizations and opportunities on each of their campuses. In her interview Katelyn discussed the creation of a new dance group at Cambridge to provide different experiences to the campus saying:

> Me and my best friends, we started the auxiliary line for the dancers for the band, but we don't have a band, but we did start the team for the actual dancers. We dance but we don't have a band. I felt like it would be a good diversity attraction, because people from the south love marching bands. I feel like it's a component of Cambridge that we need.

The women of Cambridge College discussed that the spring of 2015 saw an increase in the selection of black women to be Undergraduate Department Representatives (UDR). UDRs serve as peer advisors who provide academic and career information to major/minors and prospective students, conduct individual sessions with students on topics related to their program and serve as ambassadors for the department at special events. The roles of UDR is an academically prestigious student leader position on the Cambridge College campus and therefore the excitement of these positions being held by

black women was celebrated by many of the study participants on social media specifically Facebook. The increased excitement of these roles for the women at Cambridge came in that that black women were occupying roles that traditionally did not see representation by students of color including computer science and theater.

Figure 13. Facebook Post (Katelyn, Cambridge College)

Esther based her decision to apply for a leadership position with the Orientation program at the Oxford campus as a way to showcase a diversity of identity on campus. She shared "I'm one of the leaders of Orientation, so they [students] will see me, they will hear me speak opening night and know 'oh people actually have African accents here,' you know it's nothing to be ashamed about." In this quote Esther reflects on her identity as an African woman and experiencing pride about her identity and the unique experience it brings to Oxford. The women of Oxford and Cambridge celebrated their successes on social media and attributed popular hashtags like #blackgirlsmagic and #blackgirlsrock to highlight their continued involved in the campus community as well as continuing to change the narrative and expectation associated with black women on their campuses. Through their own meaning making participants refuse to allow the limiting views and perceptions held by members of their campus community to affect their participation and involvement on campus. The women in the study continue to

access leadership opportunities as well as create clubs and organizations to meet their specific needs as women of color on campus.

Finding the language whether on social media or in person to vocalize the importance of being recognized on campus is a journey that the 15 women in the study were each finding their way through. Having the opportunity to find one's voice and language surrounding identity was a meaningful component of the college experience for many women in the study. In the Oxford focus group it was shared:

> When I was younger I was even more critical of the things I was posting especially if they were political or activist because I knew that I could potentially have to defend myself and I didn't have the words. I didn't feel like I had it to defend myself, I agree Oxford has allowed me to grow in that and really develop in that way (Star, Oxford College).

Katelyn shared a similar experience at Cambridge:

> I was doing [majoring in] computer science, and I remember I wasn't going to do it, but I saw this one black girl, she was a TA, and I was like, "Oh, she's on it." She's black. She's a black woman. I'm a black woman. We can really do it together, and I think that it's important for black women to be in those spaces where they're not really thought of being in because of the fact that it's a lot of other black women who want to do those things but are discouraged because they're like, 'Oh, that's a white person's field.'

The concept of space both physical and virtual was important for all of the women in the study. On two of the three campuses studied, physical spaces have been created for students of color. At Oxford the space is designated specifically for black students while

at Cambridge the space is a multicultural center and within this space is an office for the black student organization. The women noted the importance of not only having space and but protecting the space so that it not lost for students that come after them. Having a physical space where programs take place and conversations that are challenging and education allows for development and understanding of one's own identity. Attending a predominately white institution places black women in spaces with people who may not understand their identity and experience. The importance of having a community of other black women, not only peers but faculty and staff to support the development and understanding of one's identity as a woman of color is beneficial and for some crucial to making the college experience meaningful. Being recognized on campus means that the institution must acknowledge that it is difficult for black women to not see themselves represented throughout the campus and therefore need a space where they can be nurtured and supported.

The findings in this study describe the experiences black women face in their existence as racialized and gendered beings on each campus examined. Although the mission and founding principles of each institution differs many of the ways in which black women experience marginalization and oppression are shared and reinforced on each campus. For the participants in the study their online and lived experiences constitute each other. Online and in person experiences are realities that layered and simultaneous constitute the experience of being a black women at all three campuses. Ava shared that: "I think it's [social media] a space that empowers certain types of people, so why not take that as a space to empower yourself to do the same thing?" Social media is a space in which participants are able to rectify the misperceptions and

judgments placed upon them by the non-black campus community and where they are able to share their truths, tell their own stories and educate their followers about issues affecting members of the black community. In addition social media is a learning space outside of the classroom where participants can read articles and engage in meaningful dialogue with followers. For the participants in the study while they would able to exist without social media, their social media participation provides them the opportunity to curate a space of existence dictated with their rules expectations unlike what they have to experience on each of their campuses. Better understanding what can and should be done by faculty and administrators to not only actively support black women but also shift institutional systems and policies is necessary to adjust the experiences of black women at each of these institutions.

5.0 CHAPTER 5

Nimako's (2014) "notion of parallel lives and intertwined belonging" (p. 59) can characterize the relationship between black students and their broader campus community. Black students occupy PWI's alongside other racial peer groups, yet they exist on these campuses with unique relationships to the institutions. For the women in the study, face-to-face experiences inform what is presented and performed, on social media, and social media experiences enhance or isolate their everyday lives as college students on their campuses. The aim of this dissertation was to understand the choices around performance of race and gender for black college women on social media and the connections of these choices to on their campus experience. Black women respond to and are affected by the campus environments in which they routinely encounter racial stress and stereotypes and choose to share some of these experiences on social media. Hybrid spaces merge the physical and digital social environment created by the mobility of users connected. Borders between digital and physical spaces are no longer clear and fixed but are blurred and not clearly distinguishable (e Silva, 2006).

CRT scholars have demonstrated the need to center race when interrogating educational structures, policies and discourse. Patton (2016) demonstrated the specific need to "disrupt postsecondary prose, or ordinary, predictable and taken for granted ways in which the academy functions as a bastion of race/white supremacy" (p.317). This chapter analyzes the experiences presented in the previous chapter and addresses the research question as well as implications for policy, research, and practice. The analyses of the research findings are organized in this chapter in the following manner: a) Invisible tax, b) Intra-racial relationships b) Whiteness as Property, c) Counterstorytelling

and d) Social media as a counterpublic. Recommendations for practice, and implications and future directions for research and scholarship are presented in response to the findings and analysis of this study's research question.

5.1 Analysis of Findings

5.1.1 Invisible Tax

While universities no longer explicitly exclude black students, racial hostility continues to circumscribe their experiences at predominately white institutions. The black women in this study experience the invisible tax, which acknowledges that black students' time and energy is disproportionately used to mitigate their experiences with anti-blackness through various forms of oppositional campus involvement and at times through use of social media. Black students must create alternative spaces of support for themselves within but separate from a university they find to be racially hostile (Givens, 2016). Wilder (2001) argues that while collectivism responds to external forces, it is also the basis for intragroup relations. Throughout history black culture has drew upon sources independent of white systems and behavior and created functions and structures independent of whites. "Collectivist notions were the organic product of real intellectual traditions and social relationships; they resonated because they were rooted in the African American institutional world" (Wilder, 2001 p. 4). Participants in the study acknowledged that in order for black women to be successful on their campuses, they must find spaces that feel comfortable and safe. As leaders on their campuses the women sought to create safe spaces also referred to by CRT scholars as counter-spaces.

Michel de Certeau's (1984) critical geography distinction between place and space explains that place is associated with those who have the power to own, manage,

control, and police space using "strategies," whereas space is connected to the oppressed who have no option but to adopt "tactics" to make some "space" in a "place" owned and controlled by the dominant group. Counter spaces are "created within African American student organizations, organizations, or offices that provide spaces to African American and other students, black fraternities, and sororities, peer groups and black student-organized academic study halls" (Givens, 2016 p. 70). Black students take up the labor required for creating and sustaining spaces that affirm their cultures and address their group specific challenges within the university campus. Through the creation of dance troupes and sororities, participants sought student engagement opportunities and leadership positions as mechanisms to enhance the quality of campus life for themselves and other black women on their campuses. In addition to the creation of new organizations, the women discussed the importance of participating in existing leadership opportunities. While these opportunities sometimes included cultural organizations, the women mainly sought involvement in opportunities that generally attract majority students. The Oxford participants discussed the excitement of black leadership at the helm of an organization where leadership has traditionally been white women. At Cambridge, Nina's desire to run for student government president came in transforming student government positions into opportunities for advocacy and encouraging more black students to participate.

Black student engagement is often experienced as a high-pressure obligation not only because of community accountability, but also because of the importance of creating communities and opportunities that assist in making the experience of attending predominately white institutions easier. Black students judge those who choose not to

actively engage in the organizations established for these purposes harshly. Givens (2016) describes the dynamics surrounding those considered "woke" or activists versus those who are not as the "invisible tax of communal expectation" (p. 18). Through peer educational systems and group accountability, the black women in this study expect one another and also black men to maintain engagement not just for their own personal benefit but for the work of making the campus experience better for the students that will come after them. Some participants used social media another means in which to conduct collective calls to actions for students of color to participate in activism efforts on campus for example, the Facebook page created by the students who protested at Cambridge College regularly announces activism efforts taking place on and off campus as a way to encourage students of color to continue engaging in dialogue and protest.

In addition to physical spaces of comfort the women acknowledged the importance of carving out virtual counterspaces that allow for support and acknowledgement of the physical encounters and experiences. Participants cited group text messages or Facebook messages with other black women as spaces in which they allow themselves to be vulnerable and authentic. Furthermore, they discussed using social media to advertise the opportunities to other black women in the community who may be interested in participating. In addition, some of the women in the study used their social media platforms as a space for call outs of specific non-black individuals, administrators or policies both on and off campus that they deem problematic. Many described their social media platforms as one of the few spaces in which they felt comfortable sharing thoughts that could be deemed controversial or divisive to their white peers on campus. For many of the students this comfort comes from their careful

vetting of Facebook friends or through restricting or curating who can view their posts. By sharing their positions online, they do find communities of individuals of their race and outside of their race who support and affirm their experiences.

The labor required for creating and sustaining these counterspaces functions as an invisible tax the women take up and explains the feelings of physical and emotional fatigue they described by participants in the study. Through a CRT lens Dumas and Ross (2016) discuss the importance of studying the schooling experiences of black people that further engages the complex social and historical particularities of blackness. Their framework seeks to address how anti-blackness informs and facilitates racist ideology and institutional practice and manifests through microaggressions. Coping with microaggressions forces the women in the study to spend their energy and personal resources constantly resisting mundane racism which distracts them from important, creative and productive areas of life (Smith, Allen & Danley, 2007). The consistent coping leads to what Smith et al. (2007) refers to as racial battle fatigue, the "result of constant physiological, cultural and emotional coping with racial microaggressions, in less than ideal and racially hostile or unsupportive environments" (p. 555). Relying on students of color, in particular black women to educate their white peers about racism is a form of racism itself, contributing to an ongoing sense of racial battle fatigue (Smith, Hung & Franklin, 2011). The invisible tax is both self-imposed by the women in the study for survival purposes and imposed upon them by an institutional climate that neglects their needs as students in a variety of ways.

While social media was sometimes described as a space where participants felt comfortable being vulnerable and authentic with each other, involvement in social media

also exacerbated the racist experiences and encounters with peers adding to their racial battle fatigue on campus. Participants contend with the problematic views and opinions of their peers in person *and* virtually. While not every participant was willing to engage in dialogue with those whose politics and views differ from their own, most described the emotions of indifference, frustration, anger and sadness in witnessing these posts. To combat these emotions, the women in this study work to sustain "subcultures" which assist in maintaining strong ties to their cultural heritage and persistence. They employ these tactics to cope with the microaggressions and racism, which they experience (Givens, 2016). Additionally they form close-knit communal ties with other black women, which take on mentor-teacher roles for one another. The women in the study recounted stories and experiences of other black women who socialized them to racial realities of their respective campus environments early on in their college experience. Harper (2013) coined the term "peer pedagogies" to describe the process in which black students assume the responsibility for the instruction of their same race peers at PWIs, specifically pertaining to navigating the campus racial climate. Several women in the study made references to upper class black women who assisted in meaning making surrounding the experience of being a person of color on each of their campuses. Social media posts reflecting on missing those individuals who have gone abroad or graduated from the institution are a constant reminder of the support systems women at each of the campuses create. Through these relationships participants gain social capital in the learning of norms and social objectives (Rowan-Kenyon, Martinez Aleman & Savitz-Romer, 2013). These spaces constructed through student led initiatives are necessary

coping mechanisms to challenge the experiences of isolation, exclusion and hypervisibility faced by participants on each of their campuses.

5.1.2 Intra-racial relationships

Despite expectations of intraracial solidarity, participants spoke to the complicated dynamics between black men and women. In August 2016 activist Ashleigh Shackelford wrote an open letter on Facebook publicly calling out black men for their lack of support of the killings of black women and specifically referenced the death of Korryn Gaines. Gaines was killed in her home during a standoff with police, but was dismissed by many black men on Twitter as a crazy woman who deserved her end. During the standoff Gaines allowed her partner to escape through the back of her home with her youngest child thus standing by her black man only to be largely ridiculed and panned by black men in her death. Shackelford sought to bring light to the imbalance of support between the issues affecting black men and black women in this country. She argued that when a black man is unjustly brutalized by police or killed, black women step into the front lines of protests and create #protectOurMen and #blackboysmatter hashtags on social media to show that black men's and black boy's lives matter. However, when a black woman or girl suffers rape or murder, there is largely silence and at times a justification for the injustice from black men. This is all with the exception of a few male voices that do speak up in the defense of black women (BGLG, 2016). This dynamic translates onto the campuses of the women in this study as participants discussed that black men and women experience their institutions in very different ways. The women in the study cited feeling invisible amongst white students and black men on campus. While Oxford is all women's institution participants also spoke of feeling invisible in the

interactions with black men at parties and other social environments on their campus as well as at other institutions. The women discussed feeling frustrated with black men for their apathy, inability to take on causes, and lack of support they provide in the activism taking place on their campuses. The women in the study wanted to be acknowledged and supported by black men for their efforts to make their campuses better, as black men stand to gain from this work.

All of the women in the study discussed that the frustrations they experience from black men are issues they never seek to share on social media. Participants recognized the need for black men to do more and take on more responsibility with their activism and involvement, but did not feel it was appropriate politically to publically call out black men on social media. Women in the study reflected on the personal relationships they have with black men as brothers, boyfriends, and best friends and did not feel comfortable publicly shaming them. According to Crenshaw (1991) the imposition of oppression exacerbated the disempowerment of those already subordinated by other structures of domination. The "double jeopardy" that Crenshaw discusses in which black women must choose between confronting sexism or racism in their experiences takes on a new meaning when the women in the study discuss their hesitation to publicly speak out about the problematic experiences they encounter with black men. Choosing instead to publicly support, acknowledge and protest the oppression facing those same men, women in this study choose to focus on racism in public posts, and not on sexism. Crenshaw (1991) concludes that recognizing the ways in which the intersectional experiences of women of color are marginalized does not require that we surrender attempts to organize as communities of color and give voice to the oppressions facing

black men. Instead intersectionality allows for a re-conceptualizing of race as a coalition between men and women of color.

Black women are expected to understand the perspectives and advocate for black men in efforts for further recognition as human beings and citizens in the United States. Having media that allow for the creation of space for the voices of black women to be heard provides black women a voice and opinion and publicly declares that they have a right to be heard and to exist and be celebrated. Neglecting to listen to the stories of black women and rendering them invisible is failing to offer them respect and humanity. Martinez Alemán and Wartman (2008) discuss student usage of Facebook to explore new forms of self-expression and impression management. The findings in this study update the literature on social media suggesting that participants seek to share their experiences in their own voices in order to change the tropes and narratives associated with them. Harris-Perry (2011) reminds us that through entertainment specifically reality television, black women are defined as stereotypes. Participants strive to show accurate perspectives of their identity and amplify their voices, voices that at times are seen as aggressive and angry. Online spaces allow for the celebration of black womanhood when others including black men choose not to. The women in the study desperately seek spaces for storytelling, sharing news, and examining the world from their unique perspective. They use online spaces to center themselves and their experiences while also enacting change on behalf of others including black men.

5.1.3 Whiteness as Property

In her essay "Whiteness as Property," Cheryl Harris (1993) traces how whiteness evolved from a racial identity to a form of protected property and argues that whiteness

was first constructed to secure specific entitlement to domination over black and indigenous peoples, and after the end of formal racial segregation, continued to preserve for whites certain benefits in social status, material resources and political power. Ferguson (2012) argued that the academy modeled for the state how to quell minority resistance in a manner that preserved systems of power:

> With the admission of women and people of color into the predominately white academic setting, the economic character of the American academy did not simply vanish. The academy would begin to put, keep in reserve, and save minoritized subjects and knowledges in an archival fashion, that is, by devising ways to make those subjects and knowledges respect power and its "laws". (p. 12)

Power as manifested in higher education institutions is an extension of white supremacist capitalism produced by a formula for "redefining and perfecting its practice of exclusion and regulation" (Ferguson, 2012 p.12). Institutional power at each of these three campuses reinforces the notion that being white is most valuable and important. The demands submitted by students at each of the three campuses requested increases in the admission and retention of black students while also calling for systemic changes including critical examinations of course curriculum as well as audits and adjustments of spaces where hierarchical racist paradigms exist within each institution. Because whiteness as property is so rarely acknowledged, claims for redress like the demands by students at each campus can become viewed as an unwarranted and unequal taking from whites, even as they operationalize their whiteness to maintain and increase advantage (Dumas & Ross, 2016).

When discussing racial and gender performances participants referred to experiences that center the perpetuation and reinforcement of systems of white supremacy. These experiences ultimately allow for the success and progress of their white peers over students of color. At each of their campuses, participants make conscious choices about their performance of race and gender in order to be accepted by the members of their campus community, including faculty and staff. In her discussion of how the audience at events dictates the styling of her hair, Wallis offers an example of one way in which women in the study make choices surrounding identity performance. She discussed not wanting her hair to be "distracting" when in meetings with campus administrators. As Rooks (1996) affirms, "hair…spoke to racial identity politics as well as bonding between African American women. Its style could lead to acceptance or rejection from certain groups and social classes, and its styling could provide the possibility of a career" (p. 5-6). While this observation is a historical one, the issues revealed are relevant today. The participants in the study seek to promote racial and social uplift for themselves, peers and those who come later, understanding they must perform identity within the existing pervasive system of whiteness. Harris (1993) explains that "it is crucial to be white, to be identified as white, to have the property of being white" (p. 1721). The women in the study balance the consciousness of integrationist ideals that determine particular manners of consumption of dress and hair that will allow them to be seen and accepted in their campus communities with the nationalist leanings that may speak to wearing their hair naturally or not dressing to the White conservative or preppy norms of their campus environment. The social media performances of participants reflected these choices through posts and articles discussing

the appreciation of black women's identity including hair and as well the varying shapes and sizes. Furthermore, social media are one of the few spaces in which the consideration around hair performance were not necessary.

In 2016 singer Solange Knowles released the album *A Seat at the Table*. The album was described as a "musical representation of the spirit within an unapologetically black woman who is not interested in remaining silent in a critical time of identity, empowerment, grief, healing and self-expression" (Mitchell, 2016). Following the album release, a syllabus was created intentionally by young black women across the country to delve into the themes of the record including race, womanhood, and equality. The syllabus sought to collect texts, music, and visual art that spoke to the experiences of black women.

The song titled "Don't Touch My Hair" describes the pressure for black women to fit a specific norm and look a particular way. With the lyrics "don't touch my hair, when it's the feelings I wear" Solange's song can be read as a simple establishment of boundaries, or as a powerful pledge of personal identity. The attack frequently launched against black people is that they are the other or the lesser. This can be seen when presidential candidates describe the experiences of black people to be of urban poverty and crime, or when the voices of black women are left out of conversations surrounding feminism or the empowerment of women. In the song Solange sought to remind black women to be proud of the strength they conjure up daily to survive. Through pictures on social media the women in the study were able to capture and put forth the performances of race and gender that align with their identities despite how they have to wear their hair on their campuses day to day. Many of the women discussed posting pictures with their

natural hair, instead of the styles they wear on campus. Many posted photos of themselves smiling, an effect that they did not generally carry on campus. Both of these kinds of posts spoke to their ability to be authentic in their identity as women of color. Many discussed feeling free to post and share photos that speak to who they are and what they want people to see using terms like "happy" and "carefree" and describing the joy they felt when they reflected on the experiences connected the photo as well the posting of the photo. The hashtag "black girl joy" was frequently used on pictures posted of themselves and engaging in activities that felt authentic. These performances were for other black women on their campuses as well as their black friends on other campuses to showcase joyful moments, not for their white peers.

On all three campuses, Facebook was the platform most used by all of the participants in the study. Several women commented that prior to college they were not active on the site but this changed when they learned that Facebook was the primary mode of communication on their campus. For Cambridge and Oxford, Facebook was a platform used by all students and failure to be active on the site could result in missing out on events and discussions happening on campus. The women in the study experienced feeling hyper-visible on social media. All of the women talk of feeling watched and at times judged on social media. Participants used privacy settings on Facebook specifically to curate an environment of users with whom they felt comfortable sharing opinions and feelings, without fear that those opinions would jeopardize their ability to garner internships or jobs following graduation. The women acknowledged that the curating of a social media profile is something with which all college students must contend. However as black women, many of them felt the stakes were higher and there

was more to lose if something on their profiles is deemed inappropriate or offensive to a white viewer. All of the women at Cambridge College referenced the experiences of Khadijah Lynch as an example of what they would not want to experience. Lynch's tweet regarding the death of two New York City police offices was sent to conservative news sites by a white student on campus and created a firestorm of articles and opinions on how the university should handle what was written. In her interviews, Ava acknowledged her friendship with Khadijah and specifically spoke to her nervousness and anxiousness of being vocal both on campus at meetings, as well as on social media. Ava feared receiving death threats if her social media profile was sent to conservative news organizations or any of her comments were picked up and reposted. The harassment that black women experience online must also be discussed. Comedian Leslie Jones experiences on Twitter are examples of abuse on social media. Jones retweeted racist tweets comparing her to a gorilla and calling her "extremely ugly." Public outcry and support was expressed for Jones and the hashtag "LoveforLeslieJ" was created to combat the abuse. Ava's fear of backlash regarding posts and comments speaks to the issue of abuse experienced by black women on social media. Black women have always been the target of harassment and violence in white dominated spaces. Social media can be an inspirational tool but also an extension of structures of racism and sexism. Social media can be a breeding ground for racist and misogynistic users. Black women are forced to make choices in their social media participation for the sake of their sanity and self-care.

5.1.4 Counterstorytelling

Counterstories exemplify challenges to dominant narratives that can represent other truths and lived experiences that directly refute hegemony (Terry, 2011). The

recognition and acceptance of stories told from an alternative to the norm challenge and expose the hierarchical and patriarchal social order (Montoya, 1995) In this study centering experiences and bringing light to the voices of the women in the study is a form of counterstorytelling. Women's social media posts can also be similarly characterized and understood.

Students of color choose nontraditional settings, such as ethnic student organizations as their primary venue for involvement at predominately white institutions (Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001). They engage in these activities as a way to establish connections with faculty members, give back to the African American community and connect to African American peers. Through the creation of new student organizations, which speak to interests of black women on campus, the women in the study sought to shape and influence campus spaces to reflect their racialized positions rather than integrating into existing organizations created by white peers. Having the ability to set structure, guidelines and expectations of their organizations with little feedback from the majority campus community empowered the women in the study. Furthermore participation in these organizations does not require the women in the study to detach themselves from their cultures of origin and adopt the values, assumptions and norms of the dominant campus culture (Tinto, 1993).

In new and existing student organizations, the women in the study reflected on the importance of showcasing the diversity of blackness and black identity. With the leadership of their society being black women, the women of Oxford discussed the opportunities for programming and education on black women in the arts. The women were excited about viewing a documentary on Nina Simone and showcasing artwork

done by black women. Student organizations vessels by which the women in the study dismantle the negative perceptions and notions of what it means to be a black woman on campus. In addition, black women are able to see themselves and those who came before them in a positive light, affirming their own identities. These are also spaces in which women are implementing events without the need for permission or approval by campus administrators, faculty members or many of their peers on campus including black men which further empowers them.

5.1.4.1 Social Media as a Counterpublic

Nancy Fraser (1989) defines counterpublics as "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses to formulate oppositional interpretation of their identities, interests and needs" (p.123). Fraser further argued, "counterpublics have a dual character. On the one hand they function as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment; on the other hand they also function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed towards wider publics" (p.68). Spaces in the physical environment can be policed by identifying its members and by using physical barriers to circumscribe a given area. Participants in the study described feelings of isolation throughout campus including residence hall rooms. However social media provides an environment where black women can authentically speak to their experiences with few barriers to interaction. As counterpublic spaces, then, social media serves as a space for counterstorytelling for these black women.

The participants in the study use social media as a counterpublic space to disrupt the dominant discourse of the negative perceptions and stereotyping they experience on their campuses. Participants curate social media pages and followers that will not only

support their identity as black women but will continue their education and reflection on issues affecting black people. The women of the study make choices around who will see posts their posts and when they are willing to invite conversation and dialogue surrounding the content they post. They also choose to be active bystanders and interrupt problematic dialogue they encounter on posts of black women they are connected to on social media platforms. Through the sharing of articles, participants seek to educate themselves about their feelings, beliefs and attitudes about their identity as women of color. In the observational interviews, all of the women in the study acknowledged using Facebook as a space to remind other users about issues of violence and brutality that also affects black women. Black women strive for the conversation surrounding oppression and systemic racism and violence to recognize their own oppression and complicate the notion that only young black men are living in fear for their lives (Chatelain & Asoka, 2015). They use social media to continue to say the names Sandra Bland and Korryn Gaines and others as a measure of their own representation and remembrance of the experiences of black women in this country.

Social media also allows the women in the study a space to showcase pride in their identity as black women. In observational interviews all of the women reflected that Facebook photos that are posted on the platform capture how they feel about themselves and therefore what they want others to see about them. Whether through Esther's picture holding the Kenyan flag with other Kenyan peers at the Boston Marathon, or pictures of the women while they study abroad or attending conferences on behalf of their institutions, participants were always excited about sharing aspects of their lives that represent the joy they have about their identity. The women make conscious choices

about sharing pictures and posts that capture the magic of black girls (#blackgirl magic), the experiences of joy they encounter (#blackgirljoy) and the talents they possesses (#blackgirlsrock). Representing black womanness as engaged, proactive, forward-moving, and embracing joy is a counterstory being told on these social media spaces.

5.2. Implications for Policy in Higher Education

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2015 black women earned 11 percent of all bachelor's degree, 13 percent of all masters' degrees and 9 percent of all doctorates awarded to students in the United States. By both race and gender, a higher percentage of black women (9.7 percent) are enrolled in college than any other group (Helm, 2016). The increasing enrollment and participation of black women indicate institutions of higher education must adopt strategies to support the continued success of this group of students. The experiential reality of black women on predominately white campuses is comprised of feelings of isolation as well as covert and overt racism and sexism. The implications for practice underscore the continuing significance of racism and sexism in the everyday lives of black women and the ways in which higher education professionals must work to dismantle these existing systems of oppression. Policy implications that will be addressed include the creation of programs and initiatives that seek to recognize black women as an entity within higher education worthy of support and outreach, as well as the further examination of how white supremacy is embedded in the work of higher education professionals and finally the ways in which institutional policies can be drafted to examine and leverage the use of social media by black college women.

5.2.1 The recognition of black women within higher education

Black women take on the responsibility of having to protect and protest on behalf of others while also being expected to be calm, collected and pragmatic. The women in the study recognized the current and potential consequences on their health, psychological well-being and emotional stability caused by the racial battle fatigue they experience. Building and maintaining social support networks are essential mediating factors for black women (Everett, Camille Hall & Hamilton-Mason, 2010), and participants in this study assumed the responsibilities to make their own supportive connections in this campus community. It is important for higher education professionals to both recognize the challenges that face black women on the campuses of predominately white institutions face and to do more to support them.

The creation of safe spaces specifically for black women to engage in reflection, active learning and developing critical thinking about their identities is necessary. In her research on black cultural centers on college campuses Patton (2006) found that the physical presence of the buildings along with the human aspects represent the recognition of black culture, people and history and provide positive interactions for those who visit the center. These factors provide a context for students to learn about themselves and feel appreciated and supported at predominately white institutions. Winkle-Wagner (2009) also suggested establishing safe spaces for black women to be with other black women and encouraged colleges to establish "liminal space on campus" where black women can be with women with less focus on their race. Understanding that racism is a permanent fixture within colleges and universities and that many campus environments promote what Harper (2012) refers to as "racial silence" (p. 15), creation of safe spaces for black women must be accompanied with the acknowledgement of the violence and

oppression perpetuated against students of color on predominately white campuses. Critical race theory reminds us that property differences manifest themselves in various ways on college campuses and the allocation of space specifically for black women to engage in dialogue, reflection and education can be seen as a radical act it prioritizes the interests and experiences of a population historically silenced at each of these campuses. Allocation of space as well as the financial resources to maintain these spaces at predominately white institutions cans be seen as a promising first step in supporting black women.

The participants of the study desired spaces to be with other black women that no outsider could penetrate. In addition to the creation of physical spaces for black women, PWI's must also support the creation of social media spaces dedicated to building networks of support for black women. Spaces on Facebook or Tumblr that provide a diversity of environments for black women to think and talk in can result in encouragement, friendship and entertainment. Each year student affairs and admissions professionals should work collaboratively to support junior and senior black women on campus to ensure that outreach and access to these online spaces is provided to all incoming black female students. These spaces offer opportunities for mentorship among black women as well as access to social capitol. Having online spaces where women can seek help and express feelings and concerns in a closed network of peers may enhance perceptions of social support as well as engender positive experiences during their college experience. In these spaces junior and senior black women can discuss how they have used social media to develop online counterspaces that celebrate and support their black womanness. Administrators and faculty of color as well as white higher education

professionals experienced in tenets of critical race theory should provide support and guidance. It is necessary to provide black women online spaces that allow the development of ideas and feelings in the company of trusted peers, where they do not have to make explicit their assumptions and values but also have the freedom to talk about the things that matter to them.

In literature and conversations during the admissions process, many PWI's make commitments to addressing the needs of black college students, yet struggle to develop successful programs that provide positive climate and support a successful academic experience. Higher education has seen the intentional creation of research, scholarship and programming surrounding the experiences of black men in college including Dr. Shaun Harper's National Black Male College Achievement study and Dr. Walter Kimbrough's Black Male Initiative Program. While researchers and administrators are becoming more aware of the need to make specific overtures toward black men, intentional programs that seek to support and empower black women must also be created. We must offer more support for black women and create stronger networks and establish new programs of service to meet the diverse needs of black women (Rosales & Person, 2003). Higher education professionals must assume the responsibility of creating and supporting through financial and human resources supportive environments for black women (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003). The expectation should not simply be placed on black faculty to mentor and support black women. Instead student affairs professionals must take on the work of building cross-cultural competence as well as an understanding of critical race theory in an effort to connect with black women and form significant relationships of depth and impact. The process begins with professionals

taking the time to understand the voices of black women, disaggregate their experiences and understand the invisible taxes exerted upon this population. This process of support and outreach through mentorship should be undertaken while institutions actively work toward increasing the number of black female faculty members and staff. Until predominately white institutions achieve diversity among faculty and staff it is essential that culturally competent mentors be trained to meet the needs of black women (Bartman, 2015).

This education of higher education professionals surrounding tenets of CRT can be augmented online in a variety of ways. First, through active engagement in the social media platforms that black women are consuming specifically Facebook, Tumblr and Twitter. Following black activists and educators such as Johnetta Elzie founder of wetheprotestors.org and Alicia Garza, one of the founders of the Black Lives Matter movement, who both discuss the intersection of race and gender in the black freedom struggle and share articles and posts can assist educators in learning more about current issues affecting the black community specifically black women. Another example is through watching YouTube videos like the MTV web series *Decoded*. The series tackles issues of race and culture through the use of sketch comedy and is hosted by Franchesca Ramsey, a black woman, who rose to prominence when a short video she produced of shit white people say to black people went viral. Higher education professionals must be committed to staying current to the social media platforms, articles, blogs and videos black women are consuming in order to be culturally competent to the needs of this population.

5.2.2 CRT and Higher Education

Critical race theory is well positioned as a critical paradigm to understand students' racial identity development. Due to the absence of racial diversity in many of the foundational theories in student development literature, critical race theory offers a different perspective to view student development with the acknowledgement of white supremacy and where, how and why it is performed. Centering race underscores the amorphous and pervasive impact of white supremacy and how it pervades not only institutional policy and practice but also, everyday educational experiences of everyone involved in the educational function (Cook & Dixson, 2013). CRT offers much utility for determining the "why" to the question of change. Much of the literature surrounding CRT underscores the pervasiveness of how white superiority and its performative discourse of whiteness is very much the cornerstone of higher education delivery.

Institutions have not seriously engaged in disrupting the racist status quo. Doing so requires acknowledgement of and space for envisioning a campus where students of color are valued and all are educated about realities of race and racism (Patton 2016, Harper & Patton, 2007). For the women in the study their nuanced experiences shape the racial realities of college life. Higher education's unjust systemic devaluing of people of color contributes to a dominant narrative in which stereotypes are propagated with no recourse or remedy (Patton, 2016). Seventy-nine percent of faculty members are white and comprise the majority of full professors, endowed chairs, college and university presidents and trustees. White men are the primary beneficiaries of leadership positions in post secondary institutions, with the exception of historically black institutions and some minority serving institutions (Patton, 2016). Predominately white institutions suppress the voices of racially marginalized groups through the negative campus racial

climates. Paolo Freire (1970) suggests that oppression is best understood through the voices of those experience it. Higher education and student affairs professionals must be open to recognizing the entrenchment of race and oppression and working to incorporate a critical race perspective into the daily practice of work. One example of how this can be done is through the creation of inclusive environments for African American faculty in student affairs preparation programs. These programs should not only focus on the recruitment of African American faculty (or other faculty of color) but also their retention and positive mentoring from White allies (Patton and Catching, 2009). Encouraging black faculty to use social media as a space to share articles published and engage in discussion outside of the classroom may also aid in creating online cohorts of support for faculty of color that assist in mentorship and retention in the academy. Examples include higher education faculty member Dr. Dafina Lazurus Stewart who uses zer twitter account to tweet about race, sexuality and gender in in higher education from a critical lens. Accessing social media as a space to engage in academic thought and experience with other researchers and faculty creates networks that are useful for support for black faculty in higher education.

Patton (2016) argues that little change will occur in the functioning of higher education given the stagnant nature of the leadership, policies, racial climate, curriculum and culture, which are deeply rooted in whiteness and she argues that students are educated in white supremacy as they pursue a "higher" education. Harper and Patton (2007) stated,

> It is entirely possible for students to graduate from college without critically reflecting on their racist views, never having engaged in meaningful

> conversations about race, using racially offensive language unknowingly…Oftentimes educators are responsible for letting students and ourselves off the hood rather than engaging the conversation and the necessary subsequent action. (p.2)

Too often professionals perpetuate the status quo or one group's construction of what is "normal" without examining the deeper role of race. When professionals recognize the complicity of their actions in maintaining campus environments that oppress non-dominant populations they can move toward realizing the goals of social justice (Patton et al., 2007). Critical race theory is framed upon the interplay between systemic structures and their impact on the individual and community. The higher education professional is always positioned within the context bound by the historical past of the institution and the contemporary lived experience of the students attending the institution. Higher education professionals are called to be architects of and create different kinds of counterspaces that "foster a 'critical' resistance to interrupt hegemonic discourse within student development work" (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015 p. 71).

Black Twitter is an example of an online space that should be utilized by higher education professionals. This was the network responsible for focusing the nation's attention to the killing of Mike Brown and has launched campaigns that criticize incidents of tone deafness and while giving voice to hashtags campaigns including: #BringBackOurGirls bringing attention to the abduction of 300 Nigerian schoolgirls and #YouOKsis raising awareness for street harassment. This online space provides a unique opportunity for higher education professionals to learn about black people and the experiences of oppression and marginalization experienced without placing the invisible

tax onto black female students on campus. It is an example of a space that non-black users can easily opt in to and learn very necessary information about facets of black culture and identity. Higher education professionals must use online spaces like Black Twitter for glimpses into the hashtags, conversations and efforts affecting black citizens. This space can be used as tool to better understand and connect the experiences facing black women in the country to what may be happening on campuses and assist in providing new and intentional strategies in the support of black women at PWI's.

5.2.3 Social media and higher education

Social media is now a key means for helping students develop, negotiate and critically examine both salient and divergent viewpoints that would not otherwise be accessible to them. Social networking has provided outlets for students to connect with marginalized populations, build networks that seek to expose oppression and its causes, and lobby for fundamental change on the campuses and in wider society. Students are developing their voices in order to position themselves as knowledge producers and through social media transform themselves into activists. In addition to the physical counter spaces that must be created, virtual counter spaces need to be explored and created as well. These spaces will allow black women to create social networks of common interest, increase social capital, and catalyze social solidarity through common interests (Porfillo, Roychoudry & Gardner, 2013). The women in this study and many black women at predominately white institutions have entered what Bhaba (1994) calls "the territory of the right to narrate (p.51)". These women are asserting their right to tell a different story about what it means to be a student at the institution and these stories challenge the normative and majoritarian tale of the experience of attending an institution

of higher education. Student affairs professionals must support and provide space for these voices to exist. Marginalized students are often familiar with their groups' voices being silenced in classroom discourse and beliefs discounted however, counterspaces like social media allow black students to foster their own learning and identity and to nurture a supportive environment where their experiences are validated and viewed as important (Solórzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000)

Cultivating an environment where each student may find their ecological niche is a responsibility for educators within educational institutions. The value of designing and maintaining aesthetically pleasing and physically attractive campuses is not new to the higher education landscape. However, higher education must adapt with technology and shift its thinking about social media spaces from being stepping stones toward on campus engagement to potentially meaningful and even transformative experiences in their own right (Wakeford, 2000). Online engagement with social media presents an opportunity for higher education practitioners to understand students' identity development processes in a more nuanced way. Student affairs professionals have the opportunity to engage students in the development of their identities that are increasingly managed at least partially online.

5.3 Future Areas of Study

According to legal scholar Derrick Bell (1992), if we face up to the reality of racism and the role it plays in society and understand that it is not simply an aberration but rather a necessary stabilizing influence in a society, it means we are able to face the real problems and fashion tactics and strategies that are likely to be more effective and lead to more meaningful endeavors. Once we adapt a different outlook to the causes of

racism and how we deal with it, institutions and individuals will be able to create policies and engage in practices that make more sense in our world**.**

Future research should examine the nuanced experiences that black women face during their college experience in their face-to-face experiences on campus and on their campus directed use of social media. All of the women discussed the importance of their co-curricular involvement to their campus experience and therefore further examination about the ways in which black women's racialized experiences impact their campus engagement and identities on an offline is important. Future research should also explore the ways that the experience of gendered racial microaggressions on and offline affect the mental and physical health of black women students.

The year 2014 found black female activists using their virtual voices to mobilize movements to address pivotal issues affecting the black community specifically black women. This activism spilled onto college campuses with protests that took place nationwide. As students of color continue to protest the current president and the racist and anti immigrant policies instituted, the use and effects of social media in the activism of black college women should be examined.

5.4 Conclusion

The Cambridge College African and Afro American Studies department released a statement during the social media firestorm of Khadijah Lynch tweets in which they sought to offer context to Lynch's tweets:

> In 1961, the great American writer James Baldwin poignantly noted that, 'To be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious is to be in a rage almost all the time.' While it may be easy and convenient at this emotionally charged

> moment to condemn Ms. Lynch, we must also strive to understand why she would make these comments. This means openly and honestly recognizing the very real pain and frustration that many young people of color struggle with in trying to navigate their place in a society that all too often delegitimizes their existence.

The women in this dissertation study are not concerned with bending to the demands of respectability politics but rather carving out spaces on their campuses and online that allow them to be authentic and engage in campus life without experiencing racism, sexism and oppression from faculty, staff and peers. Fanon (1963) notes that "the work of the colonist is to make even dreams of liberty impossible for the colonized. The work of the colonized is to imagine every possible method of annihilating the colonist" (Fanon, 1963, p. 50). Participants in the study use social media to present their reality a counter-reality, to engage in peer pedagogies, and to endure the racially disenfranchising experiences they encounter in college. The findings from this dissertation contribute to the growing literature on social media on college campuses by describing the ways in which social media is utilized to present an alternative to reality to the one experienced on each campus. This study also advocates for social media policies, programs and initiatives that seek to dismantle systems of racism, sexism and oppression that affect the experiences of black women as well as students of color at predominately white institutions.

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APPENDIX A. PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

BOSTON COLLEGE
Department of Education Leadership and Higher Education

Research Study: Racial and gender performances of African American women on social media

Researcher Name: Alana Anderson

Project Consent Form
What is the Research?
You have been asked to take part in a research study about how race and gender are presented on social media platforms. The purpose of this study is to understand how you share your race and gender on social media and how this presentation of your identity affects your student experience.

Why have I been asked to take part?
You are an undergraduate at a predominately white institution and identify as an African American woman. We would like you to participate in this study to understand how your race and gender affects how you approach and participate within social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) and the effects of this on your student experience your institution.

If you agree to participate in this study we will ask that you will:

- Participate in an interview no longer than 60 minutes with the researcher of this project about your social media use and student experience. The interview will take place and be audio recorded between April–May 2016.
- Participate in a 1:1 observation lasting no longer 45 minutes following your individual interview. The researcher will sit with you individually and observe and examine your preferred social media profile. You will be asked to screenshot the profile page that is observed and email it to the researcher. No personal or identifying information or activities about anyone within your networks will be disclosed.
- Participate in a focus group lasting no more than 1 hour in the month of May 2016. The focus group will ask you to collectively validate or dispute the initial findings identified by the research. The focus group will be audio recorded.

Voluntary Participation

- Participation in this project is voluntary-you do not have to take part if you do not want to.

- If you do not take part, it will have no effect on your student record.
- If any aspect of the study makes you feel uncomfortable, you do not have to participate in the study.
- You may leave the study at any time for any reason.
- You may skip any questions you do not want to answer at any time, for any reason.
- You may ask to turn off the audio recording of this interview at any time, for any reason.
- The PI can withdraw a participant if there is a failure to comply with the study requirements.

Risks

- This study may include risks that are unknown at this time.
- There may be possible psychological risk when discussing encounters of racialized aggressions if a student is recalling a traumatic experience they faced in social media.
- If a participant becomes upset, or uncomfortable during this study, the participant will be given the option to end their participation at any time. Additionally, a list of campus resources will be provided to the participant for him/her to utilize. These resources include, but are not limited to University Counseling Services, the Dean of Students Office, and University Police.
- Anonymity cannot be guaranteed during the focus group portion of this study, but every attempt will be made to maintain confidentiality of individual's responses.

Benefits

- Participants will have a chance to reflect on what effects their race and gender have on their social media participation and their overall student experience. This information may be helpful to administrators tasked with supporting this population and the difficulties they may face on campus.
- The results of this research may be presented at meetings or in published articles.

Privacy

- Your privacy will be protected.
- Your name will not be used in any report that is published. Any reference to your identity will be through a pseudonym.
- The study components will be kept strictly confidential.
- All research data will be stored in a locked file cabinet, and the audio recording of your interview will be erased after the data has been analyzed.
- If a BC researcher finds out during the talk that that child abuse or neglect is suspected, the BC researcher is required by law to report suspected child abuse or neglect to state officials as required by Massachusetts State law.
- We will make every effort to keep your research records confidential, but it cannot be assured.
- The Boston College IRB or Federal Agencies overseeing human subject research may look at records that identify you and the consent form signed by you.

- If the tape recorder is used, it will only be used to remind researchers what was said during the interview.
- The facilitators of all components of the project, including graduate students, have been trained in CITI human subjects' certification.

Payment

- You will receive a $10 certificate to the campus bookstore at the completion of the study.

Costs

- There is no associated cost for you to take part in this study, other than the time that has been stated in the outline of this project. You will not be required to contribute any monetary funds, or other costs that have not been described in this consent form.

Audiotape Permission

- I have been told that the interviews/focus groups/observation will be tape recorded only if I agree.
- I have been told that I can state that I don't want the discussion to be taped and it will not be. I can ask that the tape be turned off at any time.

I agree to be audio taped ___Yes ___No

Questions

I have been given the opportunity to ask any questions I wish regarding this evaluation. If I have any additional questions about the evaluation, I may call Alana Anderson at 646-765-8315.

If I have any questions about my rights as a research subject, I may contact the Boston College Office for Research Protections at (617) 552-4778 or irb@bc.edu, and I will receive a copy of the consent form.

I have received a copy of this form ___Yes ___No

Please print your name below and check yes or no if you want/do not to participate in this study. Please sign your name at the bottom.

_____

NAME

___ Yes, I would like to take part in this study.

___ No, I would not like to participate in this study

_____ _____

SIGNATURE DATE

APPENDIX B. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Racial and gender performances of African American women on social media

Objective:

- To learn about how African American college women present themselves on social media.
- To document African American college women's' experience on social media.
- To gain student perspectives regarding their experiences at a PWI.
- To examine how African American college women understand race and gender through the lens of social media.

Individual Interview Instructions:

- All individual interviews should be booked for an hour, with the goal of at least 45 minutes being spent on the interviews. Following this interview schedule a time for a 30-minute observation of the students social media use.
- Throughout and following the interview process write down any notes that will be helpful during data analysis.

INTERVIEW AGENDA

- Welcome Introductions
- Review agenda and purpose of interview
- Remind student of the consent form they signed as a condition to this study and say:
    - *This interview is voluntary- you not have to take part if you do not want to. If you find any questions uncomfortable, it's OK not to answer them. You can leave the interview at any time. Your privacy has been and will continue to be protected. We will not use your real name in any report or published research. The interview is kept confidential."*

- Identify use of recorder
- Interview Questions
- Wrap Up
- Schedule follow up meeting for observation of social media

INTRODUCTIONS

1. I would like to get to know a little bit about you:
    a. Can you tell me your hometown? Class Year? Academic interests? Major?
    b. Why did you choose to attend this institution?

RACIAL & GENDER IDENTIY

1. I am interested in learning more about your experience as an African American woman on this campus. How do you think African American students are perceived on campus?
2. How would you describe the experience of being African American student on this campus?
3. How would you describe the experience of being an African American woman on this campus?
4. How does your personal experience align or contradict the perception of the African American experience by the campus community?

SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

I'd like to now talk about your use of social media:

1. Can you tell what specific social media platforms you use the most to post/message?
    a. How often do you use social media? Why those platforms?

2. Can you tell me about your privacy settings?
    a. Do you keep your profile pages open or private?
        i. Why?
    b. Are your posts different on each of the sites you are active on?
    c. How are they different?
    d. Why are they different?
    e. Who will see these posts?
    f. Do you place any limitations do you place on your posts?

g. Are most of the people that you are connected with on social media the same race or ethnicity as you?

3. Can you describe the types of messages you typically post?
    a. What if any aspects of your personal life do you share on social media (*sexual orientation, relationship status, religion, etc.)?*
    b. When you post messages are you looking for a particular response from the people who can see the post (*liking or favoring pictures or statuses, having messages retweeted*)
    c. Do you take into consideration who will be viewing your post before you post it?
    d. Have you ever taken down a post because of the feedback you've received from it?

RACE AND SOCIAL MEDIA

As you think about your overall social media experience I would like to start examining your experience relative to elements of your identity particularly race.

1. How do you notice race or ethnicity talked about on social media?
2. Do current events regarding race affect what and how you post on social media regarding race?
3. Do you post message about your racial/ethnic experiences?
    a. If so what?
4. Tell me what you do when you come across or experience an offensive or insensitive post on social media related to race or ethnicity?
5. Do you spend any time thinking about these messages?
    a. What do you think about? If no, why not?
    b. How do you feel when you encounter these messages/posts
    c. Tell me what makes you respond to these messages?
        i. If so, how do you respond?
        ii. How long does it take you to respond?
        iii. Do you ever unfollow, block, or disconnect someone who posts these messages? Why or why not?
6. When you experience negative racial posts (i.e. *people using derogatory racial slurs? People demeaning your racial heritage? People asserting your racial heritage is inferior?)* on social media, what do you do?
    a. Do you respond? If so how?
7. Have you ever engaged in negative racial/ethnic stereotyping on social media?
    a. Can you give an example?
    b. What prompted you to post?

GENDER & SOCIAL MEDIA

Building on our topics thus far, I would like to have you think about how your gender identity is at work within your social media experience.

1. How do you notice gender talked about on social media?
2. Are there posts or messages discussed that you notice on social media that are specific to being the experiences of African American woman?
    a. If yes what are they?

3. Do current events regarding gender affect what and how you post on social media regarding gender?
    a. If yes what are some examples
4. Tell me what you post about your gender identity on social media?
    a. Do you include your race in posts about your gender?
5. Tell me what you do when you come across or experience an offensive or insensitive posts on social media related to gender?
    a. Do you find that people reference your race in negative gender posts?
6. Do you spend any time thinking about these messages?
    a. What do you think about? If no, why not?
    b. How do you feel when you encounter these messages/posts
    c. Tell me what makes you respond to these messages?
        i. If so, how do you respond?
        ii. How long does it take you to respond?
        iii. Do you ever unfollow, block, or disconnect someone who posts these messages? Why or why not?
7. When you experience negative gender identity posts on social media, what do you do? How do you respond? (*people using derogatory language when referring to your gender? People demeaning your gender identity? People asserting your gender identity is inferior?)*
8. Have you ever engaged in negative gender stereotyping on social media? Can you give an example? What prompted you to post?

STUDENT EXPERIENCE

We've talked a lot of about your experiences on social media and I would like to connect this back to your experience as a student on this campus.

1. Do your experiences on social media ever change how you portray or conduct yourself as an African American woman on campus?
2. Do you feel like your experiences on social media contribute to you feeling connected to your campus community?
    a. Why or why not?

APPENDIX C. OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Racial and gender performances of black women on social media
Observation Protocol

This observation is conducted as a means to both further understand and supplement the accounts of racial and gender performance as documented in the individual interview.

Objective:

- To validate the ways in which participants perform race and gender by observing participant profiles.
- To create an inventory of digital artifacts documenting the racial and gender performances of African American college women.

Logistics:

- Observations will take place following the individual interview of each participant.
- Following the individual interview the researcher will schedule the observation date, time and location ideally no longer than two weeks following the individual interview. Observations will last approximately 30-45 minutes and will take place in a private conference room.
- Observations will be audio recorded and saved by the date and number of the observation (i.e. 05.06.16-Alana-1). Recordings will be destroyed upon transcription.

Observation Protocol:

Prompt students to open their preferred social media platform(s) on either their preferred device. A laptop computer will be available for use if students do not have access to technology during the observation. Questions will be determined based on coding of data from individual interview related to the participants posting on related to race and gender on the social media. Furthermore participants will be asked to take screen shots of the selected social media profile and email those artifacts to the researcher. The observation may include multiple platforms dependent on the sites most used by the participant.

Observation Agenda:

- Review agenda/consent and purpose of observation
- Recap of initial reflection documents from individual interview.
- Observation of social media and questions based off coded data from individual interview.
- Wrap up and thanks

APPENDIX D. FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Racial and gender performances of black women on social media
Focus Group Protocol

The goal of this dissertation is to examine and understand how black college women perform race and social media on social. This focus group and subsequent focus groups are conducted so participants can collectively respond to themes that the researcher identified as emerging from individual interviews and observations of students' social media use.

Objective:

- To triangulate the findings and themes from individual interviews and observations of race and gender on social media in a group setting with other participants.
- To validate findings, or to remove extreme findings proposed by the researcher from an analysis of the data.

Logistics:

- The researcher will schedule and facilitate focus group interviews with students who have completed individual interviews and observations. Focus groups will be scheduled to include no more than 10 participants per session and reflect a stratified sample of participants.
- Focus groups will ideally take place during May 2016. Focus groups will last approximately 60 minutes and will take place in a private conference room.
- Focus group interviews will be audio recorded and saved by the date and number of the focus group (i.e. 05.06.16-Focus1). Recordings will be destroyed upon transcription.

Focus Group Protocol:

Questions and prompts for the protocol will be based off the findings of the individual interviews. There will be no set of questions until completion and initial interpretation of individual interviews and observations has concluded. Students will respond to themes and findings from individual interviews and observations as a means to triangulate findings across multiple phases of this study.

Focus Group Agenda:

- Welcome
- Review agenda/consent and purpose of focus group
- Identify use of recorder and/or sign consent forms
- Introductions
- Focus group questions (will be based off findings from individual interviews and observations)
- Wrap up and thanks