Spring 2022

A Different World: The Experiences of Black Women at a Southern Predominantly White Institution

LaToya Stackhouse

A DIFFERENT WORLD: THE EXPERIENCES OF BLACK WOMEN AT A SOUTHERN
PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION

by

LATOYA STACKHOUSE

(Under the Direction of Delores D. Liston)

ABSTRACT

The present study investigated the lived experiences of Black women on a predominantly White

institution campus in the South as they relate to the core themes of Patricia Hill Collins' Black

Feminist Thought. The core themes of BFT that were the focus of the research were Self-

Definition/Empowerment, Safe Space, Controlling Images, Invisibility/Sense of Belonging. Sista

circle methodology was used as the form of inquiry with two 60-minute sessions over a two-

month span. This methodology was chosen because its focus centers the lived narratives of Black

women within a safe space unlike traditional focus groups. Findings from the sista circles

revealed that the participants' experiences did align with BFT which was originally published in

1990. Black women continue to feel stereotyped and invisible and encouraged to assimilate to

the cultures and traditions of their PWI. These women are empowered to choose how they will

be defined and demand spaces where they are not under surveillance. Through this study, college

administrators, faculty and staff are provided insight to the lived experiences of Black women.

This study supports the need to provide platforms where Black women are acknowledged as

being a part of the campus culture as intellectuals and experts regarding such experiences.

INDEX WORDS: Black feminist thought, Sista circle methodology, Black women, Safe space,

Self-definition, Invisibility, Sense of belonging, Predominantly White institutions

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LATOYA STACKHOUSE
B.S., Georgia Southern University, 2002
M.B.A., Georgia Southwestern State University, 2014
M. Ed., Georgia Southern University, 2016

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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Major Professor:	Delores D. Liston
Committee:	Peggy Shannon-Baker
	John Weaver
	Denise Taliaferro Baszile

Electronic Version Approved:
May 2022

DEDICATION

To the women who have made and molded me throughout the years, I dedicate this work to you.

To grandmother Gladys, I thank you for the wisdom you shared with me in my youth and the woman that you showed me that I could be. I thank for your standing in the gap to help my mom when she was trying to provide for us. I am thankful for the first sista circles that you exposed me to while shelling peas, cooking, doing housework or being in the beauty salons. You provided <u>my foundation</u>.

To grandmother Susye Mae, I am in awe of who you were to me each day. Your unconditional love and support of me never went unnoticed. I thank you for being a great example of a phenomenal Black women and exemplary educator. You knew who I was going to be before anyone else. You were <u>my pillar</u>.

To beloved angels, Carla and Melinda, you were <u>my safe places</u> where I always felt free to be me. You both began this journey with me and although you are no longer with me, I hold your words and our true friendship close to my heart. I miss you both like crazy!

To my mom, Shirley, thank you for being you! I am enamored by your perseverance in life and the woman you have worked to become. You did it! Your children are a reflection of you and the sacrifices you made for us. I love you endlessly! You are <u>my rock</u>!

To the aunts, cousins, friends and othermothers who have reared me and played a major role in my life. I thank God for you!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to extend acknowledgments to my committee chair, Dr. Delores Liston. I chose you because from the beginning you pushed us to be greater. I recognized that need in my life and I thank you for guiding me throughout this process and helping me to grow in the field and in writing.

To my committee:

Dr. John Weaver, thank you for tapping into my creative side and encouraging me to thinking beyond the surface. Your excitement and knowledge of pop culture is truly a treasure.

Dr. Peggy Shannon-Baker, thank you for always being a sounding board and presenting us with opportunities to gather and share with one another. Our Second Sunday groups encouraged me through tough times, and I will always be appreciative for that.

Dr. Denise Tailaferro Baszile, thank you for being the sista that I needed to help me think through this work. I thank you for introducing me to so many great bodies of Black women literature (including you) who have influenced my life forever.

To my other Curriculum Studies professors, thank you for sharing your knowledge and guidance with me. There was not a course that was not a part of this completed work.

To my peer, especially the Never ABD group, thank you for being the support system that I needed throughout our coursework and beyond. We may not have gotten to this point together, but we will make it in due time!

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OUR CHANCE TO MAKE IT

My Autobiographical Roots

As a young girl growing up in a rural area of Georgia, I spent a lot of my time with my grandparents because my mother was a single parent for most of my childhood. Even when she was married, she continued to be the sole adult who was responsible for the family. Patricia Hill Collins (2000) points out:

> African-American women's contributions to their families' well-being, such as
>
> keeping families together and teaching children survival skills, such scholarship
>
> suggests that Black women see the unpaid work that they do for their families
>
> more as a form of resistance to oppression than as an exploitation from Black men
>
> (p. 52).

I did not understand all the sacrifices that my mom made for us at the time, but she ensured that none of us would have to labor the way that she has in her lifetime. I am almost certain that this trait was handed down to her from her own mother.

My maternal grandmother had retired from industrial and domestic work by the time I was school-aged, so she spent much of her time around the house. When my brother and I were not outside playing, we were confined to the sofa and loveseat to watch her shows which were often soap operas, Westerns, and Black sitcoms. Initially, the selection of shows was not a good representation of the life that we knew in the countryside of our small town. The soap operas introduced me to the lifestyles of mainly wealthy White men whose women were the benefactors of their riches. There were few people who looked like me who were rich or born into money. The stories were sometimes so implausible that we found ourselves laughing at the absurdity.

Elayne Rapping (2009) offers in her essay "The Magical World of Daytime Soap Operas" that these soaps "offer a glimpse of a world in which the guilty may be redeemed" and to "laugh at the absurdity of this vision" exposes "the distance between our dreams and our reality" (p. 337). It was in this sense that I always felt grounded in who I was and the reality that affected our daily lives.

A Different World is the one television show that has the greatest impact on my life. It is because of this show that I knew that I was going to college, and high school was a simple formality. Although it is over 30 years old it "continues to be popular, even among current high school and college-age students who were born after the show ended" (Watson, 2016, p. 14). A totally unique show of its time, *A Different World* was centered on a fictitious Historically Black College and University (HBCU) named Hillman College. It was through the lens of Hillman that I learned of the diversity among my own ethnic group. Characters emerged from all backgrounds and tackled political, racial and social issues that continue to plague all college campuses. While I did not choose to attend an HBCU for my undergraduate experience, I did bring the information that I learned with me to college. It is not a coincidence that I chose to title this work using the show's title, and each chapter title features a line from its theme song. According to Jamal Watson (2016), "from the debut of *The Cosby Show* in 1984 until the end of *A Different World* in 1993, American higher education grew by 16.8 percent. During the same time period, HBCUs grew by 24.3 percent" (p. 14). Both of my younger brothers did attend Historically Black institutions while I made the choice to attend a PWI that had my intended major.

I learned very early that my life was much different than other Black girls in my hometown. My families were viewed as community leaders because of my grandparents' involvement in clergy and as educators. I found myself at odds with many Black girls, both my

age and high school age, as early as elementary school because they felt that I thought that I was "better than them." I did not know what they meant then, but as time passed, I had learned quickly how to defend myself. Morgan Jerkins (2018) writes Black girls fight to "maintain [our] space in an environment where [our] place [is] already at the margins. For what Black girl wants to be even more invisible than she thinks she already is" (p. 15). I watched groups of high school girls bully other girls every day. Most of the girls who were doing the bullying were popular for all the wrong reasons, and their victims were often popular, quiet or refused to yield to their self-proclaimed power. Unfortunately, I allowed my early experiences to affect how I would view *other* Black girls who were not like me. The Black girls who grew up in government housing or low-income neighborhoods are often labeled as ghetto and low-class. They did not conform to respectability politics[1] and I was ashamed of them. As I became more educated about the common struggles that we all face as Black women, I have dedicated my life to being an advocate for us all. In accordance with Jerkins (2009), I agree that:

> ...all of this takes place on the battleground of being born both Black and female. We cannot afford to believe that any part of ourselves gives us an edge over another. Ultimately, we are all fighting. I intend to fight for those on the inside who are just as victimized as I am. I cannot divorce either part of my identity, and I recognize now, as I excavate my most painful memories, that to try to do so would be to understate their impact on my psychology. (p. 23)

College afforded me the opportunity to examine the diversities that exist among all Black women. I was reminded of the lessons gleaned from the characters in *A Different World* who decided to love each other beyond their upbringing and socioeconomic status. While I began

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[1] "Respectability politics" describes a self-presentation strategy historically adopted by African-American women to reject White stereotypes by promoting morality while de-emphasizing sexuality (Pitcan, Marwick & Boyd, 2018).

college with my high school best friends, I created a sisterhood with Black women who I met in my residence hall. We became a support system for one another which turned into friendships that have continued throughout our adult lives of marriages, child births, divorces and other life events.

Southern College

The path that I took through education has been one with numerous twists and turns which include career moves that were both horizontal and vertical. Immediately after graduating from a four-year institution in Southeast Georgia, my first job offer was an extension of my internship at a HBCU in the South. I enjoyed my time there but discovered that professionally many of my colleagues would view me as an outsider because I did not attend an HBCU as an undergraduate. Here I was a Black woman who had faced some adversity in a male-dominated major for three years proving my place as both woman and Black, but I was not being accepted among *my own people* because I chose a PWI. A change in administration was the catalyst for my departure after four years of service. I took positions at a technical school then back at my alma mater before leaving postsecondary education for the K12 world. After my small stint in middle grades education, I returned to higher education at a predominantly Black institution[2] (PBI) back before taking on a different role at the HBCU I worked for during my first job. I decided to work directly with college students, so I took a job as an academic advisor which then led me to make the lateral move to become the General Education Academic Advisor and later a Director at a PWI in the South that will be referred to as Southern College for the purpose of this

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[2] Predominantly Black Institution is defined as an eligible institution (A) with not less than 1,000 undergraduate students; (B)at which not less than 50 percent of the undergraduate students enrolled at the eligible institution are low-income individuals or first-generation college students; and (C)at which not less than 50 percent of the undergraduate students are enrolled in an educational program leading to a bachelor's or associate's degree that the eligible institution is licensed to award by the State in which the eligible institution is located. (Cornell Law School Legal Information Institute, 20 US Code & 1059e (b) (6))

dissertation study. I would quickly learn that the environment and surroundings of this institution was much different than other colleges. Collins (2000) affirms "as members of the subordinate group, Black women cannot afford to be fools of any type, for their devalued status denies them the protections that White skin, maleness, and wealth confer" (p. 192). Thinking of my own experience now as a middle manager in higher education, I understand that my work must be stellar in order to be respected when mediocre work will suffice for my counterparts who are White and/or men. There were days that I had to maintain civility and tact when I was raging inside. I simply responded in a way that will not validate the labels that are affixed to any Black woman with any amount of power.

In *Houdini's Box*, Alex Philips (2001) talks about myths and how they are "often about the inescapable, about the painful discovery of powerful constraints" and the stories of their "transgressions turn out to be a lesson for us all" (p.34). Many of the people who are employed at the university are alumni who many Higher Education programs and institutions discourage for so many reasons. Sadly, the university has been plagued by a consistent cycle of stagnation it has been in for many years which if not rectified will become one of the tragic "stories" that Philips speaks of in his text. Southern College has been constrained by its limited view of who they are becoming. As an institution whose population has traditionally consisted of former private high school students, the college now struggles with the influx of first-generation college students as well as an increasing number of Black female students. Significantly, the town in which the university is located, continues to operate in mostly segregated education with an overwhelming majority of Black students attending the public institution and the White students matriculating in the city's private high school. This trend is consistent with many of the surrounding counties as reminders of the privatization of schools after desegregation. In an effort in 1952 to avoid

desegregation, Georgia's then governor, Eugene Talmadge sought the idea of creating a private school system for White children fearing the outcome of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* which declared school segregation unconstitutional (Roche, 1998, p. 21-22). Southern College has continued an enrollment decline over the past few years while the local technical college's population has grown consistently. Having new administrators who implement change to assist in the enrollment and retention issues has been a point of anger and frustration for the Southern College faithful. Phillips (2012) describes four types of frustration in his book, *Missing Out*: "the frustration of being deprived of something that has never existed; the frustration of being deprived of something one has never had (whether or not it exists); the frustration of being deprived of something one once had; and, finally, the frustration of being deprived of something one once had, but can't have again" (p. 20). When change is implemented and old policies and procedures are challenged, there is a great deal of frustration on all sides of the argument. I have learned that many people can become quite content with the status quo because it is easy, and work becomes a mindless task. Unfortunately, contentment is a place where creativity goes to die because no one is willing to explore the unfamiliar. Southern College and the town in which it is located have operated in the same antiquated manner where everyone and everything has their place. Students were viewed as commodities to be managed and not consumers who deserved a holistic education in all academic areas to better prepare them for life after college.

With the new administration comes challenges from the governing system's office to increase enrollment and the pressure has been felt in the Office of Admissions. Unfortunately, this office has traditionally been all-White recruiters and counselors, many of which are alumni as well as White fraternity and sorority members. Our President pushed for more diversity and added the Multicultural Recruiter position a couple of years ago, which has made some strides in

attracting more Black women to the university. However, there has always been a core of alumni who have dominated the course of the university. This group has been determined to maintain the status quo regardless of the changes in the demographics of the student body. Many of these alumni grew up in or nearby the local area, so the values of these areas are deeply rooted in their traditions. Michael Eigen's (1996) explanation of the ego by Melanie Klein eloquently unpacks:

> The ego is part of the growth process, and the ego activity adds to the dramatic alterations in progress. The ego helps shape the processes by which it is shaped. Still the ego is driven. Its fierce activity is tied to momentous changes it does not control...it develops along a timetable, with characteristic structural and dynamic shifts (p. 27).

In the same manner, the ego of the long-standing faculty and staff members when changes directed from the Presidents and his new VPs met changes with immediate pushback and the proverbial "we have always done it this way." I found it comical when the University System implemented the Momentum Year Initiative that the academic growth mindset was solely focused on the students. Ironically, the mindset of a student can be influenced by the faculty and staff that surrounds him or her. The fixed mindsets of faculty, staff and administrators have a profound effect on the experiences of our Black women students who are not considered in many of the tables that make decisions. Structural and institutionalized power assumes "men will tend to talk first, last, and most often; set the tone and the agenda of meetings; have a disproportionate effect on decisions; and be perceived as (and presume themselves to be) leaders in almost every context (internalized dominance)" (Sensoy and DiAngelo, 2017, p. 191). The face of college administration has been slowly changing over time in higher education, but Southern College is so far behind other colleges and has never had a Black woman at the table. This is important to

note because the Black women are matriculating into the institution at a consistent rate of 18% of all fall enrollment groups and 28% of all women.[3] Yet, there is no one at the top thinking about their experiences and including those experiences in the conversation for the betterment of the group. How will their voices be heard and who will speak for them?

Introduction

I have watched *The Color Purple* more times than I can remember, but it was during my most recent viewing that one line from the movie that really resonated with me. During a turning point scene, Mister, played by Danny Glover, is upset that his wife is leaving him. So, he criticizes her since she is poor, Black, a woman, therefore, she is nothing at all. The intersection of all the characteristics of his wife puts her at a disadvantage in society. The fact that I am a Black woman from a rural area in the South creates intersections of my own which I must struggle against daily. My situation is not unique because there are many others who share the same characteristics. However, my story and the path that I had to take makes me and countless other Black women unique and missing voices in literature. In her essay, *The Race for Theory*, Barbara Christian (2000) writes:

> I can only speak for myself. But what I write and how I write is done in order to save my own life. And I mean that literally. For me literature is a way of knowing that I am not hallucinating, that whatever I feel/know *is* (p. 21).

Speaking of my chosen research, I will listen to the voices of Black women who attend a Southern predominantly White institution (PWI) in Georgia. There is a significant gap in the literature that does not share the experiences of these Black women. It is necessary in strengthening the academy to enrich the lives of other Black women. Brittany Cooper (2017)

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[3] Data retrieved from Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics

warns "if we want to take Black women seriously as thinkers and knowledge producers, we must begin to look for their thinking in unexpected places" (p. 12). There are many layers to who we are and how we choose to make our decisions, including the decision of where we choose to attend college.

Upon conducting a literature review when taking an Inquiry and Developmental Education Practice course, I found several articles and books that focused on Black males in education from early childhood through higher education years. What I found to be astounding and quite upsetting was the experience of Black women being ignored. There was also a lack of literature that researched the Southern college experience in the educational setting. Both tend to become morphed into majority groups without understanding that Black women's experiences in higher education may be different than the other groups in their classrooms. Troy Duster (2000) in *Racing Research, Researching Race* speaks of how the conversion of political power and demography molds how researchers choose to engage, or not engage, in the art of inquiry (p. xi). My responsibility is to provide a platform to a group who is often muffled in educational spaces.

Black. Women. Unsilenced.

As Black women, we have the choice to take the route to attend a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) or a PWI. Black women who choose to sit in classrooms where they are the minority, often find their voices either being silenced or being invited to speak on various subject matters for their entire race. I was convinced of this as I began to research dissertation topics. I knew that I wanted to focus on the PWI-HBCU dynamic, but I was unsure of my approach. There was more literature on the topics of Black males but not much discussing the experiences of Black females. I found this both appalling and upsetting. It was as if we did not exist, or our voices and experiences did not matter. As we were given a list of feminist

literature to read, I focused on Black Feminist Thought (BFT) while looking into William Watkins' *Black Protest Thought* which was suggested in another course. I uncovered more information on BFT which led me to want to learn more. Being the first time during my program that the focus of what I was reading spoke rather accurately regarding the shared experiences of Black women, I was immediately drawn to the subject matter and wanted to learn more. While I enjoyed other readings in Curriculum Studies, the topic of Black women's experience has often been nestled under feminism and never really having a place that addresses the entirety of our experiences. Finding ways to express the Black women perspective emerged in historical text from the Combahee River Collective (1982) who stating:

> ...we are just not trying to fight oppression on one front or even two, but instead to address a whole range of oppressions. We do not have the racial, sexual, heterosexual or class privilege to rely upon, nor do we have even the minimal access to resources and power that groups who possess any one of these types of privilege have. (p. 18)

This is where the decision emerged to select Black Feminist Thought as my theoretical framework for my dissertation research. I knew that I could not merely focus on feminism. I know that my journey as a Black woman has been permeated with struggles that were compounded by my race as well. I have shared spaces with White women who claim to be feminist but do not have the capacity to understand that our struggles are distinct. One of the most compelling essays regarding feminism, *Black Women: Shaping Feminist Theory*, was penned by bell hooks. In this essay, hooks (2000) speaks of her experience with feminist groups in undergraduate studies at Stanford University:

> Frequently, college-educated Black women (even those from poor and working-class backgrounds) were dismissed as mere imitators. Our presence in movement activities did not count, as White women were convinced that "real" Blackness meant speaking the patois of poor Black people, being uneducated, streetwise, and a variety of other stereotypes (p. 141).

This quote from hooks came later in my reading, but it confirmed that I had made the right choice of theoretical framework. I faced adversity and scrutiny regarding my qualifications to be in positions and spaces. It was not expected for me, as a Black woman, to be promoted or recognized as an intellectual. The stereotype for who others presumed me to be was already established without my permission. As I collect the stories of these young women, my dissertation research seeks to explore the experiences of Black females who attend a Southern PWI. I chose this topic because I can recall how my undergraduate experience seemed to be unique to many of my other peers. While I did not immediately feel the residual effects of being a Black girl from a small town on a Southern White campus in a small town, I progressed through my undergraduate career as a Sport Management major which was dominated by White men and was quickly reminded of both my gender and race. I was expected to give my White and Black male counterparts a pass when they did not follow through on assigned tasks while I had to work twice as hard and outperform them in the classroom in order to be taken seriously in my major. I was both Vice President and President of the club for my major. The majority males were willing to vote the females into the positions because they did not want to have the responsibility; however, they did expect to be chosen for the major events without any labor or fulfilling prerequisites.

Patricia Hill Collins (1990) depicts "U.S. Black women as a group [who] live in a different world from that of people who are not Black and female" (p. 27). Collins expressed this thought in Chapter Two of *Black Feminist Thought* which focused on the topic's distinguishing features. Her thoughts and work are the perfect theoretical framework for my dissertation. I would be remiss to research the experiences of Black women without framing those thoughts and opinions through a lens that only Black women can articulate: Black Feminist Thought. The intellectual prowess of the Black woman has continually progressed over the years despite the controlling images that have been depicted on television screens, in books and on social media. Controlling images are stereotypical images of Black women that are intentionally used to justify mistreatment, presumptions of inferiority and oppression. The media plays a major role in how Black women are viewed by the world. The overwhelming popularity of reality shows depicting Black women as controversial, promiscuous and belligerent captures public attention and becomes the talk of social media the next day. "The dominant ideology of the slave era fostered the creation of several interrelated, socially constructed controlling images of Black womanhood, each reflecting the dominant group's interests in maintaining Black women's subordination" (Collins, 1990, p. 79). We are becoming more educated and stepping into spaces that we were never privy to before this time. I use the tenets of BFT to help further educate the academy on our experiences using our own voices to answer my research question: How do the educational experiences of Black females at a Southern PWI connect to the core themes of Black Feminist Thought? Collins initially wrote *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* in 1990 and released her second edition in 2009. Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery & Taubman (1995) note:

> Racial theory itself is gendered, although the fact has not always been fully
>
> acknowledged… [Collins] acknowledges that the survival of African-American
>
> Studies Departments on predominantly White campuses has required the
>
> elevation of the category of race over class and gender. (p. 340)

Collins' work extended beyond one department on PWI campuses to "raise crucial theoretical questions...across curriculum studies" (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 341). Even White male professors in Curriculum Studies cannot label Collins' work as "special interests" relevant only to a subset of Black women and must acknowledge her contributions.

My research adds to the body of literature centering the experiences of Black women in historically White institutions which is significant to education. I used sista circle methodology as my qualitative method. The dominant culture has practiced intentional establishment of the cultural norm that every other culture is expected to adhere to as a rule. Sista circle methodology amplifies the voices of Black women on the campuses of PWIs who often feel as if they are numbers, nonessential to and unheard by the institution. This form of inquiry provides Black women of Southern College the sacred space and opportunity to share their experiential knowledge which may be unique from most college students. The view of Black women exposes perspectives that are hidden from the privileged and dominant discourse. It is time that the academy and college administrators listen to what we have to say.

The Work

This work is vital not only to Southern College, but to all PWIs in the South who accept Black women into their institutions. The research performed in this study will provide a glimpse into the shared experiences of Black female college students which is unique and often overlooked. Since 2016-2019, the average number of Black women enrolled full-time was 293.4

which is close to 12% of the total undergraduate population. The educational experience of this group plays a major role in how and why Black women choose to pursue postsecondary options in select areas and colleges over others. We have the academic prowess to succeed at any level, but the obstacles that are placed in our paths makes our plight more difficult than is necessary. Black women deserve not only the opportunity to have a seat at the table but the power to project changes that eliminate hurdles and create better opportunities for the group.

In the chapters to follow, I begin Chapter 2 outlining my theoretical framework, Black Feminist Thought. This chapter gives you more insight on the core themes of my research and highlights literature that supports BFT. Chapter 3 introduces sista circle methodology as the form of inquiry that I used with my participants. I also speak more about myself as a researcher as well as walk you through how I recruited and gathered the data from my participants. Chapter 4 presents the results of my research and excerpts from the stories of the Black women participants. I interject some literature to connect their words with current Black Feminist writers. In the final chapter, I conduct a review of the findings of my study and its connection to BFT and other studies centering Black women and their experiences at PWIs. I also discuss my recommendations for future research along with suggestions to Curriculum Studies and how to bring Black women subjectivity to the forefront.

CHAPTER 2

IF YOU DISH IT, WE CAN TAKE IT

No need to mention [Black women's] needs, hopes, dreams, or concerns. They

have none, even if they do occasionally speak of themselves as real people with

feelings. Their voices are too loud, too uneducated, or simply too aggressive.

They are always angry about something, but their feelings aren't real, so they

don't matter. Be sure to specify how reasonable you are in the face of their

unreasonable behavior (Kendall, 2020, p. 86).

For people who are both of color and a woman, we are often ostracized and treated less

than human as Mikki Kendall describes in the excerpt above. We recognize that we immediately

become targets of ridicule, so we choose to say nothing in the process. The voices of the silenced

have been ignored and muffled due to these derogatory labels that have been in place since being

brought to this country. My research endeavors will center Patricia Hill Collins' Black Feminist

Thought (BFT) as my theoretical framework. When reflecting upon why binaries exist, we must

recognize that they were created to sort and classify. "Objectification is central to [the] process

of oppositional difference. In binary thinking, one element is objectified as the Other, and is

viewed as an object to be manipulated and controlled" (Collins, 1990, p. 78).

Intersectionality and Matrix of Domination

Nichole Guillory (2019) in *A Love Letter to Black Mother* describes:

There will always be gaps and misinterpretations about Black women's ways of

knowing and being. There will be a tendency in our field – like every other field –

toward theoretical framing that privileges Western, positivist thinking – even as

the field critiques it. There will be a tendency to devalue the distinguishing

features of our theorizing – story, experiential knowing, and doing – even though

the field's discursive traditions have shifted. Our field has yet to acknowledge its

foundations – historical and contemporary – in Black women's theorizing. (pp. 1-

2)

By choosing to explore the experiences of Black women at a Southern U.S. PWI, it is

necessary to analyze intersectionality to address the subordinated discrimination because our

Blackness cannot be separated from our womanhood (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1989).

Intersectionality was first coined by Kimberly Crenshaw identifying the various intersecting

identities of Black women focusing on the interconnectedness of race and gender during study

within the legal system. How we approach education, and our understanding of that reality is

determined at this intersection. Many scholars choose to concentrate on intersections of social

identities and fail to connect the intersections to everyday identity specific experience with the

structures of oppression which is how my study contributes to the field (Harris & Patton, 2019).

Barbara Tomlinson (2019) further explicates:

Their *either/or* rather than *both/and* perspectives have long served to legitimate

the domination of men over women, rich over poor, White over nonWhite,

straight over not straight. Training in the disciplines instructs people *not to see* the

social subordinations that they can witness every day with their own eyes, if those

eyes are open. (p. 176)

We must challenge fields like Curriculum Studies to take a deeper, more intentional look

at frameworks like BFT to account for Black women's viewpoints. Colleges and universities

have made haphazard attempts to commandeer Black women's experiences within a homogeneous group thinking that a few campus diversity initiatives would suffice in aiding the group (Phelps-Ward, Allen & Howard, 2017; Collins and Bilge, 2016). The "powerblind intersectionality" explored by Tomlinson exposes the need for scholars to criticize the academy's lack of research that dismisses lived experiences of Black women and the challenges we face in these spaces. (p.175). Higher education institutions must recognize that Black women strive for fair and equal treatment both inside and outside of the classroom.

Collins'(1990) matrix of domination further supports intersectionality as it "describes the social organization in which intersecting oppressions originate, develop, and are contained...through schools, housing, employment, government and other social institutions" (p. 246). The American higher education system was, like almost every other U.S. institution, created by rich, White men for rich, White men. Even after desegregation, many PWIs continued business as usual thinking that all other races, ethnicities and women would adapt to the structure that was in place. This is a form of colorblindness that acts as if "the social construct of race has no actual consequences" and should be overlooked (Saad, 2020, p. 79). Because many more students now have access to higher education, colleges and universities are challenged with the demand for fairness and equity to address the varying experiences of this new population. Collins (1990) points out:

> Placing U.S. Black women's experiences in the center of analysis without
> privileging those experiences shows how intersectional paradigms can be
> especially important for rethinking the particular matrix of domination that
> characterizes U.S. society. (p.246)

The intersectional experiences of Black women must be woven into the fabric of higher education and not merely filed under campus diversity initiatives. For years, Black women have paid tuition to gain a well-rounded education only to receive mostly unequal academic content that continues to ignore our existence across most content areas.

At Southern College, the certificate program for Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies features a curriculum that does not have a single course focusing on Black women or other women of color. Furthermore, the history courses hold two courses about Black experience. There is one African American literature course which only appears in the course catalog and has not been on the schedule and one course in teaching in a multicultural setting for Education majors. "Beyond the numerical conversation, little is known about how Black [women] access college, what shapes their college choice, which experiences, and opportunities contribute to their retention (or attrition), and the costs associated with their survival and capacity to thrive in college" (Croom & Patton, 2017, p. 3). Missing from Black women's college experience are the issues and subject matters that help to develop us holistically and prepare us for life after college. At Southern College, invisibility is prevalent within the professional spaces as Black women sit in rooms as the minority amid small talk riddled with implicit bias, whiteness and microaggressions. Implicit bias is defined by the Kirwan Institute (2021) as "the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner" (para. 1). Whiteness is an idea which legally dates to the Jim Crow era (Crenshaw, Harris, HoSang & Lipsitz, 2019, p. 31). Races were socially constructed to distinguish Whites from all other races specifically Blacks. Robin Diangelo (2018) interjects "race is an evolving social idea that was created to legitimize racial inequality and protect White advantage" (p. 17). It was not until the late 1600s that the term "White" first appeared in colonial law (p. 17). Along with

African slaves, White indentured servants performed the back-breaking labor on U.S. plantation fields. These indentured servants were "outcasts of society" were recruited throughout Europe involuntarily, 'spirited'[4] here by unscrupulous recruiters" (Takaki, 2008, p. 53). Most of these White slaves were of Irish descent. "The Irish filled the unskilled labor jobs, those with the least security, requiring the least skill, and paying the lowest wages" (Nasaw, 1979, p. 67). The Irish worked alongside the Africans and shared in the abuse and exploitation of labor. White indentured servants came with the "hope of bettering their condition" by serving a limited time and later becoming freemen with land to begin their new lives (Takaki, 1979, pp. 57-58). Whiteness, as defined by Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017), is the "academic term used to capture the all-encompassing dimensions of White privilege, dominance, and assumed superiority in society. These dimensions include ideological, institutional, social, cultural, historical, political, and interpersonal" (p.229). Not having to think about one's race is a privilege often neglected by Whites because other marginalized groups do have to contend with the color of their skin daily. In an excerpt from Michael Kimmel (2013) in *Angry White Men*, he suggests:

> It may be hard for White men to realize that, irrespective of other factors, we have
> been running with the wind at our backs all these years and that what we think of
> as "fairness" to us has been built on the backs of others, who don't harbor such
> illusions as "meritocracy" and "fairness" who have known since birth that the
> system is stacked against them (p. xiii).

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[4] The "spirits," an Englishman reported, "take up all the idle, lazie, simple people they can entice, such as have professed idleness, and will rather beg than work." A "spirit" was a person who took men, women and children and [sold] them on a ship to Virginia (Takaki, 1979, p. 53).

Whiteness is truly a blinding experience when White people fail to recognize that there is no equity among the defined and purposely designed races. Connected to Whiteness is the "deep framing" of White men and their perceptions of Black women that is often "embedded with knowledge and information about Black women (and other groups) created substantially by influential European men over the last several centuries" (Slatton, 2013, p. 2). Deep framing as described by Brittany Slatton (2013) is our "deeply embedded world view...[which] guides how we think, emote, and process situations" (p. 2). Derald Wing Sue (2010) defines microaggressions as "everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership" (para. 2). The "academic transactions" of the master narratives "leave Black women and girls feeling inadequate and expendable, or otherwise invisible" (Haynes, Stewart, & Allen, 2016, p. 381). Solórzano and Yosso (2009) interjects that master narratives severely underscore the academic achievements of students of color (p. 134) as these narratives "essentializes and wipes out the complexities and richness of a group's cultural life" (Montecinos, 1995, p. 293). Southern College Black women must be empowered through narrating their own story through personalized experiences making who they are and their true feelings visible without the White washing.

Despite the obstacles, Black women have increased in degree attainment (NECS, 2016) and Kaba (2004) indicated that native-born Black American women influence the increased numbers of females enrolling in higher education institutions and attaining degrees at higher levels than Black men. Because of the progress of Black women, he claims they should be considered the new model minority replacing Asian Americans. Beverly Tatum (1997) writes

about the myth of the model minority in relation to Asian Americans as she breaks down each Asian ethic group to breakdown the varying performance levels. Tatum concludes that the myth "[pits] Asian Americans against other groups targeted by racism" (p. 282) questioning why other groups cannot rise to their level of achievement. While I consider Kaba's point ambitious, I would argue that we, as Black women, continue to evolve and we would not want our abilities limited in any way. There is so much more work to be done as we continue to earn approximately 10 and 15 percent less baccalaureate degrees than White men and women, respectively. Sensoy and DiAngelo (2016) note three key tenets of intersectionality that would support Kaba's argument:

(1) Social inequality includes multiple categories for complete clarification;

(2) Privilege and oppression may coexist depending on specific circumstances: and

(3) The intention of intersectionality is to encourage unity among diverse groups. (p. 177)

Degree-attaining Black women do possess a privilege of being highly educated, however, this same group is overlooked and faces discrimination in areas that would catapult them and their families to greater economic and social freedom. When examining earnings by race, Asian men and women earn more than their counterparts and Blacks only earn 69 percent of the earnings of Asian women (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). When Black women's salaries are compared to Black men, women make 92 percent of the earnings of the men despite the increase in educational attainment.

Controlling Images

When reviewing literature covered at PWIs and works that are labeled as American classics, White writers dominate the category with a few Black men and even fewer Black

women. When Black women are not the authors, we are unable to control the narrative often

being depicted in negative stereotypes which BFT labels controlling images. The images are

created to "make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to be

natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life" (Collins, 1990, p. 77). Black feminist

thought assists in providing the rationalization regarding the motivation and empowerment of

Black women over the past decades when it comes to image, education and activism. Phelps-

Ward, Allen and Howard (2018) notes "within higher education, Black women – whether

faculty, administrators, or students – must constantly prove their value to the larger academic

community in terms of their intelligence, worth, and scholarship" (p. 53). Who Black women are

as people is always in question because of controlling images which relates to W.E.B. DuBois's

double-consciousness. The experience of double-consciousness divides the psyche of Black

people making it difficult to align the Black and American identities because of lived

experiences. Controlling images that are depicted of Black women have only created myths

about who we are and what we stand for: mammies, matriarchs, welfare mothers, "Black lady,"

and the "hoochie." In the spirit of W.E.B. DuBois's double consciousness, Black women have

traditionally made the decision to try to fit in and be accepted. Loryn Hairston (2017) writes:

> The double consciousness that a Black woman deals with can take a huge toll on
>
> her mental health. Constantly looking at herself through the eyes of another to fit
>
> into a category of what is deemed acceptable, but then trying to embody her
>
> carefree spirit without stereotypical labels being plastered on to her. Being
>
> marginalized in public because of race and gender takes a toll onto the emotional
>
> well being of a person. It can lead to self-doubt or even self-hate. Black women

constantly have to wonder if they are good enough and even question what they

[are] doing wrong. (Paragraph 4)

As bell hooks (1995) points out the "devaluation of Black womanhood is central to the maintenance of White supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (p. 78). Establishing a platform for Black women to share their experiences is essential to BFT. The duality of the Black women's plight is our race and gender cannot be treated as separate parts of us, because it is the intersection of both which makes our understanding of life distinct and aids in the awareness of the complexity of the world, the people and the human experience (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 25). In the movement, Black female intellectuals have learned that we must resist the controlling images that are projected to devalue our identities. Self-definition allows us to change the narrative and paint a more honest and factual picture of who we truly are as Black women.

The Quest for Love

Culture encourages Black men to love their mothers and be wary of other women (Boylorn, 2017a). In higher education institutions, Black women may face a lack of support, total abandonment and exclusionary practices from Black men. A controlling image in BFT that Collins deconstructs is the "Black lady," a middle-class professional woman, whose image may not appear to be as derogatory as the others. She is highly educated and much more accomplished but can be viewed as the modern-day Mammy because of her hardworking nature. Brittney Cooper (2017b) outlines four ways that patriarchy has undermined the educated Black woman's ability to building loving relationships with men:

1.   Makes men see women with more education as competition rather than

good partners;

2.   Conditions men to use emotional extortion and passive aggressive

behaviors which may include withholding affection or praise (Cooper, 2017c);

3.   Justifies straight men in domesticating smart women by measuring success

by their ability to create traditional families; finally

4.   Allows Black men not to interrogate these relational preferences but rather

to see them as natural and innate. (pp. 194-195)

Even when the Black lady is winning in her career or is at the top of her class, her ability

to attain love relationships may come into question by outsiders who feel she is overachieving

and too academically or career focused. In Media/Cultural Studies, Felicia Henderson composes

an essay discussing movies, television shows and advertisements that all depict Black women as

desperate and alone. For Henderson (2009), two new stereotypes emerged: (1) the intelligence of

the Black woman will leave her single, and (2) she will then be an anomaly according to

patriarchal standards (p. 376). Many times, we are disowned and devalued by Black men and

even other Black women when we try to challenge outdated traditions within the culture. For

Black women who choose degree attainment, the challenge is even greater within the Black

community as we continue to provoke "traditional role ideology, creating cultural anxiety about

proper performances of masculinity and femininity" (Cooper, 2017a, p. 125). Especially in the

South, choosing the path to college comes with the guilt of leaving family and friends along with

jealousy and pressures from those same loved ones. During my tenure working with the Upward

Bound program in my hometown, I witnessed parents who were adamantly opposed to their

daughter's attending college. For some, it was fear that the daughter would not return home or

forget their roots. Boyfriends wanted to keep their girlfriends close for fear of losing them to

men in college. "Because they so routinely compete with men and are successful at it, they

become less feminine. Highly educated Black ladies are deemed to be too assertive—that's why they cannot get men to marry them" (Collins, 1990, p. 89). As Boylorn (2017b) points out no one has sympathy for Black women who are heterosexual, professional and educated who choose to remain single in the "dwindling dating economy" (p. 199). The archaic thought process of Black men who are threatened by assertive Black women especially in the same household leaves Black women wondering if it is even worth pursuing love relationships (Collins, 1990).

College years often expose Black love relationships as we see our men choose White women and women of other ethnicities as mates. During my own time as an undergraduate, I met Black men who blatantly ignored Black women. As a Sport Management major, I did maintain friendly relationships with many of them as they viewed me as the "cool" Black girl who was more of their classmate or friend. There were also some Black men who dated White women publicly but slept with Black women privately. "Heterosexual Black women become competitors, most searching for the elusive Black male, with many resenting the White women who naively claim them" (Collins, 1990, p. 175). These men have already determined that pursuing relationships with Black women is not worth the drama. I can recall having a conversation with a couple of Black boys who were in the process of applying to colleges. They were very vocal about their histories with Black girls during their secondary education, and the way many of these young women were "ghetto" and "loud" most of the time. The Black girls also did not find these young men attractive or potential boyfriend material because the men self-identified as being into alternative forms of entertainment rather than culturally dominant music, television or video games. This group of Black men felt accepted by White women with whom they had commonalities.

In heterosexual relationships, Black men dating outside of the race is more acceptable within the Black community than when Black women date outside of the race. However, if we choose to seek love interests outside of our race, we are criticized and considered a traitor to our race. Because of the history of sexual violence inflicted upon Black women by White men, Black women may be accused of "losing our Black identity" as an effort perpetuate the double-standard and allow Black men to control his own love relationships regardless of race (Collins, 1990, p. 176). I recall being asked by a Black man if I had dated White men to which I responded in the affirmative. His immediate response was one of anger and shame *for* me. He questioned how I could allow such an offense when White men had abused us [Black women] for such a long time. It was his manipulation that was truly the abuser. Often, Black women choose White men out of pure curiosity or because we crave attention. Mikki Kendall (2020) confessed:

> When I was a teenager with the worst taste in White boys, I dated the kind of men who would say things like "You're pretty for a Black girl," and I'd chalk it up to ignorance instead of malice. Backhanded compliments were still better than no compliments in my mind. I was a fool. A fool with low self-esteem, but still a fool. (p. 100)

We are supposed to remain faithful to Black men even when he may not reciprocate that same dedication. Who is the fool? After all, it is the Black woman's own fault that she has overachieved and now there is not a man who will view her as a suitable mate because she is strong and has it all. Morgan Jenkins (2018) explains the difference between how Black and White women face conflict. She details that Black women's resolve is more direct and, in many cases, violent as our strength and way of protection was through physical force. Jenkins acknowledges "White girls weren't expected to be strong; they didn't need to be" because "they

were already supported, cared for and coddled enough" (p. 5). The White patriarchal system is designed to hold the White woman in the highest regard as a lady and the commercialized standard of beauty, which is upheld by White men, White women, Black men and sadly, Black women (Collins, 1990, p. 98). The Black woman is not so. She has curves in all the wrong places, her lips are just a bit too full, and her hair grows wiry from her scalp. Her differences make her seem stranger and even stronger than other women, so undoubtedly, she has the capacity to work like a *mule*.[5] The Black family structure during the mid-twentieth century as Black men's wages were below the earnings of White, so Black women sought work outside of the home to support their families (Christopher-Byrd, 2019, p.183). Finding domestic and clerical work for Black women was more consistent than industrial jobs for Black men (Collins, 1990, p. 67-68). In the historical essay, *Is the Black Male Castrated?*, Bond and Peery (1970) wrote:

> For the duration of their lives, many Black women must bear the burden of male frustration and rage through physical abuse, desertions, rejection of their femininity and general appearance. Having a job provides relief for her stomach but not for her soul, for a Black woman's successful coping with the economic problem (and we might throw in the education problem) enhances her rejection by Black men, or else invites acceptance in the form of exploitation. (p. 146)

While this article is quite dated, it remains relevant today. There is so much more to us than the education we receive and the careers we choose. "Black women need to be engaged holistically as complex people with comparable needs and desires, as [we] have the right to live

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[5] In Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937), Zora Neale Hurston states that "Black women are the mules of the world"

in a society that does not judge [us] based on archaic systems of control and domination" (Christopher-Byrd, 2019, p. 199). No, I do not think that Black women want to give up on Black men, but we do demand that they accept us as equals and support us in our endeavors to be successful in our professional lives. Alternatively, there are some Black men who take full advantage of the Black woman's vulnerability and desire for companionship. Ntozake Shange's (1989) choreopoem *For Colored Girls* features a woman who had given her affections to man only to be betrayed by him. The woman, referred to as the "lady in green," makes the claim "somebody almost walked off wid alla my stuff" because she was on the brink of allowing a man to steal her identity and her love (pp. 49-51). Like the lady in green, many Black women empathize with her story and the abuse and violence from the hands of a lover.

Black women also do not want to be ridiculed or labeled because of our mutual admiration and love for each other. I have been accused of having a lesbian relationship with my best friend, and lies like this have been attached to other women as well. This is another way to survey our bodies and disrupt the bond between us. Collins (1990) notes beyond being labeled as Other, it is the "threat of being labeled a lesbian [that] can have a chilling effect on Black women's ideas and on our relationships with one another" (p. 181). Upon separation from my ex-husband, members of his family immediately attacked my relationship with my best friend of thirty years. I attribute part of this claim as a defense or even justification for a failed marriage on my ex-husband's part to protect his reputation. After all, many people questioned our marriage and why someone like me would choose to be with someone like him. Although I knew that I was not a lesbian, it made me look at myself and my friendships with other women differently for the first time in my life. Would I allow this to have a lasting effect on my relationships with other women like it had my mother? The same thing happened to my mom

when she would befriend other women. My dad would become extremely jealous and refer to her new companions as "bitches" or some other derogatory term. His next step would be to categorize her as a lesbian, because he knew that would be the final blow for my mother to end her new friendships. It did not occur to me that I have never known my mom to have a best girlfriend. She spends much of her time alone. Some Black men use the lesbian label to try to control their women and maintain their dependence on them. This was the case with my father. However, my ex-husband and his family were trying to build his character (and ego) while hoping to destroy mine. Embracing our love for one another would encourage a Black feminist praxis that would counter "invisibility, otherness and [the] stigma" of how Black women's bodies are produced and re-produced (Hammonds, 1997, pp.181-182; Collins, 1990, p. 182). The Black women of Southern College must contend with love relationship challenges throughout their tenure. Whether they are in a committed relationship or single, it is a challenge that affects them personally and becomes a part of their experience.

Mothering

Black women have had to "play the game" for such a long time to survive in the United States that it has become a tradition that has been passed down for generations. Mothers and grandmothers teach their daughters and granddaughters how to maneuver within society for survival. I recall a scene from the movie, "The Help," where Minny's oldest daughter has to quit school to begin working as a housemaid. Minny provides instructions on how to protect herself and ensure that she does not cause any trouble. Domestic help was not to be seen or heard in the White household, especially by the head of the household. These Black women gain intimate insight into the everyday lives of White people and the imperfection of White supremacist ideology, created and circulated by the elite (Collins, 1998, p. 7). Minny was passing knowledge down to her daughter for survival and provision. Collins (1990) reaffirms:

Motherhood can serve as a site where Black women express and learn the power of self-definition, the importance of valuing and respecting ourselves. The necessity of self-reliance and independence, and a belief in Black women's empowerment. (p. 191)

Black women begin the education process that serves as a survival guide for our lives. We are taught by our matriarchs to expect to work, become educated and continue to build our community (Collins, 1990; Ladner 1972 & Joseph; 1981). Historically, the daughters were encouraged to attend school to start a professional career while the sons would leave school for a blue-collar job to help support the family (Giddings, 1984, p. 329).

In agreement with Anna Julia Cooper (1892), "the world needs to hear [our] voice" which has been stifled for far too long (p. 56). This is the beginning of self-empowerment that is an essential part of BFT and sets the tone for how Black women choose to pursue career options and educational goals. I had one grandmother who was college educated and the other had an elementary education, but both supported me and wanted me to be more than they had ever been. My mother was very independent and worked hard to provide for my siblings and me. Her quietness and discouraging moods were almost always linked to monetary issues and lack of support from my father or stepfather. Thankfully, she surrounded me with women who loved me and were willing to step in and assist my mom in caring for me. I recall a list of women in my family and friends of the family who would babysit me in my youth and gave me womanly advice as I grew older. Small rural communities have the advantage of allowing lessening the burden of single mothers by including aunts, grandmothers and other women in the upbringing of young men and women (Collins, 1990; Dougherty, 1978). Oftentimes for Black women it is

the village of othermothers who help raise us. The inner circle of Black women supporting one another allows mothers the independence to work while knowing their children are safe.

Safe Places

While we have created coping mechanisms, it seems that we continue to search for those safe places where we belong free from surveillance strategies used to "signal and control" Black women in White public and private spaces (Collins, 1998). Sadly, Black women are not always safe within Black communities where we encounter sexist, racist and elitist ideologies. Safe spaces among Black women are sacred and become vulnerable when those spaces are shared outside of the group. Within this space, Black women control the narrative to foster self-empowerment but run the risk of being labeled as separatists and questioned regarding the need to separate ourselves from Black men and White feminism. We continue negotiating our lives by "reconcil[ing] the contradictions separating our own internally defined images of self as African-American women with our objectification as the Other" (Collins, 1990, p. 110).

"Black Girl Magic" has been a movement over the past decade to promote and empower Black women and girls, and it is treated as if it is a new thing. Nina Simone was singing about "putting spells on you" beginning in 1964. Magic has been defined as "extraordinary power" and "influence" stemming from a "supernatural source." This magic makes Black feminism much more enchanting than any other topic. I do not say this because I am Black and a woman, but BFT gives voice to a collective who are often understudied and overly criticized. The focus of my study is Black women who attend Southern PWIs in the United States. Black Feminist Thought speaks exclusively of Black women's experiences as it relates to the world around them in a nation that she helped build but was never invited to its grand opening because her role was not to be seen or heard. By attending college that is not a Historically Black College and

University (HBCU), Black women step into vulnerable spaces that open ourselves up to being criticized and discounted as human beings. I reflect upon bell hooks' (2000) story regarding how she was treated during her doctoral program when she criticized the course reading list in a graduate class on feminist theory which lacked Black women writers:

> When I criticized this oversight, White women directed an anger and hostility at me that was so intense I found it difficult to attend the class. When I suggested that the purpose of this collective anger was to create an atmosphere in which it would be psychologically unbearable for me to speak in class discussions or even attend class. I was told that they were not angry. I was the one who was angry. (p. 142)

Since hooks was outnumbered, she was at the mercy of the preconceived notions of her peers who preferred that she too was not seen or heard. Desegregation merely allowed Black women to have a seat in the room, but it did not protect us from microaggressions, invisibility, and implicit biases brought on by peers, faculty, staff and administrators. When we bring light to this very fact, our accusations are redirected back at us creating the "angry, Black woman" persona. While some may turn a blind eye and try to convince the populous that racism no longer exists, Collins (1990) reminds us of the "effects of institutionalized racism remain visible and palpable" for African American women, considering "we encounter racism in everyday situations in workplaces, stores, schools, housing, and daily social interactions" (p. 26). There is a tendency when a Black woman expresses how an action has affected her that her words become distorted as overly emotional or over exaggerated. As we sit in the midst of Black people and allies demanding social justice, there is repeatedly a narrative shift that attempts to derogate the efforts towards equality. This effort is magnified when it comes to Black women as we are

being targeted as angry, nasty, monsters and on occasion bitches. In *Fighting Words*, Collins (1998) describes her second-grade classroom and the programmed behavior of the Black students in the course "silenced by classroom practices that rewarded their obedience and punished their curiosity" (p. x). This is precisely why it would be a discredit to my fellow Black women to not include the entirety of our shared experiences which are unique to us and us only. After many years of being brainwashed into thinking being a strong Black woman was a rally cry, I have since determined that it has made us the target of continuing the narrative of being "the mule of the world." The Strong Black Woman myth has made White women comfortable with abusing us because we can take it, or we can wait to be equal to them because they need it more (Kendall, 2020). This Black girl strength never stops, so we as Black women continue to perpetuate a narrative that is incapacitating our emotions. We must get to a point where it becomes the norm to cry, be angry or hurt and be okay without having to always be strong (Boylorn, 2017c).

Tenets of BFT

Collins (1990) states that fighting injustice along with "analyzing and creating imaginative responses to injustice characterize the core of Black feminist thought" (p. 15). It is not enough to point out the many prejudices that Black women face but also build a body of literature that supports and educates others on the lived experience through the intersections of being Black and a woman. Kristie Dotson (2015) defines four epistemological tenets of Collins 'Black feminist thought focusing on (1) and (4) as "knowledge possession" and (2) and (3) as "knowledge production" (pp. 2325-2326):

1. A criterion on meaning, which takes lived experience and 'practical images'

as important for grounding and making knowledge claims;

2. A criterion for assessment, which refers to vetting knowledge through

dialogue with and among one's community/communities;

3. A criteria for members of one's community/communities, which articulates

forms of competence required for members of a given community of

knowers; and

4. A criterion on knower adequacy, which stipulates that those making claims to

knowledge need to also have moral or ethical connections to those claims

(Dotson, 2015, p. 2325).

The women in this study possess knowledge regarding their experiences. It is also through this study that both their knowledge and my own is being produced. The strength of this framework is one of the core themes Collins outlines: the power of self-definition. Self-definition functions as an effective navigation tool that will guide my research because it centers all the other themes of the framework. As I studied each theme, the common thread among them all was the power of Black women to determine how Black women would be defined by society. "Rearticulating the standpoint of African-American women through Black feminist thought is much more difficult since one cannot use the same techniques to study the knowledge of the dominated as one uses to study the knowledge of the powerful" (Collins, 2000, p.187). A supporting element of this framework is the empowerment that it gives Black women and any Black woman who matriculates into an institution of higher learning.

Self-Definition

The false realities of the lives of Black women have been played out in the media causing us to "[insist] on our right to define our own reality, establish our own identities, and name our history" (Collins, 1990, p. 79). The young Black women who attend Southern College exist and their stories deserve to be heard in their own words. Barbara Christian (2000) adds her own critique of new philosophers:

> But in their attempt to change the orientation of Western scholarship, they, as usual, concentrated on themselves and were not in the slightest interested in the worlds they had ignored or controlled. Again I was supposed to know *them*, while they were not at all interested in knowing *me* (p. 16).

My research would contribute to the body of literature that seeks to give the Black women's perspective at Southern College purely from the Black women who attend the institution. Self-definition supports the narrative aspect of my research continuing to open the worlds that have historically been "ignored and controlled" by the dominant population, even if it is merely a small crevice. In *Sister Outsider*, Audre Lorde (1984) supported the idea of Black women "com[ing] together to examine our sources of strength and support, and to recognize our common social, cultural, emotional and political interests…which can contribute to the power of the Black community as a whole" (p. 46). In so many Black families, the roles of the women do not resemble those of the ideological White patriarchal family. Crenshaw (2000) details "Black women are somehow exempt from patriarchal norms" (p. 222) as they have always worked outside of the home which creates an intersection of cultural norms that are contrary to the White experience. Black women play an integral part in influencing the trajectory of the family unit through activism.

Literature Review

Early Education for Black Students

The education system for Blacks in the Southern portion of the United States has and continues to be plagued with obstacles and barriers making it difficult for Black students to be successful. William H Baldwin, a trustee of the Hampton-Tuskegee, was convinced that Blacks should be disciplined in "manual labor and the boundaries of their natural environment" and was opposed to Black higher education (Anderson, 1988, p. 247). William Watkins (2001) notes "accommodationism dictated that Blacks accept the world the way it was...Race relations would gradually change" if Blacks would know their place and practice behaviors that were acceptable in society (p. 23). As James Anderson (1988) points out Baldwin's philosophy aligned with the South's racial caste system which was on the opposing side "providing [Black women and men] with the knowledge and experiences that created a wide, if not unlimited, range of social and economic possibilities" (p. 248). Wiate and Crocco (2004) asserts after emancipation "Jim Crow ensured that the social caste system of the South would continue. For Blacks, education was the key to overcome such a system" (p. 574). In many cases, Black Georgians advocated for "educational equity and empowerment" by pooling resources to create independent educational associations, build their own schools, and hire and train their own teachers (Rucker & Jubilee, 2007, p. 153). Rucker and Jubliee (2007) details Booker T. Washington had aligned with the Hampton experiment and northern philanthropists encouraged Blacks to "[start] a new life of freedom at the bottom instead of at the top of society" (p. 152). On the opposition, "W.E.B. DuBois and Anna Julia Cooper who favored the establishment of college preparatory secondary schools and liberal arts colleges" (p. 152). With Black higher education institutions being the only options, Black men and women entered private liberal arts colleges that were poorly funded by the federal government. These institutions included sixteen land-grant institutions and seven

state-controlled Black colleges which were colleges or normal schools in name only. Black

colleges began producing more Black teachers which allowed the number of schools and Black

access to education to grow (Waite & Crocco, p. 578). Blacks were able to attend private Black

colleges as well as the state Black colleges, so the question if integration was necessary became a

debate. W.E.B. DuBois and Horace Mann Bond specified the understanding of the "damage of

inferior separate schools, but were not against separation if the Black schools received funding

equal to the White schools" (Kharem & Hayes, 2005, p. 81). On the matter of separate schools,

DuBois (1935) responded "the Negro needs neither segregated schools nor mixed school [but]

what he [sic] needs is Education" (p. 335). Bond (1935) added the need to focus "our attitude

toward our existing social and economic system, and be consistent with it" (p. 327).

Early higher education for Black people created great debate among the Black

community. While Black people wanted an education, we did not want our education to be

Whitewashed, both figuratively and literally, by the process of integration. Black colleges were

the mecca of Black education and a place that we could call our own. So, the age-old adage of "if

it ain't broke, don't fix it" entered the mind of many concerning the topic of integration. In the

South, desegregation was up for debate which produced strong opinions on both sides of the

argument.

Desegregation at Southern PWIs in Georgia

The Sibley Commission of Georgia was framed as an open platform in each of the ten

congressional districts to ascertain the input of the citizens of Georgia on what should be done

regarding the Brown v. Board of Education decision. The platforms were not as open as

described with the crowds being majority White and overwhelmingly against school integration.

The commission would present two options for the witnesses: (1) "allow for a change in massive

resistance law that would permit small amounts of desegregation and preserve public education;" or (2) "maintain segregation through defiance and private schools" (Roche, 1998, p. viv). The very first hearing was held in the rural Southwestern areas of the state, since "the Black Belt would offer the commission its greatest challenge in presenting an alternative to absolute segregation" (Roche, 1998, p. 99). John Sibley began the meeting by leading with "universal facts" that "everyone preferred public schools [and] everyone preferred segregated schools" (Roche, 1998, p. 100). The Americus hearing resulted in many of the witnesses both Black and White choosing to support massive resistance. One witness, Father Finian Riley, raised a point of contention with the public hearings:

> I think we all must remember—I am sure you are all aware of it—that there is one factor in all public testimony that we have to consider, and that is the factor of intimidation. Whether we like it or not, it is a fact. We all recognize it, I am sure. That for someone to speak out publicly for any type of integration, is to invite recriminations, social, economic, and even physical. (Roche, 1998, p. 103)

The thoughts and ideas of the people who were present at this hearing has had a lingering effect upon the town in which the college is located. After desegregation, a private school was formed in the city which also included two public schools remaining segregated. When the public schools were consolidated and underfunded by the local system, the White students relocated to the local private school regardless of their families' socioeconomic status. Debates like the one took place throughout Georgia pushing the same agenda and yielding the similar results. Many of these small Georgia towns continue educating its students in the same manner today.

The desegregation process has a lingering effect on how Black students would be treated and mistreated upon entering a PWI campus. While there is not much literature on the first Black students to desegregate Southern College, one historical publication notes the names of two Black women. History books barely mention their names, but as specified by Wheeler et al. (2018):

> ...there has been surprisingly little examination of what changed throughout the South as campus after campus of formerly non-Black schools accepted Black students and went through the process of integration. The accounts that do exist are mostly focused on clashes between segregationists and integrationists rather than the less dramatic yet far more common and influential changes in student experiences and campus cultures as hundreds of colleges and universities became racially integrated for the first time. (p. 341)

Wheeler and the other authors explored the experiences of the first Black students to desegregate a Northeast PWI in Georgia. The accounts parallel many of the occurrences at Southern College during the time. The Title III liberal arts grant of the Higher Education Act of 1965 allowed both the Northeast PWI and Southern College to expand the campus through new buildings and program offerings once enrolled Black students. Extracted from a March 1959 issue of Southern College's student newspaper, a freshman student is quoted:

> Integration is upon us...It will save future generations much confusion and possibly violence if we accept it and adjust ourselves accordingly. The sooner we do, the better off we, and the nation as a whole, will be. (Tietjen, 2005, p. 75)

Although the publication was in 1959, Southern College was not desegregated until 1966. In that same year, the college campus expanded with $15 million of new construction which included a health center, a new President's home, a student center, a men's dormitory, two women's dormitories, and a field house. The teacher's education program was approved, and the nursing program underwent an expansion to a two-year associate degree program. The recruitment, acceptance, and enrollment of Northeast PWI's first Black student was linked to the approval of the federal grants the institution received towards its own campus expansion.

Researching Black Women Experiences

In recent years, there have been research and programs that target the matriculation, retention, and graduation of Black men from higher education institutions creating a "state of emergency" while continuing in the "scholarly neglect of Black women" (Patton, Crenshaw, Haynes & Watson, 2016, p. 194). The needs of Black women are often overshadowed by the patriarchy demanding that men's issues be more dominant than women's (Phelps-Ward, Allen & Howard, 2018). Lori Patton (2016) asserts "between 1991-2012, a 22-year span, only 48 articles were published on the experiences of Black college women in juried higher education related, psychology, and behavioral sciences publications" (p. 194). A recent Galileo search of "Black women undergraduates" yielded less than 300 results, when narrowed to scholarly articles, the result was 48. Rachelle Winkle-Wagner (2015) adds:

> Important insights are lacking regarding how African American women's experiences in higher education may be uniquely racialized and gendered, due to the vast majority of the studies specific to African American college students grouping both sexes together. This lack of focus on the experiences of Black women could hinder the efficacy of institutional policies geared towards

maximizing academic performance, reducing attrition and enhancing college

experiences for these students. (p. 172)

In a 1989 article, which remains relevant to the subject matter, Harriet McCombs

interjected that if given the creative freedom to generate experience-driven theories and

approaches to the arts and sciences, Black women would significantly impact social ideology and

social structure (p. 135).

Two studies conducted that explored the experiences of Black women on PWI campuses,

the findings yielded interesting yet correlated results. Study 1: Hannon, Woodside, Pollard and

Roman (2016) concluded that the data analysis produces five themes: (1) multiple worlds; (2)

belonging; (3) expectations; (4) awareness of surroundings; and (5) coping. Study 2: Alaina

Neal-Jackson found that the Black women in her study encountered gendered racial stereotyping

in collaborative academic spaces. Both studies are situated on a PWI campus with the first study

located in the Southeastern portion of the U.S. near the Appalachian Mountains and the second

study at a prestigious, U.S. top-ranking university. Both of these studies resulted in the Black

women feeling as if they have to live in two different worlds or contending with double

consciousness, a concept introduced by W.E.B. DuBois in 1903, more than a century ago.

Participants felt the need to "interact with the majority culture in order to get to more knowledge

and things" but also wanted to share and connect with other Black students (Hannon, Woodside,

Pollard & Roman, 2016, p. 659). In the Neal-Jackson (2020) study, the Black women felt that

they were "automatically assigned a slew of distinct, but related, negative images that reinforce

one another" (p. 322). In both studies, participants self-imposed responses in an attempt to

change their White peers' and sometimes faculty's perceptions of Black women. In study one,

the "expectations included working harder, proving others wrong, achieving more success than

others, and overcoming negative external expectations by making a good impression" (Hannon, Woodside, Pollard & Roman, 2016, p. 660). The Black women in the second study used "implicit peer education" as a tool to "correct stereotypical assumptions by providing a counterexample to the behavior the stereotype describes" which may be viewed counterintuitive and conforming to the master narrative (Neal-Jackson, 2020, p. 326). The use of "explicit peer education" was more direct in verbal communication and educated White peers on their problematic assumptions (p. 326). The Black women who participated were keenly aware that they were always being surveyed amid being ignored and discounted as scholars. Additionally, a study conducted by Williams and Nichols (2012) appends two forms of microaggressions: (1) "microinsults, or subtle remarks that demonstrate racial insensitivity"; and (2) "microinvalidations, which alienate, exclude, or nullify a person of color's experiences" (p. 76). Like the Black women in the aforementioned studies, both classmates and faculty felt that the women were not intelligent and were receiving preferential treatment. One of the participants recalled:

> In most of my classes, actually in all of my classes I am the only African American and I have this one anatomy of physiology class [and] sometimes like the teacher or some of the students are like 'do you understand, do you get it?' I'm like 'yeah I understand, I get it.' It's just like they feel like just because I'm the only African American person in the class that I don't understand or I don't comprehend it as well as they do. (Williams & Nichols, 2012, p. 84)

This type of microinsult may be shared by the Black women who find themselves in the more challenging courses at Southern College. The women in the Williams & Nichols project did not experience microinvalidations as often as microinsults. However, microinvalidations did

exist and may be significant to the present study. The Neal-Jackson study also included faculty

and administrators asking them to address stereotypes within the classroom and other academic

spaces creating an equitable learning environment for all students (p. 328). Being the minority

and having to educate others is exhausting and often stressful, but it is necessary and may be

empowering to those who feel they are effectively educating their peers.

Haynes, Stewart and Allen (2016) conducted a study which focused on their own past

classroom experiences using Franklin's Invisibility Syndrome Paradigm (2009). These Black

women were exposed to a learning environment in their first year of a Ph.D. program

encouraging them to "identify and deconstruct educational norms" forcing them to seek solace in

one another (p. 380). The research yielded three findings: (1) a loss of dignity in grade school;

(2) high school invalidation; and (3) invisibility in college. Evette Allen presents the "White,

Black girl" label following the master narrative and ensuring the toleration of Black women who

assimilate to "having a quiet demeanor, being well behaved, and earning good grades with the

characteristics of White womanhood" (Haynes, Stewart & Allen, 2016, p. 385). The "White,

Black girl" label is a technique parallel to "implicit peer education" used by Black women in the

Neal-Jackson study discussed earlier. "Black girls are socialized early to ascribe to a subordinate

status in schools [where] master narratives institute clearly defined lines" (Haynes, Stewart, &

Allen, 2016, p. 382). Sarah Stewart initially recognized academic inferiority through

microaggressions from her teachers in high school. Being an outsider internationally (Jamaician)

and racially, she was reminded "to stay in her place" which "promoted feelings of unworthiness

and helplessness" (Franklin & Boyd-Franklin, 2000, p. 36). The third finding focusing on

invisibility in college highlights the silence on Black women in the college classroom when the

instructor perpetuates the master narrative and Black women fall victim to "universal sameness"

(Haynes, Stewart, & Allen, 2016, p. 387). This "universal sisterhood," as defined by Chandra

Mohanty (1989), "assumes a commonality of gender experience across race and national lines"

(p. 180). Assuming that all women are the same erases us as individuals. Layla Saad (2020)

defines "tone policing" as a "tactic used by those who have privilege to silence those who do not

by focusing on the tone of what is being said rather than the actual content" (p. 46). When Black

women feel the weight of tone policing especially within the learning institution, they may

practice avoidance from dealing with White fragility or choose to instead express their feelings

about racism. "When you control the tone of how BIPOC [Black, Indigenous and People of

Color] are supposed to talk about their lived experiences with racism and the existing world, you

are reinforcing the White supremacist ideology that knows White best" (Saad, 2020, p. 50). A

separate study involving Black women doctoral students presented similar themes aligning with

the previous studies being seen as the lone representative or the small minority in a White

classroom setting. Robinson, Esquibel and Rich (2013) discussed the "Strong Black Woman"

(SBW) which resulted in self-empowerment for three of the four participants. The Strong Black

Women Archetype emerged during the Civil Rights movement and the Black Power period to

project positive images of Black women after being objectified as mammies and Jezebels. While

SBW was meant to empower, its effects have created negative repercussions as the "titanic

strength does violence to the spirits of Black women" as a requirement for survival (Harris-

Lacewell, 2001, p. 24). The Black women in the study embraced their "positive self-

identifications of resiliency and strength" contrary to the one participant who viewed SBW as a

"source of pain… [wanting] others to judge her as she saw herself: fragile, shy, quiet, uncertain,

and self-discovering" (p. 66). The researchers did emphasize the participant's upbringing in a

White, middle-class area which may have greatly influenced her response and possible White,

Black girl label. Tamara Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2009) aligns with the negative aspects of the SBW persona citing "being strong" obliges Black women to exhibit a ready endurance to a life constructed against the "backdrop of obstacles, unfairness, and, tellingly, a lack of assistance from others" (p. 71). Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2009) continues:

> The use of strength imposes a definition of who Black women are, or at least who they should aspire to be in order to gain acceptance from others and secure a foothold in the social world. Psychologically intrusive, the discourse of strength renders the material and relational aspects of oppression into realities Black women should endure rather than injustices worthy of their outrage and challenge. (pp. 107-108)

SBW as a solidarity struggle becomes the staple characteristic of Black women in the Black community and society as a whole. Some Black women do not align with the SBW image because they see it as a forced title that leaves many of us with war wounds from which we may never recover.

Researchers also conducted studies focusing on the experiences of Black women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) related fields. Emily Blosser (2020) explored Black women undergraduate engineering students, while Charleston et al. (2014) centered their inquiry on Black women computer science undergraduate and graduate majors. Both studies revealed feelings of isolation and self-identity challenges. Both groups of participants recognized the isolation navigating the academic space "not only as a woman, but as a Black woman" which parallels the isolation they experienced in everyday life (Blosser, 2020. p. 60; Charleston et al., 2014, p. 172). The Charleston et al. study further expands upon the

participants' feelings of abandonment from Black males who preferred connection with the White males in the programs. Patton and Ward (2016) contests "Black, heterosexual men are the benefactors of what [Theodore] Johnson (2013) describes as, "Black male privilege" offering points that may be challenged yet valid making gender-blind intersectionality a reality for Black people (p. 341). Gender-blind intersectionality occurs when "heterosexual men represent an identifiable category whose maleness is seldom articulated in an intersectional manner" (p. 340). "[Black] men enjoy more privilege than women, and Black less than Whites, Black men consider themselves men first because it affords privilege" (Johnson, 2013, as cited in Patton & Ward, 2016, p. 341). Participants in both studies were keenly aware of the constant surveillance they were receiving within the classrooms. Much of the attention was unwanted and often associated with negative stereotypes causing their peers and instructors to question their intellect. One of the participants in the engineering program expressed her apprehensions regarding the negative stereotype that Black people were bad at math and women were bad at engineering (Blosser, 2020, p. 61). In one case, the participant's intelligence was challenged when a "White male classmate who was assigned as her partner questioned her academic competence" (Charleston et al., 2014, p. 171). Black women in these studies are navigating spaces that have been intended for White males. Even in social gatherings for networking purposes, Black women may elect to opt-out of these opportunities due to unrecognized White privilege displayed when choosing an all-White bar or other spaces that are not welcoming to people of color and women.

A Place for Us

In a recent issue of Essence Magazine, Tracey Michea'l Lewis-Giggetts (2021) educates:

Our love for each other shows up at the kitchen table, when we hold the hand of

our homegirl who's grieving a loss so heavy that relief can only be found in

shared tears and a slice of 7Up cake. It shows up in the fatty part of the fingertips

digging into tense scalps at the salon that feels like home. (p. 83)

The Hannon et al. study implicated the practice of providing safe spaces to Black women to gather and freely express "culturally based truths without fear of marginalization" (Goins, 2011, p. 531). Safe spaces combat the feelings of isolation and feelings of being the only one and it also creates a space to reclaim our words that are "stolen and often misused or misapplied [because] we know the depth of our vocabulary when used among ourselves" (Brown, 2018, p. 82). Mohanty (1989) provided support for these spaces which produce differences in the academy "[resists] incorporation and appropriation by providing a space for historically silenced people to construct knowledge" (p. 184). Black women and their friendships are spaces necessary to affirm "sense of self and nurture their spirit in an environment that often contradicts their experiences in the world" (Goins, 2011, p. 532). In an article by Tiffany Pennamon (2019), she records Rasheeda Walker's comments:

To have counter-spaces is valuable because the representation of Black women in academic circles permits them to focus less on the challenges they have to overcome to be heard, and instead, allows them to focus on important scholarship that advances their communities. (pp. 23-24)

These spaces create a comfort familiar to Black women beginning as early as childhood into adulthood. Safe spaces aid in the creation of "linguistic and communicative change that affirms individual and group-level identities" (Davis, 2019, p. 28). bell hooks (1989) explained in the presence of the dominant culture, "the exploited develop various styles of relating, talking one way to one other, talking another way to those who have the power to oppress and dominate" (p.

15). Some people would refer to hook's explanation as code-switching. Black women use code-switching as a linguistic tool to negotiate both worlds, our own and the one we must navigate through words, phrases and colloquial expressions.

In a study conducted by Marnel Goins, female friendships were explored as the researcher observed an organic conversation between Black women. Goins suggested four primary subjects of the conversation: finances, language, appearance and race. The subject of finances centered around spending and saving as well as splurging on luxury items. The researcher noted "colloquialisms are significant to these females because they are used in their safe space, away from oppressive areas, and thus, preserve their identities and culture" (Goins, 2011, p. 539). When the women talked about appearance, there was both a positive and negative aspect of their comments but in a malicious manner. Goins pointed out the discussion of race was not the focus of the group and was only mentioned briefly because "they had a common and understated understanding" (p. 541).

Implications for the Future of Black Women

Black women's experiences take on various forms which have a profound impact on education. Amy Jacques Garvey's Black nationalism sparked a movement for Black women to educate themselves at every social class level which "demonstrate[d] the significance of self, change and empowerment for Black women" (Collins, 1990, p. 231). I would like to synthesize Garvey's movement to Stacey Abrams' call to action during the 2020 Presidential election which mobilized many women to the voting polls. Black women turned out in large numbers in support for change in America especially after the mistreatment and voter suppression issues of the 2018 Georgia gubernatorial race between Abrams and Brian Kemp. Our participation in the process

has never been in question, but our voice at the table is what we desired most. Kendall (2020) interjects "the harm-reducing votes of marginalized people will never be enough to outweigh the stupidity of White people who vote for racism at their own expense" (p. 183). However, November 2020 encouraged me as a Black woman to not only see the mobilization of my "sistas" but to also have hope in finally having an Asian/Black woman, Kamala Harris, as the Vice-President of the United States. Black women's leadership in organizations greatly influences power structures, organizational settings, and empowering the people who work within them (Collins, 1990). With a new outlook on social justice activism, the political process and empowerment, bringing the thoughts and opinions of Black women at Southern College would positively impact the campus and experience of all students.

CHAPTER 3

JUST REMEMBER YOU'VE BEEN TOLD

For the purpose of my research, I introduce a qualitative study and support group using sista circle methodology. This approach is both culturally relevant and gender specific in providing shared experiences of the Black women who attend Southern College and how they navigate educational spaces and how it connects to the core themes of BFT. The applicability of the sista circle methodology is outlined in this chapter following the research plan: methodology, my positionality, circle sistas (participants), data collection, procedure, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

Research Question Reiterated
The intention of my study is to answer the following research question:

How do the educational experiences of Black females at a Southern predominantly White institution connect to the core themes of Black Feminist Thought?

Method to the Madness
When considering investigating experiences, the qualitative approach was the best method to research natural social life. By listening to and recording original accounts from the Black women at Southern College, it challenges the status quo of how Black women are viewed by others and their sense of belonging on the campus. Qualitative study provides "insights to ways of living practices, contexts, relationships, and human impacts so that people better understand ourselves and others" (Weaver-Hightower, 2018, p. 1).

Sista Circle Methodology
Neal-Barnett et al. (2011) overviews the history of sista circles dating back 150 years to the Black club movement. Because of the varying definitions of sista circles, I

would venture to say that the tradition might have been labeled during the movement, but the tradition of Black women gathering, and sharing has long been a part of our culture. The exchange of knowledge happens in familial spaces, sacred places like the church and social organizations. "Sister circles are support groups that draw upon the strength and courage found in African American women's friendship networks" (Neal-Barnett et al., 2011, p. 214). Porter and Dean (2015) and Winkle-Wagner (2009) have used sista circles in studies of Black women on PWI campuses to help them explore their campus experiences as a group.

Latoya Johnson's dissertation focused on creating and implementing sista circle methodology beyond focus groups due to its ability to support and empower Black women. Her methodology challenges subjectivity and the fact Black women are "incapable of producing reliable knowledge claims" that elitist groups produce (Harding, 2015, p. 32). Johnson (2015) identifies three distinguishing features of her method:

(1) Communication Dynamics - the unique verbal communication among Black women through the use of code-switching, non-verbal cues and finishing one another's thoughts;

(2) Centrality of Empowerment - "regards Black women's experiences and wealth of knowledge as power" (p. 48); and

(3) Researcher as Participant - to assist in building upon BFT, the researcher participates in the circle to both share and obtain knowledge as a way of giving back and a source of empowerment.

Marvette Lacy (2018) describes the nature of this form of methodology "challenge[s] what is considered legitimate and rigorous" in traditional forms of inquiry by recognizing

and removing power dynamics (Reactions section, para. 1). My intent was for the Black

women who were selected to participate in this study to feel safe from the surveillance of

the dominant group and open about their own realities. Joan Collier (2017) used sista

circle methodology with Black women in doctoral programs during her study and

discovered her participants:

(1)   Experienced sista circles were organic spaces where they could connect

        with other similarly situated Black women;

(2)   Be affirmed in their experiences;

(3)   Be vulnerable in their discussions related to their experiences in doctoral

        studies; and

(4)   Learn more about how other similarly situated Black women experience

        doctoral programs (p. 68).

While the level of education in Collier's study varies from my research, the hope is that

both participants and I are reflective in the process of learning from one another.

All About ME – The Researcher

I have been in education for 19 years with 16 of those years being in higher education. I

hold a Bachelor of Science degree in Sport Management and master's degrees in Business

Administration and Higher Education. I am a Black woman who attended a Southern PWI within

the same state as Southern College. My experiences as a student and eight-year career as higher

education professional within PWIs have provided me with a unique interest in this study.

Sista circles were introduced to me at an early age by my grandmothers. I followed them

around as they visited with other women in the family and girlfriends. While I did not know it at

the time, this is where I learned that there is a place where women can gather to talk, share

experiences and nuggets of wisdom. A place that was just for us. There were times that those places included preparing meals, shelling peas or a friendly card game, but it was my special place with them and to other women in our lives.

During the sista circles in this study, my role as a participant was important to the effectiveness of the conversation. I knew all five participants and had worked with four of the five women extensively since they entered Southern College. The sista circles allowed me to gain more insight into who they were as women and scholars at the institution. I presented the women with question prompts and the women would begin to contribute their stories. There were times when the participants would need clarity regarding prompts, and I would begin with my own answers. At other times, their stories brought various memories to mind, and I openly shared them. All of the women have expressed their appreciation of the study and most of them have been constantly checking on me and the progression of this research.

Study Participants

Participants in the study were Black women students who are full-time sophomore- to senior-level in classification at Southern College. These women were solicited for participation through social media (i.e., Instagram and Facebook) and word of mouth. The majors of these students varied as well as their socioeconomic statuses and geographic origins. All participants spent the majority 75% of their lifetime in the United States and graduated from a U.S. high school. By narrowing the focus to this population, it will allow me to compare the high school demographics and how it may frame the experiences of the participants and their expectations of attending a PWI. Friendship groups were encouraged to participate as part of the study included group interviews and observations. However, there was only one close friend group while others had both formal and informal relationships.

I anticipated 15-20 participants but received interest from five women. Both circles were conducted in November and December which was at the end of the term. I feel that the time of the semester was a deterrent for many Black women which was around the holidays and finals. I had several women reach out with interest, but they did not have the time to dedicate to participation. This study utilized two sista circles via Zoom. The initial thought was there would be many Black women in the participating. After the response, I was content with the response from women who showed genuine interest.

Data Collection

To assist in the selection process, the women were given a questionnaire to gather demographic and background information. This questionnaire included questions regarding the following: contact information, hometown, classification, racial identity, gender identity, sexual orientation, high school information, major, residential/commuter status, and post-graduation aspirations. This document served as a preliminary interview with pointed questions that will inform the research process of the participants' mindset towards the University and their own self view. An informed consent form was provided and required of all selected participants. During the sista circle, I acted as moderator and participant with open-ended questions that encouraged participation and responses. Questions were categorized as: icebreaker and opening questions, empowerment, the institution, and support. There were impromptu questions throughout the process as the conversation progressed. All interviews were recorded and transcribed through a professional source.

Procedures Followed

For this study, institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained from Georgia Southern University. Once approved, I began to seek participants through social media outlets, Instagram, and Facebook, by posting a flyer outlining the study and its intended purpose. The

flyer was shared by followers and friends. Respondents were screened to ensure that selection criteria were met. The researcher narrowed down the respondent list and selected participants for the study. Once selected, participants were contacted via email to notify them of their selection and a Doodle poll was solicited to select the dates and times of the interviews. Some participants were contacted separately for available times for interviews because they did not respond to the poll. Interviews took place virtually using Zoom over a span of two months, November and December. While it was an online environment, I tried to create an intimate setting and each circle was 60 minutes in length. The sista circles were recorded through Zoom.

During the process, conversations formed organically and deviated from the original question or expand upon it. I encouraged participants to speak freely as this methodology combats the silencing of marginalized voices. As mentioned by Johnson (2015), "the major goal of sista circles is to gain an understanding of a specific issue, topic, or phenomena impacting Black women from the perspective of Black women themselves" (p. 45). Black women will be centered as the experts. After the interviews were transcribed, they were sent back to participants for review. Each participant received a copy of the sista circle interview. Participants were given the option to exclude content or add a reflection after review. None of the women elected to have content removed or elected to add a reflection.

Birks, Chapman, and Francis (2008) state the importance of the "interplay" of the relationship between the researcher and data as it reflects the "breadth and depth of human experience" (p. 69). To minimize potential bias during the process, I maintained notes to log memos. This process of reflexivity allowed me to examine myself and my relationship to the research project. Memo writing also helped me remember details that may be important to the study. This process was also one of the ways to increase trustworthiness.

Data Analysis

The process of coding utilized during this process were both manually and using computer assisted software. Coding recognizes patterns and later allows me to classify and reorganize data. I recognize that my lens and filters may have an impact on the codes that were determined in the process. Saldaña, Leavy and Beretvas ((2011) adds that while coding assists in classification, the "analytic memo further articulates your deductive, inductive, and abductive thinking processes on what things may mean" (p. 98). This further supports the use of memo writing to continue during analysis. As outlined by Michael Bamberg (2004):

> ...we are fully interested in the inconsistencies, contradictions, and ambiguities
> that arise as our interviewees try to find ways to mitigate the interactive trouble of
> being misconstrued. Rather than seeing these inconsistencies and equivocations as
> an analytic nuisance, they are exactly what are most interesting. They offer a way
> into examining how interviewees are bringing off and managing their identity
> claims. (p. 365)

The focus of the coding was to identify the connections of the Black women's experiences at Southern College to the core themes of Black Feminist Thought: Self-Definition/Empowerment, Safe Space, Controlling Images, Invisibility/Sense of Belonging.

InVivo Coding

The coding method considered was In Vivo coding which focuses on the actual words used by the participants. Saldaña (2013) emphasizes "folk and indigenous terms are participant-generated words from members of a particular culture, subculture, or microculture" (p. 91). In Vivo coding produces rich themes and categories which will amplify the Black women participants' voices over the master narratives. Focusing on how the language is used and the

social interaction of the group will be the strength of this method. I used their language and match their statements to the core themes of BFT. Initially, I used an online coding method initially but quickly determined that it was not for me. I printed the transcripts and used colorful annotating pens to find codes throughout of each sista circle. I picked a color for each of the core themes and identified the language and matched it to the code. This method worked best for me as I determined that it was better to have the physical copies and have the space to annotate when needed. Memo writing was used during this coding process to help reduce the number of codes and strengthen the analysis process. Member checking was utilized to validate the meanings of words and phrases when the participants were allowed to view the transcription and audio from both sista circles. Both verbal and non-verbal cues were included in the data collection process. Often the ladies would nod in approval when a participant was telling a story that related to them. As I told my own stories, I noticed the shock on their faces through raised eyebrows.

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted amid a global pandemic. To ensure the safety of each participant, I made the decision to meet via Zoom and not face-to-face. I followed protocol to ensure that participants communicated with me through my personal email address through my program. If participants emailed me at my professional email address, I redirected them. I also asked each participant to scan their informed consent to my personal email address as well. When participants completed the survey, I asked them to email me their pseudonym that would be used throughout the process. I explained to them why the pseudonym was being used and asked them to use them throughout the sista circles. During the sista circles, some participants did make the mistake of saying their own name, but I corrected that in the transcript to protect their identity. At the beginning of the each sista circle, I reiterated that participants could withdraw at any time. This statement was also a part of the informed consent document.

Summary

I have outlined my research method that was applied to answer the research question which included methodology, participants, data collection, procedure, data analysis, and ethical considerations. Sista circle methodology connected the educational experiences of Black females at a Southern predominantly White institution to the core themes of Black Feminist Thought. My next chapter provides the results of the study, proves that the methodology was followed and offers a platform for these women to tell their story in their own ways.

CHAPTER 4

IT'S A DIFFERENT WORLD FROM WHERE WE COME FROM

This chapter presents the findings of the sista circle methodology study conducted to answer the research question: How do the educational experiences of Black females at a Southern predominantly White institution connect to the core themes of Black Feminist Thought?

This chapter includes the narratives that reflect the experiences of Black women undergraduates at Southern College. To further understand the context of the sista circle methodology, I provided select stories from the participants that best support my findings which will use the actual voices and words of the participants. There were two sista circles that were conducted through Zoom to keep the participants and researcher safe. Each time, all participants were in a private space alone which were mainly their rooms on-campus. As the researcher, I joined the call from my own home.

Description of Participants

There were five participants who met the criteria established to participate in the study: (1) identifies as a woman; (2) identifies as Black or African-American; (3) must be enrolled at Southern college at the level of sophomore, junior or senior; and (4) are willing to participate in two 60 minute sista circles and complete a short questionnaire. All five signed and returned the informed consent forms. The demographics collected for the questionnaire of each participant is detailed further in the chapter. The questionnaire consisted of questions that would affirm their identity as a Black woman as well as their classification. There were also questions that would provide more information regarding their background and their thoughts about attending college in general.

The following section will present individual demographic information for all five Black women participants of the sista circles. Self-selected pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of my participants. Table 1 displays the classification, major, residency status, and the residential status of the participant. Other information provided in the questionnaire was disclosed within the type of area the participant grew up in, the racial make-up of their high schools, individual's reason for choosing to participate in this study and their family dynamics and upbringing.

Table 1: Demographic Information of the Participants

Participant (Pseudonym)	Classification	Major	Residency Status	Residential/Commuter
Anna	Sophomore	Long Term Care Management	In-State	Residential
Shirley	Senior	Psychology	In-State	Residential
Nova Love	Senior	Human Resource Management	Out-of-State	Residential
Nia	Junior	Nursing	In-State	Residential
Rose	Senior	Nursing	In-State	Residential

Anna

Anna grew up in a suburban area and went to majority Black high school. She was interested in being a part of this study because coming to Southern College was a culture shock to her. Anna expressed that she was "pass around" during her parent's divorce and was raised by her grandmothers until her parents could get situated. After that time, she moved in with her dad and stepmom. She is very close to her stepmom.

Shirley

Shirley went to a majority White school after moving to the United States at the age of nine from the Caribbean. She is a first-generation college student who feels that her high school experience somewhat influenced her decision to attend college. Shirley's interest in participating in this study was to understand whether she had become desensitized to race and gain the perspective of other Black women. She was raised by both parents in separate households early in life. Upon moving to the U.S., Shirley experienced living with her grandmother.

Nova Love

Nova Love is the only out-of-state participant in the group who transferred to the institution after attending an HBCU. She grew up in a majority Black area. Nova wanted to gather different points of view from other Black women as well. Nova was mainly raised by her mother and grandmothers alongside 26 cousins who were like siblings to her.

Nia

Nia attended a majority White high school and was interested in the study because she had found it difficult to find her group at Southern College. She felt the sista circles would assist her in finding others like her who may have different perspectives. Nia was raised along with her sister for most of life by her single mother. At an early age, she was sent to the Caribbean to live with her grandmother while her parents went through a divorce and returned later to live with her mom. She maintains that her family is very close.

Rose

Rose is the only participant from a metropolitan area where she attended a majority Black high school. Her interest in the study derived from her initial lack of interactions with people from other races before enrolling in Southern College. She wanted the opportunity to compare her own experiences to the other women in the group. Rose was raised in a two-parent household

who never married. She does not have relationships with any extended family and is close to her father and sister.

Core Themes of Black Feminist Thought

I utilized the core themes of Collins' Black Feminist Thought to find codes within the actual words of the participants: Self-Definition/Empowerment, Safe Space, Controlling Images, Invisibility/Sense of Belonging. These themes were identified in Chapter Two of this research.

Self-Definition/Empowerment

Throughout the group, each of the women spoke of their own definition of themselves that seemed to have grown as they have matriculated through college. In their own ways, they have come into a new world and have learned to embrace who they are as Black women. Some spoke about their growth as an academic and competing within the classroom setting. Nova Love explains being questioned about where she chose to sit in the classroom. The women would reciprocate their thoughts and experiences on the topic often by saying that they wanted to "piggyback" on one another's comments. It was as if they were igniting each other's thoughts and they had to chime in with their own stories. Although we were virtually meeting, the ladies were respectful of one another to wait for their moment to speak. Often, we were all eager to speak and simply smiled when we all reached for the unmute button simultaneously. Khristi Adams (2020) shares her belief on the importance of Black girls feeling connected to Black culture. "In a society that often antagonizes the existence of Black girls, connection and solidarity are what they need to feel whole" (Adams, 2020, p. 130).

> Nova Love: "...you sit in class, it's like, why you sitting close to us and shouldn't you be over there with the rest of them. And it's like, it feels awkward. And I hate to say that, but it's like, now I have to prove y'all wrong, 'cause I'm just as smart as the rest of y'all in here. And that's why I'm here."

As a fourth-year nursing student, Rose has encountered adversities but counts them as "stepping stones" that will help her in the future. She came to Southern College to learn to work with people of different demographics than her own.

> Rose: "...my Black womanhood is constantly, I want to say changing, but like, I'm like kind of learning and growing to what it really means…I'm becoming more aware of, um, not only how I view myself but how others view me, which I guess kind of changes how I view myself."

Rose's response aligns with BFT how Black women's view of their own self-definition evolves as methods of oppressions change (Collins, 1990). As Rose finishes her degree at Southern College, joins the workforce and is more economically and socially responsible, her experiences as a Black woman and self-definition will continue to change as well. While these changes may appear insignificant to women generally, BFT and other oppositional knowledges highlights the profound impact that these changes have on Black women (Collins, 1990). I listened to these young women speak about their definition and I noted how much my own definition has matured over the years. Relationships, jobs, economic status and the experiences that I have faced places me in a different mindset where I am at a place of wanting to mentor and assist other Black women.

> Me: "…because I'm a bit older and will be a year older tomorrow, um, I wouldn't define myself as someone who doesn't necessarily have to be the strong Black woman all the time.
>
> I feel that that archetype is very toxic. I also feel that I would describe myself as someone whose ambition is not determined by my gender identity or my racial identity. I would also say that, but I'm also as a Black woman [who knows] that

there are spaces that I will enter, and I'll be the first one like me to enter those

spaces.

And I feel like responsible to bring other Black women along so that it can stop

being the first or the second. And it becomes so ingrained in the culture that

nobody looks at the fact that I'm Black and, or a woman."

At this juncture in my life and research, I realize that this type of setting is unique to the

participants as it is an official space without the daily surveillance of being othered on a

college campus. I express my opinions about the SBW archetype as a part of my own

story and a reclamation of the times that I needed to feel vulnerable but did not have the

space. Karla Scott (2021) echoes my sentiments as she encourages Black women to

"seriously reconsider the mandate for strength and admit it is time for Black women to

love ourselves more" (p. 485). I do not disregard my strength, but I am instead

rechanneling that strength into ways that allow me to take care of my mental and physical

health. Like Scott, Cooper (2018), and so many others who profess Black feminism, I

have learned that "in the battle of with White women over racism and with Black men

over sexism, I can never go wrong in picking myself" (p. 67).

Shirley's response was a bit different from the other women, since she felt as though

neither her Blackness nor womaness played a factor in her life until coming to Southern College.

Shirley: "I would say from how I was brought up, um, me being Black or a

woman was not highlighted a lot…but I don't remember it being a very big thing

until I got here and saw the differences…"

Shirley also comments on how she views her own intersectionality:

Shirley: "I say that my mindset has changed to realize that I'm versatile, that I am

not fitting the status quo of, you know, what a woman should do and what a Black

woman should do or what a Black person should do, but that I am in every which

way, unique and different. And I can flow in any way that is going to bring

success and bring light shine to somebody else…I am an inspiration…I have

things to offer this world that goes beyond just the identity of what everyone else

may see, but that as I grow I'm kind of like an onion unraveling pieces and parts

of me that may disconnect from the status quo and the stereotyping that's been

brought off so easily, um, in our society. "

Perhaps, it was Shirley's upbringing in another country and then attending a high school that was

majority White that attributed to her view as a Black woman. Shirley defines her Black

womanhood in "her own terms" activates her ability to criticize epistemologies that try to define

Black women in an ideal manner (Collins, 1990, p. 292). She is adding her own knowledge

which is her personal form of empowerment.

The conversation began to shift as the women shared how they channeled their

differences to create their own definitions of a Black woman. Black women continue to struggle

at maintaining a delicate balance of maintaining the right amount of Blackness in a majority-

White atmosphere (Adams, 2020). The rules by which other groups play does not apply to our

own experiences (Rankine, 2014; Collins, 1990). Nia talked about her own struggles with her

quirky ways that may not be relatable to some, but she now accepts it as a part of her identity.

Nia: "...if I do this and that's, like, too Black, then I realized after a while, like

really, we have nothing to prove like anybody else we are all different. And that's

the point…if we're all the same, then there's nothing unique…So I feel like

having differences or being that weird person, like, that's what sets you apart

because at that point, you're being true to yourself and you know you're being

who you are…I want to be like, you know, let me just be me."

By using verbal and non-verbal communication strategies, they reinforce the notion that

"culturally imposed images hold little truth and can set the conditions for their resilience"

(Davis, 2018, p. 305). These strategies may range from assimilation with other racial

groups to separation from one's own racial group. Nia's words were echoed by the other

women in the group who choose to affix their own self-definition as Black. The

consensus of the group was the joy of their differences while simultaneously celebrating

their oneness as Black women.

Invisibility/Sense of Belonging

During the first sista circle, the women shared their thoughts and feelings on how they are

viewed on campus. The consensus was not being seen and valued as a scholar mainly in the

classroom setting. In one of my opening questions, I asked the group to share how they felt being

a Black woman on a PWI campus. Nova Love led the discussion expressing that she "felt out of

place" and had thoughts that she did not belong. Rose echoed her sentiments by adding the

metaphor that she was the "elephant in the room." She also added that in the classroom "things

are catered to the White people on campus." As a nursing student, Rose is very much in the

minority when looking at the racial makeup of the program. Many Black women have a

connectedness of their sense of belonging before coming to college through strong circles of

women in their lives. These groups (i.e., friends, family, church groups) affirm their identities

and help to provide the lens which are used to navigate higher education (Porter and Byrd, 2021).

Nia then added another perspective to the conversation.

> Nia: "Cause I feel like they're already expected to do great stuff. Like they're kind of counting out the Black people. So, like, when it came to, like, a test or something. We'll have to do better…like that's why my skin was like working against me sometimes."

Nia's statement was a powerful one as she cannot change the color of her skin, yet she feels that it is a deterrent for her. "White students and faculty frequently underestimate the power and presence of the overt and covert manifestations of racism on campus" (Tatum, 1997, p. 168). Nia finds herself pressured to outperform or stay on pace with her White peers. Monique Morris (2016) observes:

> "What can (and should) be developed and nurtured in the educational setting, but almost never is, is a deeper awareness of the numerous social factors—related to race, gender, sexuality, disability status, or other identities—that have the power to trigger Black girls and shape their interactions with people in schools." (p. 86).

It is clear from Nia's statement that she has not been affirmed in her existence at Southern College. She represents a smaller segment of Black women, and there may be others outside of this group who share her frustrations. Anna points out that she makes her clothing decisions based on her trying to fit into the campus culture. The surveillance of Black girls clothing begins in early education and follows us through puberty as our bodies begins to form the curves of a woman. Morris (2016) explicates dress codes as being sexist and biases toward young Black women that marginalizes them. Within places like the Black church, modesty may be encouraged as a mechanism for survival that "displaces unwanted attention from eyes that reduce them to their sexual function (Pierce, 2021, p.24). As these women have matriculated into Southern College, they have brought with them aspects of school dress codes and church

shaming that makes them a bit paranoid on campus. Shirley adds "it feels as though the measuring stick is different…when it comes to measuring us and our standards." The topic of assimilation was raised by Rose in response to Shirley.

> Rose: "You made such a great point. I often feel like I have to put on a show just to, like, assimilate to my classmates or fellow other White people on campus. You know, change my voice or how I act, how I normally do things."

> Shirley: "There's this mistrust of our own race because there is a reason why you feel as though you can't communicate even if it's just a simple, hey. It's the stone-cold looks. It's the walking past. Like, who are you to come to me?

As the conversation continued, Nova Love expressed her feelings about being judged when she speaks. The other participants were attentive to her story and responding in agreement by nodding their heads in the affirmative.

> Nova Love: "Because if it's not the way I talk…I'm sorry I can't pronounce certain words correctly. This is just how I say it…Now, I have to think about what I'm going to say and how to say it correctly without them judging me."

> Shirley: "I can definitely relate so much with the speech, the, the way our vernacular is supposed to be. It just, it gets me sometimes because, um, I was brought up in multiple different cultures because, you know, background being Jamaican and then also, you know, coming here at such a young age. So, I have a mixture of both and I speak very broken English.

> So, growing up because my mom knew how White people were, because my mom knew how, you know, things can be going to a predominantly White institution. She always pushed onto me. Hey, speak like this. And when I got here

before anyone knew my background, it was an assumption of, oh, you know, you

know, you sound White or you sound, you know, way too proper to be from

Jamaica. So, it really got to me because I can't truly speak, like how I normally

speak or be as comfortable as I want to. I feel like I'm stiff and stuck up

sometimes as well."

Shardé Davis (2018) emphasized communication strategies that Black women exercise resistance

to the "historical (mis)perceptions" surrounding their way of speaking and mannerisms (p. 305).

Some women in her study practiced confident speaking as a way of proving their belonging in

the same manner as Nova Love. Davis (2018) relates this practice in classrooms to the SBW

archetype as students affirm their presence "where racial diversity [is] lacking and their racial

"inferiority" [is] salient" (p. 305). When she recalled her experiences, she spoke with great

passion about being judge and her aim to "prove them wrong". Shirley's reaction had been

instilled in her home, yet she felt as if she was masquerading her true personality. I chimed in

with my own account at Southern College during a speaking engagement for a prestigious event:

Me: "I was speaking on behalf of all staff members. And so, I sat down, you

know, anytime we're going to be put in the spotlight, we want to make sure that

we are represented well.

I did my research. I wrote out my speech. I had other people read it and I think it

was a very good speech... At the end of the day, one of my colleagues came up to

me and said, "That was a great speech. Did you write it yourself? And I was kind

of taken aback because that told me a lot of things, and this is what makes it more

intriguing. Because even though my experience wasn't experienced as an

undergraduate, that little bit of microaggression is probably something that our

students are experiencing within the classroom. Where if we do perform well, or

if we speak in a certain way, then we're being viewed differently because of

stereotypical things."

The looks on the faces of the women was priceless as they could not believe the audacity of the words that had been uttered to me. I noted that perhaps Black women students may feel that as an administrator that I would not or should not have to deal with such microaggressions. Austin Brown (2018) described "being the first Black woman authority figure in a White person's world can be…intense" (p. 85). Although we have the same amount or even more degrees than our White colleagues, Black men, and other groups, we are often not viewed as intellectuals and our advanced degrees does not automatically grant is equity (hooks, 1989). Yet, we persevere seeking to negotiate educational spaces that have not fully accepted us in the fullness of who we are or seek to temper our Blackness. The women in this study are deserving of reassurance that they can belong at Southern College and are free to be themselves without judgement.

Controlling Images

Nova Love's words regarding the scrutiny of her speech catapulted my findings into the deeper topic of controlling images. As the ladies continued to share their experiences, there was a lot of interplay between controlling images and their sense of belonging. Many of the stories shared had undertones of surveillance that has been present on campus. One of the clear controlling images is the depiction of Black women as ghetto. Stemming from the ladies' conversation about speech, Nova Love shares her thoughts on the topic.

Nova Love: "I am not going to be labeled as ghetto. Yeah, I came from there, but

I'm way smarter than what you think. And so, that is, like, the one thing I feel like

they definitely target me about because it's the way I speak."

Some of the ladies expressed the disappointment of not being able to truly be themselves. They feel pressured to assimilate to the culture to avoid the labels. bell hooks (1989) focused on the topic of assimilation as being detrimental to the mental health of Black women because "at its very core it is dehumanizing" (p. 67).

> Rose: "I just feel so fake all of the time, especially when I started the nursing program, like, I felt fake coming home to my room every day. I was just like, dang, I just feel like I'm putting on a show every single day just to kind of make it…I can at least have at least a working relationship and not come out as too ghetto or, you know, too Black or whatever in class."

Anna brought the idea to the group that there were two types of Black women on the campus: one that assimilates to White culture and mainly associates with White women and the other group that is more accepting of Black culture and accepted by Black women. The other women agreed and added to the subject.

> Anna: "So, my experience with this group [the latter group] ...they've been accepting and I can have conversations with them and just like, stop and talk about hair and stuff like that. Just normal stuff that I like to engage in."

> Rose: "When I see, um, like, somebody come out and they are wearing a certain attire and everything…other White people look at them, but I'm used to it 'cause I'm like that's how people dress…"

Having other Black women who can relate your feelings and celebrate you as a Black woman is a special kind of affirmation that we need. "But so much of what it meant to be a Black girl among White girls, was to be a spectator and coconspirator in their construction of me as the other, as not quite like them" (Cooper, 2018, p. 50). The women were carving out the differences

they felt in being othered on a campus that made them feel constrained in their appearance and communication styles. The participants all had stories to share on the topic. However, Nia added that when some Black girls gather, the group may "naturally talk loud" but be seen as ghetto. She feels that the view is different for White women,

> Nia: "But, like, if a group of White girls are doing the same thing that we're doing, it's just like, oh, they're just having fun…some Black women don't really feel like doing certain things in public or even talking to others because they feel like they're going to get that ridicule or they're going to get that backlash of you're ghetto because you are doing this…So I feel like having a divide in cultural differences between two kinds does put a strain on how we can portray ourselves in a public eye."

In a study conducted by Roxanne Donovan (2011), she investigated the difference in the stereotypes between Black and White women by surveying 162 majority White students (67%). Her results yielded when emotions are paired with sensitivity, intelligence and educated, White women were view favorably as caring while Black women were viewed negatively as loud and tough. The unfavorable traits posed Black women as "hostile, domineering" in nature that appears "out of control and threatening" (p. 35). Tying back to Black women being seen as trying to castrate Black men and taking their place mentioned earlier, we are often penalized for being assertive and it is then characterized as unfeminine (Collins, 1990). On the contrary, many Black women feel that being "loud" or displaying an attitude is a defense mechanism. Having human emotions are not considered when we are under attack. Instead, we should be able to handle it in a "docile, diffident and selfless manner" (Bond et at., 2021, p. 301).

Some of the ladies continued to talk about the influences that made them more aware of how they should portray themselves as Black women. The patriarchal pressures of what a woman should do and how a lady should dress has been in heated debate as mentioned by Anna. Actress Mo'Nique expressed her concerns regarding the attire Black women were choosing to wear in public. She posed two questions on her Instagram video questioning our pride and presentation in public. Mo'Nique's comments received immediate backlash from Black women who felt as if she was placating to White patriarchal assumptions about beauty. I interjected an impromptu question asking the ladies if it was our job as Black women to police other Black women or empower them? The topic began with Rose explaining to the group her mom's expectations for her.

> Rose: "...they're going to think you're ghetto if you come out here with your bonnet on not looking right…Don't be like those White girls wearing a big ole t-shirt and some shorts to class…you better look presentable everytime you walk out of your room."
>
> Rose went on to contrast the difference between the way White women and Black women prepare their hair for the day.
>
> Rose: "And from the outside looking in, White women, they just have to wake up and go and they are good. And then I'm stressing every single day how my hair is going to look before this 8AM class so it won't be looking crazy. It may set me back. I got to stay up late at night making sure it looks right beforehand…so it kinda makes me think, well, I don't really blame, sis, for putting on a bonnet."
>
> Shirley: "I don't think it would be wise to tell everyone to be in one standard because that takes away from individual, like, how everyone is personality wise."

Rose's comparison of Black and White women affirms that the "measuring stick" that Shirley mentioned is different. Like in Rose's case, Black mothers try to prepare their daughters for a world that is not willing to accept them holistically. This is another form of silencing as we are expected to not only behave as White women stereotype but base our appearance upon them also. For some Black women live in a world where we have been both "spectator and coconspirator" of White women's construction of us (Cooper, 2018, p. 50). However, the women in this study view themselves as individuals who have the right to define themselves. The conversation shifted in defense of the more casual attire in public as Shirley pointed out that people do slip up and we all have moments of downtime. She moved to make a significant statement.

> Shirley: "But the best thing for us to do to build each other up is to not take those small moments where we messed up and embank on them and make them big. But encourage each other and grow with each other and be like, you know, I know it's hard and just keep pushing or compliment them on something else…Just build each other up in a way that you can find because we never know when someone is going through…Empower each other whenever we see someone in a lower state, yeah, be a blessing."

The women agreed with some sharing stories about times when they were not looking their best in public. They empathized with the women who Mo'Nique had scolded imploring that we be more understanding of one another. In this moment, I felt the need to examine myself as I have judged other Black women in this manner. This was an internal though that I noted but chose not to share with the group. I was proud to see that these Black queens had chosen love and not judgement. Instead of being held captive to patriarchal perceptions of what a woman should be,

this conversation further supports the need for Black women to define themselves. The Black

women who participated in these sista circles seem to acknowledge their need to empower and

support one another, but they lacked the space.

Safe Spaces

Shirley: "There's something in the air that makes it impossible for us to just

intermingle, regardless of what group you feel more connected with. Just to be

able to connect with each other across the line. So, it's hard to find a support

group because no one really wants to cross that border."

As we think about place, Southern Black women have incomparable nature that infects

our interactions with one another that may have negative connotations. In an interview, Bria

Lauren, a visual artist, emphasizes the impact of the Black home that can be a source of

intergenerational trauma and healing. Lauren expresses our mistrust with one another with our

emotions as a survival technique (Davis, 2021). During the first sista circle, Shirley made the

comment above regarding the inability to sometimes connect with one another, and it signaled to

me that this topic needed exploring deeper.

I dedicated time within the second sista circle to inquire about each participant's safe

spaces on campus. I also decided to explore their support groups that they have established

throughout their time at Southern College. Each of the women recognized their room on campus

as their safe space, but each had a different interpretation of who they felt created a safe space of

support for them. Anna talked about the group of friends who began their college journey with

her but had since departed for various reasons.

Anna: "And those people who were cheering me on, they weren't there anymore.

And it's kinda hard to find other outlets of support here because it feels like, I

wouldn't say everyone's against me, but in a way, nobody is rooting for me to

succeed."

Just as Black women enter historically White spaces, we will also choose to leave when

inclusion is not being served, a play on the lyrics to Nina Simone's "You've Got to Learn." This

can be difficult for the women who stay because we lose our safe space and must work to build

another.

Nia strongly expressed how she did not openly talk to anyone about her problems. She

felt that she gained this trait from her mother.

Nia: "I don't know why I choose to suffer in silence…I just feel like figuring out

my problems by myself and figuring out my own solution kinda helps me more

because I'm able to know the severity of it and be like cool."

"Sometimes we kinda have a hobby or something you want to pursue, but

sometimes, you feel like some people wouldn't really be interested."

Nia's suffering in silence can be equated to the SBW archetype. She is choosing to hold

all her thoughts and emotions internally and figure things out on her own. As she speaks,

I am reminded of a younger me that would have said the same and would have attributed

that trait to my mother and grandmothers. We are raised to be self-reliant and assertive

for our own protection from the penalties of gendered racism (Collins, 1990; Essed,

1991). Black women are beginning to recognize that these traits as unhealthy and actively

seek support.

Rose admitted that she needed "specific support" that was related to her faith. She

continued to discuss other areas as well. Her comments referred to Nia's concerns about not

having anyone who may relate to their unique hobbies and interests.

Rose: "Just speaking from me as a Black woman, I need other Black women

around me so I can have that support…Even with what Nia was saying with

things you like to do and hobbies, there is stuff where you wouldn't bring it up to

your friends…you don't really have someone there to push you with it because

that's not what they do which is fine. It's just having that basis of community

because once you have community, it's like, okay, I feel the support."

Shirley: "There are a lot of pseudo-supporters. There's a lot of people who say

you could do this going off basically what everybody else is saying…We all need

somebody. We need true people, not ones that are going to just say it just to sound

good."

Rose had been a part of a community during her upbringing that promoted and celebrated

Blackness in all its splendor. This community affords unique types of Black excellence in

intellectual spaces that not all Black people have experienced. Because of this, Rose and the

other women express their frustrations with friend groups who do not understand some of their

passions that may be viewed as White activities.

Shirley also mentions consistency which highlights what some in the group, me included,

feel is lacking in the supportive spaces in their lives. She continues to talk about people in her

life being "real" about their comments and following up to check on her. Shirley explained that

"consistent consistency" proves care. I introduced the term safe space to the group, asked if they

were all familiar with the term, and each woman affirmed. I then contributed with my own

thoughts on the matter.

Me: "As I have gotten older, my safe spaces have changed because I realize that I

can't give myself to everybody because some people have ulterior motives, but

like Shirley said, consistency is lacking and one of the things that I have learned

as I've grown older, and a lot of people say this: your circle gets smaller and

smaller."

Rose: "I feel like as I am growing, I'm realizing where I become the issue in my

certain relationships. I have a fearful attachment style where the root of it is

inconsistency in relationships, I have…I just think that it's so important to have

consistency because it establishes that trust you need."

When you a Black woman in a non-Black space, it can be hard to trust yourself. I recall Morgan

Jerkins (2018) in the chapter, "Black Girl Magic," is advised by her mentee "there is no limit to

overthinking when you are a young Black woman in an overwhelmingly White space" (p. 138).

We simply cannot do what *they* do, and we need to be able to trust our group. This can be hard

for some Black women because we can quickly move from celebrating one another to feeling the

need to complete with one another. I shared my own story about a person who I once considered

my best friend, and a statement she made about my lack of a master's degree at the time.

Me: "When something like that happens to you, you don't know how to react

because you realize I'm in a competition that I didn't know I was in. You realize

that you're willing to give your all and do all this for these people, and they're not

willing to provide the same for you. So, when I say I need a unique type of

support, I'd want that consistency. I'd value the fact that we all can rise together,

and it doesn't need to be a competition. I need safe spaces that when I talk to you,

when I genuinely talk to you, I know it's not going to go any further and you're

not going to tell my business to everybody, you know?

There are times that we outgrow the mindset of the people and other Black women who have traditionally been apart of our lives. College can create the opportunity to meet other Black women from various backgrounds that are diverse thinkers. Instead of utilizing those toxic traits that Bria Lauren mentioned, these women understand that we need each other to survive.

The ladies move the conversation to discuss their friendship groups and other trusting relationships with faculty or staff members on campus and family members. Towards the end of the sista circle, I asked the participants for additional comments which yielded significant information.

Rose: "I really admire that our campus has some strong influencers who implemented this on our campus which is [a Black male initiative]. I feel like that is a great program that brings our Black men closer together. I think it would be cool if they had a female version of that. Because by these talks alone have a platform opening up discussions to create a safe space for Black women to talk…Once you have that community, it helps with that college journey with grades and all that stuff…learning and getting into your Black womanhood. It's just a growing process."

Anna: "And to add onto what Rose was saying, I really feel the most comfortable when I'm surrounded by people like me."

The initiative created at Southern College mentioned by Rose targets the retention and sense of belonging. Her suggestion sparked conversation to create a similar initiative for Black women. The other women chimed in adding their desire for such a group as these women know of one another but do not really talk to one another intimately.

Nova Love: "Just by this group, we all can relate because you feel comfortable

enough to have these talks versus, I want to have these thoughts with somebody,

but you can't relate to what I'm dealing with because you have different ways."

Nia: "Even though, yes, we do go to a PWI. It doesn't have to be about the

WI…It doesn't have to be just like our counterparts. We can be able to do stuff

without being judged because we paid just like they did…I feel like a lot of the

Black women here, even Black men too, probably want to meet more of their

kind."

Shirley: "It could be a sista circle talk where you meet every now and then, and

it's just a group of Black women who do not only want to voice how they've been

feeling, just in case they don't have a safe space, but also learn how to handle

being at a PWI or just going anywhere in the world in general…This institution

really actually wants to see betterment and bring leaders higher because having

conversations like this can really cut off some bad seeds that are sown by society

and thoughts that may come from bad experiences. It can cut off those things

from growing into scars and issues later on that can choke a dream. There's a lot

of people who really feel like they can't do it because of the color of their skin

and that they're a woman."

The ladies' interest in creating their own version of a sista circle was a very inspirational point

for me as I felt that the research had produced its own conclusion. They recognize the need to

have a place of their own where they can debrief from the stressors of being on a PWI campus.

This space also allows them to engage in group knowledge and shared memory which helps to

give meaning to their daily experiences (Collier, 2017). The sista circles had provided them a

safe space with other Black women that they want to see continued at Southern College on a

larger scale.

Summary

  Collins (1990) stated "the differences among individual Black women produce different

patterns of experiential knowledge that in turn shape individual reactions to the core themes" (p.

30). This chapter epitomizes the experiential knowledge of five Black women at Southern

College. Each women brought their own stories that were connected to each of the core themes

of BFT: Self-Definition/Empowerment, Invisibility/Sense of Belonging, Controlling Images, and

Safe Spaces. Major findings of my study presented emerged from analysis of pre-interview

surveys and sista circles. This chapter began with a review of the research followed by a brief

description of each of the five participants. I included my own stories as I participated in the sista

circles and added my own thoughts about the research process. My next chapter offers

conclusions and implications of these findings and the recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 5

IF WE FOCUS ON OUR GOAL

Summary

The only people who can speak to the experiences of Black women are Black women. Lorde (1984) stated "what is important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood" (p. 40). The purpose of this qualitative sista circle study was to expand upon the research findings and experiences of five Black women who attended a PWI in the South and its connection to the core themes of BFT. Through this study, I answer my research question: How do the educational experiences of Black females at a Southern predominantly White institution connect to the core themes of Black Feminist Thought? These findings for the study can provide insight for curriculum theorists, college administrators, faculty, and staff to provide support and inclusive practices for Black women on their campus and within the academy.

The experiences of the young women who participated in this research were connected to the core themes of BFT: Invisibility/Sense of Belonging, Controlling Images, and Self-Definition/Empowerment/Safe Spaces. These themes contribute to amplifying the voices of Black women on Southern PWI campuses.

Discussion of Findings
Invisibility/Sense of Belonging

The women in this study share experiences like the women described in the literature in chapter two. In the Hannon, Woodside, Pollard and Roman (2016) study, these women felt like they were always having to prove themselves within the academic and social environments which challenged their sense of belonging. The participants talked about feelings of invisibility even when they were trying to be helpful to other students in the classroom. This relates to

Blosser's (2020) study where it was assumed that because the students were Black that they would not be successful in mathematics, but Shirley added nursing study groups to the conversation. They experienced microaggressions and often microinsults from their peers. Never in any of these stories did the women explain that they told anyone, whether faculty, staff or administration, about their frustrations but chose to suffer in silence. An overarching comment from Nia provided the feeling that her skin was always working against her. Perhaps, this may be a reason that Black women choose to leave Southern College or ignore the issues. This supports the act of writing off these microaggressions and choosing to devote their time and energy into proving their naysayers wrong (Blosser, 2020). However, these women must know that they must tap into the power of resistance and to "[disallow] dominant, mainstream interpretations of who we are to overshadow, minimize or discredit our truths" (Patterson et al., 2016, p. 58). Until they speak up and speak out against these aggressors, they will continue to feel frustrated and unheard.

Like the Neal-Jackson (2020) study, these women feel the pressure of having to represent the entire Black population when in academic settings because they are in the minority. Two of the participants were from the Caribbean, like Sarah Stewart in the Haynes, Stewart, and Allen study. Neither of the women recognized microaggressions in secondary school but shared their experiences since attending Southern College. This can be more prevalent in some majors than others. Two of our participants were Nursing majors which are dominated by White female students and two others have since changed their majors. I point this out since these women talked about feelings of being surveyed and being othered.

The SBW archetype entered the conversation as the women expressed their frustrations with being judged on their speech. While one of the participants talked about the criticisms that

she received for her pronunciation of words, another student discussed the feedback she received about her surprisingly well-spoken English. Like the women in the Hannon, Woodside, Pollard and Roman (2016) study, the women wanted to uphold their images by proving others wrong and outperforming or matching the performance of their peers. Sometimes, the drive to overperform produces stressors that weigh on our mental and physical health. In a study conducted by Shahid, Nelson and Cardemil (2018), the trio links campus racial tension as being a major contributor to stress among Black women students. Collins' foci on the mammy and matriarch images ties back to the SBW archetype which has long been a burden for so many Black women. Many university systems have spent the past two years enacting ways to improve the mental well-being of the student population. Addressing the gendered racism on the campuses would be a good starting point. These women must feel as if they belong on these campuses as much more than numbers. As I shared my own story, we gained a mutual understanding that such microaggressions happen at various levels in our lives, but it is our choice to not allow it to define or deter us through resistance.

Controlling Images

In the Neal-Jackson study, the participants were very aware that they were being surveyed daily and were also able to distinguish their struggles from their Black men counterparts. The women in this study did not mention their Black male counterparts but did focus on how Black women are viewed on campus. Arguments can be made for the hypervisibility these women feel in White spaces as well. The women in Blosser's study (2020) felt their appearance also made them noticeable to the other students like they were constantly on display. My participants were more conscious of their appearance, and it toned down to blend into the campus culture.

It is not as if these women are not aware that our Black curvy bodies have been the headlines in the top story of national news. In BFT, Collins addresses this stereotype in her description of the jezebel. We must fight daily to combat controlling images and perceptions that attempt to "break us down, suppress our capacities for self-knowing and self-love, and prevent us from deepening our interactions with others" (Patterson et al., 2016, p. 70). Claudia Rankin (2014) reserves a story about tennis star, Serena Williams, and the media and other players depiction of her as an angry Black woman, and sometimes worse, when she chose to defend herself against unfair officiating in several tennis matches. Because she did not respond in a manner that was deemed appropriate, her actions were immediately tied to her Compton upbringing. Did Serena not have a right to defend herself or should she just "shut up and played?" Recently, a Twitter post from a Black female assistant women's basketball coach, Sydney Carter, at a prominent southern college sparked a social media uproar about her attire and what is considered professional. The assistant coach fired back at her critics saying that some people were intimidated by Black women in senior positions in sports. Carter added, "When you see a Black woman who is actually confident and embracing herself, I think that that's very intimidating" (Syed, 2022, para. 5). Clothing can serve as an outward expression of personality, culture, and preference, so having to suppress such expression detracts from the essence of who we are. There is a need to challenge respectability politics and promote critical conversations in educational spaces exposing the media's stereotypical portrayal of Black women (Jeffries & Jeffries, 2015). These images become the reference tools for majoritarian stories to continue the narrative of body, voice, and image shaming.

Safe Space and Self-Definition/Empowerment

Jerkins (2018) speaks of supportive spaces within the Black community such as the Black church, Black cookout, or Black anything that was outside the "wider White world" where we

felt totally Black (p. 173). The creation of a safe space for the Black women of Southern College to gather and have a place to share and be themselves. The Hannon et al. (2016) study parallels the creation of such a space that reclaims the freedom of expression that Black women tuck away when in the company of others. All the women in my study were comfortable in their own home space, their dorm room, but were not as sure of themselves when outside of that space. They felt that they were lacking a space that was dedicated to them. Mohanty (1989) and Goins (2011), although decades apart, affirm that these spaces are necessary for Black women to reclaim their voices and share academic, social, and spiritual knowledge.

Black women are both similar and different as proven by the participants in this study, and counter spaces offer us a place to explore our complexities among our intersecting and outsider identities (Patterson et al., 2016). The women in the study expressed their inability to connect with their friend group at times because they did not understand some of their interests. Bringing a diverse group of Black women together in an intentional space would assist these women in expanding themselves beyond their traditional circles. Participants also chose suppression over resistance when dealing with microaggressions and microinsults. Safe spaces would encourage them to challenge the status quo by equipping them with ways to "resist, respond and counteract" various forms of oppression (Croom, Beatty, Acker & Butler, 2017, p. 219).

Where Do We Go from Here?
Higher Education
The findings in this study affirms that Black women on Southern College's campus share the experiences of other Black women on PWI campuses. The participants recognize their need to have a space that uniquely belongs to them. As social activists begin to advocate for equity on college campuses, now is the time to break the traditions of asking BIPOC to assimilate to the

cultural norm. College administrators should not be content with having the resources at their fingertips and choosing to ignore the injustices that are happening everyday (Kendall, 2020). They can no longer expect to count our bodies while disregarding that our needs differ from the White patriarchal framework for education.

Particularly for Southern College and other PWIs, participants suggested the creation of a sista circle as a safe space where Black women would periodically meet throughout the semester. Some participants mentioned they were growing into their Black womanhood. Formulating a sista circle would be the beginning of that journey as the Black women would be openly sharing their experiences in navigating college and life. This safe space would be attractive to potential Black women students that are looking to continuing bonding or to begin building relationships with other Black women. Throughout the sista circle process, the women found themselves in agreement with one another but also learning from one another. Many of the relationships that they had with one another were surface level before the two encounters for the research study. The space could be a conference room on campus away from high traffic areas. Having a faculty or staff member who identifies as a Black woman facilitate and participate in the meetings would help establish the baseline until the students are ready to lead the circles on their own.

For Student Affairs practitioners, there may be a need to hold a few sista circles to identify the needs of your campus. I do not think that the sista circles are a one-size-fit-all model. There may be a need for deeper exploration of where your campus stands with the inclusion of Black women. Some campuses may need to take a deeper look at the course offerings and how to include Black women in coursework, especially in liberal arts and education. I feel this model would also be beneficial to HBCU and all-women's colleges as well.

Methodology

The research of this study indicates that there is more discussion that has yet to be explored. The study was limited to upperclassmen students ranging from sophomore to senior assuming that this demographic would be more experienced on the campus of Southern College. I feel that the addition of first-year students would add more depth to the research since they are seeing the campus from a fresh perspective. I would also want to explore more deeply the dating culture on Southern PWI campuses in a sista circle setting. One of the participants did mention dating, but it did not become a topic of conversation as in the sista circle methodology conversations are encouraged to form organically. Love relationships, or the lack thereof, in combination with the three types of Black women on the campus would add value to the experiences of the Black women undergraduates. Meeting face-to-face would be more effective in the future because it would add more to conversation and environment. I would also include other women of color in the future because I had women directly express interest. Adding other women of color would add additional layers that also need to be explored on PWI campuses.

To strength sista circle methodology, I would recommend maintaining smaller, intimate groups of 5-7 participants. This will allow for the conversation to be better focused, and participants may not feel as overwhelmed in this setting. I would also recommend this method whenever Black women and their lived experiences are studied because it provides a support system and platform of empowerment.

I would also venture to say that now is the time to capture the thoughts and feelings of Black women during this current political climate as our qualifications and experiences are being questioned on national stages. I even think about the young ladies who participated in this study and wonder if their responses would be the same or different after the confirmation of Supreme

Court Justice Katanji Brown Jackson. I know that many of the core themes of BFT was triggered throughout the past weeks of the confirmation hearing.

Curriculum Studies, Help the Sistas Out!

Early in my study, I outlined my journey to BFT and how I found it nestled within the feminist literature. Curriculum Studies is a field that is charged with equipping educators with knowledge that takes a critical look at the institution of education in the U.S. This field must take a deeper look to "identify an intellectual tradition marked by Black female subjectivity" (Edwards, Baszile & Guillory, 2016, p. 707). Patricia Hill Collins and BFT opened my world to other Black women who modernize BFT and continue to place us at the center of their work. The methodology, sista circle, has also been a contribution to how Black women are researched and should be considered in contrast to traditional methods. Sista circles are culturally relevant support groups where experiential knowledge and narrating is encouraged (Andrews, Brown, Castro & Id-Deen, 2019).

While Black feminist practices have evolved over time, many of the foundational truths have remained the same. There is much more work to be done and educating others who we are as a socially constructed race and gender. The field must change and bring the stories of Black women to the forefront (Guillory, 2019). Yes, we author those stories, but the Curriculum Studies needs to provide the platform for those stories to be shared with the academy. Having more support agents who understand how racism, sexism and intersectionality work will only strengthen the field (Croom, Beatty, Acker & Butler, 2017). In the spirit of "helping the sistas out," Curriculum Studies owes Black women the dedication and recognition of exploring us as intellectuals and centering our knowledge as major contributors to the field.

Conclusion

This study centered the experiences of Black women on a PWI campus in the South. The sista circles were focused on the core themes of Black Feminist Thought: Self-Definition/Empowerment, Safe Space, Controlling Images, Invisibility/Sense of Belonging. Black women want a place where they feel safe and can share with one another.

The two sista circles gave them a space to talk and share with other Black women their struggles and triumphs while attending Southern College. The women were supportive of one another and often agreed on many of the topics. The authenticity of their stories was clear and sparked others to share their own stories. At the conclusion of the sista circles, every one of the participants talked about how rare it was to have a space that was just for them. The diversity of their backgrounds allowed each woman to add their own voice to conversation. The women enjoyed the thought of knowing that they were not alone in thoughts and feelings. I also enjoyed participating in the sista circles as it allowed me to share my own experiences that were common to the group. As a participant, I learned a great deal from the women that helped me to connect more deeply with them. The suggestion for continued sista circles has already been passed along to the administration. There have been talks regarding pilot sista circles in the upcoming semester which has been exciting for the group because they are able to immediately see the benefits of participation in research studies.

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APPENDIX A

IT'S A DIFFERENT WORLD: THE EXPERIENCES OF BLACK WOMEN
AT A SOUTHERN PREDOMINANTLY WHITE UNIVERSITY

A. CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS

B. PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

A DIFFERENT WORLD: THE EXPERIENCES OF BLACK WOMEN AT A SOUTHERN PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION

Consent to take part in research

- I_____ voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.

- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

- I understand that participation involves sharing my lived experiences as a Black woman at my current university in both group and individual settings.

- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.

- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.

- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.

- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.

- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the researcher's dissertation, conference presentation, published papers etc.

- I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm they may have to report this to the relevant authorities - they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.

- I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained in within the possession of the researcher at her home until the dissertation committee confirms the results of the researcher's dissertation.

- I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for two years from the date of the successful completion of the dissertation requirements.

- I understand that under freedom of information legalization I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.

- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Signature of research participant

_____   _____

Signature of the Participant   Date

Signature of researcher

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study.

_____   _____

Signature of Researcher   Date

C. PARTICIPANT SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Personal Email
2. What is your current classification? (Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, Senior)
3. What is your current major/academic focus?
4. What is your residential status? (Residential, Commuter)
5. What is your residency status? (Georgia resident, Out-of-State resident, International Student)
6. What is your racial identity? (Black, African-American, Multi-racial, I do not identify with any race)
7. What is your gender identification? (Female, Male, Non-Binary)
8. What type of area did you grow up in? (Rural, Metropolitan, Suburban) *Multiple selection option*
9. What was the make-up of your high school? (Majority White, Majority Black, Majority Another Race, Evenly-Mixed)
10. Are you a first-generation college student? *Neither of your parents did not graduate from college* (Yes, No, Unsure)
11. What are your current plans after graduation? (Entering the workforce, Attending graduate school, Both, Unsure)
12. Before college, did you have a teacher of color? (Yes, No)
13. Have you had any teachers of color while attending college? (Yes, No)
14. If yes to the previous question, what was the ethnicity of your professor(s)? (Black, Asian/Pacific Islander, African, Hispanic)

Ranked Question

16.   Rank order the following factors which may have influenced your decision to attend college: peers going to college, parents' goals for me, influential teachers' who supported me, teachers who didn't think I could do it/desire to prove them wrong, coaches, boyfriend/girlfriend/partner, life goals (e.g., always wanted to be a doctor)

Scaled Questions (Lowest 1 - 5 Highest)
17.   What effect did your high school experience have on your decision to attend college?
18.   How prepared were you for college?

D. SISTER CIRCLE QUESTIONS

Ice Breaker and Opening Questions:
1. What artists are currently on your playlist rotation? What do you like about them?
2. What is your favorite movie and/or tv show? What attracted you to that move/show?
3. Have you ever had a conversation with any of the women in this room?

Empowerment:
1. What is Black Girl Magic?
2. Describe your upbringing. What did your household look like?
3. How would you define yourself as a Black woman?
4. Do you feel, as a Black woman, you are visible on this campus? If yes, how so? If not, in what ways are you being excluded?
5. Do you feel, as a Black woman, you are included in the academic content of the courses being offered on this campus? If yes, how so? If not, in what ways are you being excluded?
6. What motivates you to continue your education at this institution?

The Institution:
1. Why did you decide to attend Southern College?
2. How do you feel being a Black woman on a predominately White campus?
3. Do you feel that your experiences on this campus differs from other groups? Why or why not?
4. How do you think you are viewed on this campus?
5. What are your experiences within the classroom?
6. Why do you choose to stay at this institution?
7. What are some ways that this institution has progressed since you have been attending?

Support:
1. What has been your experience of being in community and in conversation with other Black women?
2. Where are the safe spaces for you on campus?
3. Do you feel Black women need a unique type of support? Explain why.
4. Do you feel supported by the administration or others? Why or why not? Is this individual support or as a collective group? Provide examples.
5. Do you feel supported by other Black women on this campus? Tell me more about your experiences.
6. What is the social life like for Black women here?
7. Who is the most influential person in your life right now?
8. Is there anything else you would like to share?