

RACE-BASED EXPERIENCES OF BLACK COLLEGE STUDENTS ATTENDING  
PREDOMINATELY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

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by

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## DEDICATION

My entire doctoral journey has been a combination of many factors that often superseded my understanding. To my Lord and Creator, thank you for giving me the desire to learn and serve others. This journey has challenged me to grow, believe, learn the meaning of commitment, and sacrifice. Your infinite wisdom and love placed all the vessels I ever needed to accomplish this task. Thank you for allowing the sixth great-granddaughter of a slave to achieve what so many have sacrificed to make possible.

Momma, I miss you every day, but the life you lived, showed me that all things are possible through Christ. At 18, I felt unprepared to face the world without you; the love, guidance, grace, and wisdom you shared with us sustains me every day.

Daddy, who would I be without you? You have always been right where I needed you the most pushing me. Because of your love, you helped me believe in myself when everything around me said I would not make it. Having you as my daddy helped me survive the worst of days. Thank you for never giving up on my dream. Your life lessons, hard work, and sacrifices have made this dissertation a reality.

In my 34 years, I have found that everyone needs a lifelong protector and best friend. Mine just happened to come in the form of a little sister. Thank you Teche for protecting this dream of mine and letting any and every one know getting my doctorate is my goal, and it will happen. To my video editor, assignment reader, PowerPoint navigator, thank you for taking this journey with me to achieve this dream. Jarett, when you came into my life my dissertation was a distant goal, but you were always there to help me succeed, and I thank you so much! Finally, to all of my nieces and nephews you are my inspiration. Seeing the world through your eyes makes me do all that I can to

create the opportunities for you to thrive. Jai, thank you for being my sounding board and reminding me how important it was for me to accomplish this dream. BJ, thank you for being curious and always asking questions that made me think.

## ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to describe the raced-based experiences of Black students attending a predominately White institution. Data were collected through multiple sources, including informed consent, demographic surveys, and semi-structured interviews. The data collected in this study were analyzed using Moustakas's (1994) Modification of the Van Kaam (1959, 1966) method for analyzing phenomenological data. The Modified Van Kaam method consists of seven steps for examining the completed transcription of the participant's responses.

### Results

A transcendental phenomenological approach was used in my study to explore the essence of the participants' experiences that emerged from the audio-recorded semi-structured interview. Nine themes emerged from the data and identified the lived experiences of participants. The essence of the participant's experiences in this study demonstrated a variety of ways Black college students were aware of their race prior to coming to college, and how each participant's awareness of their race impacted their overall campus experience. Additionally, whether through first-hand experience, social media, or the vicarious experience of another Black student, race-based interactions were significant in altering how engaged and how safe Black college students felt while they were attending predominately White institutions.

The results of this study indicated that the overall developmental process for Black college students is independent from the majority culture and must be further

explored and supported. Specifically, future research should explore impact racial microaggressions have on Black students psychologically and behaviorally on college campuses and within their campus community.

**KEY WORDS:** *Race-based experiences, Predominately White institutions, Impact of racism*

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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

Institutional resources, endowments, faculty research, and applicant selectivity (The College Board, 2018) affect educational quality. According to Reynolds, Sneva, and Beechler (2010), as the number of criteria an institution meets increases, the quality of the education students receives increases. They pointed out that despite the various criteria and measures of a quality education, an in-depth and comprehensive review of *students of color's* experiences is not included when determining the quality of their educational experience. In fact, Reynolds et al. (2010) noted that many institutions value and pride themselves on diversity. However, few, if any, have addressed individual, cultural, and institutional racism on their campuses.

Nadal, Griffin, Wong, Hamit, and Rasmus (2014) stated that despite the belief that racism has been extinguished, racial stratification and systemic racism continue to be ingrained in all aspects of American life. During the 20th Century, efforts were made to address the history of racial injustice and oppression in many areas of American society. As such, these barriers to equality have had a profound impact on both those who were racially oppressed and those who were the oppressors (Allen, 1992; Priest et al., 2018; Slopen et al., 2016). In many integrated educational institutions in America, a persistent reality is that Black and White students live in separate worlds (Allen, 1992; Priest et al., 2018). Differences in the levels of academic performance between Black and White students are often attributed to personal orientations to college (Pieterse, Carter, Evans, & Walter, 2010). For example, parental education level, family socioeconomic status, and academic preparation were reported as predictors of college student success (Pieterse et

al., 2010; Tinto, 2007). However, even if these predictors could account for the differences in academic experiences of Black and White students, they do not account for differences in the quality of Black and White students' personal experiences on predominately White campuses (Pieterse et al., 2010). Compared to their White counterparts, Black students report more dissatisfaction, isolation, alienation, and racism at predominantly White institutions (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Seaton, Upton, Gilbert, Volpe, 2014; JED Foundation, 2017). Freeman (1998) and Seaton et al. (2014) argued that these experiences tend to constitute the rule, rather than the exception, for Black students in higher education, even at the most elite American colleges.

### **Context of the Study**

Traditionally, researchers have established racism and negative race-based experiences as stressors with significant implications on health (Hope, Tabbye, Chavous, Jagers, & Sellers, 2013; Nadal et al., 2014a; Schmeer & Tarrence, 2018; Utsey, Mark, Brown, & Kelly, 2002). Race-related stress has been linked with psychological and health issues such as self-esteem, concentration, anxiety, and depression (Nadal et al., 2014a; Reynolds et al., 2010). Racism can occur on three levels: individual, institutional, and cultural (Carter, 2007; Utsey et al., 2002). Yet, Fries-Britt and Turner (2002) stated a common faulty assumption of Black student's experiences with racist behaviors at predominately White campuses, are that racism exists as an exception and not as a common challenge. This chapter includes the following: (a) key factors that have contributed to the experiences of Black college students, (b) key terms related to known aspects of racism linked to *students of color's* college experiences, and (c) the significance of race-based experiences and Black student's mental health.

## **Historical Background Information**

Throughout the 246 years of slavery in the United States, the country continually became more divided about the treatment of slaves and their rights as human beings (Schneider & Schneider, 2007). Prior to the Civil War (1861–1865), public education in the south was virtually nonexistent for Black and White children (Schneider & Schneider, 2007). Education in any form for Black slaves in the southern states was illegal and life threatening to Blacks and Whites, because of the desire to keep slaves illiterate (Lubert, Hardwick, & Hammond, 2007). Throughout much of the 18th century, no primary schools in the southern states were available for Black children (Ware, 2015). However, northern states traditionally relied less on slave labor, making educating Black children less of a perceived threat (Schneider & Schneider, 2007) and therefore not illegal. Despite this, significant opposition to educating Black students during this time was prevalent (Schneider & Schneider, 2007). The polarizing views of slavery led to the Civil War and eventual end of slavery (Wilder, 2013).

## **Birth of Black Schools in the South**

The Reconstruction period laid the foundation of public education in the southern United States (Mitchell, 2008). After slavery was abolished, freed Black Americans immediately began seeking access to schools (Mitchell, 2008; Wilder, 2013). Due to the limited number of schools available, Black adults attended educational programs offered at schools, moved to larger towns that provided access to education, and attended classes offered at Black colleges and institutes (Mitchell, 2008).

The Freedmen's Bureau, teachers from the North, and other organizations dedicated to social change provided private funding for Black schools (Mitchell, 2008; U.

S. National Archives and Records Administration, 2016). Originally called the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, the Freedmen's Bureau was established during the Civil War to assist in the transition from a war-torn country to a free society (U. S. National Archives and Records Administration, 2016). After the Civil War ended, the purpose of the Freedmen's Bureau was to supervise and administer all relief support efforts to poor White Southerners and freed Blacks (U. S. National Archives and Records Administration, 2016). In addition, the Freedmen's Bureau provided medical assistance, housing, and legal aid. The organization operated hospitals and attempted to help Black Americans settle on abandon lands (U. S. National Archives and Records Administration, 2016).

The Freedmen's Bureau, religious leaders, and Black Americans within their communities established public education in the south (U. S. National Archives and Records Administration, 2016). As educational expansion efforts continued throughout the region, over 3,000 schools were established. Moreover, in 1868, State Legislatures developed the first budgets that included funding for Black children to attend school (U. S. National Archives and Records Administration, 2016). Despite governmental monetary support, the designated funds often did not meet the demands for this new educational platform (U. S. National Archives and Records Administration, 2016). Black schools were often crowded and lacked adequate supplies and materials (Mitchell, 2008; U. S. National Archives and Records Administration, 2016). However, the collective commitment to education led teachers, students, and parents to use and make materials that were needed in the classrooms (Mitchell, 2008).

## **Historically Black Colleges and Universities**

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) were established to serve the educational needs of Black Americans (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018). Prior to the time of their establishment, and for many years afterward, Blacks were generally denied admission to traditionally White institutions. As a result, HBCUs became the principal means for providing post-secondary education for Black students (Department of Education, 1991).

In 1837, the first Historically Black College was originally known as the African Institute. It was renamed the Institute for Colored Youth and finally named Cheyney University of Pennsylvania. Cheyney University was established with the monetary donation Richard Humphreys left in his will to start the institution (Conyers, 1990). Originally, the school focused on basic subjects such as math, English, and reading. Later, through Humphreys' vision, the school offered training for Black teachers (Conyers, 1990). Despite public policy and statutory provisions for the education of Blacks, Lincoln University (1854) and Wilberforce University (1856) were established as educational institutions for Blacks (Department of Education, 1991). Similar to Cheyney University, Lincoln and Wilberforce Universities focused on students' fundamental educational needs (Conyers, 1990; Department of Education, 1991). In the early 1900s, Black colleges began developing and gained access to post-secondary curriculum (Department of Education, 1991).

## **Morrill Act**

Representative Justin Smith Morrill originally proposed the Morrill Act in 1857. Although the bill was passed by Congress, President James Buchanan vetoed it (National



Research Council, 1995). The Morrill Act initially mandated land-grant institutions based on the number of representatives in the Senate (National Research Council, 1995). In 1861, Representative Morrill resubmitted the act proposing that colleges teach military tactics, engineering, and agriculture (National Research Council, 1995). The bill was signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln and specifically excluded states that had seceded from the Union (National Research Council, 1995).

Prior to the Civil War, education for Black children and college students was predominantly privately funded. The enactment of the Second Morrill Act in 1890 led to increased public support and funding in Black schools (Department of Education, 1991; National Research Council, 1995). Unlike the Morrill Act, the Second Morrill Act was designed to ensure that Southern states complied with the new legal and the social standards of racial equality (National Research Council, 1995).

### **Second Morrill Act in Texas**

In 1890, the Second Morrill Act required states with racially segregated public higher education systems to provide a land-grant institution for Black and White students (Department of Education, 1991). The first land-grant institution in the State of Texas was approved by the Congress in July of 1862 (Edmond, 1978; Texas A&M University, 2018). The purpose of the Second Morrill Act was to provide funding for higher education institutions on public land. The State of Texas Legislature agreed to establish the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas under the terms of the Morrill Act (Texas A&M University, 2018). Later, the college that had been designated for White males participating in military training, was renamed Texas A&M University (Edmond, 1978).

The Second Morrill Act also granted funding for the first college for Black Americans supported by the government in Texas (Eddy, 1973). The *separate but equal* doctrine of the Second Morrill Act established the Alta Vista Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas for Colored Youth in August of 1876 (Eddy, 1973). An appointed board was assembled to purchase the Alta Vista Plantation. The president of Agricultural & Mechanical College of Texas, Thomas S. Gathright, appointed L. W. Minor of Mississippi to serve as Principal (Eddy, 1973). In March 1878, eight Black men were the first to enroll in a state-supported college in Texas (Eddy, 1973; Prairie View A&M University, 2017). There were several name changes for the college, including Prairie View State Normal School for the Training of Colored Teachers. Finally, in 1973, the name became Prairie View A&M University (Eddy, 1973).

**Advanced education under the Morrill Act.** The Morrill Act also included *separate but equal* educational facilities for specialized advanced degrees. Before 1947, there were no law schools accessible for Black individuals in Texas. In 1946, Heman Sweatt applied for admission to the University of Texas Law School. Sweatt was denied admission because of his race. He subsequently filed suit in *Sweatt v. Painter* (Baker, 2014; University of Texas at Austin, 2016). In an attempt to avoid integration, University of Texas Law School officials and Texas State Legislators made several offers to keep Heman Sweatt and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) from pursuing further legal action (University of Texas at Austin, 2016). One offer included enacting the Morrill Act and establishing the Texas State University of Negroes, which would include a law school. Additionally, Sweatt was offered deferred temporary admission that would allow the Texas Lawmakers time to secure the funds for

the new impending law school (Burns, 2016; Texas Southern University, 2016; University of Texas at Austin, 2016). In 1947, Texas State University for Negroes was officially established to serve Black individuals in Texas (Burns, 2016; Texas Southern University, 2016). Later named Texas Southern University, offered expanded courses in various fields of study including teaching, pharmacy, dentistry, journalism, education, literature, law, and medicine (Burns, 2016; Texas Southern University, 2016).

### **Plessy v. Ferguson**

In 1890, Louisiana law required railroads to provide racially separated accommodations for White and Colored races. The local Black community detested the law. They were outraged when the law became regularly enforced (Cornell Law School, 2018; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018). In July 1892, Homer Plessy agreed to be arrested for refusing to move from a seat in the White section (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018). Judge John H. Ferguson heard the case and upheld the law. The case slowly moved up to the Supreme Court (Cornell Law School, 2018). In May 1896, the U. S. Supreme Court ruled that segregation in America was constitutional (Cornell Law School, 2018). The Supreme Court ruled that if facilities are racially segregated, but provided equal accommodations, they did not violate the Constitution (Cornell Law School, 2018). The Court's decision meant that segregation and discrimination were not equivalent (Cornell Law School, 2018). In education, there were separate public schools for Asian, Latino, and Native American children (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018). Where there were not enough children of a single racial group to form a school, Asian, Latino, and Native American children were usually required to attend Black institutions (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018).

## **Impact of Brown v. Board of Education**

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka was one of the five cases that were consolidated and argued before the Supreme Court (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018). According to the Southern Poverty Center (2018), the five cases were comprised of the *Brown v. Board of Education* were *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1952)*, *Briggs v. Elliot (1952)*, *Davis v. Board of Education of Prince Edward County, Virginia (1952)*, *Bolling v. Sharpe (1954)*, and *Gebhart v. Ethel (1952)*. The facts of each case were different. However, the underlying argument of each case was the constitutionality of state funded public schools (Wilder, 2013). The cases were argued before the Supreme Court in 1952. Thurgood Marshall argued the case before the Court. He raised a variety of legal issues from each case (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018). The central arguments were that dual operation of separate school systems for Black and White students were inherently unequal, and a violation of the "equal protection of the laws clause" of the Fourteenth Amendment to the U. S. Constitution (National Constitution Center, 2018, "Section 1," para 1).

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the NAACP, began to dispute the legitimacy of segregation laws in public schools and filed lawsuits in several states. Equal access to housing, education, and employment was legally granted to all citizens after the Supreme Court ruled in the Brown case (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018). Despite the landmark decision, the court delayed deciding on how to implement school integration and later required governmental interventions to desegregate public education institutions (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018).

## **College and University Desegregation**

The Supreme Court initiated several rounds of additional arguments and unanimously ruled that segregated public schools were illegal (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018). Though well-intentioned, the Court's lack of action effectively led to local judicial and political evasion of desegregation (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018). Kansas and several other Midwestern states acted in immediate accordance with the verdict; however, many public school, college and university administrators, and local officials in the South defied the ruling (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018). Texas, like many states in the south, was opposed to integrating their colleges and universities. The backlash against the Court's verdict reached the highest levels of government. In 1956, 82 representatives and 19 senators endorsed a southern platform in Congress. They urged Southern politicians to use lawful means at their disposal to resist the anarchy associated with school desegregation (Pruitt, 2018). In 1964, a full decade after the decision, more than 98% of Black children in the South still attended segregated schools (Pruitt, 2018; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018).

**College and university desegregation in the South.** The initial mandate for acceptance of Black students was met with much resistance at the university level. In addition to riots and physical threats of violence, Black college students were often subject to the highest scrutiny and punishments once they arrived on campus. Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, and Texas had similar desegregation processes. When integration was ordered by federal or circuit judges, demanding that colleges or universities admit Black students, White students and residents often immediately begin rioting. And, the Black students were often sanctioned or suspended from their university (Southern

Poverty Law Center, 2018). For example, in 1963, two Black students, Vivian Malone and James A. Hood, successfully registered at the University of Alabama despite Governor George Wallace's public threats to prevent their entry (Orfield, 2018). However, the students could not attend class until President John F. Kennedy federalized the Alabama National Guard (Shenk, 2000). By 1969, 15 years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, a small number of Black students in Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Texas, and Mississippi attended public elementary and secondary schools with White students (Orfield, 2018).

### **Integration in Texas**

Across the nation, during the 1960s and 1970s, courts ordered that school districts be consolidated. Busing programs were to be initiated to make schools racially balanced (Kemerer, 1991). In November 1970, Eastern District of Texas Chief Judge William Wayne Justice ordered the Texas Education Agency to assume responsibility for desegregating Texas public schools (Kemerer, 1991). The decision in *United States v. Texas* applied to the entire Texas public school system, including colleges and universities (Kemerer, 1991). The State of Texas was found responsible for operating dual school systems at all levels, and the decision impacted the structure of Texas schools over the next decade (Kemerer, 1991). Eventually, all Texas public institutions, including state reform schools, colleges and universities, facilities for the intellectually disabled, and state prisons were desegregated under this ruling (Kemerer, 1991). As recently as 2010, several school districts in Texas were still under desegregation orders. The school district administrators argued that integration is a matter of legal formality and is no longer necessary (Kemerer, 1991; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018).

**Desegregating colleges and universities in Texas.** The first attempt to integrate a college in Texas occurred at the University of Texas in 1885 (University of Texas at Austin, 2016). In 1939, George Allen was the first Black student enrolled and allowed to take business and psychology courses (University of Texas at Austin, 2016). In 1950, the U. S. Supreme Court unanimously ruled that denying Heman Sweatt entry to the University of Texas (UT) Law School violated the 14th Amendment (University of Texas at Austin, 2016). Later that year, 32 Black students who applied to UT were accepted into graduate and professional programs not offered at Black colleges (University of Texas at Austin, 2016). Despite Black students being admitted to the graduate schools, all other facilities such as housing, dining, and libraries, were not accessible to Black students (University of Texas at Austin, 2016).

Texas A&M University remains closely associated with Prairie View A&M University. The relationship has historically ensured that Prairie View A&M continuously offers equally competitive programs for Black students (Peshek, 2018). By 1950, 22 predominately White colleges offered admission to Black students (Peshek, 2018). In 1956, the Texas A&M student senate voted to oppose integrating the university. And, in a student-wide vote, students upheld this notion (Texas A&M University, 2018). In an effort to keep Black students from attending the main campus, a few select highly qualified Black individuals were admitted to Arlington State College, which was a part of the Texas A&M system (Peshek, 2018). In 1963, however, three Black students were admitted as distinct students to Texas A&M (Peshek, 2018). In the late 1960s, Black students begin to increase their presence on the Texas A&M campus. In 1968 James L. Courtney and Leon J. Greene graduated in January, becoming the first Black

undergraduates to graduate from Texas A&M (Peshek, 2018). By 1969, Texas A&M openly declared integration, and the Black student population rose to approximately 46 students (Peshek, 2018).

Sam Houston State University did not admit Black students until John Patrick was admitted in 1964. Wendell Baker (2014), a Huntsville, Texas community activist recalled the community efforts it took to integrate Sam Houston State University. According to Baker (2014):

We decided to begin working on matters that would improve our community and lift the status of the Blacks. The best way to accomplish this was to work within the system and to deal with people who made the decisions. We started with the integration of Sam Houston State University by arranging for Annie Kizzie to apply. However, she was turned down. She was told that the school's bylaws stated that the school was for the education of White youth only.

It wasn't long before we found another student to apply who could be admitted as a transfer student. Her name was Maxine Hayward, a teacher in the Willis, Texas Public School system. Her race was not revealed until her transcript arrived from one of the Black colleges. Though she had originally been sent a letter thanking her for her application and interest in coming to Sam Houston State, after receiving her transcript she was sent another letter informing her she would not be accepted.

She forwarded this letter to me, and upon receipt, I called a meeting and it was decided to file a lawsuit against the University. When the notice was printed in the paper it accomplished the directed effect and immediately generated



considerable interest. As a result, a young man named John Patrick, who was an honor student of his graduating class, was invited to register and became the first Black student to attend Sam Houston State University. (pp. 44-45)

The fight for equality on college campuses remains a significant issue that Black students continually face (Danielak, Gupta, & Elby, 2014).

### **Student Experiences**

A student's identity and sense of belonging on their campus can affect whether or not they choose to continue pursuing their degree (Danielak et al., 2014). Danielak et al. (2014) stated Black students often encountered conflicting culturally based expectations on their campuses and in academic environments. Robinson and Biran (2006) reported that negative stereotypes, a lack of Black role models in their curriculum, and a lack of emphasis on the positive contributions of Black Americans have created significant difficulties for Black students on predominately White campuses. Black college students who have attended HBCUs do not seem to have experienced the same difficulties as their Black counterparts who attended predominantly White institutions (Freeman & Thomas, 2002; JED Foundation, 2017). Black college students who attended HBCUs are more likely to graduate and are better academically and socially integrated than their Black peers attending Predominately White Institutions (Freeman & Thomas, 2002; JED Foundation, 2017).

Black students are less likely to complete college compared to their White counterparts (Anglin & Wade, 2007; National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). The nationwide graduation rates of Black undergraduate students in 2015 was 46%, which was 20% lower than the graduation rate of their White counterparts (National Center for

Education Statistics, 2018). JED Foundation (2017) conducted a national survey of first-year college students at various predominantly White institutions. Fifty percent of White students reported feeling more academically prepared compared to 36% of Black students. White students in this study also indicated they felt more emotionally prepared for college and generally had a positive outlook on their college experience (The JED Foundation, 2017). Meanwhile, 57% of Black students said that college was not the experience they expected. And 75% of the Black college students who responded said they tended to keep their feelings about the difficulty of college to themselves (The JED Foundation, 2017).

### **Statement of the Problem**

A major contributing factor to racism and its impact on the mental health of Black individuals is a failure to understand the emotional, the psychological, and, to some extent, the physical effects of racism (Carter, Lau, Johnson, & Kirkinis, 2017). According to the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health (2017), Black adults were 10% more likely to report significant psychological distress than White individuals. Black Americans reported experiencing subtle and unintentional racism and indicated they experience symptoms of anxiety and depression (Nadal, Wong, Griffin, Davidoff, & Sriken, 2014; U. S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health, 2017). Nadal et al. (2014b) stated that racism can adversely affect the mental health of an individual in direct and indirect ways.

The adverse impact of racism can inflict psychological pain and increase the likelihood of unfavorable socioeconomic conditions (Nadal et al., 2014b). Additionally, Nadal et al. (2014b) reported that the risk of psychiatric disorders increased significantly

due to repeated microaggressions and led to negative feelings of self-worth. Carter (2007) specified discussions surrounding race tended to be general and global with respect to the overall characteristics of racism as a form of oppression and violence. Further, much has been written about the social, economic, and political effects of racism (Brown & Dancy, 2010; Bryant-Davis, 2007; Carbado & Gulati, 2003; McGee & Stovall, 2015). What is less clear is what specific aspects of racism are related to emotional and psychological harm given a person's unique way of responding and coping with such experiences (Carter, 2007; Carter et al., 2017; Neville, Heppner, Ji, & Thye, 2004; McGee & Stovall, 2015).

College campuses have not shielded *students of color* from the effects of societal racism and, at times, they have exacerbated it (McGee & Stovall, 2015). For Black college students, less is understood about specific aspects of racism that are directly linked to particular emotional and psychological reactions of Black college student targets (Harper, 2015). Most literature exploring the experiences of Black college students and the impact of race-based experiences focused on academic success, retention, diversity, and inclusion efforts made by universities (Hope et al., 2013; McClain et al., 2016; Pieterse, Todd, Neville, & Carter, 2012; Walls & Hall, 2017). Although limited bodies of research include studies of race-based trauma in the general Black community, I could not find studies that included Black college students' voices pertaining to their race-based emotional experiences on predominately White campuses.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the race-based emotional experiences of Black students attending predominately White institutions.

Despite increased research focused on addressing race-related stress, I explored the emotional depth and connectedness of race-based encounters that underlie Black students' experiences at predominately White institutions. Neville (2004) and Cokley et al. (2017) reported colleges and universities continually lack recognition of the complex experiences of *students of color* on their campuses. During this study, I explored the lived experiences of Black students that can include the uncomfortable campus climates and take a toll on Black college students' mental health.

### **Significance of the Study**

Traditionally, studies of racial discrimination have focused on the physical effects on Black individuals (Cokley et al., 2017; Priest et al., 2018; Slopen et al., 2016). Race-related stress has been linked with psychological and health issues such as self-esteem, concentration, anxiety, and depression (Hogan, Carlson, & Dua, 2002; Nadal et al., 2014b). Recently, the literature surrounding research on race-related stressors has centered on conceptualizing, measuring, and exploring the influence of race-related stressors on Black adults' health status (Barr & Neville, 2014; Cokley et al., 2017; Fang & Myers, 2001; McClain et al., 2016). Murry, Brown, Brody, Cutrona, and Simons (2001) expanded the research to include families and adolescent development. Murry et al. (2001) explored the relationship quality of Black families who had experienced chronic stress and racism. The authors acknowledged that mothers who were subjected to frequent discrimination and general life stress experienced higher levels of depression and anxiety (Murry et al., 2001). Participants of this study experienced more conflict with family members and felt they had less effective parental relationships (Caldwell, Kohn-Wood, Schmeelk-Cone, Chavous, & Zimmerman, 2004; Murry et al., 2001). According

to Murry et al. (2001), “chronic racial discrimination amplifies the effects of other ongoing stressors in African American families” (p. 923).

**Adolescent race-based experiences.** Racism and experiences with discrimination can also have significant impacts on adolescents’ academic performance, interpersonal interactions, and their daily lives (Cokley et al., 2017; Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000; Prelow & Guarnaccia, 2011; Romero & Roberts, 2006; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004; Taylor & Turner, 2002). Landrine and Klonoff (1996) along with Walls and Hall (2017) reported positive relationships between racist events and low self-esteem as well as a variety of stress-related and somatic symptoms. Taylor and Turner (2002) explored the relationship between discrimination, social stressors, and depression among youth. In addition, Taylor and Turner (2002) argued that discrimination was related to depression more in Black youth than in White youth. Romero and Roberts (2006) similarly found adolescents’ family relationships, school performance, interactions, and psychological well-being seem to be adversely impacted by their experiences with racism.

Colleges and universities are more integrated than ever before. However, this integration inaccurately led to the assumption that *students of color* no longer face racial barriers. Mental health professionals have acknowledged and researched the mental health effects of life event stress, trauma, and racial discrimination (Helms, Nicolas, & Green, 2012; Sanchez & Awad, 2015; Thompson, & Neville, 1999). Biasco, Goodwin, and Vitale (2001) interviewed college students and asked about their knowledge of discrimination on their campus. They reported that 41% of the White students and 66% of the *students of color* indicated they were aware of racism on their campus. Additionally, participants were asked if they thought racial hostility existed between

racial groups. They reported that 75% of the students thought that racial hostility was present on their campus but was not expressed openly (Biasco et al., 2001; Hope et al., 2013).

Generally, studies of racial discrimination occurring during the college years indicated a range of frequency rates from 40–98% (Carter, 2007; Sanchez & Awad, 2015). However, these bodies of research do not provide a focus on the students' emotional experiences. Further, many studies have not investigated the direct effects of racism or other related emotional experiences. For example, (Cokley, 2007; Thompson, & Neville, 1999). Cokley (2007) indicated that Black students were able to identify race-related encounters as a perceived stressor. However, the direct link to which aspect of their lives it affected (academic, social, or interpersonal) remained unclear. Additionally, less is known about how individuals may respond and cope with racial discrimination. It is also unclear whether certain types of coping strategies may hinder psychological and emotional well-being (Reynolds et al., 2010).

During this study, I investigated and provided a more accurate understanding of the race-based perceptions and emotional experiences of Black college students who were attending predominately White institutions. Also, I identified additional emotional resources that Black students employ despite multiple encounters with racism and stereotyping. W. E. B. Du Bois (1903) coined the concept of “double consciousness” (p. 122). Black people were essentially required to have two identities. They were pressured to view themselves as they were perceived by their non-Black peers. Further, in this study, I identify common themes associated with this psychological dichotomy and the factors that impact Black college students' mental health, such as institutional and

individual racism (Carter, 2007; Carter et al., 2017). Racism is the foundation that leads to increased personal challenges for Black students at predominantly White institutions (Barr & Neville, 2014). The information included in this study reduced the current gap in literature by exploring the psychological impact of race-based experiences (Barr & Neville, 2014; McClain et al., 2016; Neville, 2004).

### **Definition of Terms**

**Black or Black American.** The foundation for the American racial caste system is rooted in colonialism, when stolen Africans were brought to North America as the primary agricultural labor force (Davis, 1991; O'Rourke, 2009). The use of physical features to categorize individuals was interwoven into the justification for slavery and the treatment of slaves (Schneider & Schneider, 2007; Wilder, 2013). In 1655, Elizabeth Key (Kaye), a biracial English and African woman, sued the State of Virginia for her freedom (Banks, 2008; Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 2019). Key's father was an Englishman who legally acknowledged her as his daughter, and before his death, assigned a guardian to protect her rights. Key's guardian subsequently revoked her father's will and sold her as an indentured servant (Banks, 2008; Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 2019). After Key's legal victory, Virginian Legislators adopted laws that applied to children of African descent who were born in the colonies. Children born from African mothers would take the social status of their mothers and be subjected to hereditary bondage (Banks, 2008; Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 2019).

In 1662, the term hypo-descent was established to solidify partially African and majority European individuals' legal status as slaves (Banks, 2008; Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 2019; Davis, 1991). Hypo-descent was the legal term for the

“one-drop rule,” meaning a Negro with any trace of African ancestry was socially categorized to a subordinate status (Davis, 1991, p. 9). The terms Colored, Negro, and later African American served as the social and legal definitions in the U. S. for Black Americans (Davis, 1991). However, in the late 1960s, many Black individuals began referring to themselves as Black, replacing the former racial classifications (Davis, 1991). For the purpose of this study, a Black person is defined as someone who identifies as Black or African American, has at least one Black parent, and was born in the United States (Davis, 1991).

**Chattel slavery.** In 1619, the first Dutch Slave ship arrived with kidnapped Africans (O'Rourke, 2009). To survive their harsh circumstances, Colonists bartered Africans for food and shelter (O'Rourke, 2009). Africans were not guaranteed any protections under British law. However, Africans were considered indentured servants, eligible for freedom and land after seven years of hard labor (O'Rourke, 2009). As Colonists began to profit from the free labor of indentured servants, landowners began to think of African indentured servants as personal property (O'Rourke, 2009). For the purposes of this study, Chattel Slavery is defined as personal property that is owned for life (O'Rourke, 2009).

**Historically Black college and universities.** Historically Black College and Universities (HBCUs) were first established as the primary education facilities for Black students. The first HBCU was founded in 1837 with the principal mission focused on all levels of education of Black Americans (Department of Education, 1991). In their initial creation, HBCUs provided both the primary, and eventually secondary, education for Black individuals (Conyers, 1990; Department of Education, 1991). Therefore,



institutions of higher learning where Blacks account for 50% or more of the student enrollment, and were created prior to 1964, are considered HBCUs (Department of Education, 1991).

**Individual racism.** Individual racism is defined as the belief in one's superiority over others because of race (Jones & Carter, 1996). Individual racism involves racial prejudice, personal stereotypes, and discrimination that creates and supports inequalities between members of different racial or ethnic groups (Jones, 1997). Individuals who initiate, create, exacerbate, or prolong individually racist acts, view other groups as inferior, and target those groups through subtle and overt interactions are defined as racist (Carter, 2007; Jones, 1997).

**Institutional racism.** Institutional racism is defined and reflected in the unequal outcomes in social systems and organizations that include educational, health, occupational, and political organizations (Jones & Carter, 1996). Specifically, Jones (1997) stated that institutional racism refers to the intentional or unintentional manipulation of policies that restrict the opportunities of particular groups of people. For Black college students attending PWIs, institutional racism can be reflected in symbols, institutional policies, traditions, and the culture of the university (Carter, 2007; Jones & Carter, 1996; Ledesma & Calderón, 2015).

**Predominately White institutions.** Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) were the foundation of the higher education system in the United States. The early purpose of PWIs was educating wealthy White males for the ministry (Wilder, 2013). The majority of these institutions were referred to as traditionally White institutions because of the binary and racial exclusion criteria prior to 1969 (Dixson & Rousseau,

2005; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018). Predominately White institutions historically maintained segregated educational facilities for different racial, ethnic, or cultural groups. Consequently, legal actions above and beyond federal mandates were required to integrate these schools (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018).

Today, White college students make up less of the dominate student body population. However, for many PWIs, White students still make up a large majority of the student body. Those institutions have sustained White student-centered traditions and culture (Bourke, 2016; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Ledesma & Calderón, 2015). For the purpose of this study, the term predominately White institutions is used to describe institutions of higher learning in which White students make up 40% or greater of the students and account for the majority enrollment of a single racial group (Bourke, 2016; Brown & Dancy, 2010). Additionally, the institutional culture, policies, and procedures of the university are centered around the historically dominate White culture (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Ledesma & Calderón, 2015).

**Race-based traumatic stress.** Bryant-Davis (2007) stated that “race-based traumatic stress has been studied in the literature under various names including, but not limited to, insidious trauma, intergenerational trauma, racist incident-based trauma, psychological trauma, and racism” (p. 135). According to Carter (2007), when individuals encounter a race-based incident:

Race-based traumatic stress injury can be a consequence of emotional pain that a person may feel after encounters with racism, which can be understood in terms

of specific types of acts as distinct types: racial harassment or hostility, racial discrimination or avoidance and/or discriminatory harassment, or aversive. (p. 23)

Bryant-Davis (2007) defined race-based traumatic stress as an emotional injury and response to an interaction that was “motivated by hate or fear of a person or group of people as a result of their race” (p. 135). Bryant-Davis (2007) and Carter et al. (2017) stated racially motivated encounters cause a stress-based reaction which often overwhelms a person’s capacity to cope. The inability to cope often leaves the injured individual to experience severe interpersonal stress that has physical consequences to the body and threatens one’s perceived safety (Bryant-Davis, 2007; Carter, 2007; Carter et al., 2017).

***Race-based trauma.*** For the purpose of this study, the term race-based trauma is used to describe race-based traumatic stress. Race-based trauma includes the definition of race-based traumatic stress but also examines the reactions to racist incidents that may include severe interpersonal and institutional psychological reactions (Carter, 2007). Specifically, for Black college students, the term race-based trauma captures the stressors motivated by racism and acknowledge the intersection between race-based trauma and other forms of societal traumas that occur and impact the student’s college experience.

**Race.** Race is defined as a social construction in which people in the United States are identified by their skin color, language, physical features, and are grouped and ranked into distinct racial groups (Jones, 1997; Thompson & Neville, 1999). Groups include White individuals, *people of color*, refugees, immigrants, and individuals with multiple heritages who have “at least one parent who has been classified as a racial minority” (Henriksen & Paladino, p. 162, 2009).

**Race-based experiences.** Race-based experiences can be indirect, subtle, and systemic (Carter, 2007; McGee & Stovall, 2015). Race-based experiences and interactions occur within the context of an environment that has sanctioned racial harassment and discrimination (Carter, 2007; McGee & Stovall, 2015). The person who experiences the racial encounter(s) may interpret them as emotionally painful, sudden, and uncontrollable (Carter, 2007; Carter et al., 2017; Pieterse et al., 2012). Additionally, race-based experiences may result in an individual exhibiting signs and symptoms associated with stress, depression, and trauma (Carter, 2007; Carter et al., 2017; Pieterse et al., 2012). However, it is important to note that despite the symptom clusters, many *people of color* often lack an understanding of the connection between encounters with racism and their emotional health (Carter, 2007; Carter et al., 2017; Pieterse et al., 2012). For the purpose of this study, race-based experiences are any direct, ambiguous, symbolic, or repeated racist incidents that result in an emotional pain response for the victim.

**Racism.** Racism can be defined as the transformation of racial prejudice into individual racism by using power directed against racial members who are defined as inferior (Neville, 2004). Racism is reflected in policies and procedures with the intentional and unintentional support and participation of the entire race and dominant culture (Jones & Carter, 1996). Racism goes beyond the individual and can include institutions and the culture (Carter, 2007, Ledesma & Calderón, 2015). Currently no definitions of racism that incorporates an analysis of the relationship between a particular type of racist act or experience to a person's emotional and psychological reactions are available (Neville, 2004). For the purposes of this study, racism is defined as any

“prejudice against someone because of their race, when those views are reinforced by systems of power” (Oluo, 2018, p. 26). Additionally, the racist event, whether subjective or objective, enacted internally or externally, may create negative psychological consequences for the victim (Carter, 2007; Ledesma & Calderón, 2015; Neville, 2004).

According to Carter (2007), two types of racism, known as harassment and discrimination, are prevalent in U. S. society. Harassment involves actions and strategies that are made with the intention of communicating ones’ subordinate or inferior racial status (Carter, 2007). Discrimination is defined as an avoidant racism, in which the majority culture indirectly engages in racist acts without appearing to be racist (Carter, 2007; Carter et al., 2017; Pieterse et al., 2012). The goal of discrimination is to minimize contact with or maintain distance with non-dominate groups (Carter, 2007).

**Racial discrimination.** Racial discrimination can be classified using a three-way typology of individual, institutional, and cultural racism (Jones, 1997). Cultural racism involves beliefs about the superiority of one’s cultural heritage over that of other races and the expression of this belief in individual actions or institutional policies (Jones, 1997).

Carter (2007) stated that the broad and subjective definitions of racial discrimination often left victims of discrimination with the responsibility of proving they were violated. Carter (2007) argued that the types of racial discrimination must be identified. Further, Carter (2007) identified three types of racial discrimination which included hostile racism, discrimination harassment, and quid pro quo racial harassment. Hostile racism is defined as direct actions, policy changes, and cultural norms that communicate a subordinate status that are often associated with negative sanctions and

acceptance by both majority and non-majority cultures (Carter, 2007). Quid pro quo racial harassment is an exchange one makes to maintain their status, employment, or position (Carter, 2007). According to Carter (2007), the victim of racial discrimination must recognize that a racist event has occurred but allow the event to happen uncontested. Discrimination harassment is similar to hostile racism, except a non-majority culture member has gained access to a majority setting but is treated differently (Carter, 2007). According to Carter (2007), the differences in treatment may include hostility, assumptions of one's character, stereotyping, lack of credibility, and trustworthiness.

**Racial group membership.** Racial group membership refers to one's social demographic and presumed cultural group (Cross, 1978). When a person indicates their race has meaning to themselves, this indication is considered as a reflection of one's "race identity, which is sometimes called racial identity" (Cross, 1978, p. 20).

**Stress.** Stress is defined as a *person-environment*, bio-psycho-social interaction wherein environmental events (stressors) are appraised—first, as either unwanted, or subsequently, as negative (Neville, 2004). Clark, Anderson, Clark, and Williams (1999) reported that people with severe stress share three core reactions that may be expressed through one or several modalities: physiological, emotional, cognitive, or behavioral. The core reactions are re-experiencing, arousal, avoidance, or psychic numbing (Carter, 2007; Clark et al., 1999).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework of this study consists of two distinct theories: (a) Critical Race Theory and (b) Race-Based Trauma Stress Theory. Each theory was

selected to examine the race-based experiences of Black college students through different lenses. Carter (2007) examined the psychological experiences of racial minorities impacted by significant race-based experiences. Carter (2007) insisted that the continual exposure to racism and discrimination is psychologically painful. For Black college students attending PWIs, racism can be reflected in the culture of their university, individual interactions, and policies of the university. The wide range of emotional and psychological experiences of Black college students can be explored through the contextual perspective discussed in Critical Race Theory and Race-Based Trauma Stress Theory (Bell, 1985; Carter, 2007; McGee & Stovall, 2015). Although thorough research on the psychological and physical impacts of racism is available, the specific effects on Black college students is limited. Through Critical Race Theory, the historical, systematic, and political influences on Black College student's race-based experiences are holistically framed (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; Ledesma & Calderón, 2015).

**Critical Race Theory.** Critical Race Theory (CRT) combines the progressive political struggles for racial justice with critiques of the conventional legal and scholarly norms (Bell, 1985; McGee & Stovall, 2015). Also, Critical Race Theory scholars challenge the ways that race and racial power are constructed by law and culture (Bell, 1985; Carbado & Gulati, 2003; McGee & Stovall, 2015). Additionally, CRT proposes that White supremacy and racial power are maintained over time, and in particular, that the law may play a role in this process. Further, CRT scholars have investigated the possibility of transforming the relationship between law and racial power and pursuing the achievement of racial emancipation in societal facets of a person's life (Bell, 1985). According to Calmore (1992):

Critical Race Theory attempts to construct a social reality and direct operation within it. It is a way of finding meaning within legal scholarship through combining language, thought, and experience. Voice is important: how voice is expressed, how voice is informed, how our voice differs from dominant voice. (p. 2167)

Critical Race Theory in higher education highlights and uncovers the majoritarian policies that have historically framed and shaped colleges and universities (Bell, 1985; Harper, 2012). Critical Race theorists stipulated that majoritarian frames preserve the privilege of Whiteness and White supremacy, which ensures Whiteness is the norm (Bell, 1985; Harper, 2012). Critical Race post-secondary scholars have sought to interrupt majoritarian defined frames by exploring colorblindness, selective admissions policy, and campus racial climate as emergent themes (Harper, 2012; Ledesma & Calderón, 2015). Further, Critical Race scholarship included challenging notions of race-neutrality, objectivity, and a historicism (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015). As asserted by Bonilla-Silva (2003) and Haney-López (2014) racism has evolved. Bonilla-Silva (2003) stated colorblindness and race-neutrality camouflage White supremacy. Haney-López (2014) explained the lure of colorblindness:

Today the dominant etiquette around race is colorblindness. It has a strong moral appeal, for it laudably envisions an ideal world in which race is no longer relevant to how we perceive and treat each other. It also has an intuitive practical appeal: to get beyond race, colorblindness urges, the best strategy is to immediately stop recognizing and talking about race. (pp. 77-78)

One central CRT principle is recognition of the centrality of race and racism in shaping everyday life experiences of all people—but especially for *people of color*.



Acknowledging the belief that racism is standard behavior provides the necessary context to understanding persistent patterns of racial inequity in higher education (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Ledesma & Calderón, 2015). Critical Race Theory recognizes and embraces the experiential knowledge of historically marginalized people (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). In higher education, this means recognizing the power of narratives that give testament to the experiences of historically underrepresented students (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). Dixson and Rousseau (2005) described the need to capture students' voices in literature:

One of the important functions of voice and stories in CRT scholarship is to counteract the stories of the dominant group (Delgado, 1989). The dominant group tells stories that are designed to “remind it of its identity in relation to outgroups and provide a form of shared reality in which its own superior position is seen as natural” (Delgado, 1989, p. 240). Furthermore, one of the functions of voice scholarship is to undermine that reality. Delgado (1989) emphasized “we must learn to trust our own senses, feelings and experiences, to give them authority, even (or especially) in the face of dominant accounts of social reality that claim universality” (p. 243). Thus, one of the functions of voice scholarship is to provide a “counterstory”—a means to counteract or challenge the dominant story. (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005, p. 11).

**Race-Based Trauma Stress Theory.** The long-standing history of racism in the United States contributes to the chronic and pervasive nature of how racism is often experienced and embedded in society (Umaña-Taylor, 2016). According to Carter (2007), racial and ethnic minority individuals may experience racial discrimination as psychologically painful or traumatic. Also, Carter (2007) stated these psychologically

painful events may elicit a response comparable to posttraumatic stress. The stress of the varied forms of racism across a range of settings can set the stage for a particularly painful event that makes the stress severe and traumatic (Carter et al., 2017; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). Through Race-Based Trauma Stress Theory, Carter (2007) examined the relationship between racial discrimination, dissociation, and common responses to trauma exposure. The mental and emotional strain *people of color* must self-evaluate on a regular basis, in order to determine if an event is related to one's race or not, limits productivity and emotional health (Carter et al., 2017; Salvatore & Shelton, 2007). Additionally, the emotional impacts of racism are reflected in the ways that one copes with or adapts to stressful situations as well as reacts to social demands and sanctions (Cheng, Cohen, & Goodman, 2015; Hogan et al., 2002; Jernigan & Henderson-Daniel, 2010; Salvatore & Shelton, 2007).

### **Research Question**

To determine the themes that allow for the description of the experiences of Black students at PWIs, I worked to answer the following research question:

What are the lived experiences of Black students who encounter race-based interactions at their predominately White institutions?

### **Limitations**

I used a phenomenological methodology that is focused on understanding the essence of the impact of Black students' race-based interactions. Therefore, data may not reflect the experiences of other *students of color*. Second, my study examined the experiences of students who attend a large PWI with more than 20,000 students. The experiences of Black students who attend small or large-sized universities may not be

reflected in my study. Further, the sampling of participants may be limited due to the size of the university and the limited number of Black students, comparatively. Thus, the snowball sampling technique was used. Currently, Black female students have higher enrollments than Black males, thereby increasing the likelihood of more female participants (Sam Houston State University, 2019). Finally, the university is located in the southwestern United States and may not reflect the experiences of Black students in other regions of the country.

### **Delimitations**

My study was delimited to exploring the experiences of Black undergraduate college students who were currently enrolled at a predominately White institution. Participants in this study may have multiple cultural backgrounds; however, they racially identify as Black. Because the study focused on Black college students, selection criteria included participants with no prior college experience to reduce comparison of the university and will have completed at least two semesters. Additionally, participants had to be currently enrolled and were traditional-aged (18–22 years old) college students. Kuh and Sturgis (1980) defined traditional-aged students as those between the ages of 18–22. Kuh and Sturgis (1980) argued that students beyond this traditional age may face demands in addition to class work that may interfere with college experiences. Finally, my study was limited by self-reported data from the participants that were analyzed using a phenomenological methodology.

### **Assumptions**

For the purpose of my study, I utilized multiple assumptions. First, I assumed the participants would be honest and forthcoming in their responses about their experiences.

Additionally, I assumed that participants have encountered race-based experiences, which have impacted them significantly. I also assumed the methodology I implemented was reliable and capable of bearing the weight of capturing the phenomenological impact of race-based experiences.

### **Organization of the Study**

The dissertation is divided into five chapters. The current chapter, Chapter I, includes the background of the study, statement of the problem, purposes of the study, definition of terms, research question, limitations, and delimitations. Chapter II contains a review of the literature. The literature review includes a discussion of the historical race-based experiences in higher education for Black Americans, desegregation, and current experiences of Black students at predominately White institutions. In this chapter I introduce the literature on Critical Race Theory and Race-based trauma stress theory that are connected and complex. Chapter III consists of a discussion of phenomenological methodology that is used for the purpose of this dissertation, including research design, selection of participants, instrumentation, data collection, and analysis. Chapter IV presents the results of the phenomenological analysis and includes the description of themes and commonalities of the participant's experiences. The final chapter, Chapter V, includes a summary of the study, discussion of the research findings, implications for future research, and conclusions.

## CHAPTER II

### Review of Literature

Black students attending PWIs face a different climate than their White counterparts. The unique experiences of Black students are often shaped by the multifaceted issues of racism that go unnoticed by the broader campus. Racism produces race-related stress, which is defined as any stress that stems from a racial event or incident (Reynolds et al., 2010). Noting the complex environment in which Black students exist at PWIs, racial stressors and their effects often create individual physical and secondary socially negative impacts. Race-related stress has been linked to psychological issues such as anxiety, increased stress, and depression (Reynolds et al., 2010). Additionally, understanding the psychological impacts of race-based experiences for Black students is imperative to increase awareness of how major racial events affect students' emotional wellbeing.

The purpose of the literature review was to (a) explain key factors that have historically contributed to racial stress, (b) examine the structure of the U. S. education system and significant race-based experiences, and (c) identify gaps in the literature related to the psychological impacts of race-based experiences. The first section of this literature review concentrates on the struggles of Black Americans and their fight for freedom and equality. Next, the review examines significant legislative processes that have changed how children are educated, and the psychological impacts of desegregation. Finally, the review explores the overall experiences of Black college students attending PWIs. Specifically, this review infuses the lens of race-related stress and racial trauma that highlight the grievances that many Black students encounter on their campuses.

There is an attempt to establish a timeline of recent events that contributes to race-related stress, but the establishment of this timeline is limited when exploring the emotional impacts of race-based interactions.

### **Treatment of Enslaved People**

The institution of slavery represents the complicated history of the United States in its rise to become the dominant economic leader. During the 246 years that America profited from chattel slavery, America went from being a minor European trading partner to one of the largest economic commonwealths in the world (Schneider & Schneider, 2007). Slave labor specifically generated profits for Southern planters and slave traders and for Northern cotton-mill owners and investors (Schneider & Schneider, 2007). According to Ransom (2001), 4 million American enslaved people were worth \$3.5 billion in 1860, making them the largest single financial asset in the U. S. economy. Enslaved people as property were worth more than all major manufacturing and railroad industries combined (Ransom, 2001). Enslaved Africans accounted for over half of the agricultural industry labor force, which included being purchased and sold under an agricultural business model (Ransom, 2001).

In 1860, approximately 400,000 White families owned 4 million enslaved persons, which amounted to 12% of the White population controlling more than half of the enslaved in the country, thus creating a system of powerful elites (Wilder, 2013). Many slave owners owned fewer than 50 slaves and restricted the movements and behaviors of the enslaved (Lubert, Hardwick, & Hammond, 2007). Through harsh discipline and violence, enslaved people were conditioned to be dependent on their owners (Schneider & Schneider, 2007). According to Schneider and Schneider (2007),

enslaved people were commonly viewed as less than human, essentially livestock, at the complete service of their owners. Slaves had no control over their lives. This forced reliance created opportunities for owners to exert power through physical and sexual violence (Schneider & Schneider, 2007). The vulnerability of being dependent on slave owners created appeasement in a strict hierarchical system that was often determined by a slaves' obedience and skin color (Wilder, 2013). Viewing enslaved people as less than human justified abuse, lower living conditions, and racial hierarchies (Wilder, 2013).

**Education of Enslaved Children.** Reading and education in any form for slaves was illegal and life-threatening to Blacks and Whites (Lubert et al., 2007). Throughout much of the 18th century, no primary schools for Black children were located in the southern United States (Wilder, 2013). Further, White politicians passed legislation that forbade enslaved persons from being taught to read or write (Wilder, 2013). It was a common fear that educating enslaved adults would pose a threat to the institution of slavery and create an uprising by the enslaved (Lubert et al., 2007; Wilder, 2013). In 1740, South Carolina legislators passed the following legislation:

Be it enacted, that all and every person and persons whatsoever, who shall hereafter teach or cause any slave or slaves to be taught to write, or shall use or employ any slave as a scribe, in any manner of writing whatsoever, hereafter taught to write, every such person or persons shall, for every such offense, forfeit the sum of one hundred pounds, current money. (Wilder, 2013, p. 152)

Legislation similar to South Carolina's was common in all southern states. The severity of the punishment varied by state but included prison sentences, fines, and death by hanging (Wilder, 2013).

*Northern states.* Northern states traditionally relied less on slave labor, making the threat of education of Black individuals less significant. Despite this fact, significant opposition for educating Black students was pervasive. In 1787, the first African Free School was opened in New York City (Wilder, 2013). In 1824, this school and six other schools were the first in the nation to receive public funding (Wilder, 2013). The single-room schools primarily educated children of the enslaved and formerly enslaved persons (Simkin, 2016). Prudence Crandall, a Quaker, opened a school for Black girls in Canterbury, Connecticut. She operated the school despite attempts to prevent it from receiving essential supplies as well as threats to burn the school (Ware, 2015). The Crandall School continued to grow, and eventually attracted girls from Boston and Philadelphia. Local authorities established vagrancy laws targeting these students (Ware, 2015). Students who were caught attending school were beaten with a whip (Wilder, 2013). Freed individuals advocated and sought legal counsel for the opportunity to be educated (Wilder, 2013). In 1850, Charles Sumner helped Sarah C. Roberts sue the city of Boston for refusing to admit Black children into its schools (Wilder, 2013). Their case was lost but led the Massachusetts legislature to declare that excluding children from education based on prejudice was no longer tolerable (Wilder, 2013).

**Educators.** Despite the danger that educators, such as John Chavis, could face, Black children were still educated. In 1808, Chavis opened a private school in Raleigh, North Carolina where he taught Black and White children (Simkin, 2016). Chavis, the first Black graduate of an American college, specialized in Latin and Greek (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018). Despite his expertise, White parents protested the education of Black students. In response, Chavis decided to redesign his school by teaching White



children during the day, and Black children by night. The night school operated as a secret night school, because if teachers were found educating Black children, they would be run out of town (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018; Bibb, 2007). A slave in Shelby County, Kentucky, recalled in his autobiography, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb* that:

Slaves were not allowed books, pen, ink, nor paper, to improve their minds. There was a Miss Davies, who offered to teach a Sabbath School for the slaves. Books were supplied and she started the school; however, when slave owners were informed children were to read, patrols were appointed to go and break it up the next Sabbath. (p. 57)

In December 1866, Mary Battey created a school for Black people in Andersonville, Georgia. Battey wrote in her memoirs:

Our school begun—in spite of threatening from the Whites, and the consequent fear of the Blacks—with twenty-seven pupils, four only of whom could read, even the simplest words. At the end of six weeks, we have enrolled eighty-five names, with but fifteen unable to read. (Battey as cited in Ware, 2015, p. 54)

Battey later recalled the expansion and increased desire for students to learn. “In seven years teaching at the North, I have not seen a parallel to their appetite for learning, and their active progress” (Battey as cited in Ware, 2015, p. 56).

**End of chattel slavery.** Throughout the 246 years of the enslavement of Black individuals in the United States, the country continually became divided about the use, treatment, and rights of slaves. The polarizing views of slavery ultimately led to the Civil War and the eventual end of slavery. In 1863, President Lincoln issued the Emancipation

Proclamation declaring “all persons held as slaves within any state, or designated part of a state, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free” (U. S. National Archives and Records Administration, 2018, “The Emancipation Proclamation,” para 6).

Section 1 of the 13th Amendment to the U. S. Constitution outlawed chattel slavery and involuntary servitude. However, the U. S. Congress was given the option to enforce this amendment as appropriate (A&E Television Networks, 2018; Lynching in America, 2018). Despite the end of involuntary labor under the law, Southern Whites were not ready to recognize their previous property as fully human (Lynching in America, 2018). The legal instruments that led to the formal end of racialized slavery in America did nothing to address racial hierarchy (Lynching in America, 2018). Additionally, the debate over the rights of these freed individuals did not establish a national commitment to the alternative ideology of racial equality (Lynching in America, 2018).

### **Fourteenth Amendment**

Civil and legal rights for Black Americans became the basis for Supreme Court decisions when Congress enacted the Civil Rights Act of 1866 (National Constitution Center, 2018). The Civil Rights Bill declared Black Americans were full citizens entitled to equal civil rights (National Constitution Center, 2018). The Reconstruction Acts of 1867 granted voting rights to Black men while disenfranchising former Confederates, dramatically altering the political landscape of the South (Lynching in America, 2018). However, the most encompassing civil rights legalization is the Fourteenth Amendment which “prohibits a state from depriving any person of life, liberty, or property, without

due process of law,” ultimately granting equal protections under the law (National Constitution Center, 2018, “Section 1,” para 1). In other words, the court ruled that the Fourteenth Amendment granted citizenship to all persons born or naturalized in the United States, which now included the formerly enslaved (National Constitution Center, 2018). This legislation was significant because President Andrew Johnson vetoed the bill, but Congress, for the first time in United States’ history, overrode the veto (Lynching in America, 2018).

**Post-Slavery Progress.** After the Emancipation Proclamation, Freed Persons experienced economic and industrial growth. More than 600 Black people, most of them former enslaved, were elected as state legislators during Reconstruction (Schneider & Schneider, 2007). Another 18 Black Americans served in state executive positions, including lieutenant governor, secretary of state, superintendent of education, and treasurer (Schneider & Schneider, 2007). In Louisiana in 1872, P. B. S. Pinchback became the first Black Governor in America (Lynching in America, 2018). Eleven Reconstruction States (Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Mississippi, Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, and Florida) sent 16 Black representatives to the United States Congress, and Mississippi voters elected the nation’s first Black senators, Hiram Revels and Blanche Bruce (Lynching in America, 2018).

### **Reconstruction Era and Racism**

Racial intimidation of Black Americans became the defining characteristic of Southern democracy during the 1870s and prompted little action from outside observers. Racism subjected Black Americans to follow racial order or be met with brutal violence (Lynching in America, 2018). Black Americans were lynched under various pretenses.

Today, lynching is most commonly remembered as a punishment exacted by White mobs upon Black men accused of sexually assaulting White women (Lynching in America, 2018). During the lynching era, Whites' enforcement of a racial hierarchy and social separation, coupled with widespread stereotypes of Black men as dangerous, violent, and uncontrollable sexual aggressors fueled a pervasive fear of Black men raping White women. There were 4084 Black American documented lynching victims. Nearly 25% were accused of sexual assault, and nearly 30% were accused of murder (Lynching in America, 2018).

Southern lynching became a technique of enforcing racial exploitation, while expanding economic, political, and cultural significance for Whites. For example, it was common for White mobs to assemble, utilize violence intended to reestablish White supremacy, and suppress Black civil rights through political and social terror (Lubert et al., 2007; Petersen & Ward, 2015). White mobs regularly targeted Black Americans with deadly violence, but rarely aimed lethal attacks at White individuals accused of identical violations of law or custom (Lynching in America, 2018; Petersen & Ward, 2015). Law-abiding Black Americans lived at risk of daily arbitrary and deadly mob violence (Petersen & Ward, 2015). The threat of falling victim to the mobs, kept the Black American community terrorized and in a constant state of fear (Lynching in America, 2018).

**Psychological impacts of lynching.** Petersen and Ward (2015) stated the traumatic experience of surviving mass violence creates insecurity, mistrust, and emotional disconnections. The violence of the reconstruction era serves as an example of the series of psychological harms that were amplified by the dangers in navigating

Southern racial boundaries (Lynching in America, 2018). Petersen and Ward (2015) argued that “lynching, the form of racial violence most characteristic of this seemingly bygone era, continues to influence contemporary patterns of violence, conflict, and inequality” (p. 115). Lynching and other forms of racial terrorism inflicted deep traumatic and psychological wounds on survivors, Black and White witnesses, family members, and the entire Black community (Petersen & Ward, 2015; Wilder, 2013). Helms et al. (2012) noted that Whites who participated in or witnessed gruesome lynchings and socialized their children in this culture of violence, were also psychologically impacted.

### **Historically Black Colleges and Universities**

Following the Civil War, public support for higher education for Black students was reflected in the enactment of the Second Morrill Act in 1890 (Department of Education, 1991). This Second Morrill Act required states with racially segregated public higher education systems to provide a land-grant institution for Black students whenever a land-grant institution was established and restricted for White students (National Research Council, 1995). The Supreme Court's 1896 decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* established a "separate but equal" racially segregated public education system (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018, “Trace school integration from 1849 to 2007,” para. 14). The Supreme Court’s decision in the *Plessy* case governed public education policy for more than a half-century (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018).

Historically Black Colleges and Universities were established to serve the educational needs of Black Americans. Prior to the time of their establishment, and for many years afterwards, Blacks were generally denied admission to traditionally White institutions. As a result, HBCUs became the principle means for providing all education-

related resources for Black Americans (Department of Education, 1991). The Institute for Colored Youth founded in 1837, later named Cheyney University, was the first higher education institution for Blacks (Department of Education, 1991). It was followed by two other Black institutions: Lincoln University and Wilberforce University (Department of Education, 1991). Historically Black Colleges and Universities were almost always privately funded by donors and local communities until the implementation of the Second Morrill Act of 1890. As a result, formerly private Black schools were mandated to become public, and 16 additional Black institutions were created as land-grant colleges (National Research Council, 1995). Those institutions then offered additional courses in agriculture, mechanics, and industrial subjects despite few college-level degrees offered (Department of Education, 1991).

Black education institutions were charged with training teachers for the Black students who would attend segregated schools (National Research Council, 1995). Black private and public institutions also specifically provided education for ministers, lawyers, and doctors (National Research Council, 1995). According to the Southern Poverty Law Center (2018):

The addition of graduate programs, mostly at public HBCUs, reflected three Supreme Court decisions in which the "separate but equal" principle of Plessy was applied to graduate and professional education. The decisions stipulated: (1) a state must offer schooling for blacks as soon as it provided it for whites (*Sinuel v. Board of Regents of University of Oklahoma*, 1948); (2) black students must receive the same treatment as white students (*MacLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents*, 1950); and (3) a state must provide facilities of

comparable quality for black and white students (*Sweatt v. Painter*, 1950). Black students increasingly were admitted to traditionally white graduate and professional schools if their program of study was unavailable at HBCUs. In effect, desegregation in higher education began at the post-baccalaureate level. (“Trace school integration from 1849 to 2007,” para 16.)

**Civil Rights Era.** Equal access to housing, education, and employment was legally granted all citizens after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. In 1954, the U. S. Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* rejected the *Plessy* decision, and held that racially segregated public schools deprive Black children of equal protections guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018). Despite the landmark decision, the court delayed deciding on how to implement the decision and asked for another round of arguments. In 1955, during *Brown II*, the Supreme Court ordered the lower federal courts to require desegregation "with all deliberate speed" (Neville, Heppner, & Wang, 1997, p. 307; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018). Between 1955 and 1960, federal judges would hold more than 200 school desegregation hearings (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018). In 1956, Tennessee Governor Frank Clement called in the National Guard after White mobs attempted to block the desegregation of a high school (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018).

**Desegregation of primary schools.** Mandating primary schools to desegregate served as the precursor for the college and university integration process. There are numerous examples of the turmoil communities faced surrounding desegregation after the *Brown* decision. For example, there were 1,000 paratroopers and a federalized Arkansas National Guard sent to protect nine Black students integrating Central High School in

Little Rock, Arkansas (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018). In Prince Edward County, Virginia, officials decided to close their public schools rather than integrate them (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018). Over the next five years, White students attended private academies, but Black students did not attend classes until the Ford Foundation donated funds to support private Black schools (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018). Ultimately, the Supreme Court ordered the county to reopen its schools and implement desegregation policies. In New Orleans, federal marshals protected six-year-old Ruby Bridges, Gail St. Etienne, Leona Tate, and Tessie Prevost from angry crowds as they enrolled in school (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018).

**Integration of predominately White colleges and universities.** Under the Jim Crow rule, all aspects of life were governed by a strict color line. The initial mandate of Black American students' acceptance was met with much resistance at the university level. However, in addition to riots and threats, Black college students were often subject to the highest scrutiny and punishments once they arrived on campus. In 1956, under court order, the University of Alabama admitted Autherine Lucy, its first Black student (Piotrowski, & Perdue, 1997). White students and residents immediately begin rioting. Later in an interview, Lucy was asked about her current experiences at the university. After criticizing the university, she was suspended and later expelled (Piotrowski, & Perdue, 1997). A Federal District Court ordered the University of Georgia to admit Black students Hamilton Holmes and Charlayne Hunter (Shenk, 2000). After a riot on campus, the two were suspended for making the campus unsafe for all students (Shenk, 2000; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018). A higher court later reinstated them, and similar patterns would continue within various universities in the South. A federal appeals court



ordered the University of Mississippi to admit James Meredith, and upon his arrival, a mob of more than 2,000 White people rioted (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018). In 1963, two Black students, Vivian Malone and James A. Hood, successfully registered at the University of Alabama despite George Wallace's public threats to prevent their entry (Orfield, 2018). However, the students were not able to attend class until President John F. Kennedy federalized the Alabama National Guard (Shenk, 2000). By 1969, 15 years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, a small number of Black students in Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Mississippi attended public elementary and secondary schools with White students (Orfield, 2018).

**Impact on Historically Black Colleges and Universities.** Despite the landmark Supreme Court decision in *Brown*, most HBCUs remained segregated with poorer facilities and budgets compared with traditionally White institutions. According to Allen (1992), adequate libraries, scientific research, and research equipment placed a serious disadvantage for recruitment to HBCUs. Over the next 35 years, many of the public HBCUs closed or merged with traditionally White institutions (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018). Although these challenges presented several difficulties, the graduation rates for HBCUs remain competitive as they strive to preserve and serve the educational needs of Black students.

**Enacting Title VI.** When legally mandated to open their doors, PWIs admitted Black students with relatively little thought given or action taken to accommodate Black students (Allen, 1992; Wilder, 2013). Title VI protects individuals from discrimination based on race, color, or national origin in programs or activities receiving federal financial assistance (Allen, 1992). In 1964, 19 states were operating racially segregated

higher education systems when Title VI was enacted (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018). In enacting Title VI, Congress reflected on its concern and repeated interventions to remedy the slow progress in desegregating educational institutions following the Supreme Court's Brown decision (Allen, 1992; Wilder, 2013). Passage of the law led to the establishment of reinforcement departments, which included the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) in the former Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (Orfield, 2018). In 1969 and 1970, after intensive investigative work, OCR notified a number of the states that they were in violation of Title VI for having failed to dismantle their previously operated racial systems of higher education (Orfield, 2018). The threat of the removal of vital federal funds forced many institutions to comply with desegregating guidelines within their institutions (Allen, 1992; Orfield, 2018; Wilder, 2013).

### **Black Student Experiences**

Colleges and Universities are a reflection of their broader society, so it is no surprise that the outside conditions have a direct effect on students (Harper, 2015; Ritchey, 2014). Significant strides in equality continue to be made despite colleges and universities continually experiencing major internal cultural shifts (Harper, 2015). Students are more diverse than ever before, and often face more complex issues while obtaining a degree. In the 21st century, Black students will continue to enroll in PWIs at greater rates than Black students enrolling at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (Allen, 1992; Ritchey, 2014). Harper (2015) found that stereotypes and perceptions of racism, both inside and outside the classroom, were previously negatively related to educational persistence for Black students attending a predominately White institution. For example, behavioral responses to race-based experiences commonly include dropping

out of or transferring from the institution at which the stereotypes were experienced (Harper, 2015). Further, Fries-Britt and Turner (2001) and Harper (2015), found race-based stereotypes over time tend to erode high-achieving Black students' confidence in their academic abilities. Students who experience negative race-based interactions in their classrooms often become withdrawn and self-suppress when professors and peers, either knowingly or unconsciously, use negative stereotypes (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Harper, 2015).

Several factors can facilitate or frustrate Black students in their pursuit of a degree at a predominately White institution. The challenges many Black students encounter at PWIs may be the surrounding hostile campus environment, culturally ignorant students and staff, limited economic assistance, lack of Black faculty, or cultural alienation and isolation (Allen, 1992; Wilder, 2013). According to Neville (2004) and Harper (2015), Black students continue to perceive PWIs as hostile, unsupportive, and unwelcoming. One way that hostility manifests itself at predominately White institutions is through peer culture. Fellow students' negative attitudes about the presence of Blacks provides an unfriendly environment for Blacks to learn (Allen, 1992; Brown & Dancy, 2018; Cokley, 2007; Harper, 2015). The lack of Black faculty and staff also contributes to the difficulties Black students directly face at predominately White institutions (Allen, 1992; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; Harper, 2015).

**Individual and institutional racism.** Individual and institutional racism experiences are often significant factors in formulating a stressful college climate for Black students (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). What Black students experience in the classroom with instructors serves as a catalyst for racist behavior by students and other

faculty (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). Salvatore and Shelton (2007) stated ambiguity in race-based experiences can negatively impact students' cognition and motivate students to utilize cognitive defenses in order to understand acts of prejudice. For Black students who engage in cognitive defensiveness, they extend their mental energy and attribute responsibility for this negative race-based interaction to themselves (Carter, 2007; Cokley et al., 2017; Salvatore & Shelton, 2007). Additionally, vague understanding of race-based interactions reduced students' performance and their focus on many academic and social tasks (Carter, 2007; Cokley et al., 2017; Salvatore & Shelton, 2007).

**Racial identity.** Gilbert, So, Russell, & Wessel (2011) argued that future scholarship has to continue to take sociocultural, racial identity, and ethnic identity factors into account to clarify the variation in mental health outcomes among racial and ethnic groups. Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, and Chavous (1998) and Gilbert et al. (2011) stated racial identity is the extent to which an individual is aware and interprets life events through their racial group. Sellers et al. (1998) developed the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity to understand racial identity from a psychosocial framework. The holistic perspective of a Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity considers one's awareness and centrality of their race as the foundation of the model. According to Sellers et al. (1998), the meaning of one's race is significant to the individual's self-concept and is central across settings. An examination of individual racial identity allows researchers to obtain a distinctive understanding of the meaning and significance of one's lived experiences and mental health (McClain et al., 2016).

Various researchers have found a link between racial identity and psychological wellness (Cross, 1991; Johnson & Arbona, 2006; McClain et al., 2016; Sellers et al.,

1998). Nevertheless, the direction in which racial identity and mental health outcomes relate is still unclear (McClain et al., 2016). Johnson and Arbona (2006) found that racial identity contributes to negative mental health outcomes in environments that do not reflect the racial values of the individual. However, Settles, Navarrete, Pagano, Abdou, and Sidanius (2010) found participants, who had strong racial group values and identity, demonstrated a positive relationship in association with their mental health outcomes.

Racial identity is a central component of understanding the adjustment and fit of Black college students. For Black students attending PWIs, their racial identity conflicts are largely responsible for a significant number of early departures from a college campus (Harper & Quaye, 2007; Sanchez & Awad, 2015). Cross's (1991) Nigrescence Model discussed the psychological components of racial identity as it relates to adjustment in society.

William Cross developed his Nigrescence theory in 1971, in which he referred to it as "an identity change process as a Negro-to-Black conversion experience" (Cross, 1991, p. 189). Nigrescence theory was written with the assumption that many Black people at the time were self-hating, separated from their culture, and in need of an identity change (Ritchey, 2014). Originally, the models consisted of five stages. However, in 1991, Cross condensed the model to four stages combining stages four and five (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). Further, there was a distinction between personal and group identity, the influence they have on self-esteem, and additions to the identities that are found within each stage (Vandiver, Cross, Worrell, & Fhagen-Smith, 2002). According to Cross (1991), the stages of the Black identity are pre-encounter, encounter, immersion and internalization, and internalization-commitment (stages 4 and 5).

***Pre-Encounter stage.*** Persons in the pre-encounter stage hold attitudes that range from low salience, race neutrality, to anti-Black (Cross, 1991). Little emphasis is given to race in this stage, and people focus on other aspects of their lives including occupation, lifestyle, and religion. The pre-encounter stage can occur at any stage in life, but college students in this stage may not acknowledge race as something that has affected their lives thus far (Ritchey, 2014). Cross acknowledges that in this stage a Black person can hold an attitude of anti-Blackness (Cross, 1991). Cross (1991) stated that “anti-Blacks loath other Blacks; they feel alienated from them and do not see Blacks or the Black community as potential or actual sources of personal support” (p. 191). This stage is often described as a lack of awareness and ignorance of one’s own racial history. Individuals in this stage are often unaware of their embedded White or Eurocentric ideologies.

***Encounter stage.*** People in the encounter stage believe they must work around, slip through, or even shatter their previous references to their ideology and worldview (Cross, 1991). College students begin to realize they are a misfit for the majority culture and represent a minority group. Others are needed at this time to provide direction for the individual to be re-socialized or transformed (Cross, 1991). The encounter stage encompasses two steps, encounter and personalize. Students can encounter a life-changing event that alters their identity and shapes how one views their race (Cross, 1991). Personalize occurs when an encounter has a personally significant impact that spurs a change in their thinking, and as a result, provokes action. Cross (1991) pointed out that the encounter does not need to be negative, as learning about the positive historical events that may lead an individual to reconsider their views of Black history and culture. However, psychologically, whether the event is positive or negative, students

can still experience conflicting emotions of confusion, hopelessness, anxiety, depression, anger, and euphoria (Vandiver et al., 2002).

***Immersion-Emersion stage.*** The immersion-emersion stage of Nigrescence addresses the acceptance and embrace of Black identity and pride (Cross, 1991). In this stage, individuals agree to take psychological ownership of their Black identity, shed their old worldview, and construct a new frame of reference with the information they now have about race (Cross, 1991). Many college students may not have yet changed their frame of reference but are committed to change (Ritchey, 2014). Cross (1991) stated the immersion stage is a powerful embrace of feeling “energized by rage [at White people and culture], guilt [at having once been tricked into thinking White ideas], and developing a sense of pride [in one’s Black self, Black people, and Black culture]” (p. 203). The immersion-emersion stage can be a catalyst for Black students to seek out Black history, art, culture, and kinship they never knew existed. Harper and Quaye (2007) also noted that many racial and ethnic minority students find themselves either subverting their identity to become involved in the mainstream culture or assimilating as they struggle to maintain a strong cultural connection to their racial identity.

***Internalization stage.*** Previously, it was believed that Blacks were assumed to be psychologically healthy and have higher self-esteem if they accepted being Black. Further, Blacks who accepted the values of White society were believed to suffer from self-hatred and low self-esteem (Vandiver et al., 2002). Societal constructions disadvantage Black people through overt and covert forms of institutionalized racism. During the internalization stage, Black people decompress all the negative stereotypes associated with being Black. They view being Black through a different lens.

Internalization encompasses a transition period where one is working through the challenges and problems of a new identity (Cross, 1991). During this time, people move away from how others view them to how they view themselves. Cross (1991) stated “the internalization marks the point of dissonance resolution and reconstruction of one’s steady-state personality and cognitive style” (p. 220). Black people begin to think critically about their newfound racial identity and how it has shaped their life. Security in one’s self-identity allows the individual to be open to initiating and maintaining relationships with White people. Most importantly, Cross (1991) stated “Black identity functions to fulfill the self-protection, social anchorage, and bridging needs of the individual” (p. 220).

***Internalization-commitment stage.*** Internalization-commitment focuses on the long-term interest of Black affairs over an extended amount of time and is now combined with internalization (Cross, 1991). This stage is the ultimate transformation, taking place when someone achieves a healthy racial identity and feels an urgent sense of action and activities. Racism, domination, and privilege are interwoven into society, and as a result “racism and race-related stress may be experienced at the cultural, individual, and institutional levels” (Johnson & Arbona, 2006, p. 1). According to Constantine, Richardson, Benjamin, & Wilson (1998) healthy racial identity development is achieved when a series of developmental stages are experienced linearly or simultaneously. Blacks begin with less awareness about their Black identity. Then, they progress to internalizing positive thoughts, become aware of the historical ramifications about what it means to be Black, and they also put thoughts and ideas into action to help educate their Black community (Johnson & Arbona, 2006).



**Race-based experiences.** Racism is operationally defined as beliefs, attitudes, institutional arrangements, and acts that tend to denigrate individuals or groups because of phenotypic characteristics (Krieger & Sidney, 1996). As previously stated, for the purposes of this study, racism is defined as any “prejudice against someone because of their race, when those views are reinforced by systems of power” (Oluo, 2018, p. 26). This definition was selected because racism can occur and be experienced within various societal contexts, but typically occurs on three levels (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). The first level is the individual, or face-to-face interactions. Next, the institutional level captured the institution’s policies, traditions, and practices that are based on biased or racist ideology. Lastly, the cultural level refers to a broader view that considers one culture and belief superior (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). Although, Black students in previous studies were able to identify race-based encounters as a perceived stressor, the direct link to which aspect of their lives it affected (academic, social, and interpersonal) remained unclear (Neville, 2004). Carter (2007) argues that the failure to clearly understand the “emotional, psychological, and to some extent, physical effects of racism on its target” (p. 78), remains a major factor in perpetuating racism.

**Race-Related Stress.** Race-related stress has been linked with psychological and health issues, such as self-esteem, concentration issues, anxiety, and depression (Hogan et al., 2002). Recently, the literature surrounding research on race-related stressors has increased significantly. Most of the literature centers on conceptualizing, measuring, or exploring the influence of race-related stressors on Black adults’ health status, including systolic and diastolic blood pressure (Cokley et al., 2017; Fang & Myers, 2001). Overwhelmingly, results from this body of work suggest a link between greater perceived

racism and lower negative health symptoms (Cokley et al., 2017; Fang & Myers, 2001). Despite these findings in this literature, there is very little research examining the effects of race-related stress on Black college students' psychological adjustment (Brittian et al., 2015, Neville, 2004).

Umaña-Taylor (2016) found 87–90% of Black adolescents in middle-to-late adolescence reported having had at least one experience of racial discrimination. Black adolescents experience discrimination across settings, including but not limited to school. In Black youth, ages 16-19, discrimination is linked to stress, low self-esteem, and psychiatric disorders (Jernigan & Henderson-Daniel, 2010). Jernigan and Henderson-Daniel (2010) and found that discrimination is also often associated with depressive symptoms and clinical depression. Jernigan and Henderson-Daniel (2010) attributed their findings in their study to the heightened awareness of Black youth's identities, which increases their sensitivity to race-based experiences. The negative impact of exposure to discrimination on the mental health of Blacks generally persists over time. Cheng et al. (2015) found discriminatory acts that occur in adolescence can be a predictor to future depressive symptomologies and stress in adulthood of Black youth.

**Racial trauma.** Racial trauma is described as the physical and psychological symptoms *people of color* often experience after being exposed to a stressful racial encounter (Carter, 2007). There are two distinct ways that racist-incident-based trauma differs from other traumas. First, the person who is experiencing physical or psychological symptoms were not targeted randomly; he or she was targeted due to their race, a factor that can simultaneously be central to one's identity, and beyond one's control (Carter et al., 2017; Henderson & Sloan, 2003). Second, the incident occurred

within the context of stereotyping and stigma about the person's racial group that set up a societal response of victim-blaming and attribution (Carter et al., 2017; Henderson & Sloan, 2003).

When *people of color* experience racism more frequently, their symptoms tend to intensify and manifest physically, psychologically, and behaviorally (Hogan et al., 2002). Similar to survivors of other types of trauma, *people of color* often experience fear and hypervigilance, headaches, insomnia, body aches, memory difficulty, self-blame, confusion, shame, and guilt after experiencing racism (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005; Carter, 2007, Plummer & Slane, 1996; Hunter, 1984; Reynolds et al., 2010; Umaña-Taylor, 2016). Moreover, Carter (2007) stated race-based experiences never exist in isolation; racial trauma is a cumulative experience, where every personal or secondhand encounter with racism contributes to chronic stress that often goes unacknowledged. For example, when a *person of color* encounters racism, it brings to mind both their own previous experiences with racism as well as their awareness of the longstanding history of racism (Hogan et al., 2002). Historical race-related events also play a significant role in shaping how *people of color* view racism (Umaña-Taylor, 2016).

**Social Media.** Online media users often experience several positive aspects to social media, which includes increasing contact with distant friends, and expedited access to information. Social media users are able to provide opinions and participate in group discussions, often establishing a sense of belonging. According to Kraut et al. (1998), there were inverse associations between internet use and depression, suggesting that possibly more social forms of internet use like chatting and gaming, reduce the risk of depression. Selfhout, Branje, Delsing, ter Bogt, and Meeus (2009) explored the notion

that the quality of social media interactions was a better predictor of mental wellness than general social media use. Social media access enhances communication with people around the world, providing a means of social education (Chappell, 2016).

Researchers have continued to expand the literature on understanding mental health issues related to social media (Blakinger, 2016; Chappell, 2016; Greenberg, 2015; Horowitz, Corasaniti, & Southall, 2015). As with all media, social media is often comprised of stressful and inaccurate information that can spread quickly. Social media use has been linked to feelings of loneliness and depression in youth (Chappell, 2016). According to Blakinger (2016), adolescent users who experience low self-esteem tend to be more active on social media. Additionally, youth indicated they experience higher anxiety because they feel the need to constantly compare themselves to others, use social media as an escape, establish a false sense of their identity online, and feel they rely too much on media images (Blakinger, 2016).

***Black student social media.*** The increased use in social media use over the last decade is almost equal among gender and racial groups (Blakinger, 2016; Chappell, 2016). According to Smith (2014), 94% of Black adults online used mediums such as Facebook and Twitter, which was greater than all other racial groups measured. Racist incidents that are distressing may include forms of institutional race-based incidents, such as witnessing racial stereotyping in the media (Blakinger, 2016; Chappell, 2016). Black social media users have not shied away from actively participating in online discussions about race (Chappell, 2016). Social media activities for Black college students and adults commonly included repeated sharing of race-related hashtags and viral videos of police perpetrating violence against Blacks, which has intensified the discourse (Blakinger,

2016). Black social media users are effectively working to undermine notions that racism is no longer a current issue in America, by expressing outrage online about systemic discrimination and racial terrorism (Greenberg, 2015; Horowitz et al., 2015).

For some time, and across multiple disciplines, researchers have unpacked the antecedents, consequences, and frequency of racial discrimination experienced by Black individuals (Blakinger, 2016; Chappell, 2016; Pieterse et al., 2012). Chronic exposure to experiences with racial discrimination have been found to precipitate race-related stress and can lead to negative health outcomes (Belgrave & Allison, 2014). According to Chappell (2016), social media discussions about race and news of racial discrimination appear to simultaneously kindle frustration and race-consciousness among Black youth and college students. Chappell (2016) and Belgrave and Allison (2014) have indicated that repeated exposure to online racial discrimination can serve as a significant consequence for Black individuals. These negative mental and physical health outcomes include but are not limited to depression, psychiatric distress, lowered self-esteem somatic, and cognitive anxiety (Belgrave & Allison, 2014; Chappell, 2016; Neblett, & Carter, 2012; Pieterse et al., 2012).

**Black Student Activism.** The recent activism of Black students can be correlated with the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement (Chappell, 2016). The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement began to organize after the 2013 non-guilty verdict of George Zimmerman in the shooting death of Trayvon Martin (Sneed, 2014). However, the BLM movement exploded in 2014 after the death of Michael Brown (Sneed, 2014). These events are key factors that contributed to the rise of the BLM movement and became triggers of race-based stress (Chappell, 2016). Sneed (2014) argues unfavorable racial

climate at PWIs and rising awareness of racial events are likely to exacerbate Black students' stress level, thus threatening their mental health and affecting their academic performance.

The recent and public killing of Black Americans by the police contributes significantly to race-related stress (Chappell, 2016; Glenn, 2016). Bryant-Davis, Adams, Alejandre, and Gray (2017) described the impact of increased direct and indirect exposure to police brutality, and its psychological significance for Black Americans: "Police brutality is a form of unwarranted physical violence perpetrated by an individual or group symbolically representing a government-sanctioned, law enforcement agency as opposed to an individual perpetrator who only represents themselves" (Bryant-Davis et al., 2017, p. 853). The high-profile cases of Philando Castile and Freddy Gray are specifically prominent examples because of the commonly perceived racism that ultimately led to the deaths of Castile and Gray (Glenn, 2016). Philando Castile was shot in front of his daughter—after he notified the officers who pulled him over that he was carrying a licensed concealed weapon (Glenn, 2016). Freddy Gray screamed for air to breathe during his arrest. He ultimately died in police custody (Glenn, 2016). Bryant-Davis et al. (2017) acknowledged that witnessing such events carries psychologically damaging consequences; "when communities witness or experience chronic police brutality, they may deal with a variety of challenges after these events, such as depression, anxiety, anger, fear, mistrust, and other psychosocial problems" (p. 855). The continual and repeated exposure to these types of stories contributes to the race-based stress between a person and the environment, especially for Black college students who

historically remain socially attuned and active (Bryant-Davis, 2007; Chappell, 2016; Glenn, 2016).

### **Black College Student Racial Trauma**

The various definitions of racism do not offer a way to connect specific acts and experiences of racism to particular emotional and psychological reactions (Neville & Pieterse, 2009). However, according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), a traumatized person may be the direct victim of a discriminatory or hostile act (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Additionally, a racially traumatized person may also witness or learn the act has occurred to someone close to them and may psychologically experience repeated details of the events that could result in a traumatic response or internalization of the event (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Bryant-Davis et al., 2017). Individuals who internalize social stereotyping suffer a poor self-concept, guilt, shame, self-blame, and may not be able to cope or adapt to the experience, which may generate greater levels of stress (Hope, & Klonoff, 1996; Nadal et al., 2014b). For college students, race-based trauma presents complex navigation of college life and interpersonal appraisals of stress (Cokley et al., 2017). Stress is a central construct in the race-based traumatic stress injury. If a stressful event is ambiguous, negative, unpredictable, and uncontrollable, traumatic stress injury increases (Carter, 2007). Race-based stress is greater for college students if the interactions present concerns that conflict with an individual's central role in their lives, personal relationships, work, and parenting (Cokley et al., 2017). For Black students, this can include individual, institutional, and cultural threats to their education at the university, lack of social support, or feelings of isolation (Carter et al., 2017). Plummer and Slane (1996) and

Cokley et al. (2017) found that in the absence of social support, Black students were more likely to experience depression in relation to stressful life events.

### **Suicide Prevalence and Mental Health Considerations**

A wider range of mental health outcomes has been linked to discrimination; however, less is known about the effects of discrimination on suicide rates in Black youth (Assari, Lankarani, & Howard Caldwell, 2017; Hooper et al., 2017). Black adolescents and young adults between the ages of 15–24 have the highest suicide attempt and death rates (Bridge et al., 2018; McClain et al., 2016). Suicide is the third leading cause of death among Black youth (Bridge et al., 2018). For Black individuals, mental illness stigma intersects with racial discrimination. Research shows that on top of the mistrust of medical and mental healthcare, Black Americans suffer from a lack of available treatment and mental health awareness (Bridge et al., 2018; Fang & Myers, 2001; Garrity & Ries, 1985; McClain et al., 2016). For many individuals, their mental health care mostly occurs in emergency rooms by multiple providers, without the benefit of having one stable health care provider invested in their long-term wellbeing (Garrity & Ries, 1985; McClain et al., 2016). Specifically, for Black college students, if counseling services are offered on their campus as a resource, the stigma of mental health and systemic mistrust often led students to decline these services (Cokley et al., 2017; Flemming, 2002).

Barr and Neville (2014) explored the impact of various components of racism, including peer alertness of discrimination and parent messages in Black college students attending predominantly White institutions. Barr and Neville (2014) found that students were significantly impacted more by the messages of racism by their peers than their parents. Although the parents' messages were often valued, the messages from peers



negatively affected the participant's mental health. The persistent exposure to discriminatory acts triggers core reactions of intrusion, arousal, and avoidance, which may be manifested in other mental health symptoms (Carter, 2007; Carter et al., 2017; Cokley et al., 2017). According to Cokley et al. (2017), common responses to racial stressors for college students included depression, imposture syndrome, and anxiety that reflect or contain the core reactions. Nadal et al. (2014b) argued that the impact of macroaggressions and discriminatory acts against a *person of color* can directly impact their self-esteem. Similarly, college students may experience a significant loss of self-worth, develop difficulty with intimate, and interpersonal relationships. Feelings of guilt and shame may arise because of increased self-blame and responsibility for discriminatory acts (Cokley et al., 2017; McClain et al., 2016). Williams and Neighbors (2001) referred to self-blame and feeling responsible in the context of racism as "internalized racism" (p. 812).

Williams and Neighbors (2001) stated the following:

The normative cultural characterization of the superiority of whiteness and the devaluation of blackness (or people of Color), combined with economic marginality . . . can lead to self-perceptions of worthlessness and powerlessness. Several lines of evidence suggest that the internalization of cultural stereotypes by stigmatized groups can create expectations, anxieties, and reactions that can adversely affect social and psychological functioning. (p. 812)

The various forms of racism *people of color* are subjected to expose these individuals to increased lifelong vulnerability (McClain et al., 2016). Cokley et al. (2017) found college students who lacked adequate support and culturally specific self-care are at increased

risk for higher rates of poor physical and mental health, experience numerous life event stressors, and receive inadequate societal support.

### **Impact on Black Student Success and Retention**

An increased stress level in an academic setting can manifest itself in several ways, including a decline in academic performance, social withdrawal, and impaired mental and physical wellness (Cokley et al., 2017; Garrity & Ries, 1985). There are standing scholarly studies in which researchers thoroughly discussed and defined race-related stress and its effect on Black students in higher education (Allen, 1992; Cokley et al., 2017; Garrity & Ries, 1985; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; Harper, 2015; Ritchey, 2014). As previously stated, frequent insults directed at Black students because of their race has a significant impact on physical and psychological health (Carter et al., 2017; Cokley et al., 2017; McClain et al., 2016). Researchers have generally found that daily-perceived hassles were related to depression, anxiety, and decline in physical health (Cokley et al., 2017; Flemming, 2002). Race-based experiences have secondary effects and threats to a student's success (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; Harper, 2015; Ritchey, 2014). Low academic performances are often unwarranted punishments for students who are struggling with the complex challenges that are attached to college life (Flemming, 2002; Ritchey, 2014). When assessing the threats to Black students' success, researchers account for psychological adjustments based on three primary factors, which includes race-related stress, psychological-interpersonal stress, and academic stress (Flemming, 2002; Neville, 2004; Ritchey, 2014).

**Assessments.** Black Student Stress Inventory (BSSI) is a measure of the psychological adjustment and academic performance norm for Black students (Neville,

2004). The principal components of the BSSI were used to assess a three-factor solution: race-related stress, psychological-interpersonal stress, and academic stress as central factors (Neville, 2004; Ritchey, 2014). Neville (2004) also provided a framework to define race-based trauma as the stressful effects of combating racism that can be experienced as traumatic (Carter et al., 2017; Neville, Heppner, & Wang, 1997).

In 2007, Carter proposed a model of Race-Based Traumatic Stress (RBTS) injury that resulted from encounters with racism to assist in classifying racism, and assess the emotional impact of racism (Carter, 2007). Carter's RBTS model classified types of racism as hostile, avoidant, and aversive-hostile forms of racism. It is important to note, Carter et al. (2017) argued that race-based traumatic stress was not PTSD. According to Carter et al. (2017), the criteria for establishing RBTS is identifying emotional pain and associated reactions after discriminatory event(s). Specifically, Carter et al. (2017) stated encounters with racism must be experienced as emotionally painful, sudden, and uncontrollable (Carter et al., 2017). Further, the reactions are expressed as intrusion, avoidance, and arousal of symptoms. The reactions include clusters of anxiety, anger, rage, depression, low self-esteem, shame, and guilt. The range of reactions reflect injury but not a mental health disorder (Carter, 2007; Carter et al., 2017).

**Predictors of Black student success.** General factors that contribute to a student's success includes being connected on campus, attending classes, developing relationships with faculty, and ensuring self-care (Flemming, 2002; Hurd, Sánchez, Zimmerman, & Caldwell, 2012). For Black students, student's success factors look differently. Various researchers have identified specific factors that contribute to positive emotional experiences of Black students (Hogan et al., 2002; Neville, 2004; Petrie &

Russell, 2015; Piotrowski, & Perdue, 1998). Students who present with a strong self-identification associated with determination and academic success, according to Petrie and Russell (2015) indicated a higher level of resilience and adaptability. Black Students who identify secure social support in which they can process and employ a system-focused perspective that reframes racial, cultural, and historical contexts, expressed this support helped them overcome difficulties on their campuses (Hope & Klonoff, 1996; Petrie & Russell, 2015). The distinction between the three types of racism was also found to be important for Black students to perceive their environment as interactive and mutually influencing (Carter et al., 2017; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). Common support can include individual affirmations or assertiveness, identifying experienced Black peers, race-based student organizations, and personal and professional care from advisors (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; Petrie & Russell, 2015). Hurd et al. (2012) found an association between higher racial centrality and increased academic performance among Black college students, indicates that seeing race as a central part of one's identity may contribute positively to one's academic performance. Guiffrida and Douthit (2010) and Carter et al. (2017) argued it is imperative that the psychological and emotional experiences of racism not be overlooked, despite considerable effort in society to hide racism and to keep targets silent.

### **Summary**

Throughout the history of the United States, racism has impacted political, social, and educational policies. Racial segregation often translated to the total exclusion of Black people from public facilities, institutions, and opportunities. This separation has significantly impacted Black people and served as a constant symbol of an inferior

position in society. Race-based practices in education have influenced the structure and operation of many colleges and universities. Colleges and universities are more integrated than ever before, and this has inaccurately led to the assumption that *students of color* no longer face barriers due to their race.

Racism at PWI continues to present challenges for Black students because many students still perceive their institutions as culturally ignorant (Cokley et al., 2017; McClain et al., 2016; Neville, 2004). Black students continue to enroll in PWIs at greater rates than Black students enrolling at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018; Neville, 2004). Yet, the nationwide graduation rate of Black undergraduate students in 2015 was 42%, which is 20% lower than the graduation rate of their White counterparts (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018; Petrie & Russell, 2015). The marginal success of Black college students at PWIs points to a larger societal issue.

Race-based experiences are connected, complex, and are generally difficult to illustrate. Race-related stress for Black college students provides students with the perception that their institution is hostile, unsupportive, and unwelcoming (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; Harper, 2015). Increasing individuals' awareness of their experiences with various racism, and particular types of emotional and psychological reactions is needed in the literature for college students (Carter, 2007; Carter et al., 2017; Pieterse et al., 2010). Further, Bryant-Davis and Ocampo (2005) and Nadal et al. (2014a) concluded that the reactions and experiences associated with racism on college campuses are in need of deconstruction into specific types of encounters such as racial discrimination and racial harassment (Carter, 2007; Carter et al., 2017; Pieterse et al., 2010). By using more

specific types of encounters with racism, it may be possible to show that targets of racism are harmed emotionally from the stress and trauma of these interactions (Carter et al., 2017; Fang & Myers, 2001).

Previous research has focused on assessing race-based trauma as it related to a student's academic success. The Race-based Traumatic Stress (RBTS) model specifies the types of discrimination Black adults experience that are critical to processing racial trauma (Carter, 2007; Carter et al., 2017). Limited studies explore the psychological impact of race-based encounters, and the daily challenges it presents Black students in their overall navigation of campus life. Despite an increased focus on research addressing race-related stress, understanding the emotional depth and connectedness of race-based encounters that underline Black students' experiences at PWIs is relatively unknown.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **Methodology**

The purpose of my study was to describe the raced-based experiences of Black students attending a predominately White institution. Specifically, I explored the uncomfortable campus climates that impacted Black college students' mental health. This study also explored the barriers or enhancements to the success of Black students.

The methodology that utilized in this study was qualitative. In particular, I utilized the transcendental phenomenological methodology (Moustakas, 1994). This methodology was used to answer the following research question: What are the lived experiences of Black students who encounter race-based interactions at their predominately White institutions? Chapter III begins with a discussion of the transcendental phenomenological research design, bracketing, selection of participants, informed consent, instrumentation, data collection, data organization, data analysis, and trustworthiness. A summary concludes the chapter.

### **Research Design**

According to Johnson and Christensen (2012), quantitative research (not used in this study) is used to measure problems by collecting a statistically meaningful quantity of numerical data. Specifically, data can be transformed into usable statistics to measure attitudes, opinions, and behaviors; then, results are generalized to a larger sample population. They also pointed out that quantitative data collection methods are more highly structured than qualitative data collection methods. Qualitative methods focus on the personal experiences of the participants.

The unique lived experiences of Black college students are best understood by using qualitative research (Yin, 1994). Qualitative researchers investigate the phenomena according to the meanings that the participants ascribed to them (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Yin (1994) described qualitative research as aiming to provide a holistic account to each participant's experiences, which may also consist of describing an event, activity, or phenomenon. Following Yin's (1994) perspective on qualitative research would allow me to employ a qualitative methodology that incorporated flexibility with new information. Consequently, the qualitative approach empowered me to develop an in-depth understanding of the race-based experiences of Black college students.

According to Creswell (2013), the research design that is best suited for examining the lived experiences of participants is a phenomenological design. Transcendental phenomenological methodology (Moustakas, 1994) was appropriate in this study for several reasons. I explored the complex interactions of individual, cultural, and institutional factors' influence on emotional responses to race-based experiences of Black college students at predominately White institutions. Descriptions and narratives were used in this study to provide in-depth information about the race-based experiences of Black college students (Brod, Tesler, & Christiansen, 2009; Merriam, 1998). Further, I aimed to capture the participants' own perspectives in order to provide insight into their motivations by identifying and describing their lived experiences with the phenomena.

### **Transcendental Phenomenology**

Transcendental phenomenology comes from the philosophical work of Edmund Husserl (Giorgi, 2006; Moustakas, 1994). According to Moustakas (1994), Husserl believed the natural sciences start from a set of knowledge perspectives not questioned by



the scientists themselves. Phenomenological research investigates the way knowledge comes into being and clarifies the assumptions upon which human understanding is grounded.

Researchers can use a transcendental phenomenological methodology to analyze and develop the perceptions of participants in great detail (Moerrer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). According to Moustakas (1994), a transcendental phenomenological approach focuses on the lived experiences of participants which were vital in capturing the perspectives of marginalized groups and cultures. Focusing on the descriptions of the experiences allowed researchers the opportunity to reach the deepest level of any phenomenon through a transcendental phenomenological approach (Giorgi, 2006).

Transcendental phenomenology was selected because the systemic processes complemented my search to elicit significant statements from participants, identify themes, and to develop an essence of their lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The essence of each participant's lived experience was captured by describing what the participants shared using a textural description. The textural description was then combined with a structural description of their experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Although I was unable to examine every essence of each phenomenon, the participants' differing backgrounds were likely to influence how they experienced and perceived similar phenomena (Moustakas, 1994).

### **Bracketing**

The first step in qualitative research is bracketing. Bracketing invokes a fresh perspective of the participant's experiences (Moustakas, 1994). I have bracketed my experiences with the transcendental phenomenological approach to help reduce my

personal influence on my study. Additionally, by bracketing my experiences, I consolidated my lived experiences in order to gain an objective perspective of the phenomenon studied (Moustakas, 1994).

Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that the researcher must maintain openness and awareness about their influence on the research and participants. In the following words, I share how I have been influenced by the phenomena under study. I am a 34-year-old Black woman who was raised in Southeast Texas. All of my post-secondary education has been attained at predominately White institutions. My undergraduate degree was obtained at one of the second-largest PWIs in Texas. My graduate work was at small and medium-sized campuses. In addition to my educational experiences for five years at two PWIs, while attending classes, I worked in Student Affairs' housing and counseling services. Encountering race-based experiences in my undergraduate career triggered my racial identity development, internalization of stereotypes, and awareness of the university's history of racism.

Exploration of the current phenomena was developed through a process-support group for Black students on campus that expressed concerns over increased discriminatory interactions with White students. Listening intently to their experiences, and recalling my similar race-based encounters, I became aware that the emotional consequences of racism for Black college students were overlooked and attributed to other external factors. I also became aware of the various emotional experiences of these students and the lack of understanding of how race-based interactions impact their lives as Black college students.

In addition to documenting my experiences of the phenomena, I enlisted a peer to assist in conducting a pre-participation and post-analysis process interview. The assisting person has a master's in psychology, has experiences working in higher education and conducting neutral interviews. I discussed my transcribed session with my dissertation chairperson and sought his guidance in identifying potential areas of biases and influence. Finally, I asked each committee member to write about their individual biases related to the subject matter.

The members of my dissertation committee were Drs. Richard Henriksen Jr., Richard Watts, and Sinem Akay-Sullivan. Dr. Henriksen, my dissertation chair and mentor, is of multiple heritage, a Black and White male. He participated in the civil rights protests of the 1960s and 1970s that helped lead to the desegregation of colleges and universities. He has taught in predominately White universities for the past 19 years and has been the only Black male professor in his program area at each of the three universities where he has taught. He is an outspoken advocate for diversity in higher education for both students and faculty. One of Dr. Henriksen's specialties is multicultural counseling. Dr. Sinem Akay-Sullivan is a female from Turkey, a predominantly Muslim country located near the Middle East. She received her master's and PhD as a minority student at a university in Texas. Since 2014, she has been teaching at a predominantly White university located in a majority Christian community.

Dr. Richard Watts is a Distinguished Professor of Counseling at Sam Houston State University and Texas State University System Regents' Professor. He stated that he grew up in a racist home where his parents taught him hateful and oppressive beliefs about diverse populations, particularly African Americans. However, as he attended

school with minorities, his experiences deviated greatly from what his parents and other relatives communicated. Consequently, Dr. Watts began a journey of striving to engage and evaluate people as Dr. King suggested, that is, by the conduct of their character rather than the color of their skin. Dr. Watts has been blessed by his work with diverse students for 25 years as a counselor-educator. A good portion of his scholarship has addressed various diversity issues. His work in the area of diversity has resulted in relationships with diverse students, faculty, and clients. The knowledge Dr. Watts has accumulated, in his career and in his experiences, is used to bracket any biases and to genuinely hear the voices of the participants in my study.

### **Participants**

After completing my doctoral proposal in the early spring semester, I made an application to the Institutional Review Board (IRB). After approval of my IRB application (Appendix A), recruitment emails were developed that explained the purpose and overview of the study, sampling criteria, participant time commitments to the study, and the researcher's contact information. Contact was made initially with the Department of Multicultural Services, the student organization that caters to Black students, Residence Life, and institutional contacts at the university chosen for this study. Additionally, university contacts and participants were asked to pass that email to students who met the criteria, along with specific instructions to contact the researcher.

If the students agreed to participate in my study, a follow-up email asked each participant if their preferred next contact was email or by phone. During these next contacts, participants indicated their interest in the study, their ability to participate. A determination was made for the time and location for the interview. Because of the

varying nature of students' schedules, several attempts were made to reach prospective participants at different dates and times. A brief voice message was left with the subject containing the researcher's contact information, along with email reminders specifying dates and times to respond if deemed necessary.

Participants in this study consisted of Black college students who were currently enrolled at a medium sized PWI and had experienced a race-based interaction. Specifically, participants self-identified as Black. The students' ages were 18–23, they had no prior college experience, and they had completed at least two semesters of college at their current university. Both men and women were encouraged to participate in the study. In qualitative research, the sample size is determined by the quality or richness of the information, as opposed to the quantity of information (Merriam, 1998). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Creswell (2013), sampling should be terminated at the point of redundancy (saturation), which occurs when no new information is forthcoming. For this study, ten participants were recruited. Participant interviews continued until saturation occurred.

**Informed consent.** Those students who met the selection criteria, and who responded to attempted contacts, met with the researcher at the interview location. Participants reviewed and were provided with a human subject's informed consent form. The informed consent and confidentiality procedures informed the participants of their protections, addressed potential conflicts that might surface during the process, and attempted to resolve concerns prior to participation in the study. Sam Houston State University's IRB human protections guidelines were implemented, participants were informed they could resign from the study at any point without consequence and made

aware of the emotional risks that might occur. Referrals to the Counseling Service were discussed with each participant. Additionally, participants were provided information about the Men of Color and Women of Color process groups through the Counseling Service.

### **Participant Sampling**

The snowball sampling technique was used to identify additional study participants via those who had already participated in the study. This sampling method involves previously identified participants nominating another potential participant to be a part of the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In other words, snowball sampling methods were based on referrals from initial subjects to generate additional subjects. Therefore, when applying this sampling method, members of the sample group were recruited via a sequence type of referral (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Snowball sampling was essential in identifying and recruiting additional participants for the study. Although data were collected from a medium sized university, Black students accounted for 16.8% of the student body population, making snowball sampling necessary to efficiently identify potential participants (Sam Houston State University, 2019). Once participants were identified, they were asked to notify the researcher of other participants on their campus who meet the selection criteria.

Purposive sampling techniques were widely used for the identification and selection of information-rich study participants (Patton, 2002). Purposeful sampling procedures allowed me to choose the demographics, sites, and participants for the study (Patton, 2002). Criterion sampling was essential for phenomenological research. Using criterion sampling, I was able to select knowledgeable participants who were able to communicate what they had experienced, thus maximizing the diversity in understanding

the impact of race-based experiences (Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2002). Further, criterion purposeful sampling was selected because the participants in this sample had to meet specific predetermined criteria (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Implementing criterion sampling ensured that all participants had experienced the same phenomenon and were from similar cultural backgrounds. In addition, criterion sampling allowed me to reach the theme saturation related to the grand tour questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **Instrumentation**

Moustakas (1994) stated that interviews are the primary tool for gathering phenomenological data. Specifically, a semi-structured interview was the structural process of my interviews. The questions were written in an open-ended fashion to avoid leading the participant's answers. Creswell (1998) asserted that the qualitative research goal is to obtain a deep understanding of the phenomenon studied. This goal was realized using the pre-written interview questions along with derived follow-up questions.

The semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix D) were used within an open framework, which allowed focused, conversational, two-way communication with participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Semi-structured interviews are appropriate for qualitative studies. The approach allows for predetermined open-ended or grand tour questions, with other questions emerging from the dialogue between the interviewer and interviewees (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Further, researchers who use individual semi-structured interviews can specifically inquire deeply into the participants' perceptions of social issues (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Researchers can also express appropriate amounts of empathy and connectedness to participants.

**Grand tour questions.** The questions created for the semi-structured interviews addressed the textural and structural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994) of the phenomena under study. According to Moustakas (1994), textural descriptions are explanations of what the participants experienced, and structural descriptions explain how the phenomenon was experienced. Specifically, structural descriptions incorporate conditions, situations, and the participant's context of their experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

The interview questions were developed by examining the body of literature and finding limited studies that addressed the impact of race-based interactions for Black college students. Much of the literature acknowledged race-based experiences can have an impact on a Black student's overall college experience, academics, and physical health, but lacked a specific focus on mental health (Allen, 1992; Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Harper, 2015; Neville, 2004; Ritchey, 2014; Walls & Hall, 2017). Specifically, the questions addressed in these studies focused on if the student encountered racism and the academic consequences of that interaction. Cokley et al. (2017) addressed the significant psychological impacts of imposture syndrome and asked participants about their academic challenges while experiencing imposture syndrome. According to McClain et al. (2016) as well as Walls and Hall (2017), in order to effectively assess the impact of racial discrimination, researchers must understand how race influences a participant's worldview and environment. Additionally, researchers must explore the participant's race or cultural background. The objective is to understand if their racial identity is a source of pain hurt, humiliation, pride, or strength in their current environment. This notion is also significant in order to understand the participant's connection to their race, and awareness



of indirect or subtle race-based interactions that may be witnessed or indirectly encountered.

Each of the grand tour questions was supported by the existing literature on this phenomenon. However, questions were general enough to capture the participant's personal stories and experiences. Walls and Hall (2017) stated that in order to capture the emotional reactions of a participant's experiences at a PWI, the researchers need to ask about personal experiences in a broader context. Based on this notion, the first grand tour question was developed to broadly capture the participant's experiences in their own way. The second question was designed to understand the participant's emotional experiences of being on their campus through their racial identity. As previously stated, exploring an individual's racial identity allows researchers to obtain an understanding of the meaning of a *person of color's* lived experiences and mental health (McClain et al., 2016).

The third question was supported by the theoretical framework of the CRT model, and the dominate White culture Black students observe on their campus. This question was also designed to capture interactions with faculty and staff, sources of support, and indirect experiences with racism (McClain et al., 2016; Walls & Hall, 2017). Question four was designed to understand the emotional experience behind witnessing acts of discrimination and the impact of observing race-based experiences via social media (Blakinger, 2016; Chappell, 2016). The fifth question was supported by research that highlighted the impact of directly encountering a race-based experience. This question was included to uncover how Black college students experience their own emotional reactions to their campus environment. Participants may share emotional reactions such

as avoidance, arousal, or any combination of reactions (Carter et al., 2017; McClain et al., 2016; Walls & Hall, 2017). Also, the fifth question was designed to capture feelings associated with the participant's reactions (McClain et al., 2016).

According to Moustakas (1994), researchers who use interviews in their study should ask broad, open-ended questions. Specifically, he stated researchers should ask participants what they experienced related to the phenomena and the contextual influences that impacted their experiences. Follow-up questions may also be asked but should focus on gathering data that led to a textual and structural description of the experience. I selected the following grand tour questions to provide an understanding of the common experiences of the participants.

The interview questions were as follows:

1. What is it like to be a Black student on a predominately White campus (Walls & Hall, 2017)?
2. Describe your emotional reactions to being a Black student at a predominately White institution (McClain et al., 2016; Walls & Hall, 2017).
3. How are you impacted by the experiences of Black students at other predominately White campuses (McClain et al., 2016; Walls & Hall, 2017)?
4. Describe how you are impacted by Black student interactions on other campuses (McClain et al., 2016; Walls & Hall, 2017).
5. Describe your emotional reactions to race-based interactions you have experienced or observed on your campus (McClain et al., 2016; Walls & Hall, 2017).

## Data Collection

Data were collected through multiple sources, including informed consent, demographic surveys, interviews, and member checking. Participants were given an information packet that included an informed consent letter. Additionally, I reviewed the purpose and duration of my study and reiterated that participants were free to withdraw at any time and that counseling referrals were available if additional support was needed. Next, the participants were provided with a demographic survey. The demographic questionnaire was utilized to determine each participant's characteristics. A demographic survey (see Appendix B) included questions about the participant's enrollment status, employment status, household income, sexual orientation, marital status, and racial-identification. Further, I collected data on race, ethnicity, sex, age, the number of semesters completed, and anticipated graduation dates.

An audio-recorded semi-structured interview followed the demographic survey in a previously selected private location. Interviews were conducted in a variety of campus settings that provided privacy and comfort for the participants. The locations of the interviews were selected based on the students' schedules and preferences. Participants were reminded that they could stop the interview at any time and were free to ask any questions. I asked five grand-tour questions that allowed exploration of additional data during the interview. The semi-structured interviews were expected to last between 45–60 minutes and were audio-recorded (Maxwell, 2013).

The primary source for data collection was the spoken words of selected participants. However, other sources of communication were considered (Miles & Saldana, 2014). Specifically, non-verbal communication, body language, facial

expressions, and emotional reactions were documented. In addition, participants were asked for information about their racial identity and their emotional experiences and interactions that influenced campus life and identity development. The discussion was facilitated by reflective listening and asking for clarification, as needed. As the interviewer, I also asked non-scripted follow-up questions related to specific information provided during the interviews. Participants were free to discuss their ideas and experiences with minimal influence.

Creswell (2013) stated that ten long-interviews are adequate to reach saturation. I achieved saturation by analyzing my data until no new significant statements or themes emerged (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Notes were taken after each interview to summarize and capture key points, serve as backup notes for the interview, and initiate the data analysis process. Upon completion of the interview process, I transcribed the audio-recordings verbatim and analyzed the transcripts for themes. Member-checking interviews were conducted as part of the trustworthiness process and did not last more than 30 minutes (Maxwell, 2013). To ensure confidentiality, all notes, transcripts, and audio tapes with identifying information will be destroyed within three years after the completion of my defense.

### **Data Organization**

Data organization was initiated after transcribing of all of the recorded interviews (Moustakas, 1994). After all data were written and transcribed, I met with my dissertation chair to discuss the raw data and ensured the data were organized accurately (Moustakas, 1994). I then engaged in Moustakas's (1994) analysis of phenomenological data and utilized reduction to identify significant statements from participants. I used the quotes in

the transcripts to consider each statement that was relevant to the topic as having equal meaning (horizontalization). Additionally, I examined the relevant statements from various angles and developed a description of the phenomena. The descriptions or horizons were then clustered into meaningful units and themes (Moustakas, 1994).

According to Moustakas (1994), imaginative variations involve adapting fluidity in seeking meaning. In this step, I derived the structural themes, or how the phenomena were experienced, from the textural descriptions. Specifically, I reflected on how the participant experienced their race-based interactions on their campus, racial identity, and psychological impact of these interactions. Then, I identified the underlying themes or contexts, considering thoughts and feelings that drove participant's responses, reflected on universal experiences of the phenomena, and clarified variant structures and themes of descriptions of the phenomena. The final stage referenced by Moustakas (1994) is called synthesis or understanding the essence. This stage was described as the integration of the individual textural-structural descriptions. These descriptions were combined to create a composite textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). I brought together the perceptions of how race-based interactions were experienced psychologically and created a collective essence of the phenomena described by the participants.

### **Data Analysis**

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), data analysis involves exploring interview transcripts to search for patterns, themes, and insights related to the phenomena. The data collected in this study were analyzed using Moustakas's (1994) Modification of the Van Kaam (1959, 1966) method for analyzing phenomenological

data. The Modified Van Kaam method consists of seven steps for examining the completed transcription of the participant's responses. The first step in this analysis process was to "list every relevant experience of the phenomena or use horizontalization" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 120).

In the second step, I applied the reduction and elimination strategies. Moustakas (1994) suggested testing each expression for two requirements:

Does it contain a moment of the experience that is necessary and sufficient for understanding it? Is it possible to abstract and label it? Expressions that are vague, do not meet these requirements, or they are repetitive, will be eliminated, or presented in more exact descriptive terms. (pp. 120-121)

The third step is clustering and thematizing the invariant constituents. I clustered the unchanging horizons of the participants' experiences in the transcription into similar themes. The clusters then became the core themes of the phenomena (Moustakas, 1994).

The fourth step included a final validation process of identifying the constant themes. This step consisted of my checking extracted themes against the participants' responses in the transcripts for compatibility. Themes that were not compatible with the participants' responses were removed. Moustakas (1994) suggested the following questions be considered when making the final identification of themes:

(a) Are they expressed explicitly in the complete transcription? (b) Are they compatible if not explicitly expressed? (c) If they are not explicit or compatible, they are not relevant to the core researcher's experience and should be deleted. (p. 121)

The fifth step of the data analysis process involved "using relevant, validated invariant constituents and themes," (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121) to develop individual

textural descriptions of each participant's experience. I included verbatim examples from the transcribed semi-structured interview process, which guided the results section when discussing the outcomes of the study.

In the sixth step of Moustakas's (1994) Modification of the Van Kaam (1959, 1966) interview analysis process, I constructed a general description of participants' individual structure of their experience based on the individual textural description, created in the previous step and implemented imaginative variation. Finally, in the seventh step, I created a "textural-structural description of the meanings and essences" of the experience for each research participant (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). Additionally, I merged the textural descriptions in step five, and structural descriptions in step six to develop an essence of the phenomena representing the entire group.

After my data analysis, I revisited my literature review in order to identify gaps in the literature and inconsistencies in the current literature. In addition, I implemented triangulation by including my personal journal, notes, and audio recordings of the interviews as data. Member checking was implemented to ensure the results of the transcriptions were accurate.

### **Trustworthiness**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness is a necessary measure of how well a researcher captures the participant's experiences. They specified that validity and reliability in qualitative studies are determined by trustworthiness. Additionally, the authors asserted criteria for establishing the trustworthiness of the study include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The credibility of my study was established through multiple points in the data collection and analysis process.

### **Triangulation**

Triangulation in this study was utilized to aid the trustworthiness of results (Maxwell, 2013). According to Maxwell (2013), implementing multiple sources of data improves accuracy in interpretations of data, and deepens the understanding of the phenomena under study. I implemented data collection triangulation of methods in my study. I collected data through individual interviews, field and interview notes, and demographic questionnaires (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I thoroughly examined all of the data that were obtained from the sources of data, along with observations, notes of non-verbal communication, answers on the surveys, and interview protocols. Triangulation was also aided by a peer review in the study to process my results and provide feedback. In the data analysis process, I enlisted help from my dissertation chairperson. Through his expertise and guidance, he ensured that I am managing my biases.

### **Transferability**

Transferability was established by describing in detail the relationships and intricacies of the environment being studied (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Criterion sampling was used in this study to provide a rich, detailed understanding of Black college students' race-based experiences on predominately White campuses. Further, the open-ended questions each participant was asked provided a detailed description of the institutional context to allow readers to determine how the findings might be applied to their campus environment (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Thick descriptions.** The term “thick description” was described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as a type of external validity that provides sufficient detail of phenomena and the research processes. The research processes were clearly provided so that readers



could determine if the information was transferable to other times, settings, situations, and people (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Additionally, direct participant responses or low inference descriptors were being shared in the results section, exhibiting trustworthiness, deeper understanding of the phenomena, and expanded interpretive validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 2013).

### **Dependability**

Dependability was established in this study by including an audit trail, use of an interview guide, field notes, and artifacts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As previously indicated, triangulation and peer-debriefing were implemented as two mechanisms of confirmability. In addition, the case report for this study included a thick description of race-based experiences on PWIs through examples of raw data to illustrate and support my findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### **Member Checking**

Member checking is also known as participant or respondent validation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checking is a technique for exploring the credibility of results. Researchers implementing member checking return participants' responses to them to check for accuracy and for reflection of their experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checking was used to validate my understanding and to allow time for clarification. Member checks were conducted with all participants throughout the interviews and ensured accuracy of responses. After themes were identified, participants were asked to meet the researcher for a follow-up meeting to determine if the themes captured their perspectives of the impact of their race-based interactions (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

**Reflexivity.** Bracketing my experiences ensured reflexivity. Lincoln and Guba, (1985) stated that reflexivity involves the researcher increasing their awareness of the influence and positionality, thus preventing these factors in the study. The entire methodology process involved reflexivity in all steps. I clarified my researcher bias by bracketing my perceptions and biases and by conducting a separate interview. As previously mentioned, my interview was conducted before the semi-structured interviews and post data analysis. After the final interview, I followed Collins, Onwuegbuzie, Johnson, and Frels' (2014) debrief guide (Appendix E). The interviewer captured my experiences of the study, my perceptions of the participants and their non-verbal communication, and the impact of the study on me as the researcher. Further, the interviewer explored awareness of ethical or political concerns and the unexpected challenges that emerged throughout the process. Finally, I engaged in self-reflection and awareness discussions and by seeking guidance from my dissertation chair.

### **Summary**

Researchers who use qualitative research methodology seek to gain an in-depth understanding of phenomena, and the flexibility to adapt the design of the study. Further, qualitative researchers incorporate new information and interpretations about what people communicate about their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative methodology was appropriate in this study for several reasons. According to Moustakas (1994), a transcendental phenomenological approach focuses on the lived experiences of participants. Lived experiences are vital in capturing the perspectives of marginalized groups and cultures (Giorgi, 2008; Moustakas, 1994). Researchers focusing on the descriptions of the participants' experiences are able to reach the deepest level of any

phenomenon through a transcendental phenomenological approach (Giorgi, 2006). The purpose of using this approach was to explore the lived experiences of Black students attending predominately White institutions. Secondly, I specifically examined the psychological impacts of the race-based interactions of Black college students, which were often missing from current literature assessing Black college students' overall experiences on their campuses.

Semi-structured interviews were the primary method of collecting data from my ten participants. All interview sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed, the transcriptions were read, and the notes were used to identify and frame significant statements into themes. A description becomes the structure of the essence. The description captures the meaning ascribed to the experience and provides an interpretation of the meaning (Moustakas, 1994). The essence of the participants' lived experiences was organized through the Moustakas's (1994) analysis of phenomenological data and analyzed through the Modification of the Van Kaam (1959, 1966) method. In the next chapter, Chapter IV, I discuss the results of the study. Specifically, the research question is reintroduced. The chapter includes participant demographics, participant descriptions, emerged themes, and a summary of significant findings.

## CHAPTER IV

### Results

Today's college campuses contain more diverse students than ever before in history. However, the lived experiences and developmental processes of Black college students are commonly overlooked, merged into the majority culture's experiences, or are identified as anomalies. To address the complex issues and adequately support Black students, the impact of the daily social, academic, and institutional race-based encounters must be understood as central components of a Black student's lived experience on a predominately White campus. Further, separating or ignoring the racial identity, race-based experiences, microaggressions, and the impact of these encounters may negatively impact the student's mental health and success at their university.

As a graduate of multiple PWIs, I have come to believe that the psychological, social, and academic needs of Black college students attending a PWI must be acknowledged and viewed through a unique and independent lens. The purpose of my study was to describe the raced-based experiences of Black students attending a predominately White institution. Specifically, I explored the uncomfortable campus climates that impacted Black college students' mental health. Despite the unique multileveled challenges (individual social, campus environment, and institutional) of Black students, this study also explored the barriers or enhancements to Black students' success. The results of my study may add to the literature, informing clinical assessment and interventions by college counselors and university personnel who aim to develop informed policies of all students.

A transcendental phenomenological approach was used in my study to explore the essence of the participants' experiences that emerged from the audio-recorded semi-structured interviews. According to Moustakas (1994), a transcendental phenomenological approach is most favorable when exploring the experiences of marginalized cultures or groups. The data were also organized using Moustakas's (1994) phenomenological approach to identify the perceptions of the impact of race-based experiences. The data were analyzed through Moustakas' (1994) Modification of the Van Kaam (1959, 1966) method for phenomenological data. The research question I answered in this study was: What are the lived experiences of Black college students attending predominately White institutions? In this chapter, I included the themes that emerged from the participant's transcripts, low inference descriptors that supported the identified themes, and a synthesis of the essence and meaning of the participant's experiences.

Qualitative data were collected via a demographic questionnaire, in-person interviews, and field notes to gain insights into the essence of the participants' experiences. A table that details each participant's assigned name, gender, age-range, religious affiliation, and enrollment status is listed in Appendix C. The semi-structured interviews took place in various on-campus locations, from private library study rooms, participants' work offices, and reserved spaces in the student center. I coordinated with each participant to identify a secure meeting location and time for the interview. The themes that emerged from the transcribed in-person interview data were (a) **racial identity and preparation**, (b) **campus environment**, (c) **social race-based interactions**, (d) **academic race-based interactions**, (e) **emotional impact of race-**

**based interactions, (f) interactions with faculty, (g) support from academic advisors, (h) Black on-campus community, and (i) coping as a Black student.**

### **Participant Demographics**

After I reviewed the informed consent process, requirements for the study, and the purpose of the study, I gave each participant a demographic questionnaire (Appendix B). I asked participants to describe and identify their demographic information (i.e., age, enrollment status, previous college experience, household income, and racial identity). Participants' ages ranged from 20-23. All of the participants were employed and listed their marital status as single. Nine out of ten participants worked part-time on their college campus; the remaining participant worked part-time off-campus. The participant's independent household income ranged from \$10,000 to \$15,000 a year. The participant's assigned pseudonyms and a qualitative written description of their racial/ethnic identity are included in Appendix C.

### **Participant Profiles**

The information that was gathered via the demographic questionnaire was obtained within the semi-structured interviews. Ultimately, ten participants met the eligibility criteria for participation in my study. There were five females and five males. Data saturation was reached satisfactorily within the 10 participant interviews. A brief profile summary of each participant is provided below.

**Participants # 1.** Erik was a 21-year-old male who identified as African American and Hispanic male. He was a senior business major who had aspirations to own his own business. He was enrolled as a full-time student and worked on campus, which helped him generate an income of \$10,000 a year. Identifying as a first-generation

college student, Erik was the oldest of three siblings and lived with a roommate off-campus. Erik encountered and witnessed race-based interactions and supported his friends through their individual encounters. Additionally, Erik was committed to his education and was a student leader in several organizations for Black students.

**Participants # 2.** L was a 21-year old single male who identified as Black. As a senior sociology major, L stated he initially struggled to find a major he enjoyed and felt was meaningful. The second eldest of four siblings, L was also the second member in his household to attend college. However, L was the first person in his family to attend a predominately White institution. Despite feeling invisible on his campus and being impacted by race-based experiences, L stated he remained overall motivated to complete his academics. A consequence of his race-based experiences included hypersensitivity, the need to constantly assess who were safe people with whom he could engage and being worried about encountering race-based violence.

**Participants # 3.** Macey referred to herself as a 21-year-old Black female and a junior psychology major, who was one of the youngest children in her family. Macey stated she was impacted by the conversations her father would have about race with her older siblings. A significant race-based interaction happened when Macey was in the second grade. Another student in her class told Macey, “you’re Black, you’re a slave, pick it up,” referring to his pencil that rolled off his desk. The internalized messages that being Black was bad and attributed to her feeling ashamed about her race for years. After arriving on her college campus, Macey interacted with diverse groups of students and learned to embrace and redefine being Black. However, Macey stated her heritage and

experiences are basically invisible to the larger sector of campus. A significant source of support for her was the Black community on her campus.

**Participants # 4.** Simone described herself as a 20-year-old Black, female, junior sociology major. Initially, Simone was a Biology major but believed she was never provided adequate support to continue her studies in that major. In her home, as she grew up, race was never discussed because she lived in a community “where everyone looked like me, so there was no need to talk about it.” After moving to another state, Simone’s mother began to prepare her for the world outside of the home as a Black woman. According to Simone, her mother’s preparation was largely inspired by her own raced-based interactions at work and the highly publicized shootings of Black individuals around the country. Simone described feeling depressed and isolated her freshman year of college and shared that her only motivation for finishing her degree was her impending graduation. A consequence of Simone encountering race-based interactions was her decreased her involvement in student organizations and general campus activities. According to Simone, “I only go to campus when I have to, and then I leave.”

**Participants # 5.** David was a 23-year-old senior agriculture communications major who identified as a Black male. He initially began his college career as a theater major but decided that after multiple auditions, he should change to a different degree plan. Additional factors for David deciding to change his major from theatre were that “a lot of other White students were placed more on a pedestal or looked at differently than the Black students there.” Outside of these incidents, David stated he has not experienced any other raced-based incidents directly. However, he was aware of the racial encounters



of other students. As one of the few Black students in agriculture, David stated he often felt lonely but established adequate support with faculty and other students.

**Participants # 6.** Taylor was 21 years old and identified as a Black and Native Hawaiian female. A member of a military family, Taylor moved to Texas at age seven. As a child, she always understood she was Black, but also began to notice her physical features were different from other Black students. Later, Taylor learned of her Native Hawaiian ancestry, but she felt her identity was confined by others who primarily saw her as Black. During her college career, Taylor was a leader on her campus, and she was aware of a few high-profile race-based incidents. According to Taylor, after each of the incidents, the university did not respond adequately, “I found out there was only a discrimination policy.” Despite her knowledge of other race-based incidents, Taylor was most impacted by an encounter she observed between a guest lecturer and a fellow Black student. After hearing her classmate being called *boy*, Taylor found it difficult to concentrate and eventually left the class early to regain her composure.

**Participants # 7.** Travis described himself as a 21-year-old male who also self-identified as a Black queer student. He stated race-based experiences have been a significant occurrence in his college experience. As a freshman, he recalled being stopped by the police and being accused of being disrespectful to the officer. Travis described being on campus felt unsafe, “When I walk, how do I know they won’t hurt me?” Also, when walking on campus, Travis stated he feels invisible because fraternities and sororities look away when Black students walk by and actively passed out flyers to other students. Social media was identified as a significant part of Travis’ college experience. Race-based interactions have been observed on social media. These interactions have helped

define the leaders in the Black on-campus community. Travis stated that within the Black community on campus, “The whole hierarchy of Blackness and what it means to be Black on campus, is based largely on who you're following—and you have to have a good following.”

**Participant #8.** Amber was a self-identified 21-year-old Black female who was a senior theatre major. Raised by her single mother, Amber stated she was taught to be aware, proud, and knowledgeable about her race. Specifically, learning about her race was never punitive, but empowering “[My mother] bought me flash cards. I still have them. . . . They had Mary McLeod Bethune, Jack Johnson, Lena Horne, Mahalia Jackson, Malcolm X, and Shirley Chisholm. I only had examples of Black excellence around me.” Although she learned to be proud of her race at home, Amber stated that when she attended school “with predominantly Black and Hispanic people, I felt weird because I am darker [skinned], and developed a sense of, not shame, but inadequacy.” Specifically, Amber said, “The bi-racial, Hispanic girls, or lighter girls used to get more attention from guys; they used to be more respected, seen as beautiful as opposed to the darker girls.” Later, as a college student in theatre, Amber stated she was reminded that colorism (or shadism) is discrimination within the same racial group among those who assign social significance and meaning to skin color.

The cultural meaning of skin color often determines how members within the racial group are valued and treated (Schneider & Schneider, 2007; Ware, 2013). Amber faced colorism in her childhood and was often overlooked for various acting roles in college. Amber recalled, “The faculty had to start doing re-auditions for *Hairspray* because they didn't [cast] enough Black people. They then switched up roles to make

them what they wanted so that they could accommodate the image they wanted.” After several attempts to get into her major, Amber was only granted smaller roles and began to meet with other Black students to develop productions outside of her program. Race-based experiences were common in her major, but to feel supported, Amber shared, “I hold meetings every single week with my Black Royalty [an unofficial group] for Black students. And every week we get in a circle, and just let it out. Each Black student shares a racist incident, so every week I'm hearing something new from the Black students about their race.” Through this community of Black students, Amber found support and stated, “I love my people and at least having this space.”

**Participant #9.** Jay described herself as a 23-year-old African American female education major. During her childhood, race wasn't a major topic that was discussed growing up. Jay stated, “I just knew I was Black because of my community.” Before coming to college, Jay stated she recalled constantly being questioned about her race. “As far as being lighter in complexion, it was definitely a thing. Just having peers and others you know throw slights or shade towards me because I'm lighter. Just people like basically bring me down because I'm light-skinned.” In describing the impact of other's comments, Jay recalled, “People would say certain things to me debating if I was Black, and when I was little it really didn't bother me of course, I didn't know it was a big issue as I was growing up, now it's hurtful.” In dating relationships, Jay recalled after potential suitors find out she is Black, “I really won't hear from them no more, like they are really short and sweet when they talk to me now, they are like hi and bye.” As a former Resident Advisor, Jay stated she experienced and witnessed several raced-based interactions that were impactful. Jay stated she has been ignored by residents and parents,

who disregard information she gave them but approached and received the same information from a White colleague.

**Participant# 10.** Scott self-identified as a 23-year-old Black male senior.

Initially, Scott delayed coming to college to help support his family. He began working at age 16 to help his mother and sister financially. Growing up, Scott stated that race was not much of a topic because “I feel like everybody around me within my vicinity, in my household, we kind of all knew what it was to be Black.” As Scott was preparing to leave for college, he recalled his first realization that race was a significant concern. Scott stated:

In the summer, I was transitioning into my first fall semester, I was spending more and more time with my church family because I was fixing to leave home. We were sitting down in a restaurant, and the dad basically said, ‘how come his son, who is White, didn't have grants, grad ceremonies, or scholarships?’ And so, like that was the first time like I sat there and I was just in my head like dang, but I was so uneducated I didn't even have a response.

The political climate on Scott’s campus was stressful for him to navigate but has also helped him to remain an active part of his campus. Scott also stated that he was most impacted by the race-based interactions of friends and other students’ experiences he learned about via social media.

### **Emerged Themes**

Upon completion of all semi-structured interviews, I transcribed each participant’s statements. I then coordinated with each participant to meet for a follow-up interview. During the follow-up interviews, participants were allowed to confirm or edit

the content of their transcript. All of the participants confirmed the accuracy of their transcript or made minor edits to their transcript. The core themes that were identified follow and are organized according to how significant they were to the participants' experiences.

### **Participants' Endorsed Themes**

- I. Racial Identity and Preparation**
  - A. Parental Preparation
  - B. Additional Influences
- II. Campus Environment**
  - A. Culture Shock
  - B. Reaction to Campus Environment
  - C. Diversity of Students on Campus
  - D. Social Media
  - E. Impact of 2016 Elections on the campus
- III. Social Race-Based Interactions**
- IV. Academic Race-Based Interactions**
- V. Emotional Impact of Race-Based Interactions**
- VI. Interactions with Faculty**
- VII. Support from Academic Advisors**
- VIII. Black on Campus Community**
- IX. Coping as a Black student**

### **Racial Identity and Preparation**

The first theme I identified was racial identity and preparation before the participants entered college. Racial awareness and preparation of Black college students in this study were often initiated in childhood. I also identified two sub-themes: (1) parent preparation and (2) additional influences, both of which were discussed by all 10 participants.

Racial identity and preparation as a theme captured each participant's development process and awareness of their race. In addition to naming his race, L included another significant aspect of his identity, when he stated, "I love being Black. I

love being an African American male, you know, because, to me, it is such a unique feeling.” Two participants shared their multiple heritage identities. Erik identified as Hispanic and African American and stated, “I’m bi-racial, but growing up, I lived in like a Black home.” Taylor shared an experience from middle school:

I started to compare myself to the other Black girls that I was in school with. . . . I have kind of different features, and I knew I grew up in Hawaii, and I knew I was born there and all that. But I didn’t know that was like a part of me actually. I just thought I was born there; I just thought I was an African American woman who was born in Hawaii.

The racial identity of the participants was also impacted by their awareness of their race. Seven out of ten participants stated that race was not discussed in their homes, but they were aware of their race due to the communities of color they grew up in. Simone recalled, “[race] wasn’t [discussed] because I originally grew up in Arkansas, and that is a predominantly Black region or area. So, it wasn’t like the need to discuss we were Black because it just seemed to be in the setting.” Similarly, David felt:

Race to me personally, it’s never really like a discussion point . . . Cause I mean, . . . like I’ve always grown up with knowing [I was Black] . . . and how it was socially. I was always very aware, there was never a conversation that needed to be had.

Further, Amber stated: “I’m not gonna say we didn’t talk about race. But like I knew, I was Black. Everybody in our family was Black. I grew up around predominantly Black and brown people for the most part.” However, Travis stated his awareness of his race had a negative impact because he was forced to become aware of how his race could

be problematic and recalled, “So that's pretty much how race was understood, like it was never a thing, until it was.”

**Parental Preparation.** Three participants shared the specific messages they received from their parents about their race and their parents’ preparation for interactions outside the home. Macey described, “In my home race really was a very normal topic. . . . I remember hearing my parents . . . talking to my [older] siblings about being careful.” Macey’s father was the primary messenger about race, she recalled, “[. . . ] It was almost as if [talking about race] was this prep work that my dad was doing, and he took [it] very seriously . . . . So race was always a topic that was always talked about in our house.”

Erik stated that race was a common topic in his household because his parents were preparing him. He reflected, “I feel like both of my parents definitely wanted us to understand that race could be an issue outside of the home. So, I definitely think they wanted us to be prepared for [such] instances.” However, Erik was also made aware of the racial tensions between his Black stepmother and his Hispanic biological mother. In his childhood home, Erik stated:

[ . . . ] Race was always taught to me. . . . and I feel like race was very openly discussed in my home. So, we didn't have the Black issue in my home [being that I'm biracial] or in both homes. But it got to a point where my mother, my biological mother, did not like my stepmother. So, race was always an issue. [ . . . ] It was toxic, very toxic, and I would say that it would go the other way around, like my stepmother had like a big issue with me and my mother. And race was always an issue in both situations. And I couldn't figure why it was an issue.

Erik also shared:

Being bi-racial kind of sucks. Like, do I act this way because I live in a Black home? Or whenever I go to my mom's house, I can't act like this because you're acting Black. . . . I was always trying to find that balance between what you can or can't do as a bi-racial person. . . . I don't want to be at my dad's house, and acting a certain way or speaking Spanish, and my stepmom be like, 'oh you only acting like that because you think that you better than them.' I didn't want to go to my mom's house and be like, oh, that's what's up. And she'd be like 'no, stop, that stuff, you got to stop, right now. Because that's not who you are,' but in my mind it is. . . . There's like always something being dictated to me, like who do you need to be or who you are expected to be.

Amber described the preparation efforts based on her mother informed her how to be aware of her racial identity. Amber stated:

My mother told me how, as a Black woman, we just have to work harder. A lot of the talk about race early on was precautionary. Then she also wanted to give me a childhood that wasn't typical of your inner-city Black child. So we would travel a lot, we did different stuff so that I wouldn't fall into the stereotypes that she witnessed where she grew up.

Further, Amber stated her mother was intentional about the dolls she was allowed to play with:

When I was growing up, my mother bought me Black dolls. I love Barbie dolls right now, I kind of still think they are cute or whatever. But she used to buy the Black ones only, and my mother just never bought the White dolls because she didn't want me to have to struggle to see myself.



**Additional Influences.** The second sub-theme identified within racial identity and preparation was additional influences. The racial identity of the participants was also impacted by other influences in the participants' lives. Six of the ten participants stated they received messages about their race from various individuals in their family, media, and interactions in primary school. In his childhood, L described the conflicting messages he saw in the media about his race:

I grew up, you know, watching the news with my grandmother, mom, and older relatives and . . . I would see some of the disdain of what the Black race would do . . . how they would sometimes treat people, how they would sometimes treat their own race, and what they would talk about [with] each other . . . It really did make me question what our race is really about?

Conversely, seeing Black sports figures had a positive influence on L's understanding of his race:

Sports was . . . [a] very appealing way to . . . make it out of poverty. . . . But then, as I got a bit older, I was able to see that you didn't always have to do sports, you can become a doctor, a lawyer, or you can become an engineer.

Similarly, Travis was also influenced by the images he saw about Black people on television:

So for me, it was like I was in [a racial] moratorium. I never really thought of race again because it was never a topic. I just knew I was Black. I knew that my sisters watched BET. I knew that I sat down to watch 106 & Park with them and could identify with people I was seeing. And so it always has been 'Travis is Black.'

There is no shame because I don't find a shame myself. So . . . like . . . that's a part of me.

In addition to the messages received from the media, Amber was influenced by the materials her mother supplied her about Black history. Amber shared:

[ . . . ] Because we traveled a lot. I went to Atlanta, and [my mother] bought me flash cards. I still have them . . . they had Mary McLeod Bethune, Jack Johnson, Lena Horne, Mahalia Jackson, Malcolm X, and Shirley Chisholm. It was a whole bunch of Black history flashcards. . . . I only had a sample of Black excellence surrounding me.

Taylor's mother was adopted by a White couple, and so for Taylor, there were multiple racial identities within her family. However, Taylor's mother was able to learn about her biological grandparents and ancestry. Learning this information was impactful because Taylor felt angry that there was a missing connection with her Native Hawaiian identity when she recalled:

I kind of just started to do more research, and I found I had family back in Hawaii. I started to connect with them, and I wanted to know about that culture because like I didn't know how to learn about the Black culture.

Participants also shared additional impactful experiences that have shaped their understanding of their race and racial identities. Two participants described specific race-based experiences as children. Travis recalled:

I know my first experience with race was [when] my sister, who at the time was 10 [years old], brought her White friend over, and she stayed over a few nights. [Then] it turned into a lot of back-to-back nights, and when my sister's friend

went to school, she told my sister's other friends that my sister was poor and didn't have much. And when we found that out, I was so angry, but that was the first time I saw the difference between races. And my parents had to explain that a lot of Black people in America aren't as well off as we are and that it's hard for some White people to see Black people are in a good place.

Macey stated that her racial identity was impacted by an interaction she experienced in the second grade. Macey stated she was told by a White classmate, "You're Black, you're a slave," and demanded she pick up his pencil. Macey was unsure why she internalized that message, but recalled, because of that interaction:

I never identified myself as Black. I would always identify as African American "because being Black was bad." So if I'm African American, that's different in my mind. . . . But you know it wasn't until I came to college and really started getting in touch with what was my definition of Black. Then I began to feel pride in being Black, what Black people have accomplished, what Black people have done, and not be ashamed.

### **Campus Environment**

Campus environment was the second theme I identified and highlighted the participants' social interactions within the campus environment. There were also five sub-themes identified and endorsed by all 10 participants as significant components of their on-campus college experiences: (a) culture shock, (b) reaction to the campus environment, (c) diversity of students on campus, (d) social media, and (e) impact of the 2016 Election. Specifically, these sub-themes captured the participant's discomfort in initially encountering the large White culture of their campus, feeling invisible and

isolated. Five out of the ten participants described their discomfort and isolation on campus as an immediate part of their encounters. Erik described his reaction as an incoming freshman:

[ . . . ] I attended freshman orientation, and I saw all of these White people, and I was just like ‘Yo, let me stay in my own lane!’ I decided I was not going to interact with these people if I really don't have to. But some of the White students were actually extremely nice . . . . And I had to understand that not all White people are the same, they do not think the same, or have the same thought process about minorities or Black people.

Similarly, Simone stated that her freshman orientation lacked Black student representation, highlighting her feelings of isolation:

I would say when I first got here for orientation or camp things, I was kind of regretful of my decision because I wasn't comfortable. I wasn't comfortable with the pool of White people in my freshman orientation. I was the only Black person at my camp, and it was about 600-700 people there. So it was a major realization that I am Black, they are White, and again we're socially and culturally different. You know, because [White students] have a tendency to stare at you.

Amber affirmed that her feelings of isolation were attributed to her general experiences as a Black student. Amber stated, “At my university being a Black person at a predominantly White campus, I felt invisible.” L acknowledged he felt isolated and uncomfortable walking on campus:

I see how others may look at me. . . . So it definitely felt like I was out of place, it felt like I was at an unwelcoming place. . . . You also had those individuals who were there that did their best to welcome you and make you feel comfortable.

Similarly, Travis recalled a common experience he observes walking on campus where he sees other Black students being disregarded as members of his campus:

It's scary to see White students hold up signs rejecting our rights as Black and Latino people. But any White person can make our experiences a joke; it's a joke to these people because it doesn't affect them. Racism doesn't affect them as it affects us, so being on campus, you definitely start realizing maybe I am affected by [White students'] actions.

Additionally, Macey affirmed feelings of isolation she experienced, despite seeing other Black students:

It is isolating, because I mean you know there are other Black people here. You know there are other Black people, you see them, but it's still the overwhelming majority of people that you see are White.

Participants also described their interpersonal social interactions that specifically attributed to feeling racially isolated. Simone affirmed her interactions with some White students were: "more passive-aggressive rather than someone being blatantly racist to me." According to Simone, the passivity of the interaction leaves her feeling tense:

[ . . . ] like you can't even acknowledge a problem if no one there is actually willing to discuss it. It's just they tend to shut people down, I have heard 'well you can leave, you can take I- 45, or Y'all make everything about race.'

The following sub-themes under the campus environment were organized by the participants' sequence and developmental process as a Black college student. The five sub-themes identified were: (a) culture shock, (b) reaction to campus environment, (c) diversity of students on campus, (d) social media, and (e) impact of the 2016 Election on the campus. Regardless of the depth of conversations about race within their childhood homes, all of the participants expressed some awareness of their racial identity. However, when Black students went onto a college campus, their race became a central component of how the participants experienced their campus environment, how they were viewed and were reminded of how racially different they were within their campus environment.

**Culture shock.** The first sub-theme that was identified within the campus environment was culture shock. This subtheme was endorsed by five out of the 10 participants. Adjusting to campus life can be impactful for all college students. However, the participants in this study described the difficulty of transitioning as a Black college student at a predominately White institution. The sub-theme of culture shock captured the participants' feeling overwhelmed by their initial encounters with the dominant White culture on campus and the impact of not seeing many Black students around them. Culture shock as a sub-theme was experienced as an initial reaction to being on their campus. The participants who endorsed this theme also indicated there were two ways they encountered culture shock on campus. The first was feeling isolated because, in the majority of spaces, they were the only Black students, or there were a few *students of color*. Secondly, participants also experienced the majority of spaces as being uncomfortable, and the participants were overwhelmed by their feelings of cultural isolation.

Four participants specifically stated they experienced culture shock as a significant part of their process as they entered college. Travis stated: “Coming into college, it is the biggest cultural shock you can experience. But I don't think I've ever seen so many White people before coming here.” Similarly, Macey stated she was initially shocked: “I just felt intimidated by the fact that there were just so many White people.” Additionally, two participants described how they experienced shock in their classrooms. Simone stated: “it's very intimidating to walk in and see no one else; it's a pool of just White, and no one looks like you in a class with 300-400 students.” Macey also described her initial feelings of shock within her major: “Because I'm a psychology major, there's not a lot of [Black students who are] psychology majors . . . So you kind of just feel stunned and singled out like people are always watching you.”

**Reaction to Campus Environment.** The second identified sub-theme captured the impact of the campus environment that the participants navigated was named the reaction to the campus environment. Previously, the participants described their campus environment as unwelcoming and isolating. Further, seven participants shared their reactions to their campus environment and described the emotional and psychological reactions to being in their college environment. Scott described his campus environment as stressful, not supportive, and unsafe. Simone stated, “I was depressed by the end of my freshman year. Because of my grades and not feeling welcomed.” Jay stated she felt her campus environment was “Tiring, I just feel like you have to constantly work to include yourself to find things that fit, be a part of groups that are accepting and also are diverse, it can be overwhelming and feels strange.” L described his feelings: “While I'm here I have mixed feelings . . . I'm proud to be at a predominately White institution as a Black

individual because it makes me feel like, as a Black person, we can go anywhere.

However, L added that as a student on his campus, he feels:

[ . . . ] **nonexistent, invisible, not important.** My voice is not heard. You know it makes me feel as if I could shout to the top of my lungs, and no one will hear me—or no one will care, you know, as opposed to my White counterparts.

L's feeling invisible contributed to his feeling frustrated by his experiences on campus:

I don't want it to be a cliché, but sometimes [I just feel] anger . . . It is a bit frustrating because you have all these ideas, and you've worked so hard to get to a college campus; then, to excel yourself, better your family, and better yourself, just to be met with racism, racist individuals, and really a racist system once again.

Additionally, Macey highlighted the isolation she feels while being a student on her campus:

It's kind of this idea where some students just try to make you feel less than . . . And it may not be all about race, because I know it's a lot of this inherent competition. . . . But I kind of feel like some people just want to be able to say, 'I'm better than you.'

Simone's feelings of isolation were comprised of her experiences with a lack of representation and general isolation on campus:

It wasn't until I got here that I was not necessarily embarrassed that I am Black, but more so, I'm embarrassed that I'm the only one. It was humiliating in the sense of like no one looks like me. . . . I'm hurt that no one looks like me, I'm hurt that



the advisors I've talked to don't look like me, I'm hurt that my teachers don't look like me.

We have in our student center walkway, a place where you can hold posters and rally for your cause. Because my university is public, they let people on campus who sometimes have limited views but are allowed to scream out whatever they want to say. I feel segregated [walking on campus]. That little area where the clock tower is, people . . . spit out anything they want to say. . . . So this is something very overwhelming because all you're trying to do is go to class.

Travis also highlighted the impact of feeling unsafe on campus:

When I am walking on campus at night, sometimes I am thinking when I see somebody, 'are they more scared than me,' or 'are they more scared of me than I am of them?' That's the same thing that goes on in my mind when I see a White person on campus. But I think I am more scared of them than they are of me. Can I walk safely?

David stated that his overall experiences have been positive, especially when he found his new major. Although he experienced isolation within his major, David shared: "It's been a positive thing; I feel like I've been given the same opportunities. Those that I sought out have been on an even playing field with everyone." Taylor described her reaction to being on her campus as an evolving process:

So, when I came here to my school, I already knew I was coming to an east Texas town, and I cannot expect too much. But at the same time, I expected everything of my university, I guess. So, at first I was completely terrified, but as my years went on, I felt empowered. I don't know, in my head, I don't say I go to my school

for some reason. I don't even really acknowledge the university namesake for who he is. I acknowledge that I guess I've detached from the university, which in essence, you can't really do that because you are still there.

Speaking generally about his experiences as a Black college student, David further explained:

I just feel like some Black students sometimes look [for reasons to say] my school doesn't care about Black people. They don't have this, that, and the third for Black people, and there's a lot of disregard for Black people on campus. I'm not denying that, but just hasn't been my experience, but I'm sure some of it is true.

**Diversity of students on campus.** A third sub-theme I identified was the diversity of students on campus. This sub-theme highlighted the participants' perceptions of their university's diversity-related efforts and policies. Five out of ten participants stated diversity of the students and the university's efforts to make the campus more diverse was a significant part of their college experience. The sub-theme diversity of students on campus specifically captured the participant's perspectives surrounding the lack of diverse students and retention of Black students. Participants also noted they experienced a lack of acknowledgment for other forms of diversity and addressing the needs of diverse students.

Simone described two realities she experienced within her university. The first reality was the ideal image of the university, and the second was a separate reality for *students of color*. Simone shared that her university was not as diverse as the officials advertise: "If you really ask us, it's not true; I don't know if I even like the diversity posters, with that one Black person they stick over in the back of the poster. It's sad; I just

don't feel represented here.” Erik also acknowledged how the recruitment efforts of the university created an illusion that diversity is valued: “The diverse school, so they say that they are, but they're not, because we only make up around 15%. I think that it's sad because it's like 20,000 students [here], so we are not diverse at all.”

Conversely, Macey observed the university as valuing diversity. However, she felt there was a lack of student retention for Black students:

I do think that my school has done a good job with diversity. . . . I say that because I do feel like you can go a lot of places on campus and see a lot of Black students. I do like that . . . we have a number of organizations here [for Black students] . . . While I just feel like my school does a good job of getting Black students, I don't know if they're doing a good job of keeping them; the graduation rate of Black students is not nearly the same as the acceptance rate.

Two participants stated that diversity on their campus is not reflected in the university's administrative response to discrimination that occurs on campus. Taylor described the administration's response as follows:

I've been here for discriminatory situations, and in each of those, after they simmer down, there's just been no action that has been taken by the university. It's always kind of this statement about how they're disappointed, but actually there's never any action; it seems like nothing, it's just fluff.

Jay also affirmed the lack of action in the university's leadership. After a race-based incident occurred:

A group of us spent time reporting the messages and flyers [a hate group placed on campus] to the president's office and letting her know; but after that, there

really was not much that had been done. . . . The response we received was, ‘Oh, I do support diversity; we’re here for ya,’ but not actually, because those are just words.

Further, Taylor conducted personal research to understand the lack of action from the university administrators:

We ended up doing more research and talking to more people that were on our side as far the institution goes. And we found out that my school does not have a nondiscrimination policy; they have a nondiscrimination statement. The statement says we don’t tolerate this, that, and the third, but there can be no action without any policy or procedures. My school actually has no policy or procedures for sanctioning discriminatory acts.

**Social media impact.** The fourth sub-theme captured under the campus environment is the impact of the shared usage of social media. The incorporation of social media in society has been rapid. Social media usage on college campuses are common, and universities often operate various types of social media accounts. All 10 of the participants in this study indicated that race-based interactions had occurred online and were emotionally impactful. Participants described seeing racist messages that spread quickly throughout the campus community, contrasting messages about other Black individuals on social media, and the impact of Twitter. Five out of ten participants stated they have observed a race-based interaction online, and all of the participants acknowledged that social media is a significant part of their college experience. For example, Macey described how quickly various messages spread through social media:

We know that everybody is a student because it's in their bio. But I definitely remember a time when some White students had a group chat, and the White students were talking [negatively] about other *students of color* in the group [messages]. Someone screenshot the messages and posted them on Twitter. My friend showed me the messages, but it was like 'Dang, did you see what so-and-so said and posted on Twitter right now,' and so many people were having the same conversation.

Simone stated she experienced two dynamics in how students responded in persons versus online:

I would say [social media played] a major role because people feel more comfortable saying what they want to say on social media instead of in person. And again, you know [on] Twitter, all it takes is one re-tweet and thousands and thousands of people can see it. [White students] have a platform for themselves, where they can go on and say racist things. Twitter definitely plays a big role at my school.

Further, Simone described the cyclical process of race-based interactions online: But it . . . is normally like a time of year that [White students] take to twitter and say whatever they want. I think it even happened this year. It was around graduation time I would say that . . . Black student Twitter and White student Twitter will battle it out. And it happens every year. Like it's a thing . . .

The effect of seeing discrimination and racism online was emotionally impactful for the participants. Taylor acknowledged the "tension that was built up" after the widespread racist messages were captured on social media and spread throughout her

campus. Jay also affirmed the significant impact of racial incidents involving students online: “Social media, it can just be very negative and very overwhelming.” Simone described:

When I first got here, I was like ‘ok I have this long journey in front of me, and you know all of the racial things are happening in society,’ and now [when] you're on social media you're seeing that it's happening right here around you. That was very . . . uncomfortable, [seeing these messages on social media] made me feel very sad. It made me a bit more paranoid, like, ‘who is actually saying this, who thinks like this, is the person looking at me because of this.’

Amber stated she has been shocked by the interactions she has seen online:

“Social media has not been the same since. Social media has exposed me to the type of racism that I thought America would never see again.” Later, Taylor described a race-based incident that went viral at her university:

For the Blackface incident on social media, there was a White girl on the basketball team. She was a little bit lighter than me, and she put on a dark brown foundation. . . . And was, like, ‘Oh, I’m in my ghetto make-up shade,’ and she repeatedly said the N-word and posted it on Snapchat. She was on Snapchat herself, and then she had a teammate who was recording her; they're basically making fun of Black people.

**Impact of the 2016 Election on Campus.** The fifth subtheme that was identified was the impact of the 2016 Election on campus. As previously mentioned, college campuses are not immune to the significant events that are happening in the surrounding society. All 10 of the participants were students during the previous presidential election.

Nine of the ten participants endorsed this theme and described specific interactions since the 2016 election night. Participants recalled seeing increased political campus activities, fear, and a shift toward a tense campus climate. Five of the ten participants described the interactions that occurred within on-campus housing. Erik stated, “The night that Trump had gotten elected . . . literally, people were running down the hallway, screaming, and banging on our doors.” L experienced a similar event and reaction that was impactful for him, “It was definitely a shock . . . to see some of our White peers . . . you know, running up and down the hallway screaming ‘We're back!’ ‘We're here!’ ‘We're alive again!’ Some going as far as saying ‘the South has risen again!’”

Three participants described the divides and separation they observed on campus.

Taylor stated:

I was actually on campus with some of my friends at the watch party, and it was just a roller coaster. All I can remember was just a roller coaster of emotions. . . . “There were just groups of people, arguing back and forth, saying ‘Trump shouldn’t have won, Hillary shouldn’t have won either, but she’s better than him, or he’s better than her.’”

Travis shared a similar observation:

The difference between election night and other significant tense events was that everyone was feeling down, but it was the most segregated thing I’ve ever seen.

All the Trump-supporting students were on one side and Hillary on one side.

Five participants discussed the difficulty of being a Black college student during this election. Erik shared:

“I feel like it was a really tough time for a lot of people who were really scared to come out of their dorms.” L described feeling scared and terrified after the election. L stated, “I was scared about being Black, and I was scared for my Black brothers and sisters who also go here and across America.” Scott affirmed that as a sophomore, he noticed, “After the election, things just got worse and worse, and more individuals and groups were targeted on campus.” Taylor also described the impact of the election on her campus, “When we heard the results, it was a lot to take in, and I was, like, ‘Well what do we do now?’ It felt like effective immediately, like, our lives were, in a way, sort of in danger.”

### **Social Race-Based Interactions**

The third theme I identified was social race-based interactions. As previously defined, race-based interactions are any encounters that occur specifically because of one’s race. Nine out of ten participants stated that they experienced a race-based interaction outside of their academic environment. Social race-based interactions consisted of emotionally impactful macroaggressions and discriminatory comments that occurred in social exchanges on- and off-campus outside of the academic environment.

Erik stated he encountered his first race-based interaction in college, “I definitely experienced a racial thing, and it was... pretty terrifying.” Erik recalled, “I remember being told, “Hey, can I call you ‘other Black boy?’” Erik also shared how he looked to his peers who were watching this interaction:

I just looked around at everybody, and literally, everyone is standing around looking at this whole situation. My friend Kathy, who invited me, didn't even take



up for me in the situation; and this literally just happened, and we are looking at each other—stuck, stuck, I was literally stuck.

L stated he often feels isolated in interactions because he is questioned about his belongingness on his campus. L shared: “There have been times while here at school, I could be having a conversation about family with a White student . . . and they stop me and just ask me, ‘Hey, do you know your dad? . . . Are you on financial aid?’ Similarly, Amada affirmed:

When I first came to college, people would ask ridiculous questions: ‘Do you know your dad?’ I would share with them that my mom had passed away, and they would be, like, ‘Oh, my God, are you adopted?’ And they would say these things, and I'm just like. why. . . One day I asked a fellow White student, and I found out it was because of what they had seen about Black people on TV.

Simone stated she felt her peers tended to approach her differently: “You're not approached first compared to the person next to you that they're familiar with, which makes it clear they are uncomfortable. People don't necessarily know how to talk to you; they have to act a certain way.” Additionally, about her White peers, Simone stated,

[They] don't know how to address you; they try to be cooler, if that makes sense. Or it's just like they have to approach you differently, and even like my advisors at the [freshman orientation] camps were doing that. So it's not that I was treated differently, and it was bad; I just noticed that I was being treated differently.

Further, she described her worry and fear of encountering a race-based incident. Simone shared: “Let's say I accidentally bumped into somebody, or like I'm getting into a heated argument; I feel like people's racist tendencies tend to come out when they are

challenged.” In her workplace, Simone recalled: “Even if I'm at work with other students, the language that they . . . use in the clothing store about minorities is very offensive.”

Three participants recalled race-based interactions that occurred near campus, or as they were heading to a social event. Simone stated that because of race-based interactions she had experienced at off-campus parties, “I stay away from [nightclubs near campus] because of the language that they use in there. I don't like to be called the N-word, or like being around those who say it, and they say it at that place.” Travis recalled being with a group of Black friends and being stopped by the police after another White student yelled obscenities at the officer. Travis stated he was fearful because he immediately had a concerning thought about his friend, “Is this the moment where Daija gets shot? Just for something that small?” Finally, David stated he and his friends left a nearby establishment and demanded a refund after they learned that only women of color were being charged to get in. When David confronted the manager, he was told, “We charge whoever we want, and we are charging them!”

A significant part of the participants' experience is being aware of the experiences of other Black students on campus. All of the participants indicated they were aware of the race-based interactions of other Black students. Participants described these specific events as isolating for other students, dismissive, and shared confusion about why the event happened. Scott stated he began to grow increasingly concerned for himself and his friend's safety when:

I was meeting up with my friend, and by the time I was walking up to her, she was crying, and I was like, ‘Oh, my God, what's wrong?’ And she's like a truck

just drove past her and called her the N-word. And I was so speechless, like, I don't even know what to say.

Taylor shared an incident she learned about on social media, in which a White student refused to serve a Black student at an office on campus. Once the Black student left the office, Taylor recalled, “The White girl from the Card Office got on Twitter and was just calling the Black girl all kinds of names, derogative racial slurs on Twitter, and she didn't receive any sort of repercussions or any sort of consequences.”

### **Academic Race-Based Interactions**

The fourth theme identified in this study was academic race-based interactions. Race-based interactions can occur in a variety of settings. Seven out of ten participants experienced race-based encounters in their academic environments. Academic race-based interactions were described by the participants as being dismissed by peers, academic stereotyping, and race-based interactions with faculty. The impact of academic race-based interactions described the emotional consequences participants experienced in academic settings. Participants described feelings of isolation, questioning chosen university, and academic disengagement. Erik shared how race-based interactions show up in his academics:

This growing thing of African Americans are being targeted by police officers, I definitely feel that . . . back in Dallas where I live, literally the day that I left to come back down to school, someone died . . . And I definitely feel there's like this institutionalized structure we as a society live by that Black is bad; and sometimes when I am in class, my mind goes back to those incidents.

The fear of being targeted in addition to race-based encounters, Erik affirmed: “[ . . . ] I would say yes [race-based interactions] have impacted me academically . . . . When people doubted me, because I am a Black kid from Dallas, it’s a downfall on my academics [but more so to let me know] . . . I got to grind out here.”

L stated he was impacted by a race-based interaction he experienced with a faculty member:

[ . . . ] There was a time I was in class, and the teacher actually asked me to pick up some homework. Before actually getting out of my seat [the instructor] said, ‘If you don't have your homework for when L comes by, he's gonna get you, he's going to hurt you. You know he's pretty scary.’

Macey described an incident with a group of project peers in which she felt dismissed by her group members:

I was the one that emailed the group, and said, ‘Hey, when do we want to meet to discuss the project tasks?’ There was a delayed response, so to get the conversation going, . . . I said, ‘I can go ahead and edit, and you can do another part.’ My White group member started not responding again. When we had class again, I went over to talk to them, and they agreed to meet after class. And it was like, well, let’s spend this hour talking to each other about what's their major, are you an English major, or anything other than the project. And so another girl in the group, she was, like, actually, ‘Hold on, Macey is saying that she can edit so we should just let her do it.’ She's kind of organizing everything, and then for the rest of the group, it was, like we were working, but they dreaded it.

Macey shared how frustrated she felt with being academically stereotyped as less intelligent. She stated: “It’s like a constant assumption that we’re not smart enough, and it’s frustrating. You know it’s downright frustrating.” She described the academic stereotyping she has experienced: “They assume you have a scholarship because you’re not smart enough; it’s the special scholarship. It’s the “Ahhh, you’re from the ‘hood, the do-you-know-your-dad kind of a scholarship.” Similarly, Simone affirmed: “You are treated like you are—here, by some exception—or something like that; it’s always, like, ‘You alone are not as smart as me being in this classroom.’”

Simone’s experiences with her peers also included feeling isolated during in-class discussions:

[ . . . ] It just feels like they're not talking directly to me, but it's directed towards me. Do you even realize that I'm in the room with you? It’s just unfair. White students treat you like you're supposed to have gone to a community college. . . . They definitely question the authenticity of you being a student at the same university. Or even in the Group Me app, if I asked a question, no one's going to answer; but let a White girl, after me, ask one, they’re quick to respond. And I’m like, ‘Why is that?’ You know, it just hurts.

David, initially a theater major shared the disparities of how Black students’ talents were observed by faculty: “I feel like there were a lot of other White students who were placed more on a pedestal or looked at differently than the Black students.” Further, he stated:

Because a lot of talented young impressionable Black kids were coming to school . . . and [they do] not receive the same opportunities per se that a lot of the White

students did; although the Black students really were talented. But for the most part, it kind of goes back to almost having to be that token Black person.

Amber also affirmed the difficulty of Black theatre students to be represented in theatre plays and the literature. Amber recalled in her second semester, “You did everything pre-1950's, it's the classical theater, and I don't know why; I don't know how people didn't understand how problematic that was for a Black person; I don't want to go back in time.” Conversely, David stated: “I won't say [race] played any factor, or it wasn't a factor in my theatre academics, but constantly being overlooked was a big factor into why I transited to Ag [agriculture].” Within his new major, David shared:

I feel like I received a ton of opportunities in Ag without even having my race or ethnicity be a factor. Because in the theater world, that's a factor that you just have to take into consideration based on the content of the show.

Taylor also recalled an impactful race-based incident she witnessed between a guest speaker and a classmate. She described being in her class:

We had a guest speaker, and he needed a volunteer from the crowd ...to help him. He was an older White man in that class, and there were you know White, Black, some Hispanic, and I think he had like a couple Asian students, pretty mixed gender as well. So a Black student raised his hand to help him do the demonstration. And the guest speaker says, ‘Come on up here, boy.’

### **Interactions with Faculty**

The fifth theme I identified in my study was the interaction with faculty. Seven of the ten participants described faculty support as overall adequate, accessible, but a tool they have to be proactive in seeking. Participants in this study generally experienced

White faculty as supportive and viewed their faculty as a resource that was vital for them to access to enhance their success. Macey stated interactions have to be initiated and cultivated by the students in her experience, “I think with [the] faculty you get out of it what you put into it.” Generally, Scott felt faculty were invested in their students and want students to succeed, but students must “Forge those relationships because you have to talk to them or find reasons to talk to them. You have to kind of go to their office and have questions; you have to be there.” Erik affirmed this notion:

Well, with the [faculty] that I have gone to [their] office hours, I feel like they do put the needs of the students first because I don't feel like any faculty member or a professor would want for a student to fail the class. . . . And I do feel like the faculty members that I have experienced definitely want to see me succeed. They definitely put me in connections with people, told me about organizations that I can get in, and funds that I could access for the business courses I have taken.

Similarly, L stated, “I think it's a mix, I think some [students] do have some teachers who may not understand what you're going through, but they have empathy for you.” David stated that although White faculty may attempt to be supportive, “They'll never fully understand or encompass what it takes or understand the needs and other stuff of Black students because it's not an experience that they've lived through.” Further, David acknowledged how “Culture and life experiences are completely different, and you tend to do better as a Black student with people you relate to or have similar experiences.”

**Interactions with Black faculty.** The participants identified Black faculty as a significant interaction they seek as a college student. However, participants identified a lack of Black faculty on their campus. They described the lack of representation that participants observed on their campus as isolating, a needed resource, and a reality of their experience. All 10 of the participants asserted there too few Black faculty members on their campus. David highlighted this through his experience with faculty: “I don't think I've ever had a Black teacher.” Erik stated while he values Black faculty, he has had limited interactions:

I do feel like there are advocates out there. I definitely feel like the few very, very, very, very few Black faculty that we have here are loved. I know a Black professor who is such a caring person, and literally, he wants nothing but for us to succeed.

L highlighted the impact of not having Black faculty:

It's pretty hard because I know. . . . as a Black student, you want to engage with Black professors, see what their stance is. . . . And having so few [Black] professors here, you honestly may not get that chance. I feel like that is a missing part of my academic experience.

Macey affirmed she has experienced a lack of Black faculty and the lack of Black researchers. Further, Macey stated, “I would love to be able to see a Black woman psychologist, who's doing research and . . . talk to her about that. . . . Because, although White researchers are great, I don't really know if their experiences can really connect to mine.” Simone also expressed the lack of Black female faculty as an impactful missing



experience: “Sometimes it is very hard to want to ask for help when it's White men all the time. “

### **Emotional Impact of Race-Based Interactions**

The fifth theme I identified in my study was the emotional impact of race-based interactions the participants encountered. Nine out of ten participants in this study recalled the emotional impact of their race-based interactions. Participants described their reactions as avoiding perpetrators, shocked that the interaction occurred, and a desire to leave their university. Erik described his race-based interaction as a multi-layered process. Initially, Erik stated he felt stuck, when others were not able to help him, then he recalled, “I tried to give this girl who said that comment the benefit of the doubt. And I was just, like, well, maybe she just doesn't understand, and maybe she has never really interacted with someone like me.” Then he acknowledged a sense of the need to get out of the situation, and when he felt safe, he was overcome with anger. In his delayed response, Erik stated: “I don't think it really hit me until I got in the car, and I was . . . Like, ‘Who does she think she is? Like, she’s wrong for that!’” L also affirmed the need to feel safe in his environment, especially when he cannot completely remove himself. L navigated his class by steering “. . . clear of that individual [who portrayed the race-based incident], since it was a teacher, I decided not to ask any questions.” L further exclaimed:

If I don't understand the materials he's presented on that day, instead of asking the teacher for assistance, I'll ask either a Black or White counterpart. . . . ‘What did this mean, and what did you take out of it?’ Because I felt very uncomfortable approaching that teacher after that statement was made . . . .

After the race-based incident, L also acknowledged he felt frustrated and described, “For the most part I felt upset, angered basically, feeling like this isn't fair. . . . I can't believe this [is] still going on.” L recalled after he had completed all of his schoolwork and student organization responsibilities for that day, he went to his room and started “crying . . . You know why . . . ‘Why did this happen to me?’ It was quite frightening; you feel powerless . . .”

Similarly, Taylor expressed her discomfort after observing an impactful racial micro-aggression toward another student: “I was very uncomfortable. I mean literally, my body was moving, my feet, I was moving my head, and I would scratch my head.”

After encountering a race-based interaction, Macey affirmed her process of questioning the cause of the encounter:

[ . . . ] I was definitely frustrated [after the interaction] then I was, like, well, wait a minute. . . . ‘What am I doing?’ . . . It's like you have to have a conversation with yourself to question your actions or ask if I did something to make this happen.

Simone stated she questioned her decision to be a student at her school, “Why did I choose this?” She stated she tried to process if her choice of school was the source of why the race-based interactions occurred. This level of questioning has attributed to Simone’s academic disengagement. She stated: “I am ready to do something else because I'm just tired of being here just dealing with the same kind of attitudes. I'd rather put myself in a box before I let people do that again.” Further, Macey stated she has noticed after being academically stereotyped by peers: “. . . It's like an extra amount of energy you have to put on to be in the classrooms and be engaged, because if you're not engaged,

or you're doing something else, then people are watching you; they're paying attention to you.”

In addition to the reactions to encountering a race-based interaction, all 10 participants shared their post-emotional experiences. Participants described their emotional experience as feeling frightened, emotionally exhausted, angry, and shocked after the race-based encounter. Two participants discussed the longer-term emotional consequences, in which they have reduced their interactions on campus, and are only motivated by leaving the university. L shared his process of navigating through his campus despite encountering microaggressions. He stated:

“You begin to question yourself, and when I didn’t understand, I had to go automatically into defense mode, and without even asking them what did they mean . . .”

After encountering academic and social race-based interactions, L said:

I stopped . . . going on campus when I didn't need to, it feels like a hassle. . . . I got tired of seeing people who don't look like me, or don't know how to talk to me. . . . It's a lot of work trying to make people treat you like a person before your race here. So I just stopped it altogether.”

Participants also described a sense of understanding race-based interactions are embedded in their college experiences as a Black student. Four participants shared sentiments similar to Taylor’s experience when she encountered microaggressions:

The [feelings] before there's never really a feeling because you never know when things are really going to happen. So it was just kind of like *a regular stay-on-your-guard-day*, and after [a race-based interaction] occurs, you are left

with just more disappointment. It was kind of like we were already so disappointed that sometimes to make it through the day, you shrug your shoulder and say, 'Oh, OK, OK, well.' But as Black students, we had to kind of break that, and to really be effective in what we wanted to do, which was to promote change.

### **Support from Academic Advisors**

The sixth theme I identified, and the participants endorsed, was support from academic advisors. Five of the ten participants in this study were aware of their academic advisors' roles in their education and had impactful encounters. The support from academic advisors' theme captured the interactions participants had with their academic advisors and their perceptions after seeking support. These interactions were reported as receiving encouragement to stop pursuing their degree or to switch majors, but they sometimes inadequately addressed the participants' needs. Erik's interactions with his advisor were difficult because he felt he reached out when he was struggling, and the advisor overlooked his needs. Erik stated:

I literally went to him, and I told him, 'Hey, this major isn't for me. I need help. I'm not passing any of my classes. I need you to do something for me, and we gotta do something quick. And this man literally told me that basically, I needed to drop out of college. . . . I switched advisors and everything—because I realized this man literally doesn't care what happens to me. And that's not somebody that I want advising me, like my academic advisor literally said, 'It doesn't look like you're going to be successful here you might need to change majors. . . .'

Macey also affirmed: "Our advisors are not as supportive. I'm sure there are some good ones out there, but maybe I've haven't interacted with one." Similarly, Simone

shared she felt the advisors “have a tendency not to help you as much. . . . They're, like, ‘Well, do you need to stop?’ You know, it's kind of, like, give up, before there's a what do you need to do next kind of thing.” Further, she exclaimed:

I just noticed that the most shocking thing was [that]most of the time, it was my Black advisors who would tell me [to] stop. And it's as if they're looking at you like well, you won't be here long anyway. I'm noticing there's just a lot of Black on Black, like, intimidation at a PWI.

However, David stated:

I don't feel, well, when it comes to my academics, it's necessarily [my advisor's] responsibility, but in a way, it is. And I say that because, like, their goal is to get you on track academically, assess what class you need to complete your degree plan, which doesn't really involve advisors always being a source of support.

### **Black On-Campus Community**

The seventh theme I identified was the Black on-campus community. The participants in this study described a sense of community was a vital part of their experience. Eight out of ten participants discussed the Black student community on their own campus, the various dynamics within this community, and how they experienced and defined this sub-community. Erik stated: “I feel like African Americans here at my school are, I would say, privileged and bougie, and I don't know, like, what it is, but it's kind of like ‘Oh, I’m better than you,’ type of thing.” Further, he discussed the effect of the rigid structure of the Black on-campus community:

Has affected, like, my whole [approach] with the Black student community, because when you look at me, I don't look Black. There's a lot of social

constructions you have to abide by. The Black community can be very, I don't want to say prejudiced, but if you're doing [something unacceptable], then you are weird. [The social constructions within the Black on-campus community are] controlling. The Black community here at my school has a lot of work [to do] to make people feel included.

Simone affirmed the difficulty of the Black on-campus community being united.

She attributed the lack of cohesion to the treatment students of color receive on campus:

When it comes to social media and even everyday stuff, White students are definitely OK with saying whatever. But when it comes to the African, African American, or even Hispanics, the minorities here have a tendency to segregate ourselves. Because of the treatment that we already get. There's not a lot of programs for us; there's not a lot of activity for us.

Further, she specifically stated [Black students]: "Fight internally so much because everybody is trying to prove that they're the *Blackest*. On the African dysphoria here [Black students] are very looked down upon by African Americans." Highlighting the conflicts between African students and the Black on-campus community, Simone shared:

So, the way [African students] see it, [Black students] are from America. Black students don't have a culture, or y'all-don't-understand work ethic. Like it's very structured how we treat each other like we don't support each other at all.

David stated he did not find the Black on-campus community to be a significant source of connection. David shared:

I know it's not allowed in the mindset of Black people to not hang out with your Black people, sing kumbaya, but that's just not my mindset, though. I think you

should only hang out with who you feel like you should. In general, I don't feel like I should [hangout with only Black students on campus].

Conversely, L stated he has found the Black community on campus to be a significant source of support: "Again, no matter what we as a Black community go through, we can still join together no matter where we are." Similarly, Macey stated: "I think overall there is this sense of community that is here for Black students. . . . It is accessible." Further, she stated: "When you really realize you have a community, it really feels, like, no, it's not just happening to me, you are not alone, and you have a sense of support."

All of the 10 participants indicated they had experienced interactions within the Black on-campus community. The participants expressed a range of encounters that contributed to their level of interactions with the Black student community. Participants also described their interactions from the perspective of being an outsider, feeling supported, and invisibility to the White culture on campus, and difficulty in making a campus-wide impact as a racial group.

Erik described his interactions with the Black on-campus community as, "They were awkward and unwelcoming." Initially, because of the isolation he felt his freshman year, Erik worked to find and establish himself within the Black community. However, despite his efforts, Erik stated: "I feel like an outsider. . . . I kind of don't know why, because I feel like I'm a genuinely really friendly person and I'm easy to talk to. And I'm heavily involved in the Black community." He also stated he feels unappreciated, and there are tensions despite having close friends who are also involved in the Black on-campus community. Moreover, Erik attributed the lack of acceptance within the Black to

his sexual attraction: “People are not very accepting and, like, for me trying to balance being involved and [being bisexual], it’s really hard because all I want to say—is this all of me?” David stated he has also felt isolated from the Black community: “I can expect to walk into an event with the Black community with the full beat [wearing make-up] and get looks; I just feel unwelcomed.”

In order to have the institution address the needs of the Black students on campus, the participants indicated they have often worked together as a group. Erik expressed how difficult it is for the Black on-campus community to get things done. He stated: “I do feel like we have small wins, like we're trying at least, you know, to do what we can. To make this campus more diverse than it is . . . We at least try to succeed in some way.” Macey echoed this difficulty and stated, “Even though Black students as a community know what we are doing, for the most part, I do feel like we're invisible.” Further, she shared how the Black on-campus community’s efforts are largely ignored by the majority culture: “After a few of the police shootings [of unarmed Black people], we had a march and a prayer on campus that were never even acknowledged [in the larger campus].”

Simone stated she felt her actions as a student leader were judged by the Black on-campus community: “You know everybody has something to say about you and what you're doing.” Simone stated that because of the constant feedback, she decided: “I just stay in my own lane now because I feel like I can't help. I can't help White people here, and I can't help Black people; I just feel I'm associating between two worlds.” David also affirmed that “Although I did not have much interaction with the Black on-campus community . . . I do, at times, wish I had, I guess, been a little bit more involved in the Black community; but I don't regret not being involved.”



### **Coping as a Black Student**

The eighth and final theme I identified was coping as a Black student. All 10 participants shared the coping strategies of how they have navigated their college experiences. All of the participants shared their personal philosophies, motivations, and internal and external coping strategies. The participants were aware of the difficulty of being within their campus environment, and all participants shared the unique ways of how they have navigated various situations. Erik shared his personal motivations for pursuing his education: “I’m not only doing this for me, but I’m doing it for the community around me. I want to see them grow [and] prosper. . . . I’m not only doing it for me but the people back home.”

Four participants shared their personal process of how they have navigated their university experience. L stated: “You know, as time goes on, you begin to become more resilient towards discrimination, but you. . . . You still feel it.” Macey stated: “As Black students, we have to have that extra layer of awareness, that extra layer of taking advantage of opportunities.” Further, she stated:

I think you know for me I had to learn even though I’m a fairly introverted person, you’ve got to talk to these people; you need letters of recommendation; you need them to be able to vouch for the work that you do. And so, I honestly feel like, as a Black student, you have to be aware. And when they throw these terms out at you, [you] got to figure out, ‘What does that mean for me?’ ‘How can I play this college game?’ ‘How do I figure it out for myself and make it work for me?’ I feel like if you can’t ask that question of how college works for you, that’s where we tend to struggle. Also, I realized it’s OK to maintain my distance and stay

away from anyone, as a way to protect myself, when you need to, because there's probably some hidden racism or there's some hidden biases.

Moreover, David shared: "It's just of the mindset that I have with everything because I feel like letting discrimination or allowing it to affect you; you start to think negative, and it does actually affect you." Taylor described her coping as a natural developmental process: "After a while, I found my maturity kicked in, and I just told myself these are some things that you just have to do. And you know you can't grow in your comfort zone." Further, Taylor shared how she has learned to broaden her interactions on her campus and increase her leadership abilities. A vital part of her experiences as a Black student was engaging with White student peers. Specifically, Taylor stated:

You need to become an orientation leader and you need to become an ambassador. You need to be in touch with White student culture in some way, because the Black student community, I mean we might look cool, but our power is nowhere near the power of the White student culture. And they have much more influence than we do. And it would just be foolish to waste all of your time invested only into the Black student community for it not to return anything to you.

Travis also shared his mindset:

If you're in a high position, what can they do to you? And so, I've always tried to have that mindset of I'm not using anybody, but I do need to utilize them to achieve my goals, and to help further the people who look like me achieve their goals. I'm starting to create spaces within the organization [that] was founded last year.

An additional component to the coping of Black students also included the various avenues of social support the participants accessed. L shared that he found significant support through his major:

[ . . . ] I found sociology. And it's so surprising, because not only did I find individuals that look like me, I found teachers who understood what it meant somewhat to be Black students at a predominately White campus. I found peers who could help me process this information I'm going through, and opportunities to honestly really love to help people.

Macey has found that talking to her parents about her experiences as a college student was helpful to process her experiences safely. She stated: "I appreciate [my parents]. I can share with my dad, and he is really insightful on how to navigate some of these conversations." Simone has also found support through her friends: "I, for the most part, I don't want to say I don't have a lot of White friends, but I definitely have my group, [which] is majority African American." Simone also expressed how she copes with navigating being on her campus, ". . . I'm happy that I'm making it through . . . I don't really participate in any traditions or go to football games."

Simone noticed changes in her academic behavior over time as a Black student and shared:

Actually, I started migrating towards the front of the class because, in the back, all you see are the White people. I just couldn't keep doing that. And so, I just moved to the front where I couldn't see anyone. You know, so my behavior changed my academics. I have to limit my distractions and, sometimes, my interactions.

Next, Simone described how she had begun withdrawing as a student: “I guess my behavior has changed from my experiences here. I tend to be like I'm a student here, but I'm not affiliated.” Additionally, Simone attributed her withdrawal to constantly being asked to educate her White peers about her experiences as a Black student:

So, I just gave up on trying to educate them. You know I used to be all for it. But now [that] my experience has changed, my behavior is changed, I just go about my day. I'd stop trying to fight the good fight. Maybe I'll pick it up soon, but it's so tiring, it's so tiring.

Finally, four participants described their personal philosophies about increasing their exposures and challenging themselves. Simone's experiences best capture this notion, “I feel like this [experience at a PWI] is a tool in your belt. You need to do this in a predominately White society, to navigate a White world. Just go ahead and be exposed to it.”

### **Synthesis of the Impact of Race-Based Experiences**

As previously, discussed in chapters one and three, the research question I answered for this study was: What are the lived experiences of Black students who encounter race-based interactions at their predominately White institutions? I searched for the essence of how Black college students uniquely developed their Black student identity (see Figure 1), integrated into their college experience, and how social, academic, and institutional race-based interactions were experienced.

The essence of the participants' experiences in this study demonstrated a variety of how Black college students were aware of their race before coming to college, and how each participant's awareness of their race impacted their overall campus experience.

Further, after beginning their college career, the participants indicated their perceived racial identity by others dictated how they were viewed at their predominately White institution. The centrality of the participant's race is not only a central component to Critical Race Theory, but also impacted the participants' comfort level being on campus, how they navigated spaces on campus, and how they were emotionally impacted by their campus. Although there was diversity in how each participant developed and was emotionally impacted, the majority of participants confirmed that their race was a central aspect of their identity as a college student. Additionally, whether through first-hand experience, social media, or the vicarious experience of another Black student, race-based interactions were significant in altering how engaged and how safe Black college students felt while they were attending predominately White institutions.

The textural-structural descriptions of participants in this study captured the diversity in the participants' experiences and the essence of the lived experiences of Black college students. Throughout this study, participants reported that their awareness of their racial identity began in childhood, and regardless of their level of awareness and parental preparation, they were individually aware of their race. The participants indicated they looked to their surrounding community to help inform their racial awareness and identity.

David stated: "My race was never really like a discussion point. . . . "Cause I've always grown up with knowing [I was Black] . . . I was always very aware; there was never a conversation that needed to be had." Similarly, Simone recalled: "I would say [race] wasn't [discussed] because I originally grew up in Arkansas, and that is predominantly Black region or area." Travis described, "I was in a moratorium. I never

really thought of race because it was never a topic. I just knew I was Black.” While many participants were able to learn about their racial identity by seeing others who looked like them, Taylor was raised in a multiracial family, “So it's kind of like growing up whenever you go see grandma and grandpa. It was, like, ‘Oh, yeah, I know they don't look like me,’ but race still was never, like, discussed in the family.” Amber stated that preparation was the basis for “The discussion of race . . . a lot of the time, especially around the time when a lot of Blacks were being killed . . . My mother basically told me what to do if I get pulled over and how to make it home.” Further, Erik also affirmed that messages in his home were centered on being prepared outside of the home: “Race was always taught to me, I was told, you . . . gotta watch out for certain things. And I feel like race was very openly discussed in my home.”

In addition to their parents, participants were also impacted by the messages they received about their race by their peers. Macey stated that through her race-based interaction, she “internalized that being Black was bad,” and this message changed how she identified racially. Taylor was informed about her race by comparing herself physically at school:

[ . . . ] My awareness of my race] didn't really happen until I got older. So as a child, I never really worried about it. It was never, like, in my head. I don't think I ever was, like, oh, I'm Black. . . . And so as I got older, maybe, like, in middle school, I started to, like, compare myself to the other Black girls at school.

L stated that messages in the media also informed his racial identity:

I grew up, you know, watching the news with my grandmother, mom, and other relatives and . . . I would just kind of see some of the disdain of what the Black

race would do. . . . How they would sometimes treat people, or how they would sometimes treat their own race . . . .

Race-based interactions were experienced by the overwhelming majority of participants. Socially, Erik recalled: “a racial slur where somebody actually called me ‘other Black boy?’” Amada affirmed: “When I first came to college, people would ask ridiculous questions, ‘do you know your dad?’ I would share with them that my mom had passed away, and it would be like ‘Oh my God are you adopted?’” Simone limited her interactions at certain establishments that surround the campus: “I stay away from [certain clubs near campus] because the language that they use in there. I don't like to be called the N-word or like [to] be around those who say it, and they say it.” Travis recalled being with a group of Black friends and being stopped by the police after another White student yelled obscenities at the officer. Travis stated he was fearful because he immediately had a concerning thought about his friend who was with him: “Is this the moment where Daija gets shot? Just for something that small?”

Academically, Simone stated she felt her peers tended to approach her differently: “You're not approached first compared to the person next to you that they're familiar with. People don't necessarily know how to talk to you, so they have to act a certain way.”

L stated he was impacted by a race-based interaction he experienced with a faculty member, in which he was labeled as scary and a threat to his other classmates. This interaction contributed to L avoiding interacting with his instructor and being hyper-vigilant in assessing his safety.

Macey shared how frustrated she felt with being academically stereotyped as less intelligent. She stated, “It’s a constant assumption that we’re not smart enough, and it’s frustrating.” This experience was affirmed by Simone: “You are treated like you are here by some exception or something like that. It’s always like you alone are not as smart as me being in this classroom.” Further, David shared the disparities of how Black students’ talents were observed by theatre faculty: “I feel like there were a lot of other White students who were placed more on a pedestal or looked at differently than the Black students.” Taylor also recalled an impactful race-based incident she witnessed between a guest speaker and a Black male classmate. She described being in her class: “and the guest speaker says, ‘Come on up here boy,’” triggering a stress-based reaction in which she had to step out of class in an attempt to relieve the tensions she was feeling.

Institutionally, the participants indicated they had to adjust expectations of their university. Taylor stated: “So when I came here to my school, I already knew I was coming to an east Texas town, and I cannot expect too much. But at the same time, I expected everything of my university, I guess.” After a student-athlete engaged in using Blackface on her campus, Taylor conducted personal research to understand the lack of action from her university’s administrators and was disappointed that “my school has no policy and procedures about sanctioning discriminatory acts.”

Unlike their White counterparts, Black college students’ experiences are specifically informed by their Black racial identity. In this study, participants described how they experienced their race in their childhood, which informed their racial identity awareness. However, when they became a student at their PWI, participants shared the structural descriptions of what they experienced emotionally through their race as their

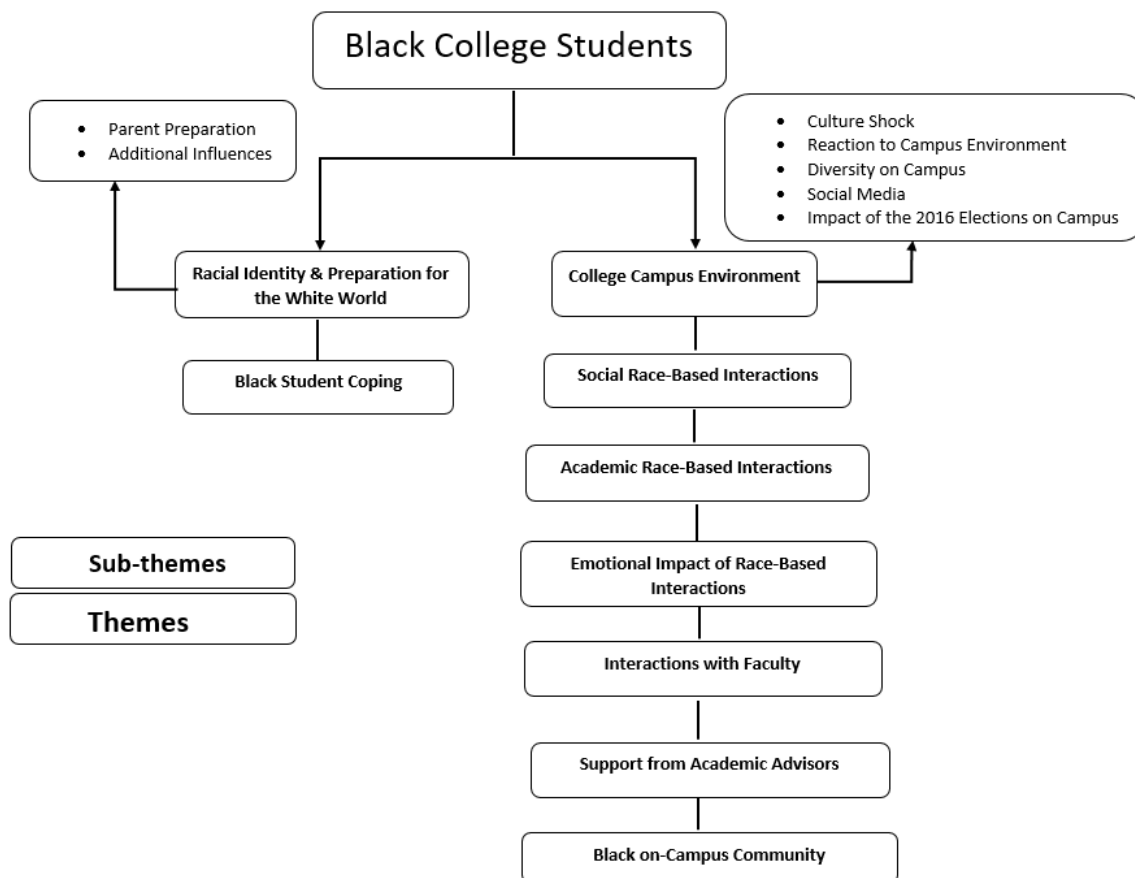


centralized identity. Participants described their campus environment generally as unwelcoming and isolating. Scott described his campus environment as stressful, not supportive, and unsafe. Simone stated: “I was depressed by the end of my freshman year. Because of my grades and not feeling welcomed.” Jay stated that she felt her campus environment was tiresome; “I just feel like you have to constantly work . . . to include yourself . . .” L described: “While I’m here I have mixed feelings. . . . I’m proud to be at a predominately White institution as a Black individual because it makes me feel, like, as a Black person, we can go anywhere.” However, L stated that as a student on his campus he feels, “. . . nonexistent, invisible, not important. My voice is not heard. You know it makes me feel as if that, I can shout to the top of my lungs, and no one will hear me.”

For participants in this study, the campus environment has been shaped by significant external factors, such as social media and national politics. Social media offers Black students the opportunity to immediately be informed about race-based incidents and acts that surrounded them. However, race-based encounters on social media also increased worry about the proximity of the individuals who post discriminatory comments. Simone stated: “[Seeing these messages on social media] made me feel very sad. It made me a bit more paranoid, like, ‘who actually is saying this, who thinks like this, is the person looking at me because of my race.’”

Overall, the experiences of these 10 participants were that Black students used their racial identity and campus environments to inform and define their lived experiences. However, many factors also influenced the participants’ experiences as Black Students on a predominately White campus. Specifically, the participants’ lived

experiences were further defined and developed by race-based experiences and the psychological impacts of encountering race-based interactions.



*Figure 1.* Synthesized Lived Experiences of Black College. This figure illustrates the themes that captured the race-based experiences of Black college students attending a predominately White institution.

## Summary

In this chapter, I included the nine themes that emerged from the 10 participant's transcripts, low inference descriptors that support the identified themes, and a synthesis of the essence and meaning of the participant's experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Semi-structured interview protocols with Black college students were conducted as a method to understand the lived experiences of the participants. The interviews provided me an opportunity to explore the essence of the raced-based emotional experiences of Black students' experience at a predominately White institution. The participants' statements in the verbatim transcriptions were analyzed through Moustakas' (1994) Modification of the Van Kaam (1959, 1966) method. The emergent themes and sub-themes captured the essence of not only the impactful race-based encounters, but the psychological impact of participants' experiences on a predominately White campus.

In Chapter V, a summary of the study and discussion of the findings is presented. Also, reported are the implications and recommendations for Black college students who were attending PWIs. Interventions and approaches for counselors and university administrators and staff are discussed. Finally, conclusions addressing the research question are presented.

## CHAPTER V

### Discussion

The purpose of my study was to describe the raced-based experiences of Black students who were attending a predominately White institution. A transcendental phenomenological approach was used to capture the participants' perspectives, and to provide insight into their motivations by identifying and describing their lived experiences with the phenomena. The essence of the participant's experiences in this study identified various ways Black college students became aware of their race before coming to college. Further, I found each participant's awareness of their race specifically impacted their individual campus experiences.

My study was guided by two theoretical frameworks: Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Race-Based Traumatic Stress Theory (RBST). Critical Race Theory and Race-Based Stress Traumatic Theory scholars examined the race-based experiences of Black college students through specific lenses of the participants (Bell, 1985; Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Carter et al., 2017; Harper, 2012; Ledesma & Calderón, 2015). Additionally, the two theoretical frameworks guided the exploration into the emotional and psychological experiences of the study's participants.

The central acknowledgment of specific experiences of one's race is significant in the Critical Race Theory. Further, CRT in higher education highlighted and removed the majoritarian frames that have historically shaped the experiences of Black students attending predominately White colleges and universities (Bell, 1985; Harper, 2012). Specifically, one crucial CRT principle is recognizing the centrality of racism in shaping

everyday life experiences of all people, but especially for Black students attending a predominately White institution.

Through the Critical Race Theory, I was able to highlight the multiple levels participants in this study were impacted within their university through their racial lens. Participants shared how their race was experienced at an individual social, academic, and institutional level, thereby making their race a core component of their college experience. Simone described her feelings of isolation as a Black student at freshman orientation: “It was a major realization that I am Black; they are White, and socially we're different, culturally we're different.”

Further, L shared: “I see how others may look at me. How others may feel that I'm not supposed to be here. [ . . . ] Why are you not at an HBCU? . . . Why are you here at this PWI?” Academically, the participants indicated their race can become a central concern for them in many forms. Simone related: “I take a lot of those classes where we actually have discussions about . . . what you think . . . and a White student will make an offensive comment, and you start to feel segregated . . .”

Macey stated she has encountered academic stereotyping because of her race: “White students often assume we're not smart enough, so it's frustrating. You know it's downright frustrating.” Macey further stated: “It is not that they assume you have a scholarship because you're smart enough; it's the special scholarship; it's the ‘Ahhh, you're from the ‘hood, and you don't-know-your-dad kind of a scholarship.’”

On the intuitional level, participants in this study felt disconnected and not supported as a Black student on their campus. According to CRT scholars, Black students' centrality of their racial identity has to be reflected in their institution's policies,

values, how administrations address the need of Black students (Bell, 1985; Carbado & Gulati, 2003; McGee & Stovall, 2015). In deepening the understanding of the experiences of Black students, participants described how their specific needs are overlooked, disappointment in the university's response, and the lack of investment in Black students. For example, Macey stated:

The [university administrators] just kind of really seem like the people in the sky that are making the university run. And so I don't really feel that connected to them, but it's like they're just people making decisions, and you don't know who they're making decisions for, do they have my best interest?

Taylor stated she has observed the inaction of the institution's leadership after a race-based interaction has occurred. Taylor recalled:

I've been here for [several discriminatory] situations, and in each of them, after they simmer down, there's just been no action that has been taken by my university. It's always these statements about how they're disappointed there's action; it's just fluff.

Simone described her experiences with the lack of representation and diversity:

If you really ask [the Black students], it's not true [my school is not diverse]. I don't know if I even like the diversity posters. Like that one Black person, they sit over in the back. So sad. It's so sad I just don't feel represented here.

Conversely, Macey stated she felt, as a Black student, there was a representation.

However, her concerns centered on the university, failing to ensure retention of Black students:

I just feel like my university does a good job of getting Black students, but I don't know if they're doing a good job of keeping them. Our graduation rate of Black students is not even close to the acceptance rate. And I don't think that is OK. I think the school needs to do a better job of figuring out a way to support Black students, so they can graduate from here, so we can go back and impact our communities.

Analyzing the data based on Critical Race Theory, challenges scholars to recognize the ways that race and racial power are constructed through campus culture and highlights how some participants disengage from campus activities (Bell, 1985; Carbado & Gulati, 2003; McGee & Stovall, 2015). Jay experienced her campus environment as tiresome: "I just feel like you have to constantly work to include yourself to find things that fit and be a part of groups that are accepting and also diverse. It can be overwhelming and feel strange." Critical race theorists stipulated that majoritarian frames preserve the privilege of Whiteness and White supremacy, which ensures Whiteness is the norm (Bell, 1985; Harper, 2012). Macey experienced this notion when she shared: "What I struggle with is how my heritage as a Black person is invisible on campus." Further, Travis affirmed how easily experiences are dismissed for *students of color*:

It's scary to see White students holding up [a sign] rejecting our rights as Black and Latino people. But any White person can make our experiences a joke; it's a joke to these people because it doesn't affect them. Racism doesn't affect them as it affects us.

The examination of Black college students' experiences on a predominately White campus is vastly different than the dominant White culture. This is because the

majority culture, race-neutrality, objectivity, and historicism eliminate the lens that *students of color* use to navigate their university (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015).

Critical Race Theory provides the framework for what Black students attending a PWI experience, while Race-Based Stress theory explains how the participants' experience their emotions. According to Carter et al. (2017), RBST acknowledged the specific experiences with racism by individuals of color and explored their psychological experiences. Specifically, Carter (2007) stated racial and ethnic minority individuals may experience racial discrimination as psychologically painful or traumatic. For example, when L experienced a race-based incident with a faculty member, he recalled, after going home, he went to his room, and he started crying. "[ . . . ] You know, why . . . Why did this happen to me? It was quite frightening; you feel powerless. . . ." Further, after observing a Black student being called *boy* by a faculty guest, Taylor stated: "I was very uncomfortable; I mean, literally, my body was moving, my feet, I was moving my head, and I would scratch my head." After that encounter Taylor described:

At first, I wasn't really sure how I feel about that. But it was kind of like my first time encountering racism, it made me mad . . . because it was so close to me . . . and, although this . . . wasn't directed toward me, I was in the classroom, in the environment. So I was just uncomfortable for the rest of the class, I remember I was clicking, clicking, I was clicking my pen . . . I realized I got annoying [to other students], so I tried to click underneath the desk, and 'I was, like, oh my goodness, I have to get out of here.' And then I think we had ten minutes left in the class and I went to the bathroom; I had to splash some water on my face. I was able to go back, and then when we got finished, I addressed it with my professor,



and I said, ‘You didn't think that was kind of odd for him to call another student *boy?*’ All he said was that most guests ask volunteers for their names, and [in the future] he would suggest that the guest ask for students’ names. I was exhausted after that conversation—because he was completely unaware of everything.

Also, Carter (2007) stated these psychologically painful events may elicit a response comparable to posttraumatic stress. The stress of the varied forms of racism range across settings and can set the stage for a particularly painful event that makes stress severe and traumatic (Carter et al., 2017; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). L described avoidance and self-isolation as how he has learned to cope after a race-based incident: “I automatically go into defense mode, and without even asking them what they meant. . . . I go into defense mode . . .” Further, Simone affirmed avoidance and emotional burnout as her form of coping:

I stopped . . . going on-campus when I didn't need to; it feels like a hassle. . . . I got tired of seeing people who don't look like me, or don't know how to talk to me. . . . It's a lot of work trying to make people treat you like a person, before your race, here. So, I just stopped it altogether.

The mental and emotional strain *people of color* must regularly access to determine if an event is related to one’s race or not limits productivity and emotional health (Carter et al., 2017; Salvatore & Shelton, 2007). Reflecting on her freshman year, Simone stated: “I was depressed during my freshman year by the end. Because of my grades and not feeling welcomed at school.” Simone described the tension she felt, based on interactions with White peers:

I guess I've had more encounters of passive-aggressiveness rather than someone being blatantly racist to me. But it's that tension that I feel that's worst; I kind of wish that people would just be like aggressively racist because at least you know. But here the White students can be very passive, but still make it clear you do not belong; it's very tense.

The reading of my literature review was developed by exploring topics on racial identity, impacts of racism (physical health of Black adults), college experiences of Black students, threats to Black students' academic success, empirical studies on the mental health of adolescents, and racial experiences. Additionally, I examined the significant historical events that have been psychologically impactful for Black people and have structured educational progress in the United States. The summaries of the literature review in Chapter II grounded my knowledge of the phenomena, and the lived experiences of Black college students.

My review of literature also guided my research question: What are the lived experiences of Black students who encounter race-based interactions at their predominately White institutions? I was able to answer the research question by conducting 10 semi-structured interviews with Black college students attending a midsize predominately White institution. The participants provided detailed descriptions of the psychological impact of their race-based experiences at their predominately White institutions. Essence and meaning-making statements emerged as a result of the data analyzed from the semi-structured interviews. Following Moustakas' (1994) Modification of the Van Kaam (1959, 1966) method, I was able to describe the themes from each of the participant's responses to the grand tour interview questions. The nine

themes that emerged from the transcribed in-person interview data were (a) **racial identity and preparation**, (b) **campus environment**, (c) **social race-based interactions**, (d) **academic race-based interactions**, (e) **emotional impact of race-based interactions**, (f) **interactions with faculty**, (g), **support from academic advisors**, (h) **Black on-campus community**, and (i) **coping as a Black student**. In the following section, I explain the essence statements as it pertains to each of the themes.

### **Discussion of Findings**

I used a phenomenological approach to achieve my goal. My approach was to fill the literature gap by understanding lived experiences and the impact of race-based interactions on the mental health of Black college students. My focus was on students attending a predominately White institution. I searched for the essence of how Black college students uniquely developed their Black student identities, integrated those identities into their college experiences, and how social, academic, and institutional race-based interactions were experienced.

The essence of the participants' experiences in this study demonstrated how Black college students were aware of their race before coming to college, and how each participant's awareness of their race impacted their overall campus experience. Further, after beginning their college career, the participants indicated their perceived racial identity was dictated by others' perceptions of their race. The centrality of the participant's race is not only a core component to Critical Race Theory, but also impacted the participants' comfort level being on campus, how they navigated spaces on campus, and how they were emotionally impacted by their campus environment. Additionally, whether through first-hand experiences, social media, or vicarious experience of another

Black student, race-based interactions were significant in altering how engaged and how safe Black college students felt attending predominately White institutions. Essential statements were derived from the semi-structured interviews and the research question. Each of the themes was discussed in terms of the theoretical frameworks.

**Racial identity and preparation.** The first theme of racial identity and preparation captured the participants' awareness, attitudes, and initial understanding of their race. Six participants reported that discussions about race were not a priority because their surrounding community consisted of racially similar individuals. The remaining four participants indicated their race was a central part of their identity before entering college, primarily because of the conversation about race in their homes. Further, additional messages about race were also primarily informed by the participants' encounters outside of the home.

Critical Race Theory and the holistic perspective of the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity consider awareness and centrality of race as the foundation of experience (Bell, 1985; Sellers et al., 1998). Although there was diversity in how each participant developed and was emotionally impacted by their racial awareness, nine of the participants confirmed their race was a central aspect of their identity as a college student. All 10 participants expressed an awareness of their racial identity. Racial identity was significant to their self-concept and central across settings.

After becoming college students and encountering the White culture on their campus, nine of the participants were often required to examine their individual racial identity and assess the meaning and significance of their race. Moreover, regardless of the preparation and race-based discussions in their childhood home, nine of the ten

participants acknowledged their racial identity was a central component in their emotional adjustment as a college student. For the first question, when I asked the participants about their experiences as Black students on a PWI, eight participants indicated their racial identity conflicted with the campus majority, which contributed to feelings of isolation and invisibility.

**Campus environment.** The campus environment theme was the largest, and the second theme identified in the study. The five sub-themes of culture shock, reaction to campus environment, diversity of students on campus, social media, and impact of the 201 Election on campus were endorsed by all 10 participants as significant components of their college experience. Semi-structured interview questions 1, 3, and 5 captured the various aspect of the campus atmosphere that participants indicated were significant. Participants described their campus environment as socially isolating, uncomfortable, and politically tense. Specifically, the participants' experiences with stereotypes, other's perceptions of their race, and feeling unwelcomed both inside and outside the classroom, negatively impacted their overall educational environment (Harper, 2015). In addition to Harper's (2015) findings of behavioral responses to race-based experiences commonly included dropping out or transferring from their institution; however, participants in my study continued to remain committed to their education at their institution (Harper, 2015).

Although participants remained committed to their education emotionally, they felt unsafe, invisible, and emotionally overwhelmed on campus and in their classrooms. Identifying the participants' coping resources provided insights into the participant's behavioral responses to remain on their campus. The participants explained how they continued their educational pursuits through extended social support, cultivation of on-

campus communities, and personal philosophies about how they assessed the value of their degree.

When participants were asked to describe their experiences as Black students at a PWI, all of the participants indicated (although they anticipated some difficulties of transitioning into college) they were unprepared for the initial culture shock they experienced. Half of the participants stated the initial period of shock commonly occurred during their first independent (separate from their parents) contact with their campus. Participants indicated they felt uncomfortable, overwhelmed, and isolated during their freshman orientation, and these feelings continued when they begin taking classes. Simone's experience culminated this notion:

It's a culture shock to walk onto campus as a freshman. You deal with 300–400 students in the class. It's very intimidating to walk in, and all you see is a pool of just White, and no one looks like you.

In addition to race-based interactions experienced within the campus environment, participants described their campus environment as politically tense and divisive. The 2016 presidential election increased seven participants' feelings of isolation, concerns for personal safety, and hyperawareness. Further, the increased tensions on campus contributed to three participants, specifically being fearful of encountering law enforcement and anxiety when driving. The influence of national politics has also contributed to participants experiencing increased campus-wide race-based interactions. Scott stated: "After the 2016 Election, things just got worse and worse; and more individual groups were targeted on campus." Through my research and

review of the literature, this finding was unanticipated and had not been published previously.

*Social media.* In answering semi-structured questions, five participants described social media as a significant component of their college experience. Social media was utilized as an informational source for news, and where they learned about race-based interactions that occurred on campus. Additionally, social media served as a connection for the members of the Black on-campus community, notification of student events, and a determinant of social status among Black students.

According to Chappell (2016), social media access enhances communication, ideally around the world and within the same communities. In my study, the participants stated social media was utilized to establish the hierarchy in the Black on-campus community. This social media-based hierarchy created disconnection, isolation, and mistrust among Black students and organizations. Four participants indicated the hierarchy within the Black on-campus community was determined by the number of followers, and the individuals that Black student leaders follow. Three participants specifically indicated a Black student organization's significance on campus was determined by their number of individuals and student-organization followers.

Travis stated that as a leader of an LGBTQ student organization, to remain relevant, he has to post and show his support for other Black student organizations. But his organization's events are not supported on social media. However, Black students used social media to determine their sub-community leadership. Participants felt these organizations were still not impactful or significant to the larger White campus culture.

Participants stated the race-based interactions encountered via social media were also emotionally impactful. Chappell (2016) found social media discussions about race and news of racial discrimination appear to simultaneously kindle frustration and race-consciousness among Black youth and college students. However, in my study, the participants identified the most common response to these encounters was a mobilization of Black students. For example, Taylor stated that after a student-athlete posted a video in Blackface, she and other student leaders met with university administrators. Further, Travis and L stated they observed Black students organizing and demonstrating on their campus. The demonstrations occurred after the students learned from social media that controversial speakers were planning to visit their campus.

Chappell (2016) and Belgrave and Allison (2014) have indicated that repeated exposure to online racial discrimination can serve as a significant consequence for Black individuals. These negative mental and physical health outcomes included, but are not limited to, depression, psychiatric distress, lowered self-esteem somatic, and cognitive anxiety (Belgrave & Allison, 2014; Bernard, Hoggard, & Neblett, 2018; Chappell, 2016; Neblett, & Carter, 2012; Pieterse, et al., 2012). The results of this study affirmed the findings of Chappell (2016) and Belgrave and Allison's (2014) about the psychological impact of race-based messages on Black college students. Moreover, participants in my study indicated they felt tense being on campus. Further, race-based interactions online confirmed the participants' doubts about being physically safe while they were on campus and heightened their awareness of who is in their academic environments.

**Faculty interactions.** Participants in this study indicated a significant missing part of their experiences as Black students was the lack of Black faculty representation.



The lack of representation participants observed on their campus contributed to feelings of isolation and was identified as a needed resource. All 10 of the participants stated there were too few Black faculty members on their campus. David highlighted this through his experience with faculty: “I don't think I've ever had a Black teacher.” L also highlighted the impact of not having Black faculty: “It’s pretty hard because I know. . . . As a Black student, you want to engage with Black professors, see what their stance is . . . . And having so few [Black] professors here, you honestly may not get that chance. I feel like that is a missing part of my academic experience.”

Allen (1992), Guiffrida and Douthit (2010), and Harper (2015) found the lack of Black faculty and staff contributes to the difficulties Black students face at predominately White institutions. Further, the participants in this study commented on the lack of Black faculty, leading to decreased opportunities for support through guidance, networking, and mentorship. Additionally, participants identified the lack of Black faculty to potential loss of academic opportunities to develop their specific research interests.

**Race-based interactions.** A second large component of the participants’ lived experiences were race-based encounters. Asking participants to specifically describe their experiences as a Black student included an awareness of race-based interactions. Nine of the ten participants indicated they directly experienced race-based encounters interacting socially with peers and in academic settings. All 10 participants stated they were aware and emotionally impacted by various race-based encounters experienced by other Black students. However, participants were most impacted by their individual experiences, and described feeling terrified, angry, sad, and frustrated that the encounter occurred.

Participants indicated they experienced race-based encounters across all settings but indicated academic race-based interactions were also emotionally impactful. Taylor described her trauma-based reactions after observing a classmate being called *boy*, in which her “thoughts were rushing,” and she needed to step out of class. Similarly, the participants recalled feeling anxious, angry, shocked, isolated, and had difficulty concentrating after the incident occurred. Additionally, Simone and L specifically indicated they experienced race-based traumatic symptoms which included avoidance, reducing contact with any reminders of their triggers, and increased arousal or fearing they will encounter a race-based interaction (Carter, 2007; Carter et al., 2017, Smith et al., 2016).

Further, Fries-Britt and Turner (2001) and Harper (2015) found race-based stereotypes over time tend to erode high-achieving Black students’ confidence in their academic abilities. Students who experience negative race-based interactions in their classrooms often become withdrawn and self-suppress when professors and peers, either knowingly or unconsciously, use negative stereotypes (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Harper, 2015). In the current study, participants also described the long-term consequences of race-based encounters as questioning their actions that attributed to being targeted, questioning their choice of university, academic and campus disengagement, and hyper-awareness of being watched by peers.

Racial microaggressions for Black college students can range from racial slights and assumptions, recurrent indignities and irritations, stigmatization, hyper-surveillance by peers and faculty, lowered expectations of themselves, and being less respected (Franklin, 2019; Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2007). Further, Black students are confronted

with assumptions that they are less intelligent and are to be feared because of their racial or ethnic backgrounds (Perez Huber & Solórzano, 2015). As affirmed in this study, these daily interactions have psychological consequences on Black students across settings and interactions. Specifically, the participants indicated their desire to engage academically was negatively impacted. However, their goal of academic success was not impacted by race-based interactions.

**Navigating predominately White spaces.** An increased stress level in an academic setting can manifest itself in several ways, including a decline in academic performance, social withdrawal, and impaired mental and physical wellness (Cokley et al., 2017; Garrity & Ries, 1985). Black students attending a PWI require emotional, psychological, and community support in navigating their campus. The Black student community represented a sub-community on a predominately White institution. The participants in this study all described a sense of community as a vital part of their college experience. The participants identified ways within the Black student community to get involved, to reduce feelings of isolation, to find social support, and to become student leaders. However, four participants acknowledged there is intergroup conflict.

Moreover, Gorski (2019) reported the strength of a racial or cultural group is that it provides a safe space for community members; however, the Black on-campus community is highly susceptible to shared feelings of burnout, stress, and racial battle fatigue. Eight out of ten participants indicated the Black student community on campus was valuable. Participants also identified their parents and their communities (back home) as primary sources for motivation and emotional support. Finally, participants also

valued having a diverse friend group to expand their social networks and increased opportunities to learn about various groups.

### **Implications for Future Research**

The results of this transcendental phenomenological study suggest race-based interactions are psychologically impactful for Black college students in academic and social environments on campus. For Black students attending a predominantly White institution, their freshman year appeared to be very critical in their overall adjustment in college and to their mental health. Additionally, this study provided the basis for further research related to the mental health of Black college students. Specifically, future researchers could explore the perceptions of Black students who attend freshman orientations and camp at predominately White institutions. Umaña-Taylor (2016) found 87–90% of Black middle-to-late adolescents reported having had at least one experience of racial discrimination. Black adolescents experience discrimination across settings that include but not limited to school.

Pre-existing psychological impacts of racism could also be further explored. Researchers could explore the significance of messages about the participants' race, as discussed in childhood, which helped to define their racial identities. Further, the significance of race and racial development could be applied to a model that discusses the emotional development of Black college students. The results of this study indicated that the overall developmental process for Black college students is an independent one that must be further explored and supported.

The results of this study highlighted the impact that racial microaggressions have on Black students psychologically and the alteration of their behavior while on their

college campuses and within their campus communities. Prior research has not demonstrated these findings utilizing the psychological impacts of race-based interactions framework. However, researchers could explore the impact of racial battle-fatigue symptoms for colleges.

**Addressing race-based interactions on campus.** Despite reported hostile campus racial climates by *students of color*, colleges and universities often make minor efforts to directly address these concerns (Harper, 2012; Museus & Jayakumar, 2012; Patton, 2015). For Black students, this often results in having their college experience frequently interrupted by race-based interactions that are largely ignored by the majority culture. Further, *students of color* are often blamed for their academic outcomes, especially if a student is considered underachieving. Colleges and universities receive little to no scrutiny for not addressing the specific needs of *students of color*, because their needs are often overlooked, or are not understood, based on the needs of the majority culture of the campus (Gorski, 2019; Museus & Jayakumar, 2012).

University administrators should be held accountable for not addressing the hostile and mentally taxing environments that sanction racial microaggressions (Mustaffa, 2017; Patton, 2015). As colleges and universities continue to work to make their campuses more diverse, spending time developing emotionally safe and healthy environments for all students is also required (Patton, 2015). According to Patton (2015), acknowledging the needs of *students of color* is uniquely separate from the majority culture. Understanding the students' perceptions of diversity and safety are the initial focal points. Additionally, an initial step for university administrators could include assessments of the institution's values, the culture of the university, and institutional

racism from the perspective of *students of color*. University administrators must be willing to understand the experiences of *students of color* on their campus.

Implementing racial battle fatigue or increased awareness about the health consequences of race-based interactions may improve university administrators' effectiveness in implementing policies that directly address race-related health outcomes (Carter et al., 2017; Clark et al., 1999; Smith et al., 2007). According to Taylor, her university has a discrimination statement that condemns discriminatory acts. However, the statement does not address racist behaviors or protect *students of color*. The perceived inaction of the university has the potential to decrease Black students' academic outcomes and increase stress or feeling unsafe. Conversely, institutional policies and programs that acknowledge and address the health of students due to racism have the potential to improve the academic outcomes of students and retention of *students of color* (Gorski, 2019; Johnson, Wasserman, Yildirim, & Yonai, 2014; Patton, 2015).

Directly addressing hostile campus environments may also increase *students of color* daily engagement on campus, which leads to an overall enhanced college experience (Gorski, 2019). According to Johnson et al. (2014), university administrators, faculty, and staff should be involved in developing institutional programs and policies. Due to the experiences of *students of color* being multifaceted, a single policy or program will not be enough to assess or address the climate and culture of the university. University administrators must also consider addressing the campus climate as an institutional priority (Mustaffa, 2017). As highlighted in this study, vague, broad or delayed responses to discrimination reduce the confidence and social inclusion of *students of color*. The systemic issue of racism on college campuses is pervasive, and

unless purposeful modifications address racially hostile environments, the experiences of Black students will continue to be altered by race-based interactions.

Education and training about racial climates to faculty and staff should specifically include addressing and dispelling negative stereotypes of Black students that lead to racial microaggressions and racial battle fatigue. As in CRT, higher education professionals should work to identify and define White privilege on campus. University policymakers can also create opportunities to disrupt systemic bias through discussions and teaching all students to analyze privilege critically. University leaders can implement race-informed policies and programs that reflect the needs of *students of color*, faculty and staff. Finally, universities should make considerable efforts to hire historically underrepresented groups and ensure these individuals are reflected in leadership positions.

***Racial battle fatigue.*** According to Gorski (2019) and Smith et al. (2007), racial battle fatigue is the result of persistent racial microaggressions of marginalized people in society. Exploring racial battle fatigue for Black students attending a PWI could consist of exploring how racial-battle fatigue symptoms are experienced and reflected on the group level. The Black on-campus community provided a smaller sense of communal support for Black students on campus. However, because of the individual racial microaggressions and Black students' shared pain, racial battle fatigue has the potential to be spread to the collective group and individual coping processes (Gorski, 2019). The exploration of the impact of race-based interactions on the Black on-campus community as a whole requires further attention and understanding of the purpose of this community for its members.

## **Recommendations for College Counselors**

College counselors play a critical role in providing an opportunity for *students of color* to have a safe space on campus to process their experiences. However, due to the stigma of mental health often discussed in the Black community, and accessibility of limited resources, college counseling centers need to be aware of the increased barriers that impede *students of color* (Ayalon & Alvidrez, 2009; Jernigan et al., 2015). This researcher has recommendations for practitioners so they can offer meaningful care to Black students. Helms et al. (2012) and McClain et al. (2016) stated initial clinical assessments must include understanding their clients' racial awareness, by asking clients about their racial and ethnic identities and culture based-values. According to Helms et al. (2012), when establishing a clinical relationship with Black college students, practitioners must assess their clients' racial experiences, campus environment, and acknowledge the ongoing impact of racism. Next, utilizing Cross's Black Racial Identity Development Model (1978, 1991), clinicians can gain insight into the client's racial development and how the client is assessing their campus environment.

In understanding the impact of race-based interactions, clinicians should explore solution-focused interventions that prepare their clients for daily racial microaggressions. Rather than focusing primarily on academics, clients may need to learn to redistribute and conserve their energy, identify racial stressors, and develop responses to address the problems caused by racial microaggressions (Carter, 2007; Carter et al., 2017; Gorski, 2019; Helms et al., 2012). Gorski (2019) and Helms et al. (2012) advocate that counselors should: (a) identify situations in which racial stress may be amplified; (b) know how to address such situations proactively; and (c) empower clients in their awareness to



navigate the institutional structures. For example, Steve de Shazer's miracle question can be utilized with Black student clients to provide an expanded view of their interpersonal and psychological needs, and to prepare Black students for future race-based interactions (Carter et al, 2017; Gorski, 2019; Helms et al., 2012; Sommers-Flanagan & Sommers-Flanagan, 2012). Further, if clients are experiencing racial battle fatigue, Helms et al. (2012) stated:

More importantly, the psychological intervention that is focused on individual trauma victims needs to be put into the context of the family, community, religion, and culture and must be sensitive to the sociopolitical history of racism and ethnoviolence in the community in which the traumatic event(s) occurred. Mental health professionals need to be willing to consider various cultural beliefs, concerns, and taboos surrounding illness and treatment in different settings and vary the degree to which family and community members become involved. Clinical interventions such as cognitive behavioral therapy might be used effectively by mental health professionals and trauma survivors in cultural settings in which the survivors feel comfortable, but the interventions will need to be culturally adapted to these settings . . . (pp. 71–72).

Further, in understanding the impact of discrimination, clinicians should explore interventions that prepare clients for the daily race-based interactions. Racially informed goal setting provides gradual steps of success and increases the client's investment and internal value. Goal setting with Black student clients also provides clients with the opportunity to strategically assess the effectiveness of their solutions and to empower future adjustments. Finally, regardless of the theoretical orientation of the counselor,

McClain et al. (2016) and Carter et al. (2017) stated, clinicians must gently but directly acknowledge cultural differences with clients, assess each client's comfort in working with the counselor, and be curious to learn about the global racial and cultural experiences of their clients.

**Counseling center administration.** Counseling center leadership should increase their recruitment efforts to reflect the need for Black-student representation. According to David, what made him pursue counseling services on his campus was:

[ . . . ] finding a shared cultural experience with a Black counselor versus talking to a White counselor. I think it would be a completely different experience with a White counselor . . . not bad . . . but I was able to have an open dialogue about how crazy I am and feel safe.

Additionally, university counseling center counselors should devote considerable effort to outreach for Black freshman students. Black clinicians should also be visible to Black students as well as in the leadership of the agency. Priority should be given to implementing race-conscious policies and programs. These policies and programs should ensure that the entire clinical staff has meaningful training. The staff should be trained so they can provide effective interventions to deal with racial trauma, the impact of race-based interactions, and racial battle fatigue.

Long term goals in addressing hostile campus environments can include building a campus-wide curriculum with all departments designed constructively to confront daily microaggressions. Next, counseling center directors should have counselors who are trained to assist and help students, faculty, and staff who have been impacted by racism on campus. Race-conscious counselors and programs should specifically address racial

battle fatigue and racial microaggressions. Also, faculty and staff should be trained so they can recognize when students may be impacted by racism on campus and make the appropriate referrals. This collaborative approach would remove the responsibility from the *students of color* to constantly be “the educator” following race-based incidents. A collaborative approach would address challenges in the institutional culture, structure, as well as leadership within the university.

### **Conclusion**

The results of the current study suggest the impact of race-based events on Black students attending a predominately White institution defines their college experience. Further, the participants in this study provided examples of the emotional impact of racism and racial discrimination on their campus. Participants reflected on the specific impactful types of race-based experiences, and the emotional consequences of navigating a predominately White institution. The psychological responses to race-based interactions included anger, fear, sadness, self-doubt, isolation, and feeling stuck. Additionally, behavioral responses to race-based interactions consisted of academic disengagement, lack of concentration, avoidance, decreased campus participation, and impatience.

According to Smith et al. (2007), racial battle fatigue is unlike typical academic stress; it is “a response to the distressing mental/emotional conditions that result from facing racism daily” (p. 180). For Black students attending a predominantly White institution, their freshman year appeared to be a very critical period in their overall college adjustment and mental health. As colleges and universities continue to work to make their campuses more diverse, they must spend time providing a healthy and safe

environment for all students through acknowledging the unique Black students that vary from the majority culture.

Critical Race Theory and Race-Based Stress theory scholars examined the race-based experiences of Black college students through the specific lenses of the participants (Bell, 1985; Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Carter et al., 2017; Harper, 2012; Ledesma & Calderón, 2015). The Critical Race Theory and Race-Based Traumatic Stress Theory frameworks provide a more comprehensive perspective of the impact of race-based interactions, and racial microaggressions by accounting for the psychological, physiological, and behavioral stress responses of individuals. These frameworks, along with racial battle fatigue, can be used to guide researchers and clinical practitioners to better understand students' holistic experience, including how race-based interactions continue to impact the health and wellbeing of Black college students.

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## APPENDIX A



Date: May 2, 2019 10:21 AM CDT

TO: Santana Simple

Richard Henriksen

FROM: SHSU IRB

PROJECT TITLE: Race-Based Emotional Experiences of Black College Students  
Attending a predominately White Institution

PROTOCOL #: IRB-2019-106

SUBMISSION TYPE: Initial

ACTION: Approved

DECISION DATE: May 1, 2019

ADMINISTRATIVE CHECK-IN DATE: May 1, 2020

EXPEDITED REVIEW CATEGORY: 6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Greetings,

The above-referenced submission has been reviewed by the IRB and it has been Approved. Because this study received expedited review and the IRB determined that a renewal submission is not needed, this decision does not necessarily expire; however, you will be receiving an email notification on the anniversary of this study approval, which will be on May 1, 2020 (NOTE: please review the reminder information below regarding Study Administrative Check-In). This study approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

**Since Cayuse IRB does not currently possess the ability to provide a "stamp of approval" on any recruitment or consent documentation, it is the strong recommendation of this office to please include the following approval language in the footer of those recruitment and consent documents: IRB-2019-106/May 1, 2019/May 1, 2020.**

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the

researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document.

**Modifications:** Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please submit a Modification Submission through Cayuse IRB for this procedure.

**Incidents:** All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please submit an Incident Submission through Cayuse IRB for this procedure. All Department of Health and Human Services and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

**Study Administrative Check-In:** Based on the risks, this project does not require renewal. Rather, you are required to administratively check in with the IRB on an annual basis. May 1, 2020 is the anniversary of the review of your protocol. The following are the conditions of the IRB approval for IRB-2019-106 Race-Based Emotional Experiences of Black College Students Attending a predominately White Institution.

1. When this project is finished or terminated, a **Closure submission** is required.
2. Changes to the approved protocol require prior board approval (NOTE: see the directive above related to **Modifications**).
3. Human subjects training is required to be kept current at [citiprogram.org](http://citiprogram.org) by renewing training every 5 years.

Please note that all research records should be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project. If you have any questions, please contact the Sharla Miles at 936-294-4875 or [irb@shsu.edu](mailto:irb@shsu.edu). Please include your protocol number in all correspondence with this committee.

Sincerely,

Donna M. Desforjes, Ph.D.  
Chair, Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects  
PHSC-IRB

**APPENDIX B**

Sam Houston State University  
Department of Counselor Education

**Demographic Questionnaire**

Dissertation: Race-based Interactions of Black Students Attending Predominately White Institutions

Gender:  Male  Female Age: \_\_\_\_\_

University Enrollment Status:  Full-time  Part-time

Numbers of semesters completed: \_\_\_\_\_ Anticipated Graduation: \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have college experience prior to attending your current university?: \_\_\_\_\_

Marital Status: \_\_\_\_\_

Religious Preference: \_\_\_\_\_

Ethnic/ Racial Identity (Please provide your own description):

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Employment Status:

\_\_\_ Full-time

\_\_\_ Part-time

\_\_\_ Unemployed

\_\_\_ Student Only

\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

Household Income:

---

Preferred method of contact:

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Cell Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  (Check granting permission to leave voicemail)



## APPENDIX C

Table A1

*Assigned Names and Demographic Information for Participants in the Study*

"Name"	Gender	Age	Enrollment Status	Religious Affiliation	Racial Identity
Erik	M	21	Full-Time	Christianity	Black/ Hispanic
L	M	21	Full-Time	N/A	Black
Macey	F	21	Full-Time	Christian	Black
Simone	F	20	Full-Time	Christian	Black
David	M	23	Full-Time	Southern Baptist	Black
Taylor	F	21	Full-Time	Baptist	Black/ Native Hawaiian
Travis	M	21	Full-Time	Christian	Black
Amber	F	21	Full-Time	Unsure	Black
Jay	F	23	Full-Time	Christian	African American
Scott	M	23	Full-Time	Christian	African American/ White

## APPENDIX D

### Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. What is it like to be a Black student on a predominately White campus (Walls & Hall, 2017)?
2. Describe your emotional reactions to being a Black student at a predominately White institution (McClain et al., 2016; Walls & Hall, 2017).
3. Describe the interactions you have experienced and observed as a Black student at a predominately White institution (McClain et al., 2016; Walls & Hall, 2017).
4. Describe how you are impacted by Black student interactions on other campuses (McClain et al., 2016; Walls & Hall, 2017).
5. Describe your emotional reactions to race-based interactions you have experienced or observed on your campus (McClain et al., 2016; Walls & Hall, 2017).

## **APPENDIX E**

Sam Houston State University

Department of Counselor Education

### **Collins, Onwuegbuzie, Johnson, and Frels' (2014) Debrief Guide**

#### **Interpretation of Interview**

1. Is there anything in particular that stands out about the interviews?
2. Looking back to the interviews, what positive thoughts come to mind?
3. During the interviews, what negative thoughts come to mind?

#### **Impact of the Interviews**

4. Is there any particular interview that was impactful and if so how?
5. Is there any particular interview that you were surprised by and if so how?
6. What experiences have you had that you believe impacted your perspective regarding the interviews?
7. What are the differences and similarities in perceptions and experiences of male and female participant's race-based experiences on a PWI?

#### **Ethics of Conducting Transcriber**

8. Were there any ethical concerns that presented themselves during the interviews?
9. Were political concerns or issues participated discussed?
10. Looking back were there any unexpected challenges that emerged throughout the process?

## VITA

### Santana R. Simple

#### EDUCATION

Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, TX

Ph.D. In Counselor Education and Supervision- *CACREP Accredited*

May 2016- present. Dissertation title: "Race-based experiences of Black college students attending predominately White institutions."

University of Houston- Clear Lake, Houston, Texas

Masters of Science in Counseling – Licensed Professional Counseling

Graduation: May 18, 2014

Texas A&M University School of Rural Public Health, College Station, TX

Master's in Public Health-Social and Behavioral Health Concentration

Graduation: August 21, 2010

Texas A&M University, College Station, TX

Bachelors of Science in Psychology

Graduation: May 9, 2008

#### LICENSURE

Licensed Professional Counselor- Texas # 73452

Nationally Certified Counselor- NBCC # 338249

#### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

*Assistant Director*, Texas A&M University- College Station, TX, January 2019- Present

*Professional Counselor*, Texas A&M University- College Station, TX, August 2016-  
January 2019

*Resident Hall Director/ Counseling Intern*, Sam Houston State University- Huntsville,  
TX, June 2014- August 2016

*Information & Referral Specialist*, United Way of Greater Houston- Houston, Texas,  
June 2011- May 2014

*Community Director*, Texas A&M University Department of Residence Life-  
College Station, Texas, July 2010- June 2011

#### PRESENTATIONS AT PROFESSIONAL MEETINGS

##### Regional

Simple, S. & Johnson-Martinez, K. (2018). *Black College Student mental health: The hidden crisis*. Presented at the Southwestern Black Student Leadership Conference- Texas A&M University, College Station, TX (Refereed).

##### State- Level

Simple, S. & Henriksen, R. C., Jr. (2016). *Friends of friends in intimate partner violence group*. Presented at the Texas Counseling Association Professional Growth Conference, Dallas TX (Refereed).

##### College/ University- Level

Simple, S. (2017). *Campus Connect: Suicide prevention*. Presented at Texas A&M University to various offices and student groups, College Station, TX.

