I, Ciera Graham, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology.

It is entitled:
Black Spaces at White Institutions: How do Black Students Perceive and Utilize Black Student Organizations at Rural and Urban Predominately White Campuses?

Student’s name: Ciera Graham

This work and its defense approved by:

Committee chair: Anuila Linders, Ph.D.

Committee member: Jennifer Malat, Ph.D.

Committee member: Ervin Matthew, Ph.D.

Committee member: Earl Wright, Ph.D.
BLACK SPACES AT WHITE INSTITUTIONS: HOW BLACK STUDENTS PERCEIVE AND UTILIZE BLACK STUDENT CAMPUS ORGANIZATIONS AT URBAN AND RURAL PREDOMINATELY WHITE CAMPUSES

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Ciera Graham
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Dissertation Committee:
Dr. Annulla Linders, Department of Sociology (Chair)
Dr. Jennifer Malat, Department of Sociology
Dr. Ervin (Maliq) Matthew, Department of Sociology
Dr. Earl Wright II, Department of Africana Studies
ABSTRACT

Extant research on black students at white colleges has often examined how black students experience several academic and social challenges, but few studies examine how black students’ exert agency to successfully navigate their college environment, and resist or oppose the racial hostility they experience in predominately white spaces. Black student campus organizations were born out of the black campus movement in the 1960s in response to racist institutional practices in higher education. These organizations were established to create safe spaces that shielded students from racial inequality in predominately white spaces, as well as providing opportunities for students to celebrate black culture. Today, given the change in the racial landscape, and the use of colorblindness rhetoric, it is important to understand what role, if any, these organizations have in operating as a site of resistance for a diverse group of black students. In-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with 40 black students at one rural and one urban institution. The primary goal of the study was to understand how one’s social identity (gender, social class and sexuality) and the physical location of the campus environment impact how students perceive and utilize black student campus organizations. Results show that both one’s social identity, and physical location play a role in their experiences, and how they perceive and utilize these organizations. These organizations are instrumental for students for several reasons 1) providing a safe space to escape feelings of marginality ;2) preserving black cultural traditions and fostering a sense of comfort and support; and 3) providing students leadership, mentorship and outreach opportunities. Limitations and directions for future research are presented.
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This study was driven by a culmination of my personal and academic experiences at two geographically disparate, predominately white colleges, variant in both size and regional location. Both of these institutions presented both similar and different challenges that impacted my personal, social, and academic adjustment. As a black female and first generation college student, I felt compelled to explore how these social identities played a significant role in the challenges I encountered. I had a personal stake in my research project, and wanted to provide a space for other similar situated students to speak candidly about their experiences without judgment or fear.

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When recounting a series of personal misfortunes, and triumphs and victory, I am reminded of a quote by Maya Angelou, “You may encounter many defeats, but you must not be defeated. In fact, it may be necessary to encounter the defeats, so you can know who you are, what you can rise from, and how you can still come out of it.” As a young PhD student, I have come to
understand that defeat is common, but I am grateful for my own strength and endurance that has allowed me to see the completion of a PhD as surmountable.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Sociological perspectives on race and racial inequality often reflect larger shifts in our socio-political climate. America’s end of Jim Crow segregation has led to the opening up of opportunities for African Americans at all levels (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Thernstrom, 2012). One consequence of these developments is the emergence of the widespread societal belief, especially among whites, that we are now living in a color-blind or post racial society, and that race and skin color have no significance and no longer shape an individual’s life chances (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Wilson, 2006). In spite of society’s preoccupation with colorblindness rhetoric, a range of scholarship demonstrates that racism still persists even in spite of formal desegregation. These contemporary perspectives can largely be classified into two camps: 1) cultural racism-societal beliefs or assumptions about the inferiority of black culture (Ben-Eliezer, 2004; Fordham & Ogbo, 1986; Powell, 2000), and 2) institutional discrimination-contemporary practices of overt or covert discrimination that continue to operate in social institutions that create socio-economic disadvantages for blacks (Massey & Denton, 1993; Omi & Winant, 1994; Western, 2001; Wilson, 1978; 1996).

While these theories challenge the common assumption of a colorblind society, they obscure how people of color exert agency to challenge social inequality (Baez, 2000). Scholars who study resistance indicate that inequality and resistance often occur in concert with each other, and that oppressed groups develop and employ resistance strategies to survive, oppose and resist systemic oppression (Baez, 2000; Collins, 2008, Delgado, 2012; Lewis & McKissic, 2010). An examination of acts of resistance provides sociologists with critical insights into how power
is reconstructed and renegotiated in society among privileged and disenfranchised populations (Foucault, 1990; Baez, 2000; Collins, 2008).

Specifically for African Americans resistance embodies multiple forms, such as hip hop or rap music, the use of Ebonics, and social movements such as the civil rights movement or the black campus movement (Asbridge, Wortley, 2009; Lawson & Martinez, 1997; Green & Smart, 1997; Tanner, Rogers, Rogers and Anderson, 2012).

While sociologists have devoted attention to examining the relationship between race and resistance, less is known about how these strategies of resistance are impacted and complicated by people’s social location or social identity. Given the racial and cultural pluralism of the United States, simple racial dichotomies no longer provide a comprehensive understanding of the heterogeneity of the black experience (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Collins, 2008). While several scholars draw on intersectional approaches, there is a still a preponderance of sociological research that overstates the universality and homogeneity of the black experience. That is, many sociological studies (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Carter, 2005; Feagin & Sikes, 1994; Wilson, 1990) that explore the resistance strategies of African Americans fail to consider how other social identities such as gender, class, and sexual orientation contribute to the diversification of black experiences with racism and inequality, and thus lead to different opportunities for strategies of resistance to develop (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins, 2008; McCall, 2005).

This study seeks to account for these aforementioned limitations by contributing a more comprehensive understanding of the heterogeneity of the black experience, as well as how opportunities for resistance are impacted by one’s social identity and social location. Specifically, I examine the relationship between racial inequality, intersectionality and resistance at predominately white campuses and institutions. Today, college campuses often represent a
small microcosm of society, and thus many of the larger racial, gender, and socio-economic inequalities present in society also manifest on predominately white campuses (Foster, 2003; Patton, 2006; Lewis & McKissic, 2010). And yet, college campuses are also social laboratories of sorts, where individuals as well as groups can experiment with cultural practices and social networks. Many African American students at predominately white schools find themselves in a context that is often racially, socially, and culturally different from and opposed to their identity (Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 2014; Feagin & Sikes, 1995; Tatum, 1997). While many studies have examined the prevalence of racism and how predominately white institutions engender feelings of isolation and marginality for some black students, less is known about how black students exert agency in challenging or contesting racial and social inequality on campus, and in the larger society.

Black student campus organizations can be conceptualized as a site and tool for resistance that aid students in combating racial and social inequality, as well as an avenue for facilitating their sense of belonging to the black campus community (Lewis & McKissic, 2010; Patton, 2006). Black student organizations are defined as collegiate clubs and organizations that serve to meet the academic, personal, social, and educational needs of African American students (Foster, 2003; Lewis & McKissic, 2010). Many of these organizations were developed during the black campus movement in the 1960s in reaction to persistent racial inequalities and in order to create counter-spaces that recognize the significance of African American culture (Foster, 2003; Tily, 2004; Patton, 2006). Given this history, it is still important to investigate whether or not these organizations are still perceived as spaces and opportunities for resistance in light of the changing racial landscape and end of formal segregation (Lewis & McKissic, 2010).
This study assumes that opportunities for resistance are impacted not only by one’s social identity (race, class, gender, sexuality) but also by physical location. To date, many studies view predominately white campuses as homogenous, and do not recognize the diversity among them (Woldoff, Wiggins & Washington, 2011). This study addresses this limitation by including two different predominately white institutions, one urban and one rural. Urban institutions are often located in racially diverse cities, while rural colleges are centered in remote, racially homogenous locations where students typically lack diverse social networks and connections to family (Woldoff, Wiggins & Washington, 2011). Given these differences between campus types, we would not only expect that these institutions create different challenges for black students, but each institution also exposes and limits them to different avenues and opportunities for resistance. Examining narratives from a diverse group of black students who are more or less involved in black student organizations allows for a more a holistic understanding of the heterogeneity of the black college experience, as well as how differently situated students interpret and respond to perceived feelings of marginalization.

In an effort to understand the extent to which students may interpret black student organizations as a space for resistance, this study addresses the following primary research question: How do black students, perceive and utilize black student campus organizations at a rural and urban predominately white college? This study also addresses a series of more specific, secondary questions that are integral to understanding the experiences of black students such as:

1) How do black students at rural and urban institutions conceptualize their college experience at predominately white institutions and what challenges do they encounter?
2) What motivates students at rural and urban institutions to remain involved, minimally involved or uninvolved in the black student organizations?

3) How do black student’s other social statuses such as gender, social class, and sexuality influence how they perceive and utilize black student organizations at rural and urban campuses?
CHAPTER II: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The concept of resistance has a long history in the social science literature, as it has added to our debate on agency vs. structure, and provided insights into how power is (re) articulated (Hynes, 2013). The term resistance has no generally agreed upon definition, but the one that most closely corresponds with my own usage of the concept is provided by Hollander and Einhower (2004:538); according to them, resistance involves both 1) action-some verbal, cognitive, or physical behavior initiated by an actor, and 2) opposition-the act of opposing someone or something else. Within the sociological literature on resistance, two dominant modes of analysis on resistance exist: 1) macro political, and 2) micro political. Macro political forms of resistance refers to highly visible, collective struggles against structures of power, while micro political forms refers to less visible and less salient, smaller scale dynamics of resistance that accompany everyday life (Hynes 2013: 562). Given these two dominant modes of analysis, resistance is diverse, varied and can take place on multiple levels and have different degrees of salience and magnitude.

This section provides an explanation of my primary theoretical framework, resistance. It begins with providing an account of the different forms of resistance that I have identified and categorized according to previous literature: 1) discourse and/or cultural resistance, 2) identity based resistance, 3) placed based resistance, and 4) social movement resistance. Thereafter, I provide an analysis of how social identities such as gender, class and sexuality shape group experiences and impact opportunities for resistance.

To anticipate the discussion below, discourse or cultural forms of resistance refers to linguistic forms of cultural expression such as art, music, poetry or oppositional rhetorical strategies. Identity based forms of resistance are defined as counter frames or counter racial
identities that challenge or oppose hegemonic identities and/or attitudes. Place-based resistance refers to physical spaces which serve as counter spaces for organizing social movements, public resistance, community organizing, and building racial solidarity. Lastly, social movement resistance involves the active opposition of the prevailing social and racial order by employing violent and/or nonviolent methods of protest.

2.1 Discourse Resistance

According to Cantwell (1992) and Weaver (2010) the significance of discourse resistance is rooted in a long history of restrictions placed on linguistic and artistic forms of self-expression of black Americans. Currently the most prominent form of discourse or cultural resistance to racial inequality is probably rap or hip-hop music. Rose (1994, 2008) argues that political gangsta rap is a form of opposition through rappers vocal critique of hegemonic structures, their articulation of inner city life, and their rejection of conventional linguistic styles (Rose, 1994, 2008; Nielson, 2011). Lawson and Martinez (1997) focus on the skepticism of law enforcement and white institutions that is expressed in rap music, and show that this skepticism is rooted in black men’s experiences with abusive law enforcement, and the over-surveillance of black communities.

According to Lawson & Martinez (1997), rap music provides a space for African American men to contest their marginal position; they do so, by assuming a place of superiority in their lyrics, and expressing a preference for their own culture. This allows them to exert a distinct form of agency that is often denied to them by larger society (Lundy, 2003). Through rap and hip-hop music, blacks have chosen to be a subject in the creation and the telling of their personal narrative rather than an object in the European experience (Lundy, 2003).
In the same way, while the use of black Vernacular or Ebonics as a resistance strategy is relatively understudied, Ebonics has been utilized as a form of resistance and cultural affirmation. Historically, Ebonics has operated as an essential form of resistance, because it redefines the rules of intelligibility set up by the dominant language, and aims to express an authentically black identity (Green & Smart, 1997). While those who use Ebonics are often dismissed as being intellectually inept or having a poor mastery of Standard English, the language nonetheless operates as a standardized form of communication for inner city youth who use it to express defiance and resistance (Green & Smart, 1997). Discourse or cultural forms of resistance often involve performative acts that celebrate black culture, while also providing an opportunity to challenge European culture and racist stereotypes.

2.2 Identity based Resistance

Sociologists have investigated the intricacies of identity formation through race relations between minority and dominant groups; studies that investigate how minority groups respond to the dominant identity or culture have identified three major identity trajectories or strategies: assimilationist, biculturalist or rejectionist (Atkinson, Morten & Sue, 1993). The majority of this work purports that minority groups have an option to adopt a dominant cultural identity, integrate aspects of the dominate culture into their own identity, or reject or abandon the dominant culture and/or identity as a means to retain their own racial or ethnic identity (Cross, 1970; Atkinson, Morten & Sue, 1993). Specifically while the rejectionist strategy accounts for how minorities reject a dominant white identity, less is known about how their own racial or ethnic background can serve as a counter-identity in which racist ideologies are challenged and contested. Several scholars have developed various typologies of identities that serve as acts of resistance and aid in preserving the cultural heritage of African Americans.
One prominent type of black identity is Afrocentricity; Afrocentricity recognizes the role that racial oppression played in the cultural obliteration and spiritual disassociation of African Americans during slavery (Asante, 2007; Cummings & Roy, 2002; Schiele, 1996). Afrocentric identities represent a group-based affiliation that attempts to reconstruct and restore the cultural, social, economic, political, and spiritual well-being of African American people, specifically with the goal of reaffirming, and restoring an authentic African culture and identity (Asante, 2007; Collins, 2008). Common practices that underlie Afrocentricity include changing European names to African names, wearing traditional African clothing in public spaces, as well as celebrating cultural events such as Kwanzaa (Asante, 2007; Schiele, 1996). The potentiality for resistance within the Afrocentric identity lies in its ability to foster a collective consciousness, build group solidarity, and liberate adherents from white control and domination by retaining a separate cultural identity (Asante, 2007). Similarly, Feagin (2010) emphasizes that while the dominant white racial frame maintains white privilege and dominance vis-à-vis people of color, blacks develop counter-identities that not only highlight the importance of African culture, but also assist blacks in understanding and dealing with white racism. Specifically, these cultural identity frames assert the positive aspects of black humanity with the sole goal of counteracting negative framing and stereotypes of blacks held by the dominant society (Feagin, 2010).

Several other scholars have demonstrated how minority cultural identities can operate as a mechanism for educational and economic disadvantage (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986) while other sociologists have investigated how culture can be used as an instrument for resistance and opposition (Carter, 2005; Willis, 1981). Prudence Carter (2005) takes issues with Fordham’s and Ogbu’s (1986) “acting white” hypothesis in her qualitative study of low-income African American students. Unlike Fordham and Ogbu, Carter (2005) argues that the notion of “acting
white” is not predicated or associated with academic achievement. Instead black students’ disinclination to act white is centered on maintaining their cultural identity, and hence is not about embracing or rejecting the dominant standards of academic achievement (p. 53). Carter (2005) investigates the complexities of how black students attempt to maintain their cultural identity through noncompliance in adopting dominant behaviors, and cultural practices. This is also referred to as “cultural straddling”, a strategic process that allows them to transverse the culturally disparate worlds of black and white, which enables them to achieve academically, while also retaining and privileging their racial or ethnic identity or pride. Several other sociologists have also demonstrated how the preservation of a black cultural identity can be viewed as an oppositional act, and also can serve as a form of non-dominant cultural capital; such findings challenge our conventional understanding that cultural capital only encompasses the identity and practices of dominant and privileged social groups (Banks, 2010; Carter, 2003; Lundy, 2005).

2. 3 Place Based Resistance

Studies’ addressing place-based resistance provides a way for sociologists to examine how blacks create physical spaces that are culturally and racially opposed to white society. Manuel Castell (1997) and Lewis and McKissic (2010) show that these physical spaces act as trenches of resistance in that they operate on principles different from, or even opposed to, those permeating the institutions of the larger society. Solórzano, Ceja and Yosso (2000) posit that counter-spaces serve as sites where deficient notions of people of color can be challenged, and where a positive racial climate can be maintained. Past literature shows that counter spaces can either be harbored within or outside of white institutions; historically, segregationist practices barred blacks from participating in predominately white educational, religious, and other public institutions which
led to the impetus for the establishment of black spaces like black cultural centers, black barber shops, and black colleges which were deemed to be the alternatives to predominately white spaces (Morris, 1984; Lewis & McKissic, 2010).

The most significant and enduring counter space created by blacks is the black church; the black church reached its prominence during the civil rights movement (Morris, 1984). Aldon Morris (1984) also recognizes the black church as a multi-purpose institution that provided the movement with an organized critical mass, a leadership of clergymen, and a safe meeting place, insulated from white control, where the black masses collectively planned tactics and devised strategies to combat racism. In the same way, during the civil rights movement, freedom schools, independent of state control, emerged as a site of resistance where African Americans could counteract a system that deprived them of intellectual freedom (Morris, 1984; Sturkey, 2010).

In many ways, black student campus organizations can be conceptualized as a form of place based resistance. Today organizations are diverse in scope, and they can be academic or educationally based (e.g. black law society), black political or religious organizations, or black special interest groups. During the black campus movement, black students fought for a space that was separate from white spaces, in which they could gather to discuss current black issues, receive personal support, and cultural validation, and host programs and functions that recognized black culture and met their needs for campus inclusion (Patton, 2006). In many ways, these organizations serve as both tangible and symbolic representation of the successful efforts of black students to convince higher education administrators of the need for such organizations (Rogers 2009; Rogers, Rogers & Anderson, 2012; Lewis & McKissic, 2010; McCormick, 1990)
2.4 Social Movement Resistance

History provides us evidence of the potential efficacy of large group based social movements that were established for the purpose of opposing the dominant political, racial and social order through concerted efforts (Litwack, 2009; Tilly, 2004). For African Americans, a multitude of violent and non-violent social movements manifested during the 1960’s, including the black power, the black student, and the civil rights movement. The oppression of African Americans by hegemonic, overtly racist social structures and institutions provided the impetus for the mobilization of blacks to contest institutional discrimination, overturn white domination, engage in consciousness raising, and improve the quality of life for blacks (Moland, 2002; Tilly, 2004). These movements can be viewed as mostly nonviolent forms of resistance that encompassed picketing, vigils, community education and consciousness raising, lobbying, strikes and boycotts (Moland, 2002). In contemporary times, large-scale social movements have declined somewhat as a result of the end of de jure segregation (Tily, 2004) but the persistence of separate organizational (e.g. NAACP, Urban League) and institutional (e.g. churches) spaces still provides opportunities for immediate mobilization when things happen, like the recent killings of Trayvon Martin (2012, Sanford Florida), Mike Brown (2014, Ferguson, Missouri), and Eric Gardner (2014, Staten Island, New York).

Examining the types of resistance strategies as well as how they are enacted allows us to understand how blacks oppose dominant discourses, exert a self defined cultural identity, create counter spaces and engage in active forms of social resistance in an oppressive environment. Discourse and identity based resistance provide counter narratives that offer everyday discursive forms of survival and escape, while resistance that occurs in the form of social movements or counterpaces are often more tangible and visual forms of resistance. It should also be noted that
multiple forms of resistance can occur together or in concert with one another. The existing research on racial inequality as well as resistance suggests that being black shapes everyday life and experiences; however, this paradigm does little to illustrate the multiple forms of oppression and resistance that differ based on other social identities such as gender, class, and sexuality.

2.5 The Heterogeneity of the Black Experience

In an effort to understand the diversity of resistance strategies employed by people of color, it is imperative to explore not only the variation that exist in the black experience, but also how the potentiality and opportunities for resistance is impacted by social identity. While there is a small but emerging literature on the heterogeneity of the black experience, there is still a prevailing assumption that race trumps other axes of identity when it comes to resistance. The construction of oversimplified notions of what it means to be black in society only compromises our ability to make sense of the nuances and complexities of social inequality (Carbado, 2013; Collins, 2008). The diversity in the black experience is marked not only by space, time, and ethnicity, but also by gender, social class and sexuality. Therefore, to understand the heterogeneity of the black experience, we must contend with intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989). While easily understandable given both past and present forms of racial disadvantage, the preoccupation with race as the most significant social status occupied by African Americans has led scholars to downplay or fail to note the myriad of ways that race intersects with other social statuses when it comes to both discrimination and strategies of resistance (Hyes, 2013). In order to better understand how diverse social identities shape group experiences, and their strategies of resistance, an analysis of existing scholarship is presented below.
2.6 Gender and Resistance

Patricia Hill Collins (2008) points to the unique position of black women in her articulation of the “insider-outsider perspective.” This perspective highlights the precarious position of black women in various social institutions by using an example of the black woman domestic who was simultaneously an insider and outsider in the families she served. Collins (2008) elaborates especially on the experiences of black women in the academy by indicating that while their influx into colleges and universities has granted them institutional visibility, their ability to question or challenge the racist and sexist epistemological underpinnings of their academic disciplines is often heavily undermined. While the unique positioning of black women in society may afford them hyper visibility and a unique form of symbolic privilege, gendered racism still persists in the re-occurrence of black female stereotypes in the public debate and the sexual objectification of black women in the media. These stereotypes are often rooted in racialized and gendered notions of black women that originated during slavery and legitimatized their mistreatment and sexual exploitation by white men (Givens & Monahan, 2005). Prevailing images such as the domestic, desexualized and subservient Mammy, and the overtly sexualized Jezebel often serve to legitimatize sexual conquest and sexual harassment perpetuated by both black and white men (West, 1995).

In juxtaposing the experiences of black women and black men, it is readily apparent that they are quite different. Empirical evidence provides a rather bleak and fatalistic portrayal of the life chances of black males; back men face numerous adversities, and are disproportionately represented among high school dropouts, the poor (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor & Smith, 2009), the unemployed and the incarcerated (Cooper, Sabol, & West, 2009). While black men’s status allows them to be participants in a system of patriarchy, their social and economic position in
society affords them a lowly status that is variably different from the social and economic privileges afforded to white men (Ferguson, 2000). The most popular conception of black masculinity is the black criminal; this conception assumes that black men are particularly prone to engage in violent or criminal behavior (Cooper, Sabol & West, 2009). This assumption often leads to discriminatory policing practices, but it also translates into disparate treatment of black male adolescents in educational settings, particularly in the form of increased surveillance, suspension, and disciplinary action (Ferguson, 2000).

2.7 Potentiality for resistance given gender differences

Extant literature illustrates how the social positioning of black women and black men elicits different resistance strategies, and enables them to challenge unique forms of gender oppression. For black women, their resistance is twofold as they are opposing racist discourses and practices by white society, as well as fighting the misogynistic tendencies of black and white men that perpetuate sexist practices, sexual objectification and exploitation. Conversely, the resistance strategies of black men primarily challenge the existence of hegemonic forms of white masculinity that have constructed a subordinated or marginalized conception of black masculinity.

First of all, black women’s insider and outsider status in the academy affords them the opportunity to challenge and contest their marginality in academic disciplines through a form of discourse resistance known as “black female auto-ethnography.” Black women auto-ethnography is largely defined as a form of self-reflective writing that allows women to articulate their own personal experiences, while connecting their autobiographical story to larger sociopolitical, cultural and racial themes (Griffin 2012). Black women’s increased presence in the academy, particularly in the social sciences, allows them to have their personal experiences
validated as legitimate scholarship. Additionally, black women can challenge the conventional cannons that only validate the works of white men and women (Collins, 2008). Moreover, Wingfield (2009) theorizes that places like black hair salons are black controlled institutional spaces that facilitate the development of strategies to resist dominant racial frames. Wingfield (2009) shows how black beauty salons operate as supportive and affirming spaces for black women to work in, which is in sharp contrast to the devaluation of black women’s work in many white controlled spaces or workplaces. Hair salons also allow black women to reframe negative images of black womanhood through the celebration of various Afrocentric hairstyles, particularly natural hairstyles (Harvey, 2008; Wingfield, 2009). Additionally, these spaces are “safe places” where black women can engage in sociopolitical debates, as well as devise strategies on how to navigate white controlled institutions (Wingfield, 2009).

Black men’s blocked access into conventional society relative to black women and white men has also led to a proliferation of resistance strategies that often occur at marginal locations in society. Some of those locations are shared by women, but others are more or less exclusively male spaces. Extant literature provides evidence of how black men engage in forms of placed-based resistance in sports and barber shops (Carrington, 1998; Messner, 1992) Michael Messner (1992) asserts that subordinated groups, like black men often use their participation in sports as a way to resist racist, colonial and class domination. Sport institutions have always been viewed as traditional male spaces where masculinity is both displayed and reinforced. These spaces were until quite recently denied to black men, which means they had fewer opportunities to display masculinity (Carrington, 1998). For that reason, sports now operates as a mechanism where black men can legitimately contest their subordinated masculine identity.
through the symbolic, and even literal “beating or defeating of the “other”, white men” (Carrington, 1998, p. 54; Messner, 1992).

2.8 Class and Resistance

Social class represents a social cleavage based on material resources, whereas classism captures a system of policies and practices that benefit members of the privileged class, while disadvantaging members of the lower class (Feagin & Sikes, 1994). In examining the black middle and lower class, there are several areas where the experiences of racism and classism converge. Practices perpetuated by dominant society such as housing discrimination and racial steering into neighborhoods segregated by race and class are common examples (Rollock, Gillborn, Vincent & Ball, 2011). However, given the historical legacy of slavery and racism, members of the black middle class still experience discrimination, even in spite of their professional and educational attainment (Feagin & Sikes, 1994; Gordon, 2012). The black middle class is uniquely positioned between two different stratification systems; their middle class status gives them advantages while their blackness brings disadvantages. Thus the examination of the black middle class allows sociologists to understand how two systems of social stratification collide.

Most sociological research addressing the intersection of class and race has focused on the experiences of urban and low-income blacks. This means we know much less about how the black middle class negotiates and handles racial discrimination in public spaces. Membership into the middle class confers a set of privileges that leads to enhanced life chances, increased educational achievement, and access to amenities and cultural forms of capital that higher incomes can purchase (Feagin & Sikes, 1994; Gordon, 2012). But for the members of the black middle class, racism shapes both the structure and meaning of their class identity. Additionally
racist practices that pervade social and economic institutions influence their lives in numerous ways, including residential choices and occupational attainment (Drake and Cayton, 1962; Gordon, 2012; Pattillo, 1999).

In contrast, low income blacks lack the presumed social and cultural capital that many middle class blacks hold; however, their experiences serve as a foundational lens through which other black populations are viewed. Extant literature has shown that the social milieu of low income blacks is characterized by discriminatory practices that impede their ability to garner social and economic capital, thus relegating them to a life of perpetual incarceration, unemployment, single parenthood, and poverty (Bowleg, Teti, Malebranche & Tschann, 2011). Additionally, their impoverished conditions and lack of social and economic resources create institutional barriers that prevent access to conventional employment and educational sectors of society, primarily dominated by their white affluent counterparts (Young, 2004).

2.9 Potentiality for resistance given class differences

For middle class blacks, resistance to racial and class inequality involves developing tools that can help them navigate two systems of stratification. Given their access to forms of social and economic capital, middle class blacks use their class identity to signal status and establish a degree of legitimacy in white spaces (Cross & Strauss, 1998; Feagin & Sikes, 1994). Middle class blacks are able to draw upon economic, symbolic and social capital when they navigate a racist or discriminatory society; these forms of capital allow them to resist racial inequality, and conform to the social milieu of middle class whites (Gordon, 2012; Feagin & Sikes, 1994; Feagin, 1991).

Moreover, their entry into mainstream institutions also affords the black middle class the privilege to establish black organizations or black spaces, including, fraternities, sororities and
other social clubs such as the “Jack and Jill” parenting club that can facilitate social mobility. These groups allow blacks to establish various educational, social and cultural opportunities that are often denied to them by affluent whites (Landry, 1988).

Conversely, the resistance strategies employed by low income blacks are often concentrated within their own habitus. Urban sociologists have theorized that low-income blacks develop an “oppositional culture” that is counter to dominant values and norms. William Julius Wilson (1996) and Ogbu (1987) both posit that the oppositional culture of low-income blacks is characterized by the rejection of conventional goals; however, the majority of the work on oppositional culture illustrates that this rejection perpetuates racial and class disadvantages. For that reason, resistance to the dominant social order largely occurs through the endorsement of street culture. For many low income and working class blacks, “the streets” serve as a site of socialization that is as important as the family, the church, and the educational system in terms of its influence on their social development and life course trajectories (Anderson, 1999; Hannerz, 1969; Perkins, 1975).

For low-income blacks, “the streets” serve as a symbolic site where they can gain respect and social recognition and participate in a form of identity construction that is often not afforded to them by white society (Anderson, 1999; Staples, 1982). Additionally, the street culture allows for the inclusion of various forms of discourse resistance such as the use of Ebonics, the adoption of hip hop culture, and street adornment and dress as a way to distinguish themselves culturally from members of the black and white middle class (Cheddie, 2010). Through the use of black stylization, adornment, dress and oppositional behaviors, urban streets can be viewed as a contested terrain where the meaning and assemblage of race and class are formed and reproduced.
The existing research on the black middle and lower classes makes it clear that class location affects both the impetus for resistance and the particular resistance strategies used. The black middle class is opposing a social structure that provides them dissimilar middle class benefits and amenities compared to middle class whites. Additionally, the black middle class through the use of both place based and identity forms of resistance is attempting to separate or disassociate itself symbolically and spatially from the plight of low-income blacks. Conversely, members of the black lower class develop resistance strategies in response to a system that denies them access to real financial and social power in urban ghettos, and that views them as evidence of a dysfunctional or pathological black culture.

2.10 Sexuality and Resistance

Sexuality serves as another site where social disadvantages can manifest. In general, queer studies have emerged as a way to examine and contest the heteronormativity of heterosexuality. Additionally queer studies advocate for the need to recognize the complex array of gender and sexual possibilities that often go unacknowledged in a hegemonic patriarchal and heteronormative society (Carlson, 2014). The experiences of black queers have largely been relegated to the margins in both black studies and queer studies. The unique position that black queers occupy leaves them susceptible to experiences of homophobia in communities of color, and experiences of racism in predominately white gay communities (Carter, 2013; Moore, 2012; Walcott, 2006).

Extant research shows that black gays are often excluded or ostracized from predominately white LGBTQ social networks and organizations, and often do not get the opportunity to engage in discussions focused on the intersection of race and sexuality in these organizations (Carter, 2013). Conversely, research has shown that the black church has been the most visible black
institution to engage in homophobia, including fairly extreme forms of discrimination such as condemnation of homosexual relationships and exclusion from the ranks of clergy (Moore, 2012). Additionally, the preoccupation with black male hyper masculinity amongst heterosexual men has led to the proliferation of homophobia in communities of color. Many gay black men have attested to the fact that homophobia in communities of color serve to subordinate other forms of masculinity as feminine and passive (Strayhorn & Mullis, 2012). Taken together, the stigma of homosexuality in the black community, and the racism experienced in white LGBTQ communities has severe psychosocial consequences for black queers (Cohen 1999; Fullilove and Fullilove 1999; Kennamer et al. 2000).

2.11 Potentiality for resistance given differences in sexuality

There is less knowledge about how non-straight black groups resist dominant racist and heterosexual hierarchies. Extant research shows that black queers employ several forms of discursive resistance strategies that allow them to challenge both racial and sexual oppression. First of all, Gaybonics, like Ebonics is a distinctive form of counter-hegemonic speech, inaccessible to dominant groups in society, which gives black sexual minorities a way to share experiences and simultaneously subvert forms of oppression such as homophobia and racism (Brown, 2006). Gaybonics reflects the dialect and linguistic style of Ebonics, but it is altered to reflect the embodiment and feelings of black queers through the use of gay vocabulary. Gaybonics operates as a protective and exclusive form of conversational discourse that builds solidarity amongst the gay community, facilitates agency of black queers, and subverts hatred that manifest in regards to homophobia and racism (Blackburn, 2005; Brown, 2006). Additionally, as a result of the perception of “gay” and “lesbian” as Eurocentric homosexual identities, blacks have coined a new name to describe their sexual preferences, “same gender
loving.” The term “same gender loving,” allows blacks to resist racist labels perpetuated by white homosexual communities, and instead adopt new terminology that grounds their sexual experiences in the history and cultures of people of African descent (Brown, 2006).

Another form of discursive resistance that black queers employ is the use of black queer liberation theology. Through the use of narratives or storytelling, black queers develop a sexual politics of resistance, in which they attempt to dismantle popular and biblical views on homosexuality as being worthy of condemnation (Sneed, 2008). Black queer literature comprises poetry, short stories, and critical essays that attempt to directly challenge the notion of blacks as a singular monolithic group. Additionally, black queer writers are able to revise their views of God and human beings as open to multiple expressions of sexuality (Sneed, 2008). To sum up, resistance among black gays and lesbians is typically two-pronged, addressing both exclusionary racial practices in white gay communities, and homophobic discrimination in predominately black spaces.

The literature presented above provides a lens through which we can view the experiences of black students who attend predominately white colleges. Given the change in the racial landscape and end of de jure segregation, race no longer overrides all other considerations when it comes to life chances and experiences. Black college students who attend predominately white colleges in the United States often have other social statuses that impact the challenges they encounter; that is, while they are bound to a context that resembles American-white culture, they also must deal with other class, gender, and sexual identities that bound them to specific subculture(s). Black students often engage in a strategic form of assimilation, in which they are challenged to integrate in some cultural spaces, while opposing others (Baber, 2012). For all of these reasons, it is expected in this study that students will attribute different meanings to the
significance and role that race, social class and sexual identities play in their lives. In order to better understand this dilemma, it is vital that we seek a more nuanced understanding of black students attending predominately white colleges.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

In this section, I explain my chosen methodology, provide a rationale for this methodology, detail the site selection for the study, and describe the selection of interview subjects. This study uses a qualitative approach comprised of in-depth face-to-face interviews in order to understand how students conceptualize their experiences. Qualitative studies offer researchers the opportunity to explore phenomena about which relatively little is known (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Interviews represent a critical and necessary form of qualitative inquiry for studying black students at white college campuses, as the voices of minority students have largely been absent or relegated to the margins in educational research (Cerezo, McWhirter, Pena, Valdez & Bustos, 2013). A qualitative approach allows for the exploration of a subjective social reality, and allows participants, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds to engage actively in the construction of theoretical frameworks.

Given that I want to understand how students negotiate and respond to challenges at predominately white institutions, in-depth interviews are best suited for my empirical goals. A phenomenological approach to interviewing allows for the emergence of first person experiences that account for the nuances of the black college student experience (Thomas & Pollio, 2002; Pollio, Henley and Thompson, 1997). In addition, the use of a qualitative methodology allowed me the flexibility to adapt the design and research questions to incorporate new information as the study progressed (Yin, 1994).

While a qualitative approach to examining the experiences of black college students is not novel, this study, unlike extant literature, examines the diversity of the black experience and interrogates the assumption of a monolithic black experience. African Americans distinguish between themselves and whites, but they also make distinctions between and among themselves
based on physical features, socioeconomic status, gender, sexuality and other axes of identity. Not only do blacks perceive these differences to matter, but also there is also evidence that these distinctions impact how different groups may interpret and respond to their marginalization (Crenshaw, 1989). This particular study takes a social constructivist view as it pays attention to how people interpret their experiences, but it also examines how context may impact how individuals make meaning of and construct their understandings of the world.

3.1 Challenges to Qualitative Research

In qualitative studies, research is often guided by the researcher’s own ontological and methodological assumptions and beliefs, and this may influence the lens through which the researcher conducts, interprets and analyzes data (DuBois, 1989). Given this, I see it as imperative that I address and provide an account of my own ontological beliefs, as I believe that my own understanding and interpretation of data is impacted by my own life experiences. I am invested in this project for numerous reasons. First, as an African American woman, I identify with the experiences and narratives of women of color, and understand how different axes of identity such as race and gender interact and create challenges in both a white and male dominated society.

Secondly, as a person of color, I have been stereotyped, judged and discriminated against both by whites and members of my own race, so I understand the complexities of race relations between whites and blacks, as well as within my own racial group. Given this, I also understand the dual management that many black students at white campuses face—they need to belong in certain spaces, while opposing and resisting others. Lastly, I have attended two different predominately white campuses, one rural institution located in a remote area on the West Coast, and one urban institution located in a racially diverse area in the Midwest. As a result of these
experiences, I became cognizant of how the experiences of racism and discrimination, as well as how my sense of belonging to the university was shaped by the unique campus culture that I inhabited at each institution. I believe my previous experiences allow me to be empathetic to the challenges black students face at each institution, and also helped me to build rapport with my study participants.

In addition, as a researcher, I am aware of how power dynamics manifest in qualitative research, especially in relation to disadvantaged study populations. My status as an African American woman provided an opportunity for participating students to speak to someone who they perceived to share the kind of cultural experiences and insights that an outsider may not understand (DuBois, 1989). It also assisted in building trust between myself and the participants. As a result, the participants were at ease and very comfortable in sharing information about their experiences, in particular their academic and social challenges at a predominately white university.

3.2 Site Selection

While there is no standard measure as of yet for determining campus type, several educational studies have distinguished qualities between urban and rural campuses. Rural campuses, in comparison with urban campuses, have much fewer students and a smaller proportion of students of color, and are located in communities with smaller and more racially homogenous populations (Woldoff, Wiggins and Washington, 2011). Conversely, urban campuses have a larger student population, a wider variety of entertainment, restaurant and living arrangements (e.g. students often don’t stay on or close to campus), a large number of commuter students, and other nearby college campuses and/or institutions. According to Woldoff, Wiggins & Washington (2001) feelings of safety also are a determinant for campus
type, as students on urban campuses often express that they feel less safe, due to the prevalence of campus and/or city crime.

For this study I selected one large Midwestern urban commuter campus (University of Cover), and one smaller rural Midwestern campus (Aberdeen University). These two campuses also exemplify the common attributes of a rural and urban campus, and both have a diverse selection of black student campus organizations. The University of Cover is a large urban, residential, research institution, consisting of three different campuses, (however, for the sake of this study, I included only participants from the main campus).

The main campus is in close proximity to businesses, residential neighborhoods, medical centers, city parks, and transportation lines. The University of Cover has a total enrollment of over 40,000 students (including full and part time, undergraduate and graduate/professional students). The second institution, Aberdeen University is a four-year rural university located in the same state as Cover. Aberdeen University has seven regional campuses; however, I selected students only from the main campus. Aberdeen University has a total enrollment of 20,000 (including full and part time, undergraduate and graduate/professional students).

3.3 City Demographics

According to the (2011) Census Bureau estimate, Cover is the state’s third largest city. Cover, with about 330,000 people, has historically been predominately white, settled by German immigrants. Today, however, the numbers of blacks and whites residing in the city of Cover are almost equal. The official population of Cover Ohio according to the 2010 U.S. Census was 52% White, 42% Black or African American, 0.18% American Indian, Latino 1.28%, 1.94% Asian and .07% Native Hawaiian.
Aberdeen is located in the southeastern part of the state, and is a historic college town. Europeans were among the first settlers in Aberdeen. The official population of Aberdeen according to the 2010 U.S. Census was 23,832; the racial makeup of the city was 86.4% white, 4.4% African American, 0.2% Native American, 6.1% Asian, and 0.6% from other races (US Census, 2010). Institutional demographic information pertaining to total student enrollment, undergraduate student enrollment, and the diversity of the college campus (i.e. all racial and ethnic student percentages) are found in Appendix A.

3.4 Sample Selection

In order to participate in this study, participants had to be at least 18 years of age and self-identify as black undergraduate students. Graduate students were excluded from this study, as research has shown that the experiences of undergraduate and graduate students are markedly different. “Graduate students often face greater demands on their time, and may spend relatively little time on campus and rarely attend or participate in extracurricular activities” (Kuh & Sturgis, 1980, p. 484). A target sample of 20 students per institution, 40 total was achieved for the present study. A sample size of 30 is often the rule of thumb for conducting in-depth qualitative interviews and achieving thematic saturation (Creswell, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

I used a purposive, snowball sampling method. Current participants provided the names of additional students who were willing to be interviewed based on their involvement and non-involvement in black student organizations. Prospective students who were involved were also recruited through various campus organizations, such as the United Black Student Association, and all active black Greek organizations (fraternities and sororities). These organizations were chosen because they are the largest, most populated, and well known black student organizations.
on most college campuses. Even though I did not recruit students from all of the black student organizations on both campuses, many students held memberships in multiple organizations and were able to attest to how different organizations serve different needs. I attended these meetings and provided an overview of the study and inquired about student interest in the study. I sent a follow up email to students who indicated their interest to participate. After students indicated their willingness to participate via email, eligibility based on the sample criteria, and a time and location for the interview was chosen. Several attempts were made to accommodate the students’ schedule; however, there were several participants who never responded to my efforts to contact them. Those who indicated their willingness to participate were sent reminders as their interview day and time approached. All interviews took place in an interview room in the African American or Multi-cultural student center on campus, or in a room in the student union building.

As stated previously, very little of the research on the experiences of Black college students distinguishes the within-group differences among them. This study attempted to address these limitations by ensuring that students represented diverse social identities. An effort was also made to include students from various academic disciplines for “variety but not necessarily representativeness” (Stake, 1994). Negotiating access at Aberdeen University to conduct research did present several challenges due to my limited connections with students, staff and administrators. I made an attempt to have students be my first point of contact, but several of them were unresponsive, so as a result, contact with administrators who worked in Multicultural Student Services was made. I contacted these members to provide an overview of the study and seek their recommendations for initial participants for this study. Once contact was made with these students, I then used a snowball sampling method to recruit additional students.
3.5 Data Collection Procedures

Data collection occurred over a twelve-month period, from September 2013-September 2014. Interviews lasted approximately an hour, and were conducted by myself, the principal investigator. Informed consent (Appendix D) from all participations was obtained; each participant was assigned a pseudonym, and all identifying information was altered in the interview transcripts to protect their identities. All interviews were recorded and later transcribed over the twelve-month period. The interview started with more general questions exploring the students’ academic and social challenges in college, their relationships to their white and black peers, and their thoughts on the general college environment.

Thereafter, questions became more focused and specific and examined the extent of their involvement in campus organizations, their reasons for being involved or mostly uninvolved in these organizations, and the benefits of these organizations. I used a semi structured interview questionnaire (Appendix B) which enhanced flexibility and allowed for the wording and order of questions to change. For example, participants’ responses to some questions led to additional probing into other questions. Brief notes were taken during each interview to summarize and capture key points, provide backup notes to the interview transcripts, and to initiate the data analysis process (Miles & Huberman, 1984; Yin, 1994).

After the interview, participants were given a self-administered brief demographic questionnaire, which assisted in categorizing the participants in terms of social status and make sense of their experiences in light of those statuses (Appendix C). This questionnaire inquired about their year in school, declared major, first generation status (whether or not they are the first in their family to attend college), social class, age, gender, racial or ethnic origin, sexual orientation, and how many black organizations or clubs they have been involved in over the
course of their matriculation (students indicated years of involvement, names of the organization, and their role(s) in each respective club/organizations).

In order to classify student’s into lower, middle and upper class, U.S. Census class classifications were used; those who reported a household income under 20,000 were classified as lower class (LC), those who reported between $20,000 to $40,000(LMC) were classified as lower middle class, those who reported between $40,000-$70,000(MC) were classified as middle class, those who reported $70,000- $100,000 were classified upper middle class (UMC), while those who reported between $100,000 and $150,000(UC), and above were classified as upper class. A further explanation of how class location was determined is found in Appendix C.

3.6. Description of Participants

Table 1 and Table 2 present the following demographic information: 1) name, 2) age, 3) major, 4) whether the participant was a first generation college student, 5) reported family income, 6) sexual identity (H=Heterosexual, L=Lesbian, G=Gay), and 7) whether or not the student was involved in black student organizations (Yes or No), and the number of black student organizations the student reported being involved in.
Table 1 University of Cover Student Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name &amp; Age</th>
<th>Year in School</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>1st Gen Y or N?</th>
<th>Family Income</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Sexual orientation</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Involvement in Black Student Organizations?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dacey, 21</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>20,000-40,000</td>
<td>LMC</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Y (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irene, 19</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Health Education</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>40,000-70,000</td>
<td>MC</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Y (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris, 20</td>
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<td>Y</td>
<td>20,000-40,000</td>
<td>LMC</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Y (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica, 23</td>
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<td>Dietetics</td>
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<td>LMC</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
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<td>N</td>
<td>Under 20,000</td>
<td>LC</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Under 20,000</td>
<td>LC</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Y (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Liberal Arts</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>H</td>
<td>F</td>
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<td>N</td>
<td>100,000 to 150,000</td>
<td>UC</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>M</td>
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<td>H</td>
<td>M</td>
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<td>H</td>
<td>F</td>
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<td>N</td>
<td>Greater than 150,000</td>
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<td>H</td>
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<td>Y</td>
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<td>LMC</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>M</td>
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<tr>
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<td>H</td>
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<td>MC</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Y (2)</td>
</tr>
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<td>H</td>
<td>F</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>F</td>
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43
<table>
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<th>Name</th>
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<th>Major Grade</th>
<th>Room</th>
<th>Living Area</th>
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<td>N</td>
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<td>H</td>
</tr>
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<td>N</td>
<td>20,000-40,000</td>
<td>LMC</td>
<td>L</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fran, 21 *</td>
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<td>N</td>
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<td>MC</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily, 23</td>
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<td>LMC</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Indicates student lives in Cover*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name &amp; Age</th>
<th>Year in School</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>$1^{st}$ Gen or N?</th>
<th>Family Income</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Sexual orientation</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Involvement in Black Student Organization(s)?</th>
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<td>MC</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>F</td>
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3.7. Data Analysis

During the interview, I informed my participants that I would be jotting down brief notes on significant points to assist in coding and categorizing their data. Prior to each interview, I made sure to establish rapport with each participant, and make him or her feel welcomed and open to being completely transparent with me. An essential task of the researcher is to establish trust among study participants while achieving insights of their lived experiences (Yin, 1994). Building rapport at the beginning of the interview was done to ensure that participants would not be bothered or distracted by my note taking or concerned about the taping of the interview. I tried to do less note-taking during the interview, as I wanted to remain present and attentive to the participant narratives. Directly after the interview, I also wrote down in more detail, salient points regarding each participant’s account of their experiences. Memoing adds to the credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative research, and it also aided me in deriving and generating initial codes from the data (Yin, 1994).

Once each interview was completed, the tape recording was then transcribed in Microsoft Word. At the end of the interview, participants were asked what pseudonym they preferred; in the event that students did not indicate a preferred name, one was assigned to them.

Given that this particular study is interested in how gender, social class, sexuality, and physical location shape student experiences, participants were assigned codes combined with their pseudonym to readily identify the type of demographic information associated with each students’ accounts. Demographic information was coded as follows: gender (M=male and
F=female) social class (LC=lower class MC=middle class UMC=upper middle class UP=upper class), sexuality (G=gay L=lesbian, T=transgender, H=heterosexual), campus type (R=rural, U=urban). A detailed list of all of the participants and their corresponding codes is provided above. This categorization scheme facilitated the process of making comparisons between different social statuses and campus type that were the focal point of the study.

Data was analyzed and coded in qualitative data management software, NVivo. NVivo allowed me to work systematically through each interview transcript, manage all of my transcripts in one project file, and uncover implicit and explicit connections between codes. Initially, an open coding method was used to break down the data into smaller segments in order to interpret them. I was specifically interested in specific themes related to students experiences of tokenism, social inequality, academic and social challenges, experiences with black and white peers, involvement in campus organization, benefits of participation in black student organization, and reasons for minimal involvement or non participation in black student organizations. Thus, data was coded utilizing these tentative descriptions. I then examined participant data that supported each of these descriptions, and established relationships among the data. Then I examined intersecting content and similar words, and phrases, in order to group data into sub-categories under the larger descriptions stated above. In order to establish relationships and combine categories, I then sorted the codes by participant gender, social class, sexuality and campus type which provided a picture of the variation in student accounts by their social status.

I also examined, analyzed and used my memos to validate themes that were developed after the axial coding process. With this method, all preliminary categories were collapsed into four major themes/chapters: 1) black student experiences of tokenism, 2) black student organizations
as a safe space, 3) black student organizations as preserving culture and tradition, and 4) black student organizations as promoting leadership, mentorship and outreach to community. Finally, supporting literature and illustrative quotes from participants are used in each respective chapter to describe findings and identify contributions.
CHAPTER IV: THE SITE: PREDOMINATELY WHITE INSITUTIONS

Predominantly white institutions (PWI’s) are institutions of higher education where the dominant race of students, faculty, and staff are white (Willie, 2003). Several cases aided in the desegregation of white and black schools, first the McLaurin vs. Oklahoma State Regents decision in 1950, the Brown vs. Board of Education in 1954, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 mandated desegregation in education, and since this time, African American students have increasingly enrolled at predominately white institutions (Baber, 2012). By 2012, approximately 54 percent of all African American students in post-secondary education were enrolled in a four-year non-historically black college or university (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

Paradoxically, while education has been credited as the “great equalizer” and as a mechanism for alleviating socio-economic inequality that persist between blacks and whites (Taylor, 2010), it has also been viewed as an institution, specifically predominately white colleges and universities where students of color experience several academic and social challenges and setbacks (Allen, 1992, Guiffrida, 2005; Guffrida & Douthit, 2010; Seldacek, 1999). Contrarily, a central mission of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) is to foster racial solidarity among African American students, by maintaining and practicing black historical and cultural traditions, and recruiting and retaining a predominately black student population, and faculty members. Black students at HBCU’s have stronger levels of race pride, more positive self-images, and more exposure to African American professors (Rucker & Gendrin, 2003; Smith, Lewis, Maynie, McCou, Swanson, & Williams, 2013). Allen (1992) asserts that black students on predominately black campuses, emphasized feelings of engagement, connection, acceptance, and extensive support and encouragement. Black student experiences at PWI’s and HBCU’s are markedly different as it relates to encounters with racism. Therefore, in order to understand the experiences
and concerns of black students, it is important to first review existing literature on the campus climate at predominately white institutions.

4.1 The Campus Climate for Black Students

For all students, beginning college requires an adjustment, and can create several academic and social challenges; however, black and white students have different perceptions of the academic and institutional environment as a function of their unique historical background, cultural values and adjustment experiences (Carter, 2013; Hurtado, Carter, Spuler, 1996; Minatoya & Sedlacek, 1983). While there is a need to avoid viewing both blacks and whites as a monolithic group, research shows that in general white students express views of the campus culture that are devoid of feelings of rejection, opposition, or distress (Baber, 2012; Guiffrida, 2005). In particular, white students are more satisfied and consistently reported less racial tension, they encounter few expectations to conform to stereotypic behavior, and conceptualize college as a climate characterized by respect for diversity (Hurtado, Carter, Spuler, 1996).

Contrarily, research shows that black students at predominately white colleges consistently report more negative experiences of racial-ethnic hostility, and generally deem predominately white campus organizations as unresponsive to their needs (Hurtado, 1992; LaSure 1993; Ancis, William, Sedlacek & Mohr, 2000).

Undoubtedly, racism at predominately white colleges is a culmination of overt and covert individualized actions and institutional practices that contribute to race becoming more salient in the lives of black students (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). Racial micro-aggressions that reinforce black inferiority and white superiority remain pervasive at predominately white campuses (Hurtado, Carter, Spuler, 1996). In a qualitative study of African American students attending an elite, white university, black students reported experiencing racial micro aggressions both within
the classroom setting and in social spaces that led them to feel ignored, scrutinized and stereotyped (Solórzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000). Additionally, Johnson-Durgans (1994) found that African Americans living on campus were confronted with an unwelcoming residence hall environment, less friendly peers, and even perceived faculty, academic and developmental services to be uninviting and inaccessible (Stage & Hamrick, 1994; Strayhorn & Mullins, 2012).

For many black students, racism and prejudice can also manifest in the absence of black faculty and black perspectives in their college curricula. Through culturally diverse curriculum and mentorship, black students are able to develop their sense of self, and become more self-efficacious and confident (Warren & Carter, 2013). For many students, the lack of black scholarship in the classroom not only creates feelings of marginalization, but it also propels white students to develop flawed racial stereotypes of black people perpetuated in the media and popular culture, which often undermines black and white student relations (Foster, 2003).

Educational research has shown that the lack of minority teachers and mentors at predominately white schools is an impediment to black student success and persistence (Joe & Davis, 2010). Social support, especially in the form of mentorship from faculty and administrators, remains a critical resource for improving the success and persistence of minority students. Faculty-student relationships are strongly correlated with student satisfaction in college (Astin, 1999); however, studies indicate that black students are often unable to form strong relationships with white faculty at PWI’s (Flemming 1984; Mayo, Murguia & Padilla, 1995). Some white teachers may not fully understand the culture of the students they are teaching, and through their endorsement of white culture and ideals, they may inadvertently discourage black culture and hence impede minority student success (Joe & Davis, 2010). In contrast, minority teachers tend to utilize culturally relevant pedagogical strategies that foster academic and social
engagement among students (Ladson-Billings, 1995). For that reason, the presence of minority faculty and administrators on campus creates opportunities for mentorship and role models, as well as sources of support and inspiration (Scott, Taylor, & Palmer, 2013)

Existing research regarding the experiences of black students highlights the reoccurrence of racism and minimal sources of social support (Hurtado, 1992, LaSure 1993, & William, Sedlacek & Mohr, 2000). Most interesting is that these events of racism and feelings of isolation often go undetected by white students (Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000). This provides evidence that white students are housed in a social space, which is socially, culturally, and racially a reflection of white domination and privilege (Carter, 2013; Hurtado, Carter, Spuler, 1996; Minatoya & Sedlacek, 1983). While white students remain largely unconscious of incidences of racism and unaware that they engage in racially separatist practices, the lack of racial sensitivity and lack of social integration into the campus culture are pronounced dilemmas for black students.

Researchers have demonstrated that race plays an important role in the college experiences of black students; however, less attention has been paid to how gender, social class, and sexuality impact students’ college experiences. Gender proves to be a critical variable, as black men and women are situated differently at predominately white campuses (Cokley, 2000, 2001, Davis, 1995). Black women are viewed as having social power that exceeds that of black men, given that black women have higher educational and occupational attainment than black men (Cohen & Nee, 2000, Cross & Slater, 2000). Fleming (1984) notes that women of color at PWI’s report more racial discrimination and unfair treatment, but in comparison with minority men show better adjustment, and display more independence and assertiveness in response to challenging situations.
In regards to social class, many higher education institutions are often regarded as spaces where affluent, middle class values are learned and nurtured (Martin, 2012). Students learn a distinct set of middle class values that aid in both their educational and occupational success, which is often referred to as a “hidden curriculum” or “cultural capital” in most educational contexts (Bourdieu, 1996). A hidden curriculum is beyond the bounds of traditional forms of knowledge; this is where students learn good behaviors that are rewarded in the larger society, such as punctuality, and learning how to assert themselves in the face of authority (Bourdieu, 1973). Many first year students who come from working class families often face several difficulties in navigating the college environment successfully. To the contrary, dominant class students are likely to enter college with a wealth of not only economic and educational capital but also cultural capital (Martin, 2012).

Lastly, the experiences of black gay and lesbian students at predominately white colleges has been largely understudied. However, a few studies indicate that black gay students face several challenges when integrating into the college environment, as many encounter racism from predominately white gay spaces, and homophobia in predominately black spaces (Strayhorn & Mullins, 2012). Therefore, exploring how black gays and lesbians interpret and negotiate these challenges, while resisting forms of oppression within the campus environment is of interest to this study.

This study takes as its starting assumption that black students, because of their multiple and intersecting identities will experience the college environment somewhat differently. It is therefore important to explore how differently situated black college students interpret and respond to their marginalization. For many students, fostering a sense of belonging involves engagement within the university culture through both formal and informal means. Research has
shown that for white students, integration into the campus culture occurs largely through informal means of socialization such as their peers or family (Lewis & McKissic, 201). For, students of color, in contrast, social integration is more likely to be fostered through formal associations like minority or ethnic student campus organizations (Lewis & McKissic, 2010). This next section presents an overview of the scholarship focusing specifically on student involvement in black student campus organizations.

4.2 The Protective Role of Black Student Organizations

Two pertinent theories, Alexander Astin’s (1984) theory on student involvement and Vincent Tinto’s (1993) theory on institutional departure illustrate the centrality of student integration into their social and academic college environment. Astin’s (1984) theory of student involvement refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that students devote to campus activities and student organizations. The quality and quantity of a student’s involvement will influence the amount of student learning and development. Similarly, and more relevant to my study, Tinto’s (1993) model of institutional departure states “in order to persist, students need integration into formal (academic classes) and informal academic systems (faculty/staff interactions) and formal (extracurricular activities) and informal social systems (peer group interactions) (p.35).

Taken together, Astin’s and Tinto’s work shows how variant levels of social integration often influence students’ social adjustment at their educational institutions. Social adjustment refers to students’ sense of belonging to the campus culture, the extent to which they feel supported by their institution, and their ability to adapt successfully to the expectations and challenges of college (Tinto, 1993). Social integration is defined as how one is incorporated and/or included or excluded into a campus culture (Feagin, Vera & Imani, 1996). Social
adjustment and social integration are often fostered through formal aspects of college life such as campus organizations. Additionally student involvement in organizations creates feelings of attachment to the campus, provides companionship, and allows students to persist (Fischer, 2007).

These theories do not pay attention to how black student organizations often serve as counter-spaces to other traditional forms of student involvement occupied by white students. Subsequent research has confirmed that black student organizations do indeed serve to improve the campus climate; and have lessened the marginalization and isolation black students face at predominately white institutions (Guiffrida, 2003; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Kuh & Love, 2000; Lewis & McKissic, 2010; Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001; Murgiua, Padilla, & Pavel, 1991). Current studies show that participation in black student organizations serves several purposes, as it fosters, 1) cultural familiarity, 2) community service and political participation/activism, and 3) faculty support/mentorship.

4.2.1 Cultural Familiarity

Black student organizations provide opportunities to connect with peers who share similar cultural backgrounds, experiences and understandings on campus (Patton, 2006; Kolb, 2007). Additionally, participation in these organizations allows students to fraternize with friends, find people to date, and develop smaller coalitions and sub-groups with other black peers with whom they can discuss intellectual subjects related to their coursework, conflicts with white students and faculty, and black popular culture (Lewis & McKissic, 2010; Museus, 2008). Several African American student organizations also produce cultural programs that celebrate African Culture such as Kwanzaa and black history month events (Patton, 2006).
Moreover, involvement in these organizations gives students respite from the white world and a place where they feel comfortable letting their guards down to talk in black English and socialize in ways that are comfortable and familiar without fear of perpetuating negative stereotypes (Guiffrida, 2003). Cultural familiarity facilitates closeness and instills a sense of belonging to both the black campus community, and the larger institution.

4.2.2 Community Service & Political Participation/Activism

Black students are also able to engage in philanthropy, as many student organizations often participate in local community revitalization efforts and community service projects (Guiffrida, 2003). Many of the community service projects are often connected to improving the social conditions of blacks; such, opportunities for social and political participation often leads to an increased sense of personal and community empowerment (Bobo & Gilliam, 1990).

Additionally, many organizations are deeply committed to addressing issues such as poverty and different forms of inequality; this is often accomplished through campus and community forums, volunteering at non-profit organizations and local schools, and increasing the political participation of black students and community members through voting drives (Kolb, 2007; Patton, 2006). An emphasis on community service and political participation propels students to advocate for their own racial and ethnic communities, and join other black students and administrators in effecting social and political change on and off campus (Museus, 2008)

4.2.3 Faculty Support/Mentorship

Findings show that black students perceive black faculty and staff members who serve as advisors to student organizations to be extremely influential in shaping and improving their college experience (Patton, 2006; Smith & Moore, 2000). Staff members often serve as informal
advisors and mentors who help students locate campus resources, select academic majors and careers, and navigate the larger campus climate (Lewis & McKissic, 2010; Patton, 2006). In addition, given the ties that many black faculty and staff members have to higher administrative channels at the university, black faculty often serve as liaisons or as a bridge between black students and the larger institution (Davis, 2004; Patton, 2004, 2006).

4.3 Black Student Organizations as a Site of Resistance

While existing research on participation in black student organizations highlights how elements of resistance manifest, no attention is paid to how these elements of resistance are impacted by either the students’ diverse social identities, or the physical location in which the college is situated. Earlier modes of resistance often involved highly visible protest actions, such as demonstrations, public meetings, sit-ins, and marches, aimed at changing a social order that systematically excluded African Americans from full participation in social and political life. Given the end of formal segregation, these traditional modes of resistance do not always fit the contemporary social and racial landscape. Today, resistance to oppression involves a wide range of strategies, ranging from large collective protest actions to individual, autonomous acts that are about everyday acts of empowerment; these latter forms of resistance are not necessarily aimed at creating a new order or opposing a dominant power (Hyes, 2013). That is, as the structure of racial domination has changed, so has resistance to it. With this observation in mind, it is important to consider the role of human agency in the formulation of resistance strategies. However much of the research on student marginalization has assumed that black students lack agency in responding to their perceived feelings of marginalization. Through their involvement in black student campus organizations, students develop both physical and symbolic counter-spaces that allow them to participate in culturally relevant activities that give meaning to their
lived experiences. Given that black student organizations were developed as a result of resistance and opposition, they represent the most tangible and visible form of placed based resistance on college campuses. It is here that students of color gain validation, and acquire critical skills to navigate the college environment (Cerezo, McWhirter, Pena, Valdez, & Bustos, 2013).

4.4 Importance of Context for Resistance

In light of research that shows the importance of context for the development of particular forms of resistance, I examine student experiences at two different institutions, one located in a rural area that is overwhelmingly white and one in an urban area that is racially diverse. Specifically, this study takes into account how campus environment shape students’ perceptions of the challenges they experience, as well as their involvement in black student campus organizations. While predominately white campuses are critical sites in examining how black student organizations serve as a site of resistance, there is a dearth of research that examines the diversity of predominately white institutions. Additionally, while not hugely supported by empirical research, the physical locale of college campuses may play a role in the adjustment experiences of black students, as students on urban campuses may have opportunities to create more expansive social networks outside of the college campus, while black students in rural areas are often in remote locations, and isolated from family and other social networks that could potentially be critical in their social adjustment to the college environment (Woldoff, Wiggins & Washington, 2011). Additionally, according to Donahoo and Caffey (2010) students at rural institutions often leave home to attend college, and therefore, need to establish new support networks. Consistent with this finding, I expect a greater propensity of students who have moved away from home, particularly those from urban cities, and are now attending rural institutions to
join or become involved in black students campus organizations in order to foster a sense of social and cultural familiarity.

Other studies have also illustrated that rural colleges are highly residential, with a large proportion of the student population residing on or very near the college campus, while, urban campuses have a high number of commuter students who do not live on or close to campus (Hurtado, 1992, LaSure, 1993). This difference no doubt has implications for how all students; including African American students conceptualize their sense of community at their respective institutions. In general, it is expected that students from the rural campus articulate a sense of community or sense of belonging to their campus culture, while students at the urban campus may feel less connected to their college campus. Moreover, it is also expected that the reasons for joining these organizations differ across campus type.

To sum up, the examination of how black students perceive and utilize black student organizations as a potential source of resistance to the racial hostility they experience is deserving of more empirical investigation. For that reason, this dissertation examines how black undergraduate students at one urban and one rural predominately white institution conceptualize their experiences with black student organizations. In order to further understand how, if at all, black students make use of these organizations. I interviewed forty students who are differently involved in such organizations. Finally, in an attempt to portray a heterogeneous black experience, I examine how factors such as gender, social class and sexuality shape the experiences and involvement of black students at their respective college campuses.

This dissertation, while largely exploratory gives support to the claim that nonacademic factors influence the educational trajectory of black college students at predominately white campuses. Past studies have focused extensively on the causes of attrition of black students at
predominately white colleges. According to a Journal of Blacks in Higher Education report (2012), the overall graduation rate for whites in 2012 was 60.2%, whereas for blacks the graduation rate was 37.9%. While some researchers have hinted at inferior academic preparation prior to college entry, several researchers have highlighted the need to investigate non-academic factors that may influence the premature departure of blacks from predominately white institutions (Echols, 1998). Reasons for high attrition rates such as inferior pre-college schooling experiences, academic under-preparedness (Loo & Rolison, 1986), financial difficulties (Ottinger, 1991), and an unwelcoming campus climate have been cited in previous studies (Ancis, Sedlacek & Mohr, 2000). These factors, individually, and cumulatively have served as explanations for why black students often do not persist or graduate at the same rate as their white counterparts. Only quite recently have researchers begun to focus on factors within the college institution that impact black student’s sense of belonging and aid them in persisting to graduation (Choy, 2002; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002). It is this latter body of research to which this dissertation seeks to contribute.
CHAPTER V: TOKENISM “THE COFFEE STAIN ON THE WHITE RUG

The impact of tokenism for minority groups has been studied quite extensively by sociologists (Hughes, 1944; Kanter, 1977). Tokenism is experienced when an individual’s social group is a numerical rarity in a place or context that they inhabit. Specifically, Kanter (1977), in her work on gender tokenism in the workplace, finds that tokens experience heightened visibility, which leads them to feel as if their performance is heavily scrutinized. Moreover, members of the dominant group typically think of tokens as representatives of their entire group, rather than as individuals. That is, dominant group members often attach assumptions and stereotypes to the token’s master status, which makes it difficult for tokens to distance themselves from these inaccurate associations or stereotypes (Hughes, 1944; Kanter, 1977). Additionally, perceived differences between the majority group and the token group often become exacerbated, and this often leads to social exclusion, and feelings of uneasiness.

These same consequences of tokenism are also observed in the lived experiences of black students in predominately white settings (Allen, 1992; Torres, 2009; Woldoff, Wiggins, & Washington, 2011). Their black identity often serves as their master status; and their source of marginality in white spaces. It is important to first understand student experiences of tokenism and marginality, as these experiences may play a role in how students strategically utilize or distant themselves from black student organizations.

5.1 Student Experiences of Tokenism in the Classroom

Ideally, the college classroom should be a space where civility, and cooperative learning is fostered. Maintaining a critical mass of diverse students helps promote cross-racial understanding, and promotes an environment where students feel engaged and comfortable. In my study, students at rural and urban institutions expressed feelings of discomfort and uneasiness
when discussing the lack of diversity in the college classroom. Participants recognized the sheer rarity of people of color in predominately white spaces, particularly in the classroom environment. Students used evocative and descriptive images such as “the black sheep” that elucidated their awareness of being a numerical rarity.

I am in the history of the crusades class. And I found it kind of difficult because I am like the black sheep of the class. Because I was the only black person in the classroom, I felt really awkward (Vicky, female, urban)

I’ve just learned that I am going to be the elephant in the room in an all-white classroom, I just have to learn to accept that (Stefan, male, rural)

I was the only black one in my learning community. So in that classroom, it was very awkward (Doria, Male, rural)

Drawing on Kanter’s (1997) findings, these students highlight how being the only or one of few black students in the classroom engendered feelings of discomfort. The image of being the “elephant in the room” or the “black sheep” signified that many students felt uneasy about being out of place because they were black. These images not only express their own awareness of being hyper visible, but are also self depreciating. While the college classroom is designed to serve as an inviting space for learning and cooperation to occur, these students had to also deal with the feeling of being hyper visible, which could potentially comprise opportunities for learning and cooperation

Black students’ experiences of being a numerical rarity were not only apparent in the classroom, but it was also very pervasive at the departmental, institutional, and as the students
already anticipated occupational level. Specifically, occupational distinctiveness (Laws, 1975; Yoder, 1991 1994), for example, refers to “intrusiveness” into a field traditionally dominated by members of a social group other than one’s own (Yoder, 1991). This was particularly relevant for Black college students in this study. The students below highlight how their chosen majors were not populated by other black students.

My major is Health Education, Exercise and Fitness. I am the token black guy besides athletes. I am the token black guy in all my classes (Gregory, male, urban)

When I first came here, someone told me that if I majored in chemistry, I was going to be a coffee stain on a white rug. I didn’t know what they meant by that until I actually went to a lecture. They played it off good. I asked them, what did you mean by a coffee stain on a white rug? I told them, I know what you meant. As a coffee stain, did you mean I was the only African American? He was like yes, you are going to be different, you are special. People are going to notice you when they walk past you (Justin, male, urban)

There ain’t none [blacks] in the classroom. That’s a dagon shame. Let me see there are four blacks in the entire chemistry department and we don’t have classes together (Anna, female, urban)

I also am interested in going in the legal field but it also had me questioning going into that field because I know that it is predominantly white and male dominated. I felt like gosh, am I going to fit in because of who I am? I am not going to change (Vicky, female, urban)
These students’ accounts illustrate the discomfort and frustration of being a token in a primarily white academic department and professional field. This hyper-awareness of being a numerical minority was magnified for students in majors where the number of black students, and females were quite low, specifically in the sciences and technical fields. Literature on STEM fields highlights the overall low numbers of graduating scientists, and the apparent disparity in graduation rates of black students compared to their white and Asian counterparts (McAllister, Domingo & Carrillo, 2011). Similarly, Vicky points to the persistent disparities in the legal field and says that her status as a black female makes her question her ability to assimilate into an environment that is white and male dominated.

5.2 Dealing with Racial Micro-Aggressions in the Classroom

Racial micro-aggressions are defined as everyday insults and denigrating messages conveyed to people of color, and often further intensify feelings of tokenism (DeAngelis, 2009). The participants in this study report numerous micro-aggressions delivered verbally and non-verbally. Racial micro-aggressions took on several forms----the expectation to underperform, serving as representatives of one’s race, and being type-casted as the expert on race relations (Cleveland, 2004; Gurin & Nagda, 2006; Jackson, Thoits, & Taylor, 1995; Nettles & Millet, 2006).

Elizabeth, Cassandra, Trayvon and Donte address one common micro-aggression and that was the expectation they felt from whites to underperform. In their experience, students in the classroom held lowly and stereotypical assumptions of black students’ academic capabilities.

Now in the classroom, it is definitely a lot different. I have had a lot of experience being the only girl and only black in my class. I have had experiences where students would
say, I don’t think I want to work with her, I don’t think her work ethic is up to par

(Elizabeth, female, rural)

I am an International Affairs major which is similar to political science. Sometimes I realize that you do have to show your face. I am not scared, I won’t back down if you have problem with my debate. I will chew you out hardcore because I have to stand up for myself. They think this black girl doesn’t know what she is talking about. At the end of the day I do and will state my point at any given time (Cassandra, female, urban)

Sometimes it’s hard to work with whites in groups in class, they always think, here is this stereotypical black guy, who is probably a jock, and not interested in school and is just trying to get by. Well they are wrong, I’m not a jock, I don’t play sports and I actually excel in school (Trayvon, male, rural)

People give compliments sometimes that they don’t know are rude. Like you are so smart, you speak so well. I’m like what made you think I couldn’t speak well or that I wasn’t smart. Was it because I’m black? Because I don’t think you would say that to one of your white peers. That’s weird but it’s almost like I take it as it is something about being in the territory of higher education and one of few black males in higher education (Donte, male, urban)

The assumption of black intellectual inferiority is widely known and held in American society, and black students are keenly aware of these stereotypes (Steele & Aronson, 1995). While these students highlight that these stereotypes were controlling, pervasive and salient in the learning environment, Cassandra and Trayvon make it abundantly clear that they are not
apprehensive about disconfirming these stereotypes. On the other hand, Donte highlights how whites assumptions of black students’ academic deficiencies are often masked as compliments.

Another prevailing expectation of blacks in the classroom is that they should play a central role in discussions on race, preferably by sharing their own experiences. As the comments below show, this expectation is not always welcome.

As far as students in classes, race issues come up in all sociology classes. It seems like there is an expectation of black students to always tell their story while the white student plays the dumb card. I don’t feel like I need to be your autobiography. I don’t feel like I need be your history channel. I shouldn’t have to be the person to tell you about all of my problems or all the things I have gone through just because I am black, Read it somewhere (Tyrone, male, urban)

Whenever a conversation about African Americans or diversity in general would come up people looking at you thinking, you are the go to expert on this. Even in staff meeting or other meetings, people would turn around and be like tell us what you feel about this topic as if I am an expert. Yes I can speak on that but we are not all monolithic people, there are other opinions (Allison, female, rural)

I mean it’s different being the only black person in your class but I actually took a diversity class and I was the only black. We did talk about race. I just feel they always expect you to be that one person to speak for your whole group. I actually got an email from my professor that was like if you want to share your story, please do but I know this could be awkward for you (Joanna, female, rural)
Tyrone, Allison and Joanna acknowledge that with difference or marginality comes the obligation of being the expert on not only the black experience, but also issues of diversity and race more generally. These students speak candidly of incidents where whites were reticent to talk about race, and saw it as solely a responsibility for black students. While this was not substantiated by student accounts, white students’ reticence could be attributed to their fear of saying the wrong thing or offending someone. Additionally, research shows that whites are often reluctant and detached from race discussions because they often think race is something outside themselves, and they don’t consider themselves a race (Lewis, 2003; Tatum, 1997).

Even in spite of these subtle micro-aggressions, there were very few instances of blatant, and overtly racist actions performed by whites on both campuses, however, two students reported such visibly racist incidents:

It was a serious issue where the professor put a lot of different pictures on the board and they had pejorative terms describing AA’s like a “nigger.” Some of my white peers in the back were laughing. I told the professor after class, I was so offended. We went through all these Civil Rights pictures where a black person was being shot in the head from the back while running across the railroad tracks and it was like “get that nigger”. It was so bizarre to me. Meanwhile people in the back are laughing. During the break, I went to the professor and told her, I can’t stay here because I was offended by the fact that she didn’t stop the laughter in the background (Tyrone, male, urban)

We read a story that we had to discuss in class and it was about some man following a woman around. It happened to be a rich man and he was following her around. I think my teacher put a whole other spin on it and switched it the other way around. In the story
I think the man was black. He was rich and a multimillionaire. Then girl raised her hand and said if a black person was walking behind me, I am going to be scared too. She legit said that and didn’t think twice about it. I am the only black person in the class and I have other people nodding their heads like, yea that is scary. I’m looking like why is that scary? Just because I am walking down the street behind you (Mary, female, rural)

Beyond feeling like a numerical minority, black students felt that their presence in the classroom was both subject to both exclusion and scrutiny by whites. In their experience, many white students held negative assumptions about both the academic performance of black students in the classroom, and also seemed to assume a homogenous black experience, that is, that all blacks share similar views on race and race relations, encounter the same racial injustices, and hence can speak for everyone. Many students described this imposition as uncomfortable, frustrating and overly burdensing. Frustrations arose out of the double burden of both having to deal with the racial insensitivity of whites, and also the forced imposition within the classroom to also “talk about race” when solicited. This imposition had two major consequences: 1) it further separated and isolated black students from white professors and students in classroom, and 2) it somehow absolved whites from the responsibility to think about race and to actively engage in, “race-talk.” In short, then, because race so often became a salient identity in the classroom, the participants in the study experienced the classroom as a space where the boundaries between whites and blacks were heightened.

5.3. Dealing with Racial Insensitivity on the Quad

Racial incidents on the quad were quite frequent, as white students were not subjected to the same surveillance and policing by an instructor as in the classroom environment. This freed
whites to express both covert and overt racial sentiments with very little fear or expectation of a consequence. Nathan and Mary describe a few different incidents that shed lights on explicit racist actions that are displayed on campus.

You want to be where you feel more welcomed. For that reason, I guess I don’t find myself around a lot of white people when I am not in class. Then sometimes you can hear people saying racial things or anything that may be hurtful to a black person and that isn’t welcoming (Nathan, male, rural)

So Black student union has a twitter account, and just recently the black community made an announcement about an upcoming discussion on Trayvon Martin and black male violence, and it just wasn’t for blacks, we wanted everyone to attend. A white student from the university responded and said, I didn’t even know you niggers could create a twitter account, and what’s the point of this discussion? Just saying this stuff on twitter, I was like wow it’s unfortunate that the school lets people who think like this stay at this school (Mary, female, rural)

Incidents of explicit racial discrimination such as what Nathan and Mary describe elucidate that incidents of overt hatred for blacks was not absent. Mary highlights how the anonymity granted to people who use online spaces, like Twitter; allows individuals to express racial sentiments and beliefs without fear of consequence. While the introduction of civil rights legislation and socially enforced taboos against explicit racism has served to decrease incidents, implicit racial bias has often replaced overt expressions of discrimination (Dovidio, Gaertner& Kawakami, 2002). Instances of implicit racial bias
were mentioned by two students who also took the initiative to redress whites in understanding their insensitivity.

Sometimes things happen and they [whites] won’t see it from the perspective that I see it from. A really good example that I often use is one day I was with an intern and we were writing stories and this girl was producing. It was during the presidential election so she had to discuss the Obama rally. She was setting up the show, she thought she would end the show with a kicker, and she wanted it to be something fun like animals in the zoo. I was like, oh you can’t put that there. We just put a segment about the president and then you want to put in a segment about animals in the zoo. When I asked her, she was like why? And in my head, I was just like why are you asking me why, it’s obvious? That is a time I had to step back and say that she doesn’t see it from the perspective that I do. To her, it just was like she is putting stories together but to me it was like we are doing a segment on the first African American president and to put on a segment after that about zoo animals is kind of like a mockery and offensive (Allison, female, rural)

I have had a few strange experiences. When we’re in the LGBT center one time and this gay white male asked why do you have things in here in Spanish? I was like, there are Spanish-speaking people that may be queer. It was mindboggling to me that he wouldn’t understand that people of all different identities could be queer (Janet, female, urban)

These incidents provide evidence that while the landscape of racism has shifted and overt forms of racism are less common, they are not completely removed from the experiences of black students at white campuses. Taken one by one, some of these incidents can appear too idiosyncratic and too ambiguous to provide unequivocal evidence of racial hostility. But taken together, they add up to a hostile climate where the risk of racially based offenses are ever-
present. As members of a minority group, black students remain acutely aware of the nature, type and severity of micro-aggressions, both inside and outside the classroom. And every time they encounter them, they are faced with the difficult task of determining which incidents should be acknowledged and challenged, and which incidents are better left uncontested. For students like Janet, and Allison, they remained active in addressing these incidents, and respectfully challenging discriminatory practices in interpersonal interactions. But they also found it quite frustrating.

While many students indicated that the racial incidents they encountered often occurred at the interpersonal level, they linked the hostility they experienced as indicative of a racially hostile campus culture, which could only be rectified by administrators at the institutional level. Hence, many of the participants questioned the institution’s commitment to addressing and rectifying racial mistreatment outside of the classroom and critiqued what they saw as insufficient efforts at improving the racial climate by campus administrators

I don’t feel like they [administrators] do enough for black people. I had one friend and he was Deejaying and a white female came up to him and hit him. He reported it but it was swept under the rug. Again I just don’t feel as though there is enough done for black people (Angelina, female urban)

It is like we are here. we do a lot of things but we don’t get the recognition for it. I won homecoming queen this year and my counterpart was white. When articles were done about homecoming, they would have a quote from the king, but they would not mention me, or no one would contact me (Tyra, female, rural)
Angelina and Tyra bring up two different incidents occurring on their campus that illuminate the lack of institutional response to incidents in which black students are discriminated against or ignored. Diversity and inclusion are two important priorities at both of these institutions, and while efforts have been made, these accounts illustrate that there is still some discrepancy between students’ lived experiences, and the institutional response to racial inequality. The result is that the black students do not entirely trust the administration when it comes to fostering an inclusive environment.

5.4 The Obstacle of Being both Black and Queer

Feelings of exclusion and marginality are even more pronounced for blacks who identify as lesbian or gay at predominately white campuses. Given that black students experience racism and prejudice, and gay students encounter heterosexism and homophobia, black queer students often have to be very strategic in how they navigate both black and white spaces. Despite greater strides towards improving gay rights and acceptance of same-sex marriage, homophobia still pervades society (Harris, 2009). There is also a prevailing assumption that the black community is more opposed to homosexuality than the white community due to blacks’ high religiosity (Ward, 2005). Johnson (2003) reports that homosexuality is often viewed as a white problem by many black religious leaders, and is often perceived as sinful by many black religious leaders. Thus, students who are open about their sexual identity are often met with fear, distrust, and exclusion from the black community. A large majority of African-American Christians are theologically conservative. The Pew Research Center’s (2008) national study of American religion lists African-Americans among the most religiously committed American ethnic groups. The resistance of many black churches to same-sex lifestyles has often gone uncontested. Two
students in this study who identified as lesbian or gay indicated that they sometimes experienced a lack of support, even homophobia in predominately black student organizations.

I joined an organization for black students and it helped me but it was very structured and I identified with it because I was black but not because of my sexual identity, I felt conflicted. At the time, I didn’t know if there were programs for people with different sexual identities. In the black community, you are always black first. I was comfortable in my identity as a black person but the fact that I was having bigger issues with my sexuality is the reason I stayed away from the black student community. I felt like I didn’t have anyone to go to about my sexual identity in that community so I stayed away (Dacey, female, urban).

The school endorses a lot of heterosexual ideals, everything from social events, and educational events too. The black community is very homophobic, and I felt very unwelcomed in a lot of black student organizations because I can be an outwardly gay male. They don’t talk about homophobia, it’s an issue they would rather push under the rug. (Tyrone, male, urban).

Along with feeling as if there is a code of silence around LGTBQ issues, and the discriminatory treatment that these populations receive, students also indicated that there was a double negotiation that they had to undergo in finding spaces that were equally accepting of their black and sexuality identities. Research shows that blacks also struggle when they try to align themselves with white queer groups and allies, as these groups are often neither particularly accepting of blacks nor sensitive to the challenges faced by black students who identify as gay or lesbian (Jenkins, Lambert & Baker, 2009). Janet and Johnny highlight this sentiment below.
At first when I first entered this school, I was under the impression that you can’t be queer and black in both white and black spaces (Janet, female, urban).

I think as a community we haven’t found ways to create a space for black LGBTQ students, we know they exist, but we never talk about issues facing them. Everything is always blacks deal with racism, and that’s true, but we also deal with sexism, and homophobia. I can’t go to white LGBTQ organizations where I know they actually address these issues, I will feel strange (Johnny, male, rural).

These students acknowledge that there is a double negotiation that they must undergo, as their feelings of marginality are pervasive in both white and black spaces. Their master status of being black relegates them to marginal locations in white spaces, and their disclosure and acceptance of a non-heteronormative sexual identity renders them as an outsider in predominately black heterosexual spaces. Janet acknowledged her initial perceptions of feeling as if she couldn’t fully express both identities in black or white spaces, however, she attended an institution that recently instituted an organization titled “True Colors.” This organization was geared towards students of color who identity as LGBTQ. This space or type of organization was not present at the rural institution, and thus Johnny expresses a need for this type of space to exist.

5.5 Class variations on campus

Much research on the black middle class finds that they are still subject to racism and discriminatory practices by whites, even in spite of their class privilege and access to social and economic resources (Feagin, 1991; Feagin, 1994; Patillo-McCoy, 1990). In this study, some of the discomfort felt by middle class blacks occurred in their micro level interactions with other blacks, especially those who were raised in predominately black, low income and urban areas.
Middle class blacks often report that their racial identity is scrutinized by their black peers, and that there is a prevailing assumption that ascension into the middle class, and the adoption of middle class attitudes and behaviors, equates to the loss of a black identity (Fraizer, 1957; Hughes & Thomas, 1998). It is through their attainment of wealth and power that they are presumed to shift their identification from (poor) blacks to (middle class) whites (Fraizer, 1957). In this study, students constructed class differences by reinforcing distinctions between suburban and urban blacks. Embedded in each of these classifications were assumptions about upbringing, attitudes, and behaviors, as well as rules for engagement with the black community. This distinction between “urban blacks” and “suburban blacks” was noticeable on both the urban and rural campus and illuminates how students impose divisive categories among themselves in order to create lines of both inclusion and exclusion within the black student campus community. Tyra and Maxine discuss the attributes associated with being a “suburban black.”

I found that there are two types of black people. There are the black people that grew up in suburban areas, and they stay with those kinds of blacks and there are ones that grew up in non-suburban areas. Typically those from suburban areas may have grown up in a two parent home, while those in an urban area where raised by a single parent. We were raised differently; we have different views I find that even though the ones that grew up in the suburban areas may not associate themselves with black people outside their area. One of my best friends is like that, she grew up in a white area and most of the people in her high school were white. She is in a white sorority and everything (Tyra, female, rural).
I grew up in an all-white town, and went to a really good school. I know I am not white but I feel like I am white coming here because I have never been around so many blacks in one place. I was like oh there are a lot of you [blacks]. When I came to campus, I thought there was a lot of black people, but I know not every black person feels that way (Maxine female, rural).

Tyra and Maxine highlight that a suburban upbringing is associated with being raised in a two parent home in a racially homogenous neighborhood, and attending a good school. Through Tyra’s juxtaposition of her own and her friend’s upbringing, she highlights distinct differences between “urban” and “suburban” blacks. These divisive categories led to feelings of not fitting when in predominately black spaces, especially for those who came from affluent backgrounds. These students all perceive themselves to come from a different socio-economic background than the majority of the black students on campus.

At the University my biggest challenge is being an African American at a predominately white institution because you are a minority and depending upon where you are on the social ladder it can make you more of a minority or not. For me I feel like I have stood out. My social location as a middle class black male makes me an outsider here because I am perceived to be not as black as I should be (Tyrone, male, urban).

I would say that I am not the average black student because I didn’t grow up in a predominantly black setting or environment. So it was always uncomfortable for me to be in an all-black setting (Estelle, female, urban).
I had a black friend I went to middle school with and I saw him here because he goes to school here and he only has white friends. It is weird because I ask him why he never comes to black events. He told me he didn’t even know that there were black events, I tell him about them and he still never comes. I feel as though, he feels unwelcomed. I never felt that was possible (Nathan, male, rural)

For these students, there was a common association that the “average” black student coming from an urban, predominately black environment, and being raised in a suburban neighborhood was not seen as the norm. This sentiment remains prominent for Estelle and Tyrone, two students who reside at an urban institution, as they express that they feel like outsiders in predominately black settings. In addition to this sense of feeling excluded, or not feeling as if they belong, students also constructed notions of what it means to be “black” which were largely informed by class identities. This stereotype of “talking white”, and avoiding the use of slang or black Ebonics further defined what it meant to be a “suburban” black. Justin and Dustin make this clear in their comparisons of suburban blacks on campus to urban blacks in their home communities.

I notice that some of black peers in college are different than my black peers who I attended school with. They are a little more professional, less risk taking. They have more ambition and are more successful and more outgoing than the black peers I would associate with during high school. They are a little more “white professional.” They are capable of expressing themselves in ways that will not put them in jail (Justin, male, urban).
I came from an all-black urban high school and there was a lot of slang used in class. There is this one girl in my public speaking class in college. This girl speaks proper English but at my high school, they would have probably said that she is “talking white.” (Dustin, male, urban).

Generally speaking, the findings presented in this section suggest that students from suburban areas use their upbringing and location of their prior schools to try to understand how this impacts their degree of integration with other black students. Geographic factors, specifically the racial and class composition of the black students’ home communities do impact student’s feelings of belonging both within and outside their own racial group. Research has shown that black college students often come from racially segregated, and homogenous black residential environments (Massey & Denton, 1993). Given that most college campuses are characterized by and teach students middle class culture and values, black students who grew up in predominately white affluent suburban communities have an easier time adjusting to predominately white universities. But this also means that, many of them struggle when it comes to fitting in with black peers who come from predominately black urban areas, and embody the typical qualities of an urbanite. In the end, as long as assumptions regarding the disposition, style, attitude, and behaviors of “suburban blacks” persist, these students are more likely to distance themselves from other black students who come from different class backgrounds.

5.6 Challenges for Black Women and Black Men

Both black men and women highlight that being a minority has negative consequences, specifically the imposition of racialized and gendered stereotypes that force them to occupy marginal positions on college campuses. In Black Feminist Thought, Collins (1990) argues that the mobility of black women has been largely restricted by external and sexist definitions
regarding what it means to be a black woman in the United States. Black women in this study highlighted how these stereotypes were self-controlling, and how they contributed to their lack of meaningful social relationships with whites.

Sometimes I think I should be more aggressive in the classroom, you know speak out about things that I don’t like. But I didn’t want to be the angry black girl that hates and complains about everything. Subconsciously, I think to myself I really don’t like the things I hear, but I know I will be outvoted and I am the only black person so I kind of just leave it alone. Things like that pushed me away from closely interacting with my white peers but I have had some good experiences with them but not too much (Lisa, female, rural)

With white peers that are in the classroom, we are automatically segregated. It’s not until you work in a group with them that you would talk to them. Other than that, you probably won’t talk to nobody. I can be open, outspoken, outgoing and I do have to watch that sometimes, because I don’t want to be the “loud black girl”… I have been able to make friends with people in the classroom. But it’s just for that minute or for that class, other than that you really don’t talk with them anymore (Anna, female, urban).

First of all, Black women have to cope with stereotypical portrayals of black womanhood, in particular, the stereotype of the “loud or angry black women.” This forced black women to be very conscious of how their behaviors and attitudes could be misinterpreted or type casted. Professional status (e.g. college student) cannot protect black women from these self-controlling images (West, 2008), as Lisa and Anna highlight how there is an additional burden of being viewed as a stereotypically “loud black girl” and thus not being viewed as a competent
student. Secondly, it is clear from many of the women’s accounts that they valued interpersonal relationships; however, within a predominately white context, these women felt restricted by racialized and gendered assumptions from creating and establishing meaningful relationships with their white peers.

The lack of meaningful relationships between black women and their white classmates was frequently mentioned. Black women not only reported incidents of insensitivity with their white peers and professors, but also experienced their relationships with whites as being very superficial and rarely, going beyond conversations about coursework. As the comments below show, the women do not attribute this to overt racial hostility on the part of whites, and yet they all point to a vague sense of not quite belonging together.

I have white friends but honestly I don’t hang with them outside of class, only in study groups. I have a few but they all hang out with black people. I don’t know how it ended up that way but I really don’t have any social network with my white friends (Ariel, female, rural).

I have no white friends that I actually hang out with now. I have some that I will talk with every now and then. It has kind of been that way since I was in high school. We can relate on class work and then it would be like ok, I’ll see you later (Dacey, female, urban).

Socially I haven’t really been around my white peers that much. In the classroom, when I first got here it wasn’t a culture shock to me because the school I come from is diverse but it was weird because I didn’t really know how to speak to them in class. First of all, I
was a little shy anyway so I didn’t know how to interact with them because they have different backgrounds and it was kind of hard to relate to the majority of them. Other than classwork, I couldn’t talk to them about anything (Lisa, female, rural)

These black women were very cognizant of the dearth of white peers in their immediate social circle—for the most part, their relationships with whites were relegated to classroom, and discussions centered on issues pertaining to academics or schoolwork. Arielle points to whites’ lack of initiative in seeking out diverse peer groups, while Mary, Dacey and Lisa highlight that this arrangement just fell into place seemingly without anyone taking any deliberate action to make it happen.

Unlike black women, black men’s experiences of marginality were shaped not only by their race and gender, but also by their residence in an urban environment. Black male students are often mischaracterized as “thugs,” “unintelligent” and “criminals” in predominately white environments (Parker, Moore, Black, 2014). In this study, it was primarily black men at the urban campus who reported incidences of mischaracterization and stereotyping. That is so in large part because urban campuses are often situated in poor communities where crime and drug use, as well as racial profiling of black men by white law enforcement are more pervasive. In many ways, then, black men at urban universities must deal with the imposition of a stereotypical identity by whites that is often shaped by the context in which they reside.

This inability to distance themselves from the stereotype of the urban criminal or thug was prevalent in the accounts of black males who attended an urban institution. Specifically, black males in urban environments articulated a theme of feeling both hyper visible (unconcealed, and easily noticeable) and invisible (hidden, and ignored). Alford Young (2004) speaks of this tenuous position in his book *The Minds of Marginalized Black Men*; black men who transverse
into white spaces are typically hyper visible because they are often the only one of a few in their position, and thus they stand out. However, because of their gender and race, their presence is not the norm in predominately white environments, which means they are also simultaneously rendered invisible in certain situations. This same phenomenon is observed when blacks ascend into higher positions or climb the social ladder (Lowe, 2013).

Me personally I haven’t had any problems with racial profiling. I do get cold in the city and I have a ski mask because my face gets cold. I have to be cautious about wearing it because of the general descriptions of black male robbers. I always fit the description of a criminal act around here which gets on my nerves (Gregory, male, urban).

As a black male, I understand that I am a minority, even more of a minority than black females. So I am always going to be noticed, I have to watch how I walk, talk, and dress, I don’t want whites thinking I am some thug, so I have to be careful about how I conduct myself (Justin, male urban).

There are always so many crimes going on around here, and it sucks because as a black male especially if I am walking home at night, I am subject to being stopped or being seen as a predator, I just know it (Josiah, male, urban).

Like black women, black men talk about the stereotypes that impact how they are perceived in white spaces, and they too report having to modify or alter their behaviors in order to avoid being typecast. While all of the black men in this study acknowledged feelings of marginality, the association of black males with criminality was a theme only mentioned by those attending the urban campus. These men were acutely aware that even as college students,
they were still subjected to discriminatory treatment. The policing of their behavior and actions was also governed by the university’s incessant university wide crime alerts that often include a description of the suspect so vague and general that numerous college-age black men fit it: a black man, approximately 20-25 years old, about 6 feet tall, and wearing a dark hoodie. These crime alerts only caused whites to consistently regard black men as sources of fear. While the majority of the campus crime was perpetuated by non-college students, black male college students did not feel protected by their status as a college student and hence constantly monitored their demeanor, so as not to be perceived as “criminal.”

Conclusion

An overarching theme in all of the student accounts is that marginality, and feelings of exclusion are a prominent feature in many of their experiences. History shows that black students have struggled extensively to become integrated into the campus culture at white colleges as demonstrated by the history of Jim Crow segregation, gradual but insufficient efforts towards real integration, and the opposition towards affirmative action we see today (Scott, Taylor & Palmer, 2013). Intersecting experiences of racism, gender, class, and sexuality all collectively create divisions between minority and majority groups. The following chapter demonstrates that it is primarily through their involvement in black student organizations that students learn to strategically survive at predominately white universities. While black student organizations were historically developed as spaces of resistance, this study demonstrates that these organizations still serve as a “safe haven” or “safe-space” for escaping the realities of a racially and culturally insensitive campus climate.
CHAPTER VI: BLACK STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS AS A SAFE SPACE

Safe spaces are essential for marginalized groups to discuss their identities, interest and issues independently and away from the surveillance of dominant groups (McBride, 2001). Scholars who study the use of safe spaces among marginalized groups, often look at how these spaces can be either physical or symbolic, however, regardless of the type, these spaces are able to foster a formation of a collective identity (Bairstow, 2007; McBride, 2001, Schroeder, 2012; Tatum 1997) by allowing groups to express themselves openly without rejection or hostility from the dominant majority. Filax (2007) demonstrates that organizations targeting LGBTQ students alleviate some of the pressures that LGBT students face, as they have to negotiate their everyday lives in heteronormative and homophobic schools and society.

Similarly Beverley Tatum (1997) points to the necessity of safe spaces for black students in predominately white schools, and shows strategies of resistances are developed within this space. More specifically, Tatum (1997) examines how these students make a deliberate choice to physically separate themselves from non-black students within the confines of a predominately white school. While the students are still confined and bound to the school, their separation allows them to create a distinctive symbolic and social space to develop affinity with other black peers. She argues that black students practice their “language”, in these spaces and are also able to retreat and regroup (Tatum 1997).

Safe spaces can offer many benefits to it members; it can lead to the development of collective consciousness and the empowerment of group members. This empowerment can be used to mobilize and challenge dominant cultural practices, ideals and norms as well as social inequality (McBridge, 2001; Schroeder, 2012). For example, safe spaces like the black church have provided opportunities for members to develop campaigns and interventions to target the
stigma surrounding AIDS in the black community (Beadle-Holder, 2011). More generally, organizations like NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) have served as critical sites for the development of a critical mass to challenge health, economic, and educational inequalities in the black community (Moore, 2012)

In many ways, black student organizations can be conceptualized as a safe space. According to my participants, these organizations give them a reprieve from feeling as if they are marked, always on-guard, often unsafe and continually scrutinized. It is through their involvement that they are able to cultivate experiences that are vastly different from feelings of marginality they feel in predominately white spaces. In other words, with the help of black student organizations, the students feel that they were able to create and foster a sense of belonging, acceptance and shared experience.

Many of the black students in this study concluded that the college environment is not supportive; a supportive environment would mean a campus climate that is inclusive and free of prejudice and hostility. All of the students in this study understood the importance of involvement in campus organizations as a vehicle for developing both interpersonal relationships and professional skills. However, black organizations are unique in the sense in that they are designed to help students deal with the marginality they experience in predominately white spaces.

According to my participants, black student organizations allowed them to: 1) establish a source of support and comfort, 2) develop strategies to combat and deal with discriminatory treatment within and outside the campus community, and 3) engage in a conversation about racially sensitive topics without fear of the white gaze. While students at both campuses acknowledged that these organizations provide a safe haven, students’ emphasis on using these
organizations as a mechanism to deal with experiences of marginality was largely informed by their specific campus environment. Students at the rural institution placed a greater emphasis on engaging with their black peers and joined black student organizations due to the lack of a critical mass of black students on campus. In the next section below, it becomes quite evident that students attending the rural campuses conceptualized their choice to be involved as an ultimatum of sorts; meaning that their persistence and the quality of their college experience hinged on developing a sense of attachment to the black community.

6.1 Join or Perish

When examining the role that context plays in students’ decision to join black student organizations, it is readily apparent that the physical location of Aberdeen University propelled and influenced students’ decision to seek out predominately black spaces. All but one of the students at Aberdeen University reported being involved in black student organizations(s), while, there was more variation in involvement among students attending the urban institution (14 involved, 6 reported being completely uninvolved). This variation is most likely attributed to the differences in how these students articulated feelings of marginality, with students at the rural campus indicting a greater magnitude. For example, one of the students said, “there are basically no black people here” (Elizabeth, female, rural). Many students at Aberdeen pointed to the dismal number of black students, and even framed their involvement as an ultimatum of sorts—be involved in black student organizations or perish.

There are only like five of us here, so you have to join organizations here, if not, you’re really going to hate it here. (Lisa, female, rural).
I have had friends that come here and seclude themselves, and they hate it. You can’t do that here, not as a black student (Kendra, female, rural).

The university is so different from where I come from, I knew when I first got here, I had to meet other black people if I was going to make it (Johnny, male, rural)

I know if I wasn’t involved in black student organizations, I probably would not be here right now (Nathan, male, rural).

This join or perish ultimatum made involvement in black student organization seem like a necessity or a requisite for survival at a rural institution. Black students at the rural institution comprise only 4.6% of the student population, which may have exacerbated their feelings of marginality, especially for students like Johnny who come from more racially diverse areas. The black students at the rural institution therefore made more of a concerted effort to seek coalitions and alliances with other black students on campus. These relationships became even more urgent to the students given that the community of their college town was also racially homogenous (overwhelmingly white), and students infrequently traveled back to their home communities due to the demands of being a college student.

In contrast, I found much more variation in student involvement in black student organizations at the urban institution. While students from urban institutions also articulated feelings of marginalization and exclusion, they did not conceptualize their involvement in black student organizations as a solution to such problems to the same degree. This is likely due to the relatively larger presence of blacks on campus and the norms that govern urban-commuter schools. Black students at the urban institution represented close to 9% of the student population,
and thus their feelings of exclusion, while present, may have not been as magnified as students attending the rural institution.

6.2 Organizations foster comfort

Black student organizations provide opportunities for students to feel comfort and support. For many students, the classroom was not always a comfortable or supportive environment, as discussed in the previous chapter. In predominately black student organizations, students emphasized feelings of engagement, connection or a sense of belonging to their peers, and forming connections with other students who were “like them.” Below the students, each from the rural institution speak about how these organizations foster a sense of closeness. It is through the formation of a close and strong black community as stated by Tanya below, that these students are able to feel a sense of comfort, and relate to one another.

Being at a PWI, you can definitely feel like you are the only black when you are always in class with all white students. The black community here is very close and strong. So being involved in it kind of gives you a sense of belonging (Tanya, female, rural)

I was involved and was the president of the black student union so I see the need for having a tight black community. And having that escape route of people that are going through the same things as you. Just relaxing, it’s a lot like home (Nathan, male, rural).

I think being a part of the organizations, you get a chance to be around other people like you. You get used to coming to class and being the only black person but being a part of these organizations helps you feel comfortable (Lisa, female, rural).

Socially, I have had the greatest experience with my black peers because I think it is kind of cool that we all get along and understand each other (Kendra, female, rural).
Comfort is discussed in different ways by these students; Tanya and Lisa highlight how black student organizations provide a temporary escape or shield from experiences of marginality in the classroom. Images such as “the black sleep,” “or the “elephant of the room” did not characterize how these students felt in predominately black spaces, instead they highlighted how they felt a sense of connection and affinity to these organizations. Nathan and Kendra, highlight that comfortability was also established by being in the same space as people who understood each other. Nathan, specifically, likens his experience to being at home. It can be gleaned that he views these organizations as a family, where there is a mutually shared understanding that makes him feel valued and protected.

6.3. Self–Validation

According to Filax (2007) and Tatum (1997), safe spaces allow marginalized groups to be fully expressive, comfortable, welcome and safe. Many students highlighted how these organizations provide self-validation, acceptance and empowerment.

It is difficult to be black at predominately white institutions. I don’t want make us seem like victims because we are not victims by any means but these [black] organizations give me a sense of place, they let me know that I matter and that I am relevant (Tyrone, male, urban).

In predominantly white organizations, my first thought is whatever I am about to say is automatically to some extent discredited because I am a woman of color. Even in queer groups. I have been in queer groups where they aren’t listening to me probably because I am black. The groups that keep people of color in mind are more accepting (Janet, female, urban).
These quotes illustrate how black students are creating and cultivating an alternative experience in a space away from whites where they can connect with other black students, and develop of sense of comfort and acceptance. Additionally, through their involvement, some participants were able to develop a strong sense of self-empowerment or validation, a sense of feeling like they mattered. For example, Janet, a student at the urban institution emphasizes how her identity as a black queer often leads to feelings of exclusion and rejection in predominately white spaces. These benefits were oftentimes not present in predominately white spaces, particularly the classroom, because black students are overly consumed with feeling invisible, ignored, stereotyped, and having to defend their position as black students at a white college.

The relationships that were created within black student organizations were also important beyond organizational activities; most significantly, they served as a form of network armor within predominately white spaces, such as the classroom. Many students reported that building alliances with other black students to deal with being a numerical minority was an important way to cope with feelings of isolation in the classroom and beyond.

6.4 Building Alliances outside Black Student Organizations’

For the students, I interviewed, black student organizations provided them an opportunity to meet and establish relationships with other black students, and many of these relationships extended beyond predominately black spaces, and into the classroom. Their friendship ties helped alleviate feelings of marginality in the classroom.

Usually when I walk in class, I look and count how many black people were in class or just look for a familiar face, which happens to be black. These are often people I hang out with in other organizations, knowing that we are in class together is comforting (Vicky, female, urban).
But percentage wise there are not a lot of black people here and for that reason I think we all gravitate toward each other. The core of the black community which I would consider myself to be a part of, I think we are really close knit. Our relationships are obvious because we will always sit together in class. We try to study together (Nathan, male, rural).

These students speak about the comfort they feel when taking classes with same race peers. Not only do these students share the experience of being black students at a white college and being involved in black student organizations, but they also support each other by sitting together and working together.

As these comments demonstrate, many students make a conscious choice to resist the overwhelmingly white environment they find themselves in. One common strategy is for students to try to avoid being the only black student in the classroom and, once there, to form supporting alliances with other black students. Participation in black student organizations facilitated such alliance building in that the students often recognize each other from events. This created a sense of visibility and aided black students in establishing a united front or buffer to deal with racial incidents and marginalization in the classroom. Students were able to develop a sense of interdependence, or collectivism, in which everyone was accountable and responsible for each other.
6.5 A Safe Place to “Talk Race”

Classroom conversations about race and racism can be difficult for both white and black students. White students avoid race conversations for several reasons: 1) society does not racialize whites the same way as people of color, and thus they are much less likely to think of themselves as having a racial identity, 2) whites often fear that they may say something ignorant, and 3) many whites think talking about race and highlighting racial differences is in itself racist (Tatum, 1997)

In general, many of the students in this study believed that neither white students nor white faculty members were sufficiently equipped to talk about race or even to recognize racism within the college environment. In predominately white spaces, black students quickly learned the unspoken rules regarding the breadth of race conversations, who could engage in such discussions and what the repercussions for challenging the rules were. Students involved in black student organizations were able to both challenge and contest these rules through three different strategies: 1) establishing physical and social distance from whites in race discussions, 2) creating of a larger topical terrain of race discussions, and 3) collectively acting to combat racial incidents.

Students were very transparent about how they chose to separate themselves from predominately white spaces. Within the confines of black student organizations, race discussions were neither imposed nor forced, and instead black students felt free to decide how and when they would participate in such discussions.

In predominately white organizations, you will be twiddling your thumbs or just talking about sports. You can talk about anything in the black community. I don’t feel like you
can go to predominately white organizations and talk about relationships or social issues like the Trayvon Martin case (Donte, male, urban).

I like it because yes you can have intellectual conversations in class but it doesn’t pertain to black issues. It is in a relaxed setting so you can have the conversations that you usually can’t have (Tyra, female, rural)

Both Donte and Tyra emphasized the importance of making the choice to “self-segregate” or detach themselves from predominately white spaces. Tyra’s depiction of black organizations being viewed as a “relaxed setting” further highlights the security that students felt in discussing topics that were controversial, and often prohibited in white spaces. Additionally, Doria also highlights another theme that was prevalent among several students, and that is the liberty to talk about a multitude of racial issues.

We talk about issues that are relevant for the black community. Like racism within our own race. Like light skin versus dark skin and things like that. Also I like that during black history month, we actually celebrate it. I really enjoy those things (Doria, female, rural).

As far as BSU [Black Student Union] I just started going this year and I am very interested in the discussion that they have as far as white privilege, the black church, and student senate rights (Elizabeth, female, rural).

Students highlight the importance of utilizing the right language to talk about race; for example, phrases like “white privilege” are rarely mentioned in the classroom, as it might make white students feel defensive or less inclined to talk about race (Boylorn, 2011). Both Elizabeth
and Doria point to how their involvement in black organizations allows them to widen the terrain of race discussions---they are able to discuss issues that are relevant to the black community. Discussions on intra-racial discrimination were infrequent in the classroom, which means that many black students expressed a need for safe spaces to discuss issues impacting the black community, such as colorism, white privilege, and discrimination.

Additionally, there was an instance of whites engaging in race talk with blacks. This practice allowed for interracial dialogue to occur in a space that blacks controlled. It was in black controlled spaces that black students could assert themselves, create an agenda for the discussion, and redress white students’ inaccurate assumptions about race. Janet discusses this specifically in one of her organizations, “True Colors.”

For starters, you get a place to talk. In our second meeting there was a whole bunch of people and we did a presentation about the “R word.” And we just talked about race. And it gave colored people a place to express themselves to white people. White people would ask questions and we wouldn’t yell at them because it’s a safe place to ask questions. But we will tell you why what you said was wrong. I like that my organization provides that space (Janet, female, urban)

Janet highlights the practice and importance of race talk, but also discusses how in black controlled spaces, black students were able to privilege their own experiences, and deconstruct racial barriers by engaging whites in a discussion about race outside of predominately white spaces. Janet says that her organization, “True Colors” provides both a safe, and inclusive place for blacks and whites to congregate, and where they together can address the many inaccurate assumptions about race that whites typically have. Such events highlight the power and utility of narratives to both connect with others and deconstruct barriers.
6.6. Combating Racial Acts

Engaging in outside activism was common for students attending the urban university, most likely because they resided in close proximity to neighborhoods with large proportions of African Americans living in poverty, and thus were palpably confronted with racial inequalities on a daily basis. Additionally, students could also tap into structures outside of the college environment that were supportive of and conducive to black protest movements and organizations.

On campus, the most common pattern of activism was for students to initiate their own protests that were oftentimes also supported by black faculty, administrators and staff. Through the use of key administrators and staff, they were able to bridge the communication gap between students and the university administration. Students also remarked on how black organizations seemed underfunded compared to predominately white organizations. Several of the students at the urban campus remarked that the African American Student Center was unsanitary, dilapidated, and in need of renovation—the university, they felt, remained oblivious to the insidious conditions of the center, and were resistant to channeling financial resources into the center to be able to rectify these problems.

They [white administrators] are not as supportive as they should be. Being at a campus that does have a rising black population, you would think they would be a little more progressive. We just opened the new center last spring and it was a fight to get it to code. There was issue with asbestos falling from the ceiling; they were doing construction underneath the center. During exams, you could hear power jacks while we all were trying to study. There was a rodent problem. The building was fine when we first got it but it was one of those things where they didn’t up keep it because it was like you asked
for the building, and we gave it to you and we had to make videos and complain about it for the school to even do anything about it. They offered us money to fix the center if we would remove the YouTube videos (Dacey, female, urban).

We had to develop a way for the university to hear and understand how horrible the conditions were in the center, so we created a YouTube clip to show people. This is our place, and if the university cares about inclusion, they need to create a space that we are proud of and one that is safe (Josiah, male, urban)

Through a sense of shared experiences and sentiments regarding the deplorable conditions of the cultural center, students were able to create visibility and transparency of these conditions through a YouTube Video. Both Dacey and Josiah emphasized their emotional connection to the center as a separate entity within the campus environment, and used that connection to not only develop a narrative of resistance but also to act on it. Black students understood the value and importance of physical infrastructures like cultural centers, as such centers often represent the only space on campus that give them temporary reprieve from the “white gaze.”

In other accounts, students at the urban campus also discussed how their involvement in organizations allowed them to challenge racial incidents within the larger society. They clearly understood that experiences of racial inequality extended beyond the immediate campus environment. In that sense, their experiences of exclusion, stereotyping, and marginality are characteristic of the lived experiences of many blacks in America whether or not they go to college (Lewis & McKissic, 2010, Stotzer & Hossellman, 2012). Their engagement in outside forms of activism fostered a sense of collectivism and interdependence among fellow group
members, local community officials, and black America at large. Destiny, Donte, and Josiah all highlight how their organizations allowed them to address societal issues and problems in urban areas.

The reason I choose to be involved in my sorority was from seeing the women in the organization and how they represented themselves and how bonded they were. Also seeing the programs that they put on, they weren’t just trying to do social events, they were trying to bring attention to problems in the black community and actually try to address them (Destiny, female, urban).

A couple of my fraternity brothers and I participated in the Trayvon Martin protest downtown. As black men, we were impacted by this event, and we knew that having discussions in the center wasn’t enough, we had to act (Donte, male, urban).

Anytime we can help out the black community in the city, we do, from giving back, volunteering and tutoring. It’s obvious that as black university students, we are sometimes more privileged than blacks who live in the city, so we try to help the cause as much as we can (Josiah, male, urban).

Destiny, Donte and Josiah all convey a need to act to address problems in the black community via their organizations. Destiny and Donte emphasize how they did not want to maintain a passive role in black Greek organizations, specifically Donte highlights how members of his fraternity felt particularly compelled to participate in the Trayvon Martin protest given their identity as black men. Given that students at the urban campus
lived in close proximity to blacks who lived in the city, they were able to observe, and work to rectify these inequities first hand.

6.7. Race isn’t All We Want to Talk About

Many students in this study talked about how their experiences at predominately white campuses are not only shaped by race, but also by other facets of their identity. Black students understood that oftentimes race served as their master status; however, they also agreed that racial identity alone does not inform the totality of their experience. Those who adopted a more intersectional approach to their experiences understood that most racial discussions within black student organizations were limited, and one-dimensional, in the sense that race conversations were generally privileged and pervasive in these spaces. In order to deal with this, some students sought out other marginalized spaces on campus that were more inclusive in nature, instead of spaces that were almost always populated by blacks.

I joined a diversity awareness program and I remember reading about them thinking, this sounds great but I couldn’t join them that year so I made sure my schedule was clear for the next year to apply. So their motto is "reach one teach one.” We get a group of people together and talk about race, sexuality, class and all the different intersectional ties of that. I thought that was really important because I never had those conversations growing up. I learned so much about sexuality and gender in the last two years (Jessica, female, urban).

A couple students of color who identified as LGBTQ decided to create an organization called “True Colors.” We knew there needed to be a space for
colored groups who identified as gay. Myself and others got tired of confronting the homophobia in some of the black groups (Janet, female, urban).

All of the conversations in the black student union are always typically heteronormative, and I think it’s great we are allowed to be honest with each other on these issues. That’s what college is all about, we learn to see the world differently once we leave here. But if that’s the case, we also need to talk about other issues that often don’t see the light of day—sexism, homophobia, ageism, and discrimination against people with disabilities (Jaquan, male rural).

Much research on intersectionality has paid attention to the experiences of black women (Collins, 2008), which means that we know less about other types of intersections. Such as sexuality, and age. The students were well aware of the primacy of their racial identity held in white and black spaces. However, several of them, did not want to remain encapsulated in only this status, Jessica, Janet and Jaquan all suggest that intersecting identities were mutually constituted, and thus it was hard for them to distance concerns about race from concerns about other axes of identities. For both Jessica and Janet, it became a matter of seeking out, or even creating, spaces where these other conversations were not only tolerated but also encouraged and nurtured. This attention to intersectionality illustrates that in many respects while race still is of great significance to the lived experiences of many blacks, the change in the racial landscape from the Jim Crow era to now has led students to become more attentive and introspective about how other forms of discrimination and exclusion manifest.

A key benefit of safe spaces for black students in this study was the ability to counteract or neutralize their negative encounters with white peers and faculty both in and outside the
classroom. These groups allow students to foster collaborative and meaningful relationships and engage in unrestricted racial debates and discussions in which their experiences are both affirmed and validated. While these organizations allowed students to voice their frustrations, and mobilize to act on these issues, many students also resisted the primacy that was placed on race in these organizations and advocated for the black community to adopt a more intersectional approach to “race talk.”
CHAPTER VII: THE PRESERVATION OF BLACK CULTURE AND TRADITION

THROUGH BLACK STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS

Culture is commonly defined as the attitudes, customs, beliefs, ways of life and modes of thinking that differentiate one group from another (Crane, 1994). Historically, slavery, Jim Crow restrictions, and widespread discrimination have relegated blacks to marginal spaces to develop and celebrate a culture uniquely their own (Castell, 1997; Ceja & Yosso, 2000; Lewis & McKissic, 2010; Morris, 1984). Many of these cultural practices are rooted in Africa, even if they have incorporated elements of European American culture (Telfair & Nash, 1996). Today, distinct African American cultural practices have arisen around music, art, literature, religion, food, and holidays.

The sociological literature on culture is immense, so I make no attempt to review cultural sociology in its entirety. Two traditions in cultural sociology that both address inequality are especially pertinent for this study. Some scholars explore how dominant cultural practices can be converted into social and economic forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1973, 1996; Lareau, 2011; Carter, 2005), while others explore how disadvantaged groups express or exhibit opposition towards conventional norms and practices through the creation and use of countercultures (Carter, 2005; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Willis, 1981).

First, Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital has been employed extensively in sociological and educational research. He conceptualizes cultural capital as non-monetary assets that promote social mobility such as education, intellect, styles of speech, dress and physical presentation (Bourdieu, 1973, 1996). Educational researchers have found that cultural capital is not only conferred in schooling context, but it is also required to navigate the school environment successfully (Carter, 2005; DiMaggio, 1982; Nora, 2004). Teachers and school administrators
often reward some cultural repertories, dispositions, habits, and styles more so than others; one result of such practices, as several studies have demonstrated, is the reproduction of social inequality (Stanton-Salazar, 1997; Lareau, 1987). Moreover, because the elements of cultural capital are not race-neutral—they derive from a middle class white worldview—the cultural repertoires of minority groups, specifically those of lower socio-economic statuses, are often excluded and devalued in predominately white schooling contexts (Carter, 2005; Torres, 2009).

Secondly, extant literature on counter cultures show how they typically develop on the fringes or margins of society; while often ignored by dominant groups – unless they cause trouble – counter culture groups can, under some circumstances, contribute to cultural change at the level of dominant culture (Torres, 2009). Countercultures often hold values that are in opposition to the mainstream, and thus unconventional behaviors and practices are embraced (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; MacLeod, 2008; Moynihan, 1965; Willis, 1981). The development of counter-cultures among minority groups can be seen as reactions to persistent discrimination and exclusion in mainstream society (Castell, 1997; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Countercultures have shown to either reinforce the marginalization that minority groups experience (Torres, 2009; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986), or to act as mechanisms for combating social inequality as these cultures allow minority groups to preserve or maintain their cultural practices, values and norms (Lewis & McKissie, 2010; El-Khory, 2012)

Minority groups in predominately white contexts often deal with the challenge of preserving aspects of their own culture, while also utilizing aspects of dominant forms of cultural capital in order to both gain social mobility and successfully navigate predominately white spaces. Recent research has demonstrated that racial minorities in predominately white schools often engage in a strategic form of assimilation, which means they are able to utilize two distinct
cultural repertories, one for interacting within mainstream white society, and one for interacting in predominately black contexts (Carter, 2005; DuBois, 1903; Torres, 2009). Several students in this study explained how, when they found themselves in predominately white spaces, they monitored or policed themselves so as to avoid behaviors that could warrant discriminatory treatment from whites. In order to avoid discriminatory treatment, they accentuated behaviors and practices that seemingly brought them closer to whites and reduced the risk that they would be marginalized and excluded, such as adopting white speech patterns and distinctive white interactive styles.

When I first came here, I did find myself changing the taste of the people or groups I hung around with. They say the community that you hang around is the community that you become. So I found myself changing the type of music that I listened to. Mostly I would say from the lifestyle I used to live. I curse less now. I don’t drink at all (Justin, male, urban).

I was involved in a group project with a bunch of white students, and I didn’t like how the project was moving along. I could have been more aggressive about the decisions regarding the project but I didn’t want to be the “angry black girl” that didn’t like everything the group was doing. Subconsciously, I thought to myself I really don’t like the project, I’m outvoted and I am the only black person so I kind of just left it alone (Lisa, female, rural).

When you are with your African American counterparts and you feel comfortable and just talk the way you would at home. You switch into the classroom environment, which
is almost the same as how you would act in white organizations. You sit up a little straighter. You are firmer on the things that you believe and your opinions. You have to communicate in a way to ensure that everyone gets it. Everyone is not going to get it (Allison, female, rural)

These students highlight how conformity to white middle class speech patterns and culture was not only a way to avoid discriminatory treatment by whites, but also a way to demonstrate affinity and solidarity with whites. In particular, Lisa illustrates how stereotypical images of black women are both controlling and pervasive, and thus she must demonstrate restraint in her interactions with whites. Allison compares black and white interactive patterns and practices, and shows how context or the space one inhabits dictates or governs one’s interactive style. Their statements of changing their style and dialect, and behavior illustrate their hyper-awareness of how white forms of cultural expressions are rewarded in white spaces. They also both implicitly make the connection that the acquisition and endorsement of this form of capital allows them to navigate college successfully. Accordingly, a common theme in their accounts is the idea that there is a strict delineation between spaces that accept and/or reject non-dominant forms of cultural practices, and for students at both rural and urban institutions, learning and utilizing strategic assimilation was a necessary survival strategy.

7.1. Doing Black Culture

For black students at predominately white campuses, black organizations and black cultural centers serve as spaces where black students can engage in a distinct type of black cultural practices. The students in the study talked about the freedom to engage in culturally relevant activities in predominately black spaces as a way to avoid forfeiting their cultural identity or fully assimilating into white culture.
I noticed that I could find people like me in the African American Resource Center. Even though it is predominantly black, it is still that social community that I was used to from high school. We could relate to the same type of music, the same type of conversations. Rather than appearing to be more proper or educated and talk about things that I have no interest in such as snowboarding (Justin, male, urban).

I am a theatre major, and I like how black organizations provide the opportunity to engage in black arts. We put on a production during black history month, and I got to read a monologue from the play “For Colored Girls.” I would never get to do this in white organizations. In some ways, how I act and like to perform on stage is not wanted in some of the white arts groups (Shauna, female, rural).

Yes… I am at a PWI so I expect to participate in PWI activities. Black people I know, typically we don’t want to go to a hockey game. We will go to a basketball game or football game or have a dance. However, that is not necessarily what the predominately white group I was involved in was into and I was like okay... I am not going to keep coming to this, granted I could try and change it, but what if I stepped up and make change but what if the organization didn’t like that and the organization would just die. So I decided to eliminate myself and go to where I feel like I fit in the most (Anna, female, urban).
I am a part of FACES, a modeling group for students of color, and last year we got to put on a fashion show and we wanted to recognize black females and natural hair, so that’s something we got to do. I am happy we got the opportunity to do so (Lisa, female, rural).

These students also discuss distinctive components of black culture that these organizations foster: Justin discusses snowboarding as outside of the confines of black culture, while Anna characterizes football or basketball as predominately black sports. Shauna and Lisa depict how black artistic organizations also allow them to perform black plays, and wear black natural hairstyles in a fashion show. Shauna and Anna specifically emphasize that they felt restrained in predominately white spaces, and Anna indicates that it was this feeling of being excluded, that made her deliberately leave a white organization to join a black student organization that was more culturally familiar.

In order to successfully navigate the college environment, black students had to be what Prudence Carter (2005) refers to as a “cultural straddler.” Straddlers, according to Carter, are students who are able to understand and use the (white) cultural norms that govern their school context, but who also use non-dominant cultural repertoires with ease. In conceptualizing the cultural styles of black people, many students highlight the characteristic ways in which they talk, dress, entertain themselves, and express cultural preferences, around sports for example. These students make a conscious and deliberate choice to develop affiliations with black organizations to strengthen their sense of self, but also to hone the ability to navigate predominately white spaces. By participating in activities that are specific to black culture, they are able to reduce the pressures to fully assimilate into white spaces, and instead preserve aspects of their own culture.
7.2 Class differences in understanding culture

Class differences can contribute to the feelings of marginalization that many students experience at white colleges; black students from non-affluent backgrounds often experience cultural shock in navigating college campuses where norms and values of affluent groups often are pervasive (Torres, 2009). Given that white colleges and universities have historically served middle class and wealthy white students, non-affluent blacks often have to confront unfamiliar cultural practices while middle class blacks typically have had more exposure to privileged forms of cultural capital (Torres, 2009; Woldoff, Wiggins, Washington, 2011). In order to make distinctions between different class groups of blacks on campus, many students use terms such as “urban” and “suburban.” Suburban denotes having grown up in predominately white and affluent neighborhood, while “urban” has the connotation of having grown up in a predominately black neighborhood. With some variations, most students in the study belong to the urban group, but three students in particular grew up suburban and were able to articulate how their “suburban” upbringing had shaped their understanding of culture, as well as their cultural practices.

I think growing up in a white community has taught me what it takes to succeed, and that is having skills to interact with all groups of people. I have a diverse set of friends because I don’t always do things that are considered culturally black (Cassandra, female, urban).

I would say that I am not the average black student because I didn’t grow up in a predominantly black setting or environment. It was always uncomfortable for me to be in an all-black setting. Like I didn’t mind going to [black] functions but I wasn’t going to
make myself be that way all the time. I had a friend that was like, “oh we are going to
the black cultural center, do you want to go? I never went to the black cultural center, I
don’t want to say I was alienating myself because I did go to events that held. But I
didn’t go there on a daily basis as other black students did, so it was foreign to me. He
was like Estelle, what’s wrong, you act like you never been around black people before? I
had to laugh and say, “do you understand that most of my friends are white? He was like
oh yeah, yeah, yeah because you are an Oreo. “ He was joking. He was like “yeah, yeah,
yeah, you are not the same person to always be around the same crowd of people.” I
don’t just want to be around one culture. I want to experience as many as possible
(Estelle, female, urban).

Growing up in a predominately white environment most of life, I had friends who were
mostly white. I had to learn how to interact with cultures outside of my own, and this at
some times meant not always acting black. I think black organizations are good, but they
have the tendency to not celebrate other cultures; I think given that we live in a multi-
cultural society, it’s good to be able to get to know different types of people (Joseph,
male, rural).

Given their limited exposure to all-black culture prior to coming to college, these students
experienced exclusively black spaces as at least partially alienating and also as limiting in that
they did not seem to foster cross cultural interactions. They also made the connection that
residing in predominately white areas had taught them to navigate predominately white cultural
contexts with ease. It is not so that these students felt any less black than other students, but it is
apparent that their experiences of blackness were shaped by their class experiences. While class
remained integral in shaping the students’ cultural practices, it also influenced how students conceptualized the social and economic benefits of being open to different types of cultures. The experiences of Keaton and Nathan were very different from the suburban students but also highlight the complexities of how their race impacts communities, cultural styles, social connections and social mobility.

Well I attended an all black or predominantly black high school. I really wanted to get away from just being around my culture and my race, and I wanted to attend a white college. I have to eventually adjust to different races especially in the workforce. I wasn’t used to Caucasian people, or Indians, Asians and stuff. I had been around some Hispanics because I went to a Spanish speaking school in elementary school but never really Caucasians so I had to challenge myself (Keaton, male, rural).

Coming to college is a difficult thing to do because you have to grow and that is already uncomfortable but then to leave the black community is even more uncomfortable and I think that is how a lot of people get stuck in these organizations. When you apply to a job, and the interviewer says, what experiences have you had with being involved and you are like black, black, black, black, that is great but people feel certain ways about that (Nathan, male, rural).

Nathan and Keaton point to the restrictions associated with only being involved and having exposure to black people. Keaton, a student from a predominately black environment, felt compelled to develop networks with non-blacks, and thus this prompted him to attend a predominately white college. On the other hand, Nathan doesn’t make it clear that he is also seeking a diverse cultural network, but he does highlight that being solely involved in black
student organizations could warrant scrutiny in a job interview. Students understood that the adoption of (white) middle class values, speech patterns, and cultural practices, as well as the immersion in white and racially and culturally diverse spaces, could yield social and economic privileges both within the campus culture and beyond college life. These students’ understanding of culture could be informed by the devaluation of black culture in white-dominated spaces, especially work (Strausbaugh, 2006; Tatum, 2003). Given the devaluation of black culture in traditional white middle class settings, these students knew that in order to be successful they had to at times socially distance themselves from blacks and black culture.

7.3. Lack of Cultural Inclusivity

While most participants believed that black cultural spaces were necessary, some pointed out that such spaces and organizations were at times mistakenly assumed by outsiders to not be exclusive and unwelcoming to those who are not black. This challenge is best exemplified in Lisa’s statement, a female at a rural institution.

The majority of the groups I am in are black organizations. Once whites see black organizations, they think it is only for blacks, so they sort of leave (Lisa, female, rural)

Tyra, Shauna, and Maxine, who are all students at the rural institution talk about how their student center, which is referred to as a “multicultural student center,” has been reconstructed as a black only space. They did not fault themselves for others’ apprehension to participate in center activities or attend black events. Instead they elucidate how the word “multi-cultural” has become synonymous with black culture by many non-black students on campus. Even though the word “multi-cultural” encompasses the diversity of various social and cultural backgrounds, the cultural center was visibly a black student space.
I do feel it is like the black only student center. I feel like a lot of times even though it is a multicultural center, we are the heaviest minority besides international students on campus. They have their own house too. I mean they have a place to go. It is not like Latinos and other cultures around campus cannot come in here, they just don’t. Also there isn’t as many of them as there are black students. I think it just comes down to people feeling intimidated or not seeing other people that they know in here (Tyra, female, rural).

Even when white people that we are cool with come in here for a project or something, they are like oh we are allowed to come here? I thought this was only for black people? I think a lot of people know they can come in here but are just not comfortable coming in here (Shauna, female, rural).

I think some people don’t feel welcomed. Others feel they should have nothing to do with it because I think when most people hear multi-cultural, they think black and Latino or Mexican. That rules out white and Asian. Multi-cultural is not race, it is culture and I think people need to recognize the difference. Yes, your culture tie into your race but race doesn’t tie into your culture. For example, I like fried chicken because I like it not because I am black. Likewise, I like watermelon because I like it not because I am black (Maxine, female, rural).

While some students were aware of how culture was misunderstood by outsiders and those who did not come to the center, one student, suggested that black student organizations were exclusionary by not actively creating spaces for other cultures to co-exist. Nathan pointed to
what they saw as the hypocrisy of black student organizations; while these organizations are designed to serve as spaces of inclusion for black students at white campuses, they are often exclusionary in practice and not welcoming to all students who might otherwise have benefitted from a safe space.

I think the black people here are kind of exclusionary to other black people. It is difficult to explain, it is like exclusiveness within the black community that people perceive. Then I think it is so weird that black people always talk about getting more in touch with our black side but don’t do enough to welcome in the blackest people, like the Africans on the campus. That is kind of backwards to me because I played soccer in high school so I have a lot of experiences with that. I meet a lot of African people that I never thought I would come close with. They have a lot of the same experiences that blacks do with race. Because their skin is dark, they get put in the same box that we are in. I think we need to do better with that (Nathan, male, rural).

Nathan also touches on another major contention in the black community, and that is the separation between African Americans and those who are of more recent African descent. The research examining the chasm of African Americans and Africans has mostly concluded that the separation between these groups is largely due to their different historical experiences of racism and mistreatment (Walters, 2007). Nathan highlights that African and African American are often polarized terms, hence the lack of inclusion of African people in their cultural center. However, research shows that black immigrant populations are subjected to discriminatory experiences associated with their black identity (Ogbu 1991; Walters, 2007). Given this common experience, Nathan highlights the need for a more welcoming space for those of African descent.
7.4 Recreating a culturally pluralistic place

Recognizing the tension between exclusionary practices and inclusive ambitions, many students believed that they had to create spaces that were more culturally pluralistic, or physically position them in spaces where students from multiple cultures could feel welcome. As members of black student organizations, these students wanted to dispel the myth of black students as exclusionary and self-segregating.

I think students sometimes look at it as the African American center versus the Multi-cultural center. It should be inclusive. I have tried to encourage people to come in here. I will purposefully have meetings in here so people can see it. I think more students are starting to use it more (Allison, female, rural).

I am the minority chair in my residence hall, and I took this position because it allows me to interact with those outside my racial group. I put on a couple of minority programs were they had someone from the Diversity Awareness Program and we had conversation about racial awareness, and other identities. We also had programs where Indian dancers could come in and teach us various dances (Irene, female, urban).

Allison and Irene highlight the autonomy they have in both navigating the college environment and (re) defining the spaces they inhabit. Allison laments the lack of inclusivity that is suggested by the minimal number of nonblack students in the black cultural center, and thus she makes a concerted effort to invite nonblacks into a space they had perceived as being exclusively for blacks. In many ways, she acknowledges that this cannot be achieved until she makes a deliberate effort to foster inclusion and cross cultural interaction. Irene is also
determined to promote cross-cultural interactions, but she is using more neutral spaces to do so, like the residence hall she is in charge of.

Other students were interested in collaborating with students groups outside of the black community as a way to increase the visibility of their organizations, but also as an avenue for engaging nonblack members and dispelling the myths of blacks as exclusionary.

We need to branch out to a wider diverse group of people, and organizations. In the black student union, we were talking about the fact that we need to do more programs in collaboration with other people. We kind of stick to the usual, we might collaborate with Alpha Phi Alpha (a black fraternity) or the black student programming board. We keep it in the community. I wonder if other organizations are open to collaborating with us.

Like in the black student union, we have three white members and they are really nice. Sometimes I feel the name is really off-putting. Even at the college fairs, and we are like you should sign up and people are like but I am not black. Sometimes I think the name is a challenge (Mary, female, rural).

If we have a program with Black Male’s Quarterly, you will generally have the same crowd. Which means you’re preaching to the choir? The same thing for Kappa Alpha Psi. When you tap into similar organizations that are fighting for similar causes with a different outlet or different skin color, it helps engage participation. It also helps to tweak and see what they are doing to bring it back to our organization (Josiah male, urban).

Even though a few students highlighted how black student organizations are viewed as culturally, socially, and physically separate from other student groups, these students
acknowledged that divisions between black and nonblack student organizations needed to be eradicated. In an attempt to promote an inclusive campus environment, the rural institution would put on a campus fair for incoming students to be introduced to and exposed to campus organizations. Mary specifically highlights the challenges of black student organizations in appealing to a more diverse crowd; using the word “black” in many of the organization’s titles made nonblack students feel as if they could not participate or join. These students are able to see the potential affinities between black and non-black organizations, and hence advocate for developing alliances with other groups as a way to benefit black student organizations.

7.5 Black Greek organizations as preserving tradition

Another way in which the preservation of black culture was maintained was through students’ involvement in black Greek organizations, or historically black Greek fraternities and sororities. Extant research rarely makes distinctions between white and black Greek organizations. However, some scholars have noted that many of the characteristics of white Greek organizations are not applicable to black Greek organizations (McClure, 2006; Parks, Morial & Malveaux, 2008; Ray, 2013). This research indicates that white and black Greek organizations differ both socially and structurally, and that members of the respective organizations have different experiences and hold different values (McClure, 2006).

Black Greek organizations were initially developed due to persistent exclusion of blacks from white fraternal organizations; that is, blacks developed organizations in order to combat a hostile racial climate, foster a sense of community, and deal with social and political issues in the black community (Fox & Ward, 1987; Kimbrough, 2003; Parks, Morial & Malveaux, 2008). White Greek organizations do not share the same history, and thus the values and norms which govern their organizations are markedly different (McClure, 2006).
Gregory, Josiah and Destiny, all highlighted a major difference between white and black Greek organizations: Black Greek organizations promotion of lifelong membership. Research shows that members in black Greek organizations are expected to remain active participants beyond their college years in alumni and national chapters by financial contributions and participation in social and community activities (Rogers, Rogers & Anderson, 2012).

Even going to fraternities and sororities, white frats and sororities it isn’t a for life thing. Whereas in the black ones, it is (Gregory, male, urban).

My uncle raised me; I stayed with him throughout my high school years. He was a Kappa, so that was the only fraternity I was familiar with. He also remarked on being a Kappa, it was a thing for life, and he still keeps in contact with many of his fraternity brothers. When I got down here to college, one of my mentors was a Kappa’s so it was the first thing that I was exposed to (Josiah, male, urban).

Speaking for black Greek organizations, it is a lifetime commitment for us. You always have the bond with the people that you spent time with. On the other hand for the white ones, yea they are involved but it isn’t necessarily something they stay involved with. They don’t necessarily have grad chapters so maybe they will stay involved, maybe they won’t. With us it is like yea we are going to pay our dues and continue to do community service and continue to do things that we need to do. I think that is one thing I love is the lifetime membership (Destiny, female, urban)
Another distinction they made between black and white Greek organizations was how white organizations are typically equated with preserving a sense of status or prestige, while black Greek organizations are seen as both preserving and cultivating tradition.

Going to Greek life. I noticed that when it comes to white Greek organization, it becomes a status thing. On the flip side with black Greek, it isn’t as much status as it is tradition. Your parents belong to this particular black Greek organization, so you look into it and want to join. It is one of those things that people do, especially those who come from a black cultural background. Black Greek organizations are founded on the idea that college was not meant for us, and so these organizations exist because of that (Dacey, female, urban).

I think with a lot of white Greek organizations, it’s just something they do because it’s cool and popular, and they get to make more friends. I mean in some respects white people are able to separate themselves from other whites by who is Greek and who is not Greek (Jaquan, male, rural).

Dacey and Jaquan both discuss how the existence of and engagement with black Greek organizations is linked historically to black culture. As Jaquan sees it, white students join Greek organizations for very different reasons, including especially for purposes of gaining status and extending social networks. Dacey also illustrates that there is still a common practice of becoming Greek based on familial affiliations. Research shows that this practice is often less pervasive among white Greek organizations (Rogers, Rogers, Anderson, 2012). She also regards black Greek organizations as different from white Greek organizations as she emphasizes the development and origin of these organizations in the historical mistreatment of blacks in white
schools. Some of the most influential and celebrated black leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks and W.E.B. DuBois are members of black Greek Letter organizations, and thus these organizations continue to serve as semblance and tangible representation of the black struggle for liberation and equality (Ray, 2013).

Conclusion

Most participants emphasized that black organizations provide students the opportunity to engage in culturally relevant activities and preserve black culture, but a few, expressed some regret around the fact that these spaces typically operate as exclusively black spaces. While culture serves to build solidarity among similarly situated people, the findings of this chapter also demonstrate that culture can be perceived as quite restrictive and alienating. Larger societal conceptualizations of black culture often place blacks in narrow and segregated roles. In various media forms, black culture is often portrayed as a monolithic entity, where people occupy a limited set of roles and characters (Richeson & Pollydore, 2002). Given this background, blacks are often unable to exercise cultural fluidity or exhibit multiple cultural repertoires as they traverse white spaces. This dilemma prevents them from engaging in cross cultural transactions and integrating or blending aspects of their culture into others. The students who advocated for a more culturally pluralistic space were responding to these constraints and actively advocate for cross-cultural communication and collaboration in both black and nonblack spaces.

These narratives also highlight the importance of the college environment in shaping students’ preferred cultural practices. For students today, college presents an opportune time to engage with individuals outside from other cultural backgrounds and build both formal and informal relationships. Several of the students concluded that a diverse worldview and the
ability to build relationships with multiple cultural groups were tools that they could use to gain social and economic capital.
CHAPTER VIII: LEADERSHIP, MENTORSHIP AND OUTREACH

Research has shown that a lot of out of class learning occurs within extracurricular activities, student activities, student organizations and campus wide programs (Astin, 1993, Tinto, 1994). While many students in this study attested to how racial and cultural oriented student organizations aid in alleviating feelings of isolation by allowing them to develop relationships with peers, students also emphasized how critical these organizations are in the development and nurturance of essential life skills. Current theories on extra-curricular involvement highlights how these organizations impart valuable knowledge and allow students to engage in an experiential form of learning that is often not present in the traditional college classroom. Student campus organizations promote leadership skills (Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, 1991), allow students to engage in mentoring relationships (Astin, 1993), and provide service learning/community service opportunities (Graham & Cockriel, 1997).

Colleges and universities are often been viewed as training grounds for the development of leadership skills (Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, 1991). In many campus organizations, students who assume advisory roles or leadership positions gain conflict resolution, organizational and interpersonal skills (Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, 1991). In addition to identifying the benefits accrued from leadership experience, studies have also examined the challenges in assuming leadership roles for both students of color, and women. Many obstacles exist that impact minority group members’ ascension into leadership roles, including especially a hostile racist and sexist climate. For both women and people of color, there is often a lack of role models in leadership positions; for women, specifically, the leadership culture often affirms and rewards masculine qualities, and thus women leaders often are viewed as both less qualified and less effective (Adams & Keim, 2007; Astin & Leland, 1991). Consequentially, this often
impacts women’s sense of competence, and self-efficacy, and diminishes their likelihood of obtaining and remaining in positions of power (Astin & Leland, 1991; Fox Keller, 1978).

Given the limited opportunities for minority group members to assume leadership roles and the negative experiences they encounter, mentorship plays a vital role in improving the prospects for potential minority group leaders (Astin & Leland, 1991). Scholarship on mentorship in higher education falls into two broad categories: studies that focus on the specific types of mentoring relationships, and studies that seek to identify the positive academic and social outcomes of mentorship. Mentorship in higher education remains vital for student success (Astin & Leland, 1991). Students who are able to form ongoing and meaningful interactions with students and faculty and seek their assistance are more likely to persist than students who do not (Bush, 2004; Freeman, 2003; Ikehwaba, 2001). A large component of the socialization process for undergraduate students involves out of the classroom interactions with faculty and students. Accordingly, many of the norms and values of higher education are acquired through these informal and formal interactions (Tierney, 1997). The positive outcomes of mentoring relationships, whether, formal or informal, have been well documented; mentorship has a significant impact on student’s career decision, socialization into academic and professional roles, and grades (Freeman, 2003; Tierney, 1997).

Specifically, for black students at predominately white institutions, mentorship improves satisfaction with college. To date, the majority of the research examining mentorship for African American students has largely concluded that formal and structured mentorship relationships with faculty members are more beneficial for students than unstructured mentoring relationships (Jacobi, 1991; Strayhorn and Terrell, 2007). However, less is known about how
student organizations create avenues for the development and maintenance of both formal and informal mentoring relationships.

Another key component of student campus organizations is the opportunity for engagement or participation in service learning or community service. Many studies have examined the effects of students’ participation in higher education institutions on their civic awareness. According to Graham and Cockriel (1997), involvement in extracurricular activities can impact students’ awareness of political and social problems within their immediate college environment and encourage them to be more involved in politics and find their voice in a democratic society (Rhodenbaugh, 1998). Additionally student campus organizations that provide avenues to engage in community service increase students connections to the community, allow them to become knowledgeable of local community needs, and enhance their citizenship skills (Zimmerman-Oster and Burkhardt, 2001). Additionally, Graham and Cockriel (1997) emphasize that community service helps students develop empathy and compassion through helping people. Oftentimes, college campuses are detached from local community members or often act in isolation from the larger community in which the college is situated (Zimmerman-Oster and Burkhardt, 2001). However, students who are involved in the community are able to bridge at least some of the gap between local community members, and the larger campus community.

The development of key life skills such as leadership, mentorship and citizenship was emphasized by several students in this study. In analyzing their reasons and the benefits of their involvement as it relates to leadership skills, mentorship, and outreach several themes emerged 1) the importance of pursuing leadership roles for professional development; 2) challenges to being a leader in white organizations; 3) strategic leadership in diversity organizations; 4) the
importance of peer mentoring; and 5) the importance of community engagement for students at rural institutions as a mean to pursue social justice, and enhance their attachment to their local community.

8.1 The Importance of Leadership in Black Student Organizations

Out of classroom experiences remained vital for students’ acclimation to the college environment and for their professionalization in a career upon graduation. The development of leadership skills was an important goal for many of the students in this study. Out of the 40 students interviewed, 22 held a leadership or executive cabinet position in a black student organization over the course of their college career, while only fourteen held a position at the time of the interview. Donte, Lisa and Anna, students who hold leadership roles, summarize the importance of black student organizations in providing an avenue for students to assume these positions, as well as gain a multitude of skills.

Being a part of these student groups pushed me to a level of leadership that I didn’t think I had within me. In my opinion, being a part of my black groups, I have gained more leadership experience. In white organizations, everything is already set and done. You really just have to follow this model and if you follow the model, you are good. In the black groups you don’t get any model or anything and you just have to make it happen. In the black organizations, we have limited resources and you just had to make it happen. I am always curious if my white counterparts were put in that position, would they be able to truly rise to the occasion? It’s cool to be on the executive board and all you have to do is be the treasurer. I know how it is to be the treasurer, president and secretary all rolled into one. The greater level of leadership that I get from black organizations is the biggest difference (Donte, male, urban)
My involvement in black organizations has made me a great leader, and I know that some white students don’t learn the skills we learn. It has taught me some things that I will use in whatever career I go into. Sometimes I don’t like people on the executive board but I have to work with them. So that is something that I have learned. I have learned organization skills, planning skills, management skills (Lisa, female, rural).

It definitely made a difference in me feeling important. It made me feel like I have a place on this campus. Before becoming an executive board member in an organization, I didn’t feel like that before. Being a member is one thing but when you are actually one of the people behind the scenes, organizing things, planning things, getting things ready for conferences, getting things ready for general body meetings. You are like I am really doing this, it makes you feel important (Anna, female, urban)

Donte, Lisa and Anna touch on a few of the intangible rewards of being involved in black student organizations, and that is gaining a diverse set of leadership skills. While these rewards may be common for all students regardless of the racial composition of the organization, Donte and Lisa make a unique point, and highlight how their leadership experiences may not mirror the leadership experiences of white students in predominately white organizations. Donte is also involved in white student organizations, and uses this experience as a reference point in drawing comparisons between the two different types of organizations. He alludes to a certain fragility and shortcoming in black student organizations, and that is a smaller membership pool. He remarks on how students in white organizations are given well-defined, singular roles, while students in black organizations often have to assume multiple leadership roles. By taking on
multiple roles, Donte indicates that he is able to learn how to quickly adapt to circumstances and
navigate through trial and error situations.

In addition to the skills mentioned by the students above, a few women also highlighted
how they acquired planning/coordination skills through the power and autonomy they
experienced in shaping the direction of their organizations.

As the Vice President of Black Student Union, I help the President in not only leading but
also helping mold the direction of the organization. We just don’t want it to be a social
group, we want to be a group of action and social justice (Mary, female, rural).

Women who are leaders on campus, they have to keep the organization afloat.
Definitely the public image is very important. As the President of my sorority, we like to
recruit people who are different. It is not about having people that are all the same in an
organization. You need diversity. It is nice to have people that have a different mindset
or different outlook on life. All of my sorority sisters have different personalities and it is
hilarious to see all of us in a room sometimes (Destiny, female, urban).

Mary and Destiny highlight a critical aspect of leadership, which is the ability to be a
visionary, and being able to shape and plan current and future agenda for their respective
organization. These women were very observant of the challenges and gaps in their organization,
whether it was the lack of attention paid to activism and social justice, or the need to recruit a
diverse membership body. It was through these leadership positions that these women were able
to address these challenges and set the organization on a somewhat different course and rectify
these gaps.
8.2 Challenges to Being A Leader in White Organizations

For several students in this study, black student organizations provided an outlet for obtaining leadership roles and skills that were often perceived to be inaccessible in predominately white student organizations (Estelle, female, urban). Some students did report being involved as members in white student organizations that were often more academic or professional in focus. However, these students also reported some trepidation when it came to assuming a leadership role in a predominately white organization. Tanya and Jessica are both involved in white student organizations, and talk about how these organizations did not foster a sense of inclusivity and belonging.

There are a lot of challenges when it comes to being a leader in the white community. I am involved in a predominately white academic fraternity, and it is hard because people don’t readily approach you. Like when you come in the room, no one is going out of their way to make you feel welcome, it’s an awkward vibe. I feel like that is the most challenging part, fitting in with the white community (Tanya, BF, rural).

Sometimes, I want to be more involved in white student organizations, you know more than just being a member. But politics always play a role; people have made their friends already. The hardest for me is when people self-select, they self-select who they want to hang out with in these organizations and who they want to lead these organizations. Some of it is popularity, and some of it is race based. I don’t always feel a part of the group (Jessica, BF, urban).

Tanya and Jessica highlight how they are often in the margins in white student organizations, and for this reason have come to view white student organizations as isolating,
unfriendly, and not welcoming to black students. A key attribute of most leaders on college campuses is the ability to forge meaningful relationships with their membership body, but also to work strategically with other campus constituents. For both of these students, the culture of white organizations was not conducive to building meaningful relationships with the immediate membership body. This culture lead to the feeling of “not fitting in” and this had an impact on their sense of belonging or attachment to predominately white organizations. In many predominately white spaces, there is always this expectation that students who hold marginal identities need to adapt to the organizational or institutional culture in order to fit in and be fully accepted (Lewis & McKissic, 2010). In many ways, this engenders feelings of self-blame among black students, while also simultaneously concealing the responsibility that whites play in fostering a culture that is exclusionary.

8.3 Strategic Leadership in Integrated Organizations

In spite of the exclusion students encountered in some predominately white organizations, several of them were involved in more integrated diversity-related organizations. Within these spaces, black students were viewed as leaders who advocated for diversity, change, and social justice both within and outside the immediate campus environment. The students attending the rural institution were much more aware of the numerical rarity of students of color on campus, and thus they became invested in issues of recruitment and retention of students of color at the university level.

Some of the students I talked to held leadership positions in the Recruiting Society and the Cultural Programming Board. The Recruiting Society provides students an opportunity to be involved in the recruitment of underrepresented students. The Cultural Programming Board allows students to work together across many different student groups, regardless of racial
composition, to organize culturally diverse programs. As mentioned previously, for students at the rural institution, their involvement in black student organizations was central to their decision to attend college, their satisfaction with the college experience, and their persistence. For that reason, being involved outside of predominately black spaces in order to engage in university efforts focused on diversity, and improving the campus climate for current and future students was both a necessity, and a strategic form of leadership.

Three students in particular describe their first exposure to these organizations and remark on how organizations were instrumental in first shaping their decision to attend their institution.

The Recruiting Society puts on two events-the Multicultural Visitation Program (MVP) and Cultural Connections. MVP is for high school seniors who are interested in attending the university. They come down for two days and stay overnight and we put on all these programs, and let them tour the campus. Cultural Connections is for admitted students only and they come with their parents. They basically do the same thing as MVP. They let you know where things are. When I got here, I searched where this place or that place was. We have the expo where you get to see all the different organizations, I enjoyed it because of the impact they had on my decision and I am completely satisfied with my decision (Joanna, female, rural).

Cultural Connections was a weekend thing with our parents. It was basically for admitted multicultural students. It was majority black and that is where I met a lot of the black community. I wanted to start making friends then so it wouldn’t be much of a jump when school began. A lot of us kept in contact. A lot of people here come from larger
urban cities three to four hours away from campus so they already knew some people (Jaquan, male, rural).

In high school, I attended the Multi-cultural visitation program, even though the university was far from home, they made me feel welcomed. I met a lot of black students, and other students of color who were so friendly. It felt like a small family environment, and that’s something I wanted in a university (Nathan, male, rural)

For many rural institutions, recruitment of diverse students, specifically those from urban areas is both an important and challenging task. Rural institutions often have to deal with the dilemma of being viewed by students as less desirable as they are often located in remote areas, and are racially homogenous (Woldoff, Wiggins, & Washington, 2011). Jaquan highlights how many black students came from predominately urban areas that were more than three to four hours away from the campus environment, and for these students establishing a sense of familial like ties or attachment to the university was of chief importance. Visitation programs, specifically those targeting diverse students, provided an opportunity for the students to be introduced to and become more engaged within the campus environment via student organizations. While participation in the university’s visitation programs was completely voluntary, these programs allow students them to build connections and relationships with other similarly situated peers, specifically for those who grew up in the same areas.

Students who attended these visitation programs understand the importance that they play in diversifying their college campus, and instilling a sense of belonging for themselves and others. These organizations had the primary goal of engaging multiple constituents across various racial and cultural groups in order to create cohesion and foster an inclusive campus
climate. However, many black students strategically used these culturally integrated organizations in order to demonstrate their commitment to university recruitment, retention and inclusion efforts and to successfully navigate a predominately white college environment.

The Recruiting Society which nowhere in the name does it say that it is a black organization but when it was created, it was created to draw in black students. I became a part of it because it was the organization that inspired me to come here. I like talking to the high school students and then you see them come here the next year, it is a rewarding experience. I love it (Joanna, female, rural).

I am involved in student senate, it is predominantly white but actually I am in the black branch of it. I have a voice in letting administrators know what some of the needs are of black students on campus (Mary, female, rural)

In predominately white organizations, some black students felt as if leadership opportunities were hard to obtain due to an unwelcoming environment. While they were able to access positions of leadership in black student organizations, they still remained very insular and sequestered from nonblack students and administrators. Moreover, as stated in the previous chapter, exclusive involvement in black student organizations presented minimal opportunities for cross cultural interactions with other nonblack students, and other student groups.

In many ways, diversity oriented organizations eliminated both of these challenges—these organizations shielded the black students from the exclusion they felt in white organizations, but it also allowed them to be more connected and engaged with the larger organizational structure of their school. Organizations like the student senate, the Cultural Programming Board and the Recruiting Society were all geared towards fostering a more culturally inclusive space for all
students on campus. They were able to use these organizational spaces as venues to advocate for students, and promote policies and programs that recognize and celebrate the diversity of the students. Students at the rural institution were able to escape the difficulties associated with obtaining and maintaining leadership roles in white organizations by joining student groups which were more racially and culturally representative and diverse, and hence were more welcoming to students of color.

8.4 The Significance of Peer Mentoring

Navigating the college environment for the first time can present several challenges—the transition into the college environment can engender feelings of inadequacy among many of these students, they may have little or no knowledge of the expectations of college students or little experience with how to interact with authority on college campuses (Dennis, Phinney & Chuateco, 2005). This lack of knowledge may prevent them from taking advantage of the campus services that could help them persist in college.

A prevalent theme in this study was how black student organizations provided benefits and tools in helping them navigate the college environment, one organization in particular was Bridges. Bridges is an organization at the University of Cover that assists students with their adjustment to college and provides workshops, peer mentoring and other social and academic activities to improve retention and graduation rates for black students, many of whom are first generation college students.

Bridges is a really good support program. The whole thing is mentor based. They assign you to someone that is older and they give you advice. My mentor is always willing to help me out if I need help academically or socially. They encourage us to use the resources on campus like tutoring (Irene, female, urban)
Since I am a first year student, I am in the Bridges program. It is a program that helps first year African American students to transition through college and you get a mentor that is an upper class man. I have a second year mentor. He has been really helpful so I really like that program. With Bridges, I get the support of my mentor. I text him and pick his brain about studying and college life. That’s a really big resource. Bridges also has retreats, we had a speaker and we did fun activities to interact with other people and other African Americans. It’s a really good program. (Dustin, male, urban)

Being a first generation college student with no support system, Bridges became that support system. (Donte, male, urban)

There is also has a similar mentoring program at the rural institution called STARS which offers financial and academic support to first year students of color. Many students spoke about how this program provided them with tools and strategies to manage the rigors of college life.

STARS is a multicultural program where incoming freshman come in and receive peer mentoring. Typically the peer advisors have about five or six mentees, who are incoming freshman. At the time I met with my peer advisor weekly and gave her updates on my academics and social life. Basically the whole program is to help freshman transition from high school to college. They provide you free tutoring for whatever you need. You get the one on one with the peer advisor. It helped me a lot because we were like a family my freshman year (Lisa, female, rural)
STARS definitely helped me get familiar with faces. Even though they may not be my best friends it helped me establish some associates. They provided me a lot of information about the school and kind of helped me feel like I was at home (Doria, BF, rural).

Bridges and STARS are both programs geared towards providing essential tools to successfully adjust to the college environment. Students like Doria, Lisa and Dustin spoke about how peer mentors were critical in providing guidance on how to navigate and manage the rigors of college and learn the college going culture. First year students who participated in each of these programs were paired with an older student who served as a mentor, and students like Doria and Irene highlight how their mentors influenced them to become more engaged in the college environment, and utilize academic resources such as tutoring. Donte, a senior student at the urban institution reflects back on how Bridges became a critical support system for him as a first generation college student. These particular organizations targeting first year students are advantageous, as they are able to instill lessons to students that allow them to flourish in the college environment, while also still allowing them to build alliances and relationships with other similarly situated students in order to verbalize and validate their experiences as a black student on a predominately white campus.

8.4.1. Mentorship, Respectability Politics and Black Men

In response to the poor academic outcomes and retention rates of black men in higher education, President Obama established a federal initiative called “My Brother’s Keeper” in September 2014 in order to rectify the inequities facing black men in terms of underachievement, and unemployment. Black men, in comparison to other ethnic and gender groups, are disproportionately underachieving in academic settings: they earn fewer degrees, drop out more
often, and have lower grades (Bush & Bush, 2010). Additionally Harper (2009, 2012) suggested that black men have more limited levels of academic and social engagement within the college environment than their female peers.

Bush and Bush (2010) indicate that engagement with faculty and campus support services are vital to the persistence and success of college students, but black men are less likely to use them. Black males in college often endure a climate of discriminatory treatment characterized by low teacher expectations, insufficient academic preparation for college level work, and the debilitating consequences of severe underrepresentation (Wood & Ireland, 2013).

To address these challenges mentorship has emerged as an important tool for providing black men with role models and support. Donte, Jaquan, Chris and Keaton discussed two primary benefits of mentorship, role modeling and relationship building for black men on campus.

It’s good to see black males that look like myself and when I talked to them they had similar situations but they were all still pushing toward higher education. They were legit making it and for me not having a lot of male role models especially ones that looked like myself, those men became the role models to lean on and my support system (Donte, male, urban).

I think mentorship is very important. I am glad I had a mentor who was a black male. He really helped make my first few weeks here easier. Like my mentor walked me to all my classes my first couple of weeks, and we hung out and became friends (Jaquan, male, rural)
I’ll say last year and this year I was invited to the organization, Black Male 100 and I got to be surrounded around positive black men on the campus and other students and professors (Chris, male, urban).

A lot of upper class black male students have definitely reached out to me. If I speak up and say I am struggling in this class or need help in this class they are more than willing to help me. Whether it be tutoring, giving me a book or leading me in the right direction to get some help (Keaton, male, rural)

These narratives illustrate the importance of providing men with venues for male bonding and peer support in academic and social spaces. Along with the disparity in black male college enrollment, many black men in college are in spaces where the presence of black male faculty, staff and administrators is also quite limited. Thus, attempting to build alliances among black men within the college environment can pose quite a challenge. These students emphasize how vital it is for them to congregate in safe spaces where they can validate each other’s experiences, and seek and share personal and academic advice.

One topic relevant to black men is how to avoid mistreatment and discrimination in white spaces. The term ‘respectability politics’ captures this dilemma well (Noguera, 2008). According to Majors (1993) the problematic assumption embedded in respectability politics is the idea that black culture is inherently deficient; this assumption, in turn, serves to conceal the roles that structures and systems play in reproducing inequality. For black men situated in an urban environment, learning respectability politics—that is, learning how to present themselves in a respectable manner--- is an important tool in their efforts to avoid stereotyping victimization and mistreatment. It can be assumed that the experiences of many students who attend an urban
environment are shaped by the environment outside of the college institution. According to my participants, respectability politics was a topic emphasized in many mentoring relationships.

Gregory and Donte discuss the importance of how black organizations provided the opportunity for peer support and mentorship. In particular, Gregory highlights his motivation in founding an organization titled, “Black Men’s Quarterly (BMQ)”, an organization that promotes the personal and professional development of black men. Additionally Donte highlights how predominately black male spaces allowed him to gain mentorship and guidance on appropriate dress and communication.

There were no other spaces or organizations for black men to get together. BMQ just kind of started by having conversations. I definitely wanted the organization to be academic based because of the article about graduation rates. I saw cats [men] that have been here for 6 to 7 years, not graduating. I call them “super seniors”. They were just here not graduating, all that loan money and you are just kicking it. That is how I felt about the older guys (Gregory, male, urban).

There are certain things that are accepted in that world that are not accepted in the real world. Men would be like we have to be professional all the times, so I had some males telling me this is what you need to wear. I was always a good talker but I talked real fast. People ask me how you can get in front of people and talk. To this day I hear them saying in my ear “Donte you need to slow down, stop talking so fast, like really slow down”. Because I am naturally a fast talker (Donte, male, urban).

From Gregory’s statement, he makes a presumption that being a “super senior” or taking longer than six or seven years to complete a degree was problematic, and thus an organization
that provides mentorship for black men. He emphasizes that these “super seniors” were just “kicking it” or not taking their education seriously. From Donte’s perspective, however, the problem may not be a lack of effort but instead a lack of knowledge; he talks about how he did not possess the proper etiquette in professional situations, and he was instructed by many of his peers on how to redress his communication and dress.

Society’s constant admonishment of black men and their culture for their perceived failures explains why the politics of respectability has become such an important part of mentoring relationships among black men. Messages and directives such as “go to school” “graduate on time,” “work hard,” dress well” and “speak articulately” are directives that black men must heed in order to deal with racism. It is via these messages that they internalize a belief that their life outcomes are their own responsibility, and they must comport themselves to white standards of dress and communication in order to successfully navigate a predominately white environment (Noguera, 2008).

8.5 Advocating for social justice through community engagement/service

In order to understand, promote, and enact social justice, students must first develop a heightened and critical awareness of oppression, exclusion, and discrimination. Generally, black students are able to empathize more with other disadvantaged groups given their own experiences of racism and oppression (Lewis & McKissic, 2010; Patton, 2010). Black student organizations often serve as vehicles for promoting a group awareness of discrimination, and provide opportunities for collective mobilization that enables students to fight against injustices (Patton, 2010).

For students at the rural institution, their commitment to social justice was directly shaped by the context in which they resided. Aberdeen is one of the poorest counties in the state, the
population is 64,757. Medicaid recipients are 19 percent of the population, and food stamp recipients total 18 percent of the population (US Census Bureau, 2010). Although rural poverty is no worse than urban poverty, there are unique challenges and differences. Rural residents who live in poverty often face social isolation from social services, and higher transportation costs. These challenges create burdens when it comes to seeking employment, and taking advantage of health and education opportunities (Jazairy, Alamgir & Panuccio, 1992). Many students spoke openly about the realities of poverty and the harsh living conditions of Aberdeen residents. Through their involvement in both predominately black and white student organizations, they were able to engage in efforts to rectify social problems within their community.

The one thing you will notice is that the university is a bubble. The second you step off of campus this is like one of the poorest counties on this side of the nation. United Campus Ministries [predominately white organization] is one of the organizations I volunteer with and they cook meals for the community. We cook it, serve it and then we are allowed to talk with them. Just from talking with them, one of their main issues is that it is hard for them to get help despite the riches that are on the campus. A lot of them are still in poverty. They still seem happy. So Aberdeen has grown on me for that reason (Tanya, female, rural).

I guess you can consider United Campus ministries an organization that I am kind of involved with. Once a month I set up dates for my commission for student senate to go there and volunteer. We will go and cook and serve food and fellowship with people in the Aberdeen community that aren’t as fortunate. We do that Saturday afternoon. I use them as a resource to reach out to the community (Elizabeth, female, rural)
Aberdeen County is one of the poorest in our region and one of the poorest in the nation if I am not mistaken. If you just stay on campus you don’t really see the struggle. It is eye opening. As part of Black student Union, we get toiletries, clothes and can foods and we donate to My Sister’s Place and Good Works. They are two different community organizations. My Sister’s Place is for battered women and Good Works I think they just help the community as a whole (Martina, female, rural).

Tanya reiterates how universities operate in a “bubble” and remains isolated from the lived realities of the immediate community outside the university. Given the low density of a place like Aberdeen, residents are often concentrated in a very small area, not far from the university landscape. While students may have been able to physically distance themselves by remaining within the confines of the university, their involvement in both predominately white and black organizations allowed them to confront poverty and engage in volunteer efforts and build relationships with local residents.

Being a black student at a rural institution presented several challenges, especially for those who come from urban areas. Two students spoke about the lack of black establishments like hair salons and churches in the area. However, several of them understood that in order to enjoy their college experience while being distant from their home communities, they had to gain and sustain some type of attachment to the external community. Elizabeth, a female student, illustrates the connection between volunteering and establishing a sense of identity and affinity to the Aberdeen community.

I like the opportunity to give back to the community because this is home for us even if it just for the four years we are here. We have to make this home and treat it as such by
giving back to the community. Volunteering has opened my eyes to several different
things and I am definitely grateful for that (Elizabeth, female, rural)

Beyond providing respite from the social inequalities that pervade predominately white
campuses, black student organizations are also instrumental in providing students with
opportunities to learn valuable life and professional skills through leadership, mentorship and
outreach. Mentorship provides exposure to positive role models, as well as teaches black men
the required respectability politics in order to survive in a predominately white school. This
chapter also demonstrates how context plays a role in shaping students’ participation and
outreach experiences. For students attending the rural institution, living in a small, racially
homogenous campus community allowed for more opportunities to engage in both institutional
efforts of diversity and inclusion, and community service within the larger Aberdeen community.
CHAPTER IV: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this qualitative study was four-fold; first to explore how students at rural and urban institutions conceptualize their college experience, and the challenges they encounter; second, to gain a better understanding of the motivating factors that allow students to remain involved, minimally involved or uninvolved in black student organizations; thirdly, to understand how other social statuses such as gender, social class, and sexuality impact their experiences, and their involvement in black student organizations, and fourthly to gain a better understanding of the role that physical location (urban vs. rural) plays in shaping their experiences with black student campus organizations.

The theoretical literatures on resistance and intersectionality are central to understanding students’ experiences. Resistance involves a wide range of actions and behaviors, and can occur in a variety of context and settings (Hynes, 2013). Acts of resistance occur at the micro level, involving the use of counter-identities or discourse forms of resistance, or at the macro level, which is evidenced by more visible forms of protest such as social movements (Hollander and Einhower, 2004; Hynes, 2013; Litwack, 2009; Tilly, 2004). Black student organizations were born out of a concerted effort by black students and civil rights leaders to challenge racial inequality in our education system, to demand a more diverse representation of faculty members, to demand more diverse course offerings, the development of black studies programs, and the establishment of organizational spaces for minority group students (Rogers, 2012; Rogers 2009, Lewis & McKissic, 2010; McCormick, 1990). Today the racial landscape has changed, and efforts to increase diversity at predominately white institutions have emerged as a significant and deliberate institutional goal. Despite these gains, however, black students still experience the racial climate on white campuses to be less than hospitable (Ancis, Sedlacek, Mohr, 2000; Allen,
Given the history of black student organizations, and black students’ current experiences at PWI’s, it is important to investigate whether or not these organizations are still perceived and utilized as spaces of resistance.

Overall, this study finds that opportunities for resistance are impacted not only by students’ social identity (race, class, gender, sexuality) but also by the physical location of their campus. Drawing on the voices of a diverse set of black students at an urban and rural institution, this study highlights the heterogeneity of the black experience, the complexity of student lives in college, and the nuanced ways in which one’s social identity and physical location both restrain and facilitates opportunities for resistance. This chapter provides a brief overview of the study and a discussion of the findings as they relate to the literature. In addition, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research are presented.

9.1 Student Experiences at Predominately White Institutions

Understanding student experiences and how they articulate their challenges at predominately white campuses is integral to making sense of how useful these organizations are in redressing these challenges. Based on this study, student experiences of marginality were evident at every level, including the classroom, the department, and the quad. In the classroom, students had to deal with a multitude of racial micro-aggressions. The two most important and devastating micro-aggressions the students reported can be summarized as first, the expectation to underperform, and second, a form of role entrapment through which students are expected to perform not only pervasive stereotypes such as the “angry black woman” and “the underachieving black athlete,” but also increasingly, “the black expert” on race relations. Kanter (1977) posited that individuals in token positions experience role entrapment as a source of stress. They are expected to behave under applied stereotypes prescribed by the majority group.
In this study, many students were aware of stereotypes, and consequentially how self-controlling these stereotypes were. Thus a few students made a deliberate attempt to suppress particular behaviors that could be viewed as stereotypical, and accentuate more socially acceptable behaviors in the classroom to avoid discriminatory treatment.

On the quad, students encountered relatively more overt and disparaging incidents of racial discrimination. Students in this study admitted that their everyday lives were filled with incidents of racial microaggressions, and in some cases, acknowledged that their white peers were generally unaware they had committed an offensive racial act. This lack of awareness allows many whites in society to be oblivious about the meaning and impact of offensive racial actions (Bonilla-Silva, 2010, Tatum, 1997; Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo & Rivera, 2009). It is evident that some black students in this study felt that it was laborious and despairing to consistently address or challenge the discriminatory practices, and thus in order to avoid expending excessive energy, students had to strategically choose which incidents to address. Even as they recognized how exhausting it could be to address issues of race, some of the students concluded that one major step towards transcending racism was through interracial dialogue. According to my participants, this was either done one on one, or in Janet’s case, white students were brought into a predominately black space to openly discuss misconceptions about race. Interracial dialogue can serve as a tool to lessen intergroup hostilities and conflict and to foster racial harmony (Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo & Rivera, 2009). Yet, some students acknowledged that even with their attempt to redress whites, the larger institutional response to racial incidents on the quad were sometimes less than satisfactory. Many students in this study realized that their master status took on primacy in all of their interactions with their white counterparts, however, my findings
demonstrate that race alone did provide a comprehensive account of the totality of their experience, both within and outside black student organizations.

9.2 The Impact of Social Identities on One’s College Experiences

Adjustment to a predominately white college environment for black students presents several challenges (Feagin & Sikes, 1995; LaSure 1993, & William, Sedlacek & Mohr, 2000). In addition to managing the rigors of academic life, students must learn to make meaning of their personal identities in relation to their college environment, and the social interactions with their white and black peers (Johnson-Durgans, 1994). When black students enter predominately white colleges, they often become keenly aware of a predominately white culture, and many black students feel pressure to give up their own black cultural identities in order to adapt to a pervasive white culture—this culture has distinctive white ways of talking, dressing, and acting (Feagin & Sikes, 1995). However, this study finds that student’s social identities allow them to experience this culture differently—for instance, a black student from a suburban area, and affluent middle class background may find it easier to fit into this culture because it resembles their upbringing.

The role of social class, gender, and sexuality on students’ college experience has not been widely studied in higher education. A majority of the research has focused on singular dimensions of identity, such as the experiences of gay and lesbian students, women, or people of color (Carter, 2005, Cass, 1979, Davis, 2002, Dowing & Roush, 1985). Focusing on multiple facets of identity (e.g. being black and gay) broadens our understanding about how these intersections impact their experiences, and challenges in college.
9.2.1 Challenges of Gay & Lesbian Students

In this study, students were asked to self-report their sexual identity, and only five students identified as lesbian or gay. While the study could have benefitted from a larger sample of students who identified as LGBTQ, these five students spoke very candidly about their experiences. For these students, their sense of marginality was largely informed by larger societal perceptions of race and homosexuality in the white and black community. Homophobia is considered to be quite prevalent within the African American community, and homosexuality is often viewed as antithetical to being black in the African American community (Carter, 2013). Similarly, in many mainstream, white LGBTQ organizations, black LGBTQ members are not well represented, and little attention is paid to how race produces different social disadvantages for black queer (Carter, 2013; Moore, 2012).

Given this history, students in my study shared a sentiment of conditional acceptance. For many of the gay students, they felt that black student organizations were largely heteronormative, and did not recognize differences in sexual identity. Therefore in black heterosexual communities, they had to suppress their sexual identity, and in predominately white gay and lesbian communities, they were unable to celebrate their black identity. Janet discusses this tension between these two identities by acknowledging that you can’t be both black and queer in both white and black spaces, while Dacey made a deliberate choice to leave a black student organization due to the lack of inclusivity, and join an organization that allowed her to be fully open about her sexual identity.

In order to rectify this problem of conditional acceptance, students at the urban institution had a space where they could contend with the reality of being both black and gay; this space was an organization was named “True Colors.” While students at the rural institution had access
to more mainstream, and more predominately LGTBQ organizations, there was no formal organization that existed for black queers. Even though students at the urban institution were able to create a space of acceptance via a formal student organization, this did not protect them from dealing with racial and cultural insensitivity from whites that may have ventured into this space.

9.2.2 Challenges of Middle Class Students

Given the growth of black middle and upper class in the larger society, blacks are consistently having more interracial contact with whites due to the number living in and attending racially integrated or predominately white neighborhoods and schools (Farley and Frey 1994; Massey and Denton, 1988). According to my participants, students use their upbringing, location and the racial composition of their prior schools to understand and make class distinctions between themselves and other students. Additionally, students also utilized socially constructed speech, dress and cultural practices in order to distinguish between “suburban” and “urban” black students. Black students who grew up in predominately white affluent suburban communities did not necessarily view transitioning to a predominately white college as a challenging experience. Specifically, they also could make friends with white people more easily. However, these students also expressed difficulty in fitting in with black peers who come from predominately black urban areas. These students perceived that the majority of the black students came from urban areas, and thus it was the differences in class experiences that contributed to suburban (middle class) students decision to withdraw or detach themselves from the black community, and at times propelled them to seek out nonblack friends, and more racially and culturally diverse spaces and organizations.
While scholars have refuted the idea that not acting white is associated with a rejection of academic achievement (Carter, 2005), Gene Demby (2013) argues that “acting white” has more to do with social markers and cultural capital than academic achievement. If you dress like other black kids, have the same cultural interest as other blacks and lived in the same kind of neighborhood, you are viewed as displaying an authentically black identity, and often receive greater acceptance from the black community (Demby, 2013). The middle class students in my study indicated that given the dissimilarity in class experiences, they didn’t quite feel comfortable, or as black as they should be in predominately black spaces.

9.2.3 Challenges of Black Men & Women

The black women and men who participated in the study reported dealing with racialized and gendered stereotypes. While history shows that both groups are objectified, albeit in different ways, stereotypical images of black femininity and masculinity only serve to dehumanize and control both groups. Black women elucidated how their awareness of stereotypes of the “angry or loud black girl” stereotype inhibited them from in fully expressing themselves in interracial interactions with their white peers in the classroom. Morris (2007) outlines that not only is this stereotype often engrained in the psyche of whites, but also white teachers often discipline black girls for talking with an attitude. In the educational environment, this talking with an attitude, or being loud in tone or volume has often been viewed as an act of defiance or a way to signify a need for confrontation. Black female students discussed feeling reticent to be assertive when they were in disagreement with their white peers; in many ways this sheds light on how black women police their disposition in the educational environment- in order to be perceived as “lady-like” they must be affable and reserved and avoid being loud and talking with an attitude (Koonce, 2012; Morris, 2007).
Additionally black women were also more frequently aware of the lack of social connections with their white peers in the classroom. Several black women spoke about how conversations with their white peers did not go beyond the surface level, and revolved around issues of homework or academic assignments. These women were able to point out that many of their relationships with whites did not physically or socially extend beyond the confines of the classroom, and many remarked on the minimal number of white friends they had. Patricia Hill Collins (2008) highlights that black women have traditionally defined their sense of self not by separating themselves from others but by connecting with others-- their family, community and immediate social environment, which in turn impact their larger sense of self. It can be assumed that black female participants’ attentiveness to social connectedness demonstrates how central relationships, and relationship building are to understanding their experiences, as well as how they make sense of their lives.

There was little evidence that black women use black organizations in different ways than black men; however, one female student at the urban institution did mention that black women are more often than not leaders of black student organizations on campus. Williams (1987) found that black women are often more likely to be more politically engaged and participate in voluntary associations of all kinds at a higher rate than black men. Pierce, Avery and Carey (1973) highlight that this is often attributed to a cultural tradition of “carrying the torch” for black men, and as a result of racism and economic necessity, black women have been forced to assume many of the responsibilities and duties that were once exclusively assigned to men during the Civil Rights era.

When comparing the experiences of black men and black women participants, it is evident that their experiences on white campuses are quite different. When discussing the challenges of
black men, it is difficult to understand their challenges without first examining the physical location of the campus environment. The urban institution was surrounded by a community filled with many problems that typify urban areas—crowded and dilapidated residential housing, underfunded social institutions, and incidences of violent crime, and gang activity (Welch, 2007). Both white and black students were confronted daily with these inequities however, it was black men who had to contend with the daily worry of being viewed as a criminal by whites, and stopped by the police. Marc Mauer (1999) explains that whites have long viewed criminal behavior as an inherent characteristic of blacks. This practice, in which officials often times unjustly target racial minorities in criminal cases may be a consequence of prevailing stereotypes about the race of criminals (Welch, 2007). In order to deal with this persistent worry and concern, black men strategically used black student organizations as a way to develop a counter-narrative of black male hood. This strategy is discussed below, along with a larger analysis of how black student organizations were utilized as sites of resistance.

9.3. Black student organizations as a site of resistance

Resistance proved to be a relevant and useful theoretical framework given both the history of black student organizations, as well as the existing research on how black student support groups are often used as to counter or alleviate the obstacles they face at predominately white colleges (Feagin & Sikes, 1995; Lewis & McKissic, 2010). To date, the majority of research on resistance in schooling context has viewed resistance as individual acts of defiance or opposition (Solomon & Ogbu, 1992), such as the rejection of academic achievement (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986), behavioral or vocal challenges to authorities, and more ethno-centric forms of resistance such as the utilization of culture based behaviors, such the practice of unique languages and communicative styles such as black English (Solomon & Ogbu, 1992). The findings of this
study elucidate how black student organizations, in some instances, provided students a formalized structure to engage in oppositional forms of behavior in order to avoid feelings of marginalization, to engage in culturally relevant behavior, receive self validation and empowerment, and bring about social justice, both within and outside the campus environment. Many students alluded to a cultural balancing of sorts, or what Prudence Carter (2005) refers to as cultural straddling, in which they had to learn to operate and navigate between different cultural frames—adopting dominant group norms when the need arises, and switching to more black cultural forms of behavior. For students who were heavily involved in black organizations, their involvement in these groups provided a safe space in which dominant black cultural frames could be utilized. According to my participants, four features were instrumental in defining black student organizations as safe spaces: 1) opportunities to build alliances with their peers, 2) ability to define the boundaries of race-talk, 3) opportunities to preserve culture and tradition, and 4) ability to generate a counter-narrative via respectability politics to dominant racial frames.

9.3.1 Seeking out as a safe space

Unlike previous analyses of resistance in the schooling environment, this study advocates that resistance must be understood within the social, cultural and physical contexts in which they take place, but also by the social and cultural identities of the actor. First to understand students’ resistance approaches, we must first understand that racism is engrained in lives of black students at predominately white colleges (Feagin & Sikes, 1995). Thus, black students demonstrate agency by finding tactical ways to create a safe space, develop a sense of self, and engage in culturally relevant activities—a lot of these benefits accrued from their participation in these organizations were perceived to be absent in most predominately white spaces.
Involvement in black student organizations extended beyond organizational activities, and students used these organizations in order to cope and manage negative experiences in the classroom. Participants spoke about how black student organizations allowed them to forge networks and build allies in order to combat the racial hostility and feelings of tokenism in the classroom, and to create physical and symbolic spaces that were more inclusive and accepting. Vicky, Mary, Nathan, Keaton and Jaquan spoke about how it was a common practice to avoid being the “token” black student in the classroom, and thus through their involvement, they were able to form supportive alliances in order to lessen feelings of marginalization in the classroom.

Unlike the classroom, black student organizations provided them with a safe place to talk about race, engage in culturally relevant activities and develop strategies for combating racial inequality on campus, and within the larger black community. Race-talk in predominately black spaces was not imposed or forced upon them, and neither did they have deal with the constant pressure of being the sole expert on race relations. Donte and Tyra demonstrate that race talk in black spaces was not restrictive or limited to certain issues, and they felt completely free in deciding how and when they could participate in such discussions. Students also expressed discontent with “race-talk” practiced exclusively in predominately black spaces, and highlighted how there was a need to have more conversations and activities addressing other marginalized identities—gender and sexuality. In order to accommodate for their divergent interests, students often sought out other marginalized spaces outside the black community that they perceived to be more inclusive in some respects.

9.3.2 Preserving Culture & Tradition

According to my participants, culture both promotes solidarity and restricted students’ interactions in both black and white spaces. Several students spoke about how black student
organizations allowed them the opportunity to create an alternative space in which they could engage in culturally relevant activities and practices that were often absent in predominately white spaces. One student discusses her reason to leave a predominately white organization because she does not identity with the culture of the group. Attending basketball games over predominately white sporting events like hockey, and participating in black musical productions and natural hair fashion shows were examples that students provided. By identifying how black organizations allowed them to express a particular form of black identity created a sense of separateness from white student organizations. This same sentiment was observed in Petroni’s (1970) research on black culture in predominately white schools; Petroni (1970) argued that black students make a deliberate choice to participate in black activities to ensure their social and cultural separation from white activities. Black students are often forced to accommodate whites and whites cultural norms in the classroom, and thus their desire to engage in culturally relevant activities symbolizes a rebellion against an established social and cultural order in white schooling contexts (Petroni, 1970, Tatum, 1997).

By the same token, some students understood that black organizations are often perceived as exclusionary by white students. Fegin and Sikes (1995) found that members of racial oriented organizations are often perceived as being self-segregationist. From this study, it was evident that students saw this as a problem, and tried to deliberately create a more inclusive and racially and culturally diverse space.

Mary and Josiah highlight the benefits and consequences of cross collaborations with other non-black campus student organizations. They acknowledge that collaboration is beneficial for increasing the visibility of their organizations, and dispelling the perceived myth of black student organizations as exclusionary. Some white students were even quite vocal about how
they perceived these organizations to not be for students who identified as black, and for that reason, students like Allison and Irene made a concerted effort to promote cross cultural interaction in both predominately black, and racially neutral spaces like residence halls.

9.3.3 Counter-narrative and Respectability Politics

The significance of mentorship for black men demonstrates the disparate social statuses that black men and women occupy on college campuses; given black men’s underrepresentation in higher education, mentorship is regarded as a tool to improve their success in college (Cohen & Nee, 2000; Cross & Slater, 2000). Mentorship for black men is holistic, and did not simply consist of lessons on how to succeed in college academically, but it also focused on how to present oneself in terms of dress and speech in order to avoid discriminatory treatment. Donte’s assessment of his mentoring experiences with his peers illustrates that he learned respectable ways to talk and dress from older black males. In many ways the emphasis on respectability politics can be viewed as a form of stereotype busting (Hassinger & Plourde, 2005), while black men learn to acquiescence to white cultural norms, they also in the same token, attempted to defy and reject common perceptions and stereotypes of black male-hood. Black men attending the urban institution reported constant surveillance, and were very cautious about being type-casted as “criminals” or “thugs.” This is an important example of how locations/spaces not only take on their own distinctiveness, but also how spaces can mold and shape the identity of the individuals who inhabit it. The black organization, Black Male Quarterly, was cofounded in order to resist or oppose the negative perceptions of black males who are not persisting or succeeding in higher education. Research on resistance highlights this notion of transformative resistance. Hassinger and Plourde (2005) suggest that students adopt adaptive behaviors to disprove prevailing expectations or stereotypes.
9.4. Themes of non-resistance

Resistance did not inform the totality of the black students’ experiences. Themes of resistance appeared to be infrequent when student’s discussed how black organizations provided opportunities for leadership development, and knowledge of the college-going culture. While students indicated that opportunities for leadership were perceived to be inaccessible in white organizations, their perceptions of the benefits of assuming these positions were linked more to developing valuable life and professional skills, such as organization skills, how to take initiative, and how to deal with and rectify organizational challenges.

Experiences outside the classroom have been found to be instrumental for students’ persistence in college. Pascarella and Terezini (2005) noted that engagement in co-curricular opportunities such as student organizations, community service, and volunteer/outreach has several benefits: 1) more meaningful and positive relationships with faculty and peers, 2) a greater a sense of academic and personal self-confidence, 3) a greater feeling of attachment or sense of belonging to the campus culture, and 4) the development of leadership skills. Many of these benefits are very common in all student organizations/groups, regardless of the racial composition, and thus many students joined both black and white organizations in order to develop essential skills that were critical for their success in the professional world, after college.

For black students, learning the college going culture was facilitated through organizations like Bridges and STARS. These organizations were geared towards providing students’ with an opportunity to acquire essential academic skills such as time management in order to manage the rigors of college. When students discussed these organizations, they spoke about the acquisition of academic skills as a key motivator for joining this organization, no students expressed any
racial or cultural motivators to join this organization or remain involved. Research suggest that participation in first year seminars, and the attainment of academic skills as a result of participation are not only powerful predictors of student success and persistence, but they are also critical tools that teach students explicit and implicit norms of the college environment (Astin. 1984; Tinto, 1993). Specifically, for a first generation college student like Donte, an organization like Bridges can give him a sense of support, as many first generation college students come to college lacking the proper socialization to be able to navigate the college environment (Martin, 2012).

9.5 *The Role of Campus Type*

Strange and Banning (2001) and Woldoff, Wiggins and Washington (2011) show that college campuses have distinct environments, and have an impact on student experiences. To date, many studies examine predominately white campuses as a monolithic entity (Hurtado, 1992, LaSure 1993, & William, Sdlacek & Mohr, 2000), and attention to the diversity of predominately white campuses has been relatively understudied. While there are a multitude of campus types, the comparison of urban and rural campuses are the focal point of this study. The structure, culture, and demographics of colleges and universities are all impacted by the external community in which they are located (Woldoff, Wiggins & Washington, 2011) Patton (2004, 2006) and Lewis & McKissic (2010) highlight how black organizations provides avenues for students to engage in activism, and community participation. However, my study suggests that the presence and frequency of these activities were largely informed by the physical location of the college environment.

Students attending the urban institution, were more likely to report activism around issues relevant to the black community was more common, as this was evidenced by the actions the
students’ took to bring attention to the deplorable conditions of their black student center, and the various protests around black male victimization by whites that the students talked about attending. Students at the rural institution highlighted how they participated in volunteer efforts to address the inequalities that pervaded, their small, rural community—poverty, hunger, and domestic violence. This finding demonstrates the important role that context plays in shaping student’s opportunities and avenues for activism. Students situated in an urban environment could also tap organizations or an apparatus outside of the college environment as a means to challenge racial and social inequality. Students at the rural institution were aware of the poverty that plagued residents in the community. However, active protest on racial inequality was not discussed, and instead students used organizations to pursue volunteer efforts in order to rectify larger inequities (e.g. hunger, poverty) that plagued the community outside of the college environment. While not validated substantially by students in the study, Elizabeth spoke about the intrinsic motivation to not simply want to improve the living conditions of Aberdeen residents, but also to establish a sense of belonging to the outside community. It can be hypothesized that for students attending a rural institution creating some attachment to the city is vital to thriving in small, remote, racially homogenous environment that is different from their home community. Additionally, given the smaller size of the student and city population, relationships between college students and administrators and community residents may be easier to forge (Woldoff, Wiggins and Washington, 2011).

It is apparent that campus type played less of a role than I had initially hypothesized. While it was quite observable that students attending a rural institution reported being more involved and less detached from black student organizations, when compared to students at the urban institution. However, given the sampling technique, this finding is not conclusive, but it may
provide some insight into how context shapes both the utility of these organizations, and the frequency in which they are used. There are concrete differences in the experiences of attending an urban or rural institution, and given the racial and social demographics of most rural areas, students, especially those who have previously lived in urban areas, may show a greater interest in finding racially oriented spaces in order to accommodate for a potentially isolating experience.

In the same token, it was also hypothesized that black student organizations would be less central to students attending an urban institution, given the high number of students who commute, and the amount of students who live within close proximity to the campus environment. It was assumed that these students would already have pre-established networks prior to starting college, and would report using alternative and off campus networks and spaces more so than on campus student organizations. This finding was not observable, and only six students reported being from the city in which the urban institution was located. This could speak to the all-consuming nature of pursuing a college education. Many students reported not only balancing a full time course load, but also part time jobs and organizational commitments, and thus relationships and networks were more likely to be situated within the college environment.

9.6 Limitations

Because of the nature of qualitative research, the ability to generalize the findings is limited. While the study included perceptions of students from two different schools, both institutions were situated in the same regional area, and thus the experiences of these students may not be typical of college students in other regional areas, and at other campus and institutional types (i.e. private, historically black colleges and universities, minority serving institutions).

A number of constraints are relevant when interpreting particular findings of this study. A snowball sampling technique was used, and thus homophily could have been at play. Students
were more likely to refer students who they had prior, close relationships with, and who were most similar to them in terms of previous residence, culture, beliefs, class status, academic major, and involvement in black student organizations. This could have contributed to the minimal number of urban students who reported not being from the immediate area, as well as the little variation in involvement status among students at the rural institution. Of the forty students interviewed, 23 were female, 17 were male, and only 5 identified openly as gay or lesbian, and thus more variability in terms of sexual identity was needed.

Additionally, twenty-two students reported having held a leadership position at some point in their college career, and fourteen held a position at the time of study. Students who do hold these positions are less likely to have negative perceptions of these organizations, and less likely to be disengaged from the black campus community. However, I also believe this is indicative of the necessity and importance of these organizations at predominately white campuses, as well as how effective these two institutions were in promoting student engagement and involvement in the black campus community.

9.7. Recommendations for future research

After reviewing the findings and limitations of this study, several recommendations for future research come to mind. To gain more insight into how students utilize black student organizations, future research should include participants from geographically diverse colleges, and from different institutional types (e.g. private & public). It is also recommended that in order to understand the complexities of resistance and black students’ experiences, future studies should include more diverse participants who hold different social identities, as well as different college environments. A study that includes younger students, traditional age versus non
traditional age students, or specific academic majors may assist in uncovering factors that limit or promote involvement in black student organizations.

Next, black students’ perceptions of the campus culture are not only impacted by safe spaces such as black student organizations, but their experiences are also be informed by larger institutional diversity initiatives and minority mentoring programs that aid in black student’s success and persistence at predominately white colleges. While black student organizations were the most tangible, and allowed for easy recruiting of participants, it is also important to understand how larger institutional diversity initiatives, diversity programs and organizations are perceived and utilized by black students.

This study substantiated many of the findings of qualitative research on black students at white colleges reviewed in previous chapters. The findings also challenged some findings by previous research by utilizing a diverse sample of black students. This study is among few that view black students as having agency to navigate the college environment. Talking directly with these students and hearing about their own personal experiences helps me understand how they conceptualize their experiences, and how they use black student organizations to succeed and thrive in college. Themes emerged from their interviews that may help sociologists and higher education administrators recognize black student’s personal and academic challenges as well as how black student organizations are essential for their persistence in higher education.
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APPENDIX A: INSITUTIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS

University of Cover Student Demographics, 2014-2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Enrollment</th>
<th>43,691</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>32,677</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate &amp; Professional</td>
<td>11,014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio Residents</td>
<td>34,567, 79.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-Campus Residents</td>
<td>5,199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Age</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male/Female</td>
<td>19,975/23,716, 45.7%, 54.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>3,613 8.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>1,321 3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>1,178 2.7%</td>
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Aberdeen University Student Demographics, 2013-2014

<table>
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<tbody>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>4,743</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical</td>
<td>539</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male/Female</td>
<td>11,592/11,065, 49%, 51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>1,037, 4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>290, 1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>17, 923, 79.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaii/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>19, 0.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

More general questions are asked in the beginning first to achieve an understanding of how they conceptualize their experiences at their respective colleges. Whenever possible, probing will be done.

1) What aspects of your college experience have been the most positive? What have been your greatest challenges?

2) What have your experiences been like with your white peers?

3) What have your experiences been like with your black peers?

5) What kind of clubs/organizations are you involved in with the Black campus Community? (The black campus community will be defined as collegiate clubs and organizations that serve to meet the academic, personal, social, and educational needs of African American students; organizations meet on campus, are oftentimes housed within a school’s African American student center, predominately African American in make-up, consist of student officers and a faculty/administrative advisor, and are identified by the institution as a campus organization)

6) Why did you choose to be involved in these organization(s)?

7) What kind of support/resources is/are available for you if you need help? Support will be defined using House (1981) broad classes of types of social support 1) Emotional support-providing empathy, caring, love, trust, esteem, concern and listening 2) Instrumental support providing aid in money, labor, time or any direct help 3) Informational support-providing advice, suggestions, directions and information in coping with personal and academic problems 4) Appraisal support-providing affirmation, feedback, and encouragement.

8) What impact has participation in these organizations had on your college experience?

9) In what ways have these organizations benefited or not benefited you?

10) What influence does your participation or non-participation in these organizations have on how you feel about your campus?

11) What do you find most appealing about the organizations you are involved in? Least appealing? Why?

12) What do these organizations offer you that other campus organizations do not provide?

13) Describe your involvement in organizations outside the college environment?
APPENDIX C: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Instructions: This is a demographic questionnaire, and will be used for categorization purposes only. You may skip or refuse to answer any question you choose. Your real name will not be associated with any information on this questionnaire.

1. Please indicate your year in school?
   --------Freshman
   --------Sophomore
   --------Junior
   --------Senior

2. Have you declared an academic major? Circle Yes or No. If yes, please list your major on the space provided.
   Yes or NO
   __________________________________________________?

3. Are you a first generation college student? Circle Yes or No (the U.S. Department of Education defines first generation as “Neither parent had more than a high school education.)
   YES or NO

4. What is the primary occupation of your mother, father or guardian? Please list
   Mother_______________________________________
   Father________________________________________
   Other__________________________________________

8. Please report an estimate of your family’s (including all guardians in your household) combined annual income: Indicate your option by checking a box
   □ Under $20,000
   □ Between $20,000 and $40,000
   □ Between $40,000 and $70,000
   □ Between $70,000 and $100,000
   □ Between $100,000 and $150,000
Greater than $150,000
Do Not wish to answer

5. How old are you? (Indicate in years)__________

6. Do you identify as male or female? Circle one
   Male
   Female

7. What do you identify as? Please check as many that apply
   White, non-Hispanic
   Hispanic or Latino
   Black or African American
   Native American or American Indian
   Asian/Pacific Islander
   Other
   Biracial/Mixed Race
   Do not wish to answer

If your racial/ethnic origin is not found above, what do you identify as? Please indicate on the space below

8. What is the zip code in which you grew up in? __________

9. What do you identify as? Please check as many that apply
   Straight
   Bisexual
   Gay/Lesbian
   Do not wish to answer
10. Please indicate by circling if you are a part time or full time student? (Full time status is defined as at least 12 credits in an academic quarter/semester, part time status is defined as being enrolled in less than 12 credits in an academic quarter/semester)

Part Time

Full time

11. How many African American or black organizations/or clubs have you participated in since you started college at your institution? ______________

12. Please list the African American or black organizations/or clubs you have participated in? Please indicate your years of involvement and your role and/or position in each organization and/or club. If you are not involved in any organizations, please indicate N/A for not applicable

____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________

NOTE: In order to determine social class, students had to self-report an estimate of their family’s combined annual income (all guardians in their household). Options included 1) Under $20,000, 2) Between $20,000 and $40,000, and 3) Between $40,000 and $70,000 and $100,000, 4) Between $100,000 and $150,000, 5) Greater than $150,000, and 6) Do not wish to answer. Numerical categories instead of nominal categories (upper, middle and lower class) were used to avoid the high frequency of most students classifying themselves as “middle class”; it is assumed that more class variation in this study will result if students are asked to think critically about their annual numerical income. In the event that students did not know their family’s annual income, or did not wish to answer, this question was left blank. I also asked students to report the zip code of the city and state in which they were born. This was also used as a secondary measure to determine student’s social classes, as many neighborhoods are segregated and grouped by members of the same socioeconomic status. While this is not the most comprehensive measurement of one’s class status, it should at least serve as a suitable approximate.
APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT

Adult Consent Form
University of Cincinnati
Department of Sociology
Principal Investigator: Ciera Graham
Faculty Advisor: Annulla Linders, Department of Sociology Professor

Title of Study: Black spaces at white institutions: How do African American students perceive and utilize the black campus community at an urban and rural predominately white college?

Introduction
You are being asked to take part in a research study of how college students perceive and utilize the black campus community (i.e. African American student organizations) at rural and urban predominately white colleges. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study.

Who is doing this research study?
The person in charge of this research study is Ciera Graham of the University of Cincinnati (UC) Department of Sociology. This study is conducted as part of her dissertation research, and she is being guided in this research by her advisor, Annulla Linders who is a professor in the sociology department at the University of Cincinnati.

What is the purpose of this research study? The purpose of this study is to learn how undergraduate students perceive their college experience, their college institution, as well as how they perceive and utilize the black campus community (i.e. African American student organizations).

Who will be in this research study?
About 40 people will take part in this study. You may be considered a participant in this study if you

• Are a full or part time student at the University of Cincinnati

• Are at least 18 years of age

• Are an undergraduate student (i.e. pursuing a Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science) at the University of Cincinnati

You are ineligible to participate if you are not a full or part time student, not at least 18 years of age and/or an undergraduate student.

What will you be asked to do in this research study, and how long will it take? If you agree to participate in this study, I will conduct an interview with you. The interview will last about one hour to one and a half hour. The interview will include questions about your college experience, your peer relationships and interactions, the challenges you face in your college experience, your perceptions of the black campus community(i.e. African American student organizations), and the
extent of your involvement in these organizations. Upon completion of the interview, you will complete a short, written demographic questionnaire that will inquire about the following: This questionnaire will inquire about their year in school, declared major, first generation status (whether or not they are the first in their family to attend college), age, gender, race, how many black organizations or clubs they have been involved in over the course of their matriculation (student will indicate years of involvement, names of the organization, and their role(s) in respective club/organizations). This questionnaire will be used to categorize interview data based on particular student demographic characteristics.

Are there any risks to being in this research study?
There is some risk, while minimal, that you may find some of the questions about your college experience to be sensitive. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You can refuse to answer any questions that you don’t want to answer or questions that make you uncomfortable. You may also terminate or end the interview at any point in time. If you decide not to take part or to skip some of the questions, it will not affect your current or future relationship with the University of Cincinnati. If you would like to talk to someone because this research made you feel upset, the researcher will provide you with contact information about people who may be able to assist you.

Are there any benefits from being in this research study?
There are NO direct benefits to you for participating. College can oftentimes be a very demanding and challenging experience, and thus, the researcher hopes to learn about these experiences.

What will you get because of being in this research study?
You will be paid $10.00 in cash to take part in this research study.

Do you have choices about taking part in this research study?
You have a choice about whether or not your interview will be auto-taped. If you choose to have your interview audio-taped, the taping will begin at the start of the interview, and stop at the end of the interview. There is a place at the end of the document to indicate whether YES you wouldn’t mind having your interview audio-taped, or NO you would not like to have your interview audio-taped. Please indicate your choice.

How will your research information be kept confidential?
Your answers will be confidential. The records of this study will be kept private. I, the principal investigator will be the only individual in charge of collecting and managing the data. In any sort of report I make public, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you; your real name will not be used, instead, I will use a pseudonym. A master list of student’s real name, and all audio tapes, and transcribed interviews will be stored separately in a locked storage cabinet in the principal investigator’s main office location. Only the researcher will have access to the records. If we tape-record the interview, I will destroy the tape after it has been transcribed, which I anticipate will be within three months of it’s taping.

Agents of the University of Cincinnati may inspect study records for audit or quality assurance purposes.
What are your legal rights in this research study?
Nothing in this consent form waives any legal rights you have. This consent form also does not release the investigator, the institution, or its agents from liability for negligence.

What if you have questions about this research study?
The researcher conducting this study is Ciera Graham. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Ciera Graham at grahamc6@mail.uc.edu or at 206-512-4662. The UC Institutional Review Board reviews all research projects that involve human participants to be sure the rights and welfare of participants are protected.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant or complaints about the study, you may contact the UC IRB at (513) 558-5259. Or, you may call the UC Research Compliance Hotline at (800) 889-1547, or write to the IRB, 300 University Hall, ML 0567, 51 Goodman Drive, Cincinnati, OH 45221-0567, or email the IRB office at irb@ucmail.uc.edu.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Do you HAVE to take part in this research study?
No one has to be in this research study. Refusing to take part will NOT cause any penalty or loss of benefits that you would otherwise have. You may start and then change your mind and stop at any time. To stop being in the study, you should tell

Agreement:
I have read this information and have received answers to any questions I asked. I give my consent to participate in this research study. I will receive a copy of this signed and dated consent form to keep.

In addition to agreeing to participate, Please indicate your option by checking a box.

☐ I consent to having the interview audio taped
☐ I do NOT consent to having the interview audio taped

Participant Name (please print) ____________________________________________

Participant Signature ________________________________ Date __________

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent ______________________ Date _________
Be a part of an important study on the role black student organizations play in YOUR college experience

Are you an undergraduate student?

Are you at least 18 years of age?

Do you have opinions regarding black student organizations on campus?

If you answered YES to these questions, you may be eligible to participate in this research study

The purpose of this research study is to explore the role that black student organizations play in your college experience. Students who are EITHER involved or uninvolved in black student organizations on campus can be involved.

The study is part of a doctoral candidate’s dissertation research. If you would like to learn more about this research study, or are interested in participating, please contact Ciera Graham at grahamc6@mail.uc.edu.