BLACK WOMEN STUDENT LEADERS THRIVING AT A PREDOMINATELY WHITE

INSTITUTION: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY

by

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(Under the Direction of Ginny Boss)

ABSTRACT

Studies have proliferated illustrating Black women's experiences on campus with sense of belonging (Haynes, 2019), Black women's identity development (Porter & Byrd, 2021; Porter & Dean, 2015; Porter et al, 2020), and connections between coping strategies and navigating non-Black environments (Apugo, 2019; Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, 2014; Jones & Pritchett-Johnson, 2018). There remains room in the discussion to focus on how programmatic interventions such as student leadership development activities specifically aid Black women college student development. This qualitative narrative inquiry study aimed to examine thriving among Black women college students in leadership positions to understand how they navigate life at a predominately White institution.

Using Black feminist thought as a theoretical framework to center Black women's student leader narratives (Collins, 2000) and using Schreiner's (2010a) thriving quotient, a theoretical model to analyze students' sense of thriving, a deeper understanding of perceptions of

thriving was gained. Four Black women college student leaders participated in this study. The following themes emerged from the findings: Reflecting on Being a Black Woman and Student Leader, Managing Challenges and Obstacles to Thriving, Aiming for Academic Thriving as a Goal, Reflecting on Intrapersonal Thriving and the Leadership Journey, and Building Community and Interpersonal Thriving. The findings support the core belief asserted by Black feminist thought that Black women are the authors of their own experiences and understand how to communicate their needs, wants, and desires. Additionally, the study mostly supported Schreiner's thriving quotient. Black women college student leaders rely on the community to support their sense of thriving (Apugo, 2019; Haynes, 2019; Hotchkins, 2017; Roland, 2021).

Implications include student affairs administrators considering thriving as a qualitative measure of student success in their assessment of campus programming and assessing campus programs to see a demographic breakdown of students participating in student leadership activities. By focusing on how Black women conceptualize thriving, this study adds to the literature on Black women narrating their own experiences without deficit language or stigmatization. This study can contribute to building literature on Black women college students using Black feminist thought as a theoretical framework or lens.

INDEX WORDS: Black women college students, student leaders, thriving, sense of thriving, Black feminist thought, leadership development, leadership activities, higher education

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my students, who inspired me to dig deeper into studying the campus experiences of Black women college students. My student leaders are now professionals, movers, and shakers in their respective careers. My students have displayed joy in their ability to achieve success in college and beyond.

I dedicate this dissertation to my sister, who also earned a doctorate, championing the marginalized in K-12. May our fire for advocacy never cease. May our passion for our students never dissipate. I see this accomplishment as the beginning for both of us as Black women educators.

I dedicate this dissertation to my brother, whose intellectual curiosity and dialogue on longstanding community issues inspired me to interrogate and confront the environments surrounding our students.

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, who have fought for a better life for their children, valued education, and instilled in me the motivation and character to seek justice.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

With increasingly diverse groups of students enrolling in college campuses each year, some students are experiencing college in a fish-out-of-water context or as outsiders entering a new and established environment. Upon writing this study, I reflected on the stories and narratives of many college students that I have encountered over my tenure working in higher education. Take Monica, for example, a returning sophomore to a predominantly White institution in the Southeast United States. Monica identifies as a Black American woman with several other identities, such as first-generation student, middle-income socioeconomic status, and suburban. Monica is a bright and energetic learner ready to return to the campus environment. Monica attended a campus ambassador training over the summer and is now looking to get more involved in a student leadership coordinator role. As Monica continues her studies at university and eagerly participates in a student leadership role, it is important that higher education researchers and practitioners study how a student leader with her characteristics will negotiate the campus environment.

As colleges and universities around the nation continue to become increasingly diverse, administrators are often tasked with finding new and innovative ways to engage their evolving student population (Museus & Jayakumar, 2012; Patton & Croom, 2017). Student affairs administrators often tap into the functional area of student leadership development programs and activities to engage students in personal growth and thriving on campus (Arminio et al., 2000). Studies consistently show that students who participate in student leadership positions during

college are likely to be engaged, have positive on-campus experiences, and perform well academically (Arminio et al., 2000; Haynes, 2019; Komives & Wagner, 2017). Engaged students are also more likely to give back to institutions in the future as alumni and become connected with job opportunities (Arminio et al., 2000; Jones et al., 2016; Komives et al., 2011; Komives & Wagner, 2017). However, when institutions experience demographic increases in diversity, student affairs units should reflect on how all students respond to programs, services, environments, and experiences.

With newfound diversity comes a rich tapestry of ideas, beliefs, cultures, subcultures, differences, and nuances not previously observed in the student body. Additionally, increased diversity brings opportunity for research on subpopulations largely ignored by previous scholarship, mostly shrouded in positivist research traditions aimed at studying the dominant culture student population, White students (Bartman, 2015; Commodore et al., 2018; Patton et al., 2016; Patton & Croom, 2017). Foundational scholarship in the field of higher education was mostly centered on cisgender White males from elite social backgrounds (Patton et al., 2016; Patton & Croom, 2017). As we look at other populations, such as Black women college students, questions begin to form surrounding their experiences at higher education institutions. Institutions can also observe whether the student leadership programs and activities on their campuses are catering to subgroups such as Black women in an effective way.

This study explored Black women college students, their leadership experiences on campus, and understanding the connections between leadership experiences and thriving. This study examined Black women college students' experiences at a predominately White institution. As a higher education professional, I believe it is important to expand research on traditionally underrepresented student populations to better inform our practices and better understand the

students we serve on campus. I embarked on this study to learn more about Black women college students as a subgroup, exploring the literature on challenges to this subgroup and the potential impacts of college leadership activities on improving the college experience and development of Black women students. The sections of this chapter include the background on the problem, purpose statement, research questions, purpose of study, significance of study, theoretical framework, and a definition of terms.

Background of the Problem

What can be said of Black women college students as they currently exist in our higher educational framework? An emerging demographic in the modern era of higher education, in 2016, Black students made up 14 % of the undergraduate population, with Black women representing about 62% of Black undergraduate college students (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Although a historically marginalized group facing considerable barriers to success, Black women college students display strong achievement trends (Bartman, 2015). For example, Black women outpace Black men with degree attainment rates of 64% of Black students, a rate greater than White, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, and Multicultural college women in female/male intragroup comparisons (Bartman, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2019)**.** Black women college students display dynamic results of achievement in the classroom and an orientation toward engaging in co-curricular leadership roles (Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, 2014; Haynes, 2019) despite a history of systematic oppression, discrimination, and marginalization (Porter et al., 2020). In terms of their lived realities, Haynes (2019) surmised that "[Black] women find themselves situated in such a way that their academic dreams run in juxtaposition to their raced and gendered realities" (p. 1002). Even as Black women continue to make gains in increasing

enrollment and graduation rates, achievement gaps also persist among this demographic (Bartman, 2015).

Studies have proliferated illustrating Black women's experiences on campus with sense of belonging (Haynes, 2019), Black women's identity development (Porter & Byrd, 2021; Porter & Dean, 2015; Porter et al, 2020), and connections between coping strategies and navigating non-Black environments (Apugo, 2019; Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, 2014; Jones & Pritchett-Johnson, 2018). In recent years, there have been studies concerning aspects of Black women college student leaders, including studying black women student leaders in traditional campus leadership roles (Roland, 2021), Black women student leaders' experiences on predominately White campuses (Hotchkins, 2017), and Black women student leaders as activists (Domingue, 2015; Hotchkins, 2017).

There remains room in the discussion to focus on how programmatic interventions such as student leadership development activities specifically aid Black women college student development. Additionally, there is room in the discussion to explore Black women college students and add to the literature on marginalized student populations from a non-deficit perspective (Harper & Kezar, 2021). Many studies focus on Black men due to historically low/crisis-level enrollment trends, leading to an urgency to address a struggling demographic (Commodore et al., 2018). Black male students have lagged in enrollment compared to their Black female counterparts. Black men college students are less likely to progress and graduate at the same rates as Black women college students (Commodore et al., 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Other critical literature focuses on Black students in general as a monolith; therefore, it cannot be generalizable to Black women as a group (Porter et al., 2020). Moreover, studies focusing on Black men students, Black students as a group, and Black women students

tend to focus on issues facing these demographic groups from a deficit perspective where academic deficiency, longstanding systematic oppression, and societal issues of marginalized students are the primary focal points, the issues being more visible than the actual lives of marginalized students (Harper & Kezar, 2021; Hotchkins, 2017; Patton & Museus, 2019). The issue is seeing the problem instead of the people who live with the problem. Comparatively, when focusing on gender, studies on women in college could be skewed toward dominate culture themes (White, cisgender females) and lack the nuances and context of the lived realities of Black women (Porter et al., 2020).

Problem Statement

Higher education and student affairs researchers are steadily building a body of scholarship on studying Black women and the factors leading to their retention and success on campus (Commodore et al., 2018; Patton & Croom, 2017). Research on Black women college students exists in a duality of documenting longstanding problems that Black women face due to racial injustices (Corbin et al., 2018; Kelly et al., 2021) while also documenting the strides that Black women college students make in achievement and student leadership engagement causing some researchers to investigate Black women as a model minority (Apugo, 2019; Domingue, 2015; Haynes, 2019; Hotchkins 2017; Jones, 2020, 2017; Roland, 2021).

The college environment at a predominately White institution can be difficult for Black college women to navigate (Apugo, 2019; Haynes, 2019; Kelly et al., 2021). In addition to typical pressures college students face, such as striving for academic success, adjusting to social life, transitioning to adulthood, and finding a career and purpose, Black women students experience historical systematic racism, oppression, and marginalization (Corbin et al., 2018; Kelly et al., 2021; Patton & Croom, 2017). With higher education research on Black women

focused on deficit issues such as gaps in learning and oppression stemming from systemic racism, the problem remains that more research needs to be conducted on understanding experiences that lead to thriving and positive campus life experiences for Black women. Increasing calls remain for research to be produced from an anti-deficit perspective where diverse student populations are studied holistically beyond being seen as a problem that needs fixing (Harper & Kezar, 2021; Patton & Museus, 2019). The literature frames the Black women's campus experiences in terms of racial and gender oppression and environmental conflict (Apugo, 2019; Haynes, 2019; Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

There remains room to research how Black women students, in their own words, articulate what supports and experiences on campus allow Black women to thrive, particularly in terms of their leadership experiences. These concerns are relevant for higher education professionals looking to create programs, services, or policies to aid the success of Black women, such as leadership development programs and activities. A study that does not approach the subject matter from deficit issues gives an opportunity for professionals to learn more about Black women college students in a more individualized and humanistic way instead of just focusing on the persistent issues.

This study explores the experiences that lead to thriving and positive campus life experiences for Black college women student leaders. Previous research highlighted culturally relevant interventions to support the needs of Black women college students in terms of sense of belonging and identity development (Apugo, 2019; Haynes, 2019; Porter & Dean, 2015; Porter et al., 2020; Shahid et al., 2018). However, more research is needed to explore how Black college women at predominantly White institutions decide on relevant social support to encourage their own sense of thriving.

Purpose of Study

This qualitative narrative inquiry study aimed to examine thriving among Black women college students in leadership positions to understand how they navigate life at a predominately White institution. Looking at the support strategy of student leadership positions and activities, I examined how Black women college students perceive this type of experience through the context of examining undergraduate Black women who actively participate in student leadership positions at a public 4-year large institution in the Southeast United States. This study employs a narrative inquiry methodology for the research design due to the unique opportunity to tell the story of Black women college student leaders as they articulate their sense of thriving.

Significance of Study

Institutions of higher learning are challenged to create programs and services to help garner the success of Black women to counteract the negative legacy and realities left in the wake of societal disadvantages. A study on understanding how Black women college student leaders thrive can aid in helping institutions craft programs to foster student development in marginalized populations. Researchers have discussed thriving in college students from various standpoints, including psychological, spiritual, and marginalized students (Garriott et al., 2019; Morgan et al., 2018; Schreiner, 2010a). Studies have also highlighted how student leadership opportunities can provide a sense of belonging, well-being, and positive campus experiences for Black women college students (Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, 2014; Haynes, 2019; Hotchkins, 2017; Roland, 2021). Possible implications for research include a better understanding of how to articulate thriving for underrepresented populations such as Black women. This study provides additional research surrounding Black women college students who engage in a leadership role

on campus. Narrative research gives an opportunity for underrepresented voices to be heard

(Chávez et al., 2012; Ganss, 2016; Porter et al., 2021a; Stewart et al., 2022).

Research Questions

Below are the research questions I explored in my study:

1. How do Black women student leaders define thriving in college for themselves?

    a. What barriers to thriving do they identify?

2. How do Black women college students describe their experiences in student leadership

    positions?

3. What do Black women college students perceive to be the impact, if any, of student

    leadership activities on the experience of thriving?

Theoretical Framework

This study uses Black feminist thought as a theoretical framework. Black feminist

thought as a framework uses narratives, observational research, historical accounts, and political

context to analyze the experiences of Black women (Collins, 2000; Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

This study was analyzed through both the critical and constructivist paradigms. Black feminist

thought as a theoretical framework supports the need for Black women to tell their own stories,

promoting the belief that Black women have a unique perspective and experience that is not

experienced by Black men or White women students on campus (Collins, 2000; Howard-

Hamilton, 2003; Porter et al., 2020). Black feminist thought as a theoretical framework also

acknowledges the diversity of experience in Black women due to other identities that they hold

associated with class, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, and generation (Collins, 2000;

Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

Using Black feminist thought, I examined where the framework's ability to center Black women's narratives connects to a sense of thriving as another way of analyzing student success. Using Schreiner's (2010a) thriving quotient, a theoretical model that examines students' sense of thriving, I observed perceptions of thriving with a small sample of Black women college student leaders. The sense of thriving provides an expansive view of student success, and narrative inquiry could help to interpret how individuals articulate and construct a sense of thriving on both interpersonal and intrapersonal levels (Schreiner, 2010a). As the study centers on Black women college student leader voices and narratives, the study will analyze whether the components that comprise Schreiner's thriving quotient are true to the experience of the participants or whether there are aspects of defining thriving that are unique to this population (Schreiner, 2010a).

Definitions of Terms

There are often multiple ways to conceptualize certain terms. Additionally, there are terms that may not be familiar to all audiences due to a term's colloquial or cultural existence. In this study, I use a set of terms and would like to clarify their definition in the context of this study. Below is a list of terms and definitions for this study:

- #BlackGirlMagic: #BlackGirlMagic is a cultural term that emerged in the American Black community during the 2010s to refer to the resilience, strength, and dynamism of Black women who have proven to be exceptionally excellent in their careers, gifts, and abilities (Apugo, 2019; Porter et al., 2021). This term can also be applied to Black women who excel inside and outside the classroom.

- Africultural coping strategies: Africultural coping strategies are culturally based intervention strategies rooted in Black traditions and cultural mores of community,

spirituality, and rituals (Apugo, 2019). Africultural coping strategies draw upon group and communal processing for mental and emotional support (Apugo, 2019).

- Black feminist thought: Black feminist thought is a theoretical framework that uses counter-narratives to inform research. Black feminist thought asserts the need for Black women to tell their own stories, promoting the belief that Black women have a unique perspective and experience that is not experienced by Black men or White women in the context of American society (Collins, 2000; Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Porter et al., 2020).

- Black women students: Black women students in this study can be defined as cisgender female-identifying individuals and transwoman-identifying individuals who associate or identify with the group of people who are descendants of Africans or peoples from the African diaspora (Collins, 2000; Commodore et al., 2018). The Black women college students in the study will be traditional-aged college students between the ages of 18-24 who started college as first-time, full-time freshmen after high school.

- Intersectionality: Intersectionality is a framework used in studies analyzing multiple frames of identity, such as gender, race, and sexuality, in which power and privileges are observed along with the many identities individuals may hold (Collins, 2000; Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Porter et al., 2020). Many studies on diverse student populations acknowledge the framework of intersectionality as a way of observing power dynamics students must negotiate due to their identities.

- Leadership development programs: Leadership development programs in student affairs are a group of programs and activities involving college students engaging in a leadership role, learning concepts of leadership education, and engaging in activities that lend to community building or service. Leadership development programs in higher education

have traditionally been involved in multiple functional areas of student affairs, such as student activities, civic engagement, multicultural affairs, fraternity and sorority life, and student leadership offices (Komives et al., 2011; Komives & Wagner, 2017).

- Marginalized students: Marginalized students are students who have been traditionally neglected and treated as less significant than students belonging to a majority or dominant group population. Often in the context of higher education literature, marginalized students are typically referred to as individuals belonging to minority and traditionally underrepresented groups such as racial/ethnic minorities, religious minorities, and sexual and gender identity minorities (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Harper & Kezar, 2021; Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Patton et al., 2016; Solorzano et al., 2000).

- Minoritized students: Minoritized students are students who are considered in the racial/ethnic minority of a student population. Typically, at a predominately White institution, these racial minorities include non-White student populations such as Black, Hispanic or Latinx, Asian, Pacific Islander, or American Indigenous (Patton et al., 2016). In the literature, minoritized students are often depicted as being made to feel less than or not supported in the same way as students belonging to the dominant majority student population who are typically considered White students (Patton et al., 2016).

- Predominately White institution: Predominately White institutions are postsecondary colleges and universities that have a student population of more than 50% White students (Patton et al., 2016). Predominately White institutions in higher education have traditionally served White students and largely adapted policies and support services that cater to the dominant population.

- Student leadership activities: Student leadership activities are formal experiences in which a college student participates in activities that aid the student in developing as a leader, understanding their leadership identity, and the connection of the experience to serve a community (Arminio et al., 2000; Jones et al., 2016; Komives et al., 2011; Komives & Wagner, 2017). Student leadership activities include student government, university ambassador programs, civic engagement, academic competition groups, religious/affinity/identity-based groups, service-oriented groups, campus student employment, and fraternal organizations (Hotchkins, 2017; Roland, 2021; Soria et al., 2019; Zúñiga et al., 2015).

- Thriving/sense of thriving: Thriving or sense of thriving can be defined in this study as relating to the emotional, psychological, and social health of students as well as determining their connectedness to and engagement with the community (Schreiner, 2010a). Thriving involves the ability to flourish or grow developmentally in several aspects of a student's life such as academically, interpersonally, and intra-personally (Schreiner, 2010a).

- White students: White students in this study can be defined as individuals who associate or identify with a group of people who are descendants of European ancestry (Patton et al., 2016). This racial group constitutes a majority racial group in the United States as well as a majority group for undergraduate college students nationally.

Chapter Summary

This chapter is an introduction to the narrative inquiry study about Black women undergraduate college student leaders and their experiences of thriving at a predominately White institution. The background on the issue, research problem, purpose statement, and research

questions were addressed, along with the significance of the study and terms and definitions. In Chapter 2, the literature will discuss research on Black college women, student leadership, and sense of thriving, along with a discussion of methodological genealogy on research involving Black women college students.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Higher education scholars continue to build on the research of Black women college students by exploring the world through the critical lens of oppressed groups while using various research methods to investigate the unique experiences of Black women college students (Apugo, 2019; Haynes, 2019; Porter & Dean, 2015; Porter et al., 2020; Shahid et al., 2018). Traditional student development and higher education research primarily focuses on White students, with historical research often tested on cisgender White males from elite social backgrounds (Patton et al., 2016). The discourse on Black women college students continues to develop as higher education administrators look for information on this demographic to understand student development gaps and increase educational attainment rates (Commodore et al., 2018; Patton & Croom, 2017). Additionally, as scholars review how certain activities impact the student experience, such as leadership roles, researchers are now considering how student leadership opportunities impact the campus experience for subgroups of students like Black college women (Domingue, 2015; Haynes, 2019; Hotchkins, 2017; Jones, 2020; Roland, 2021).

The literature review will discuss themes of what remains to be known about Black women college student leaders and their experiences of thriving at predominantly White institutions. To set the foundation of the literature review, the study will focus on theories and frameworks, college environments, institutional support, and the student leadership experience for Black women college students. Following the foundational discussion of literature concerning Black women college students, literature on the sense of thriving will be explored.

Additionally, the review includes discourse on the methodologies used to inform the research and gaps that currently exist in the literature on Black women college students.

What is Known about the Discourse on Black Women College Students

Theories and Guiding Frameworks

To better understand Black women student leaders, guiding frameworks and theories surrounding Black women college students as a subgroup should be explored. Black women college students are often studied under the context of intersectionality with attention to how both gender and race make their experiences unique (Collins, 2000; Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Porter et al., 2020). Black feminist thought is a guiding theoretical framework for many studies on Black women college students (Apugo, 2019; Haynes, 2019; Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Jones, 2020; Porter et al., 2020). Black feminist thought, as a guiding theory, has grown out of the initial work and influences of other critical theories, such as Critical race theory, and movements, such as feminism and womanism (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1995). Developed out of the intellectual efforts of Black women scholars investigating the experiences of other Black women, Black feminist thought seeks to center Black women's voices in a way that other forms of research lack due to researcher identities and perspective-taking (Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

Black feminist thought as a theoretical framework focuses on using counter-narratives to inform research. Black feminist thought asserts the need for Black women to tell their own stories, promoting the belief that Black women have a unique perspective and experience that is not experienced by Black men or White women in the context of American society (Collins, 2000; Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Porter et al., 2020). This theoretical framework also acknowledges the diversity of experience in Black women due to their other identities, such as class, sexual orientation, gender expression, religious affiliation, and age generation (Collins,

2000; Howard-Hamilton, 2003). While understanding the diversity in the experiences of Black women, Howard-Hamilton (2003) noted that Black feminist thought also seeks to look for common themes and experiences that could be considered a common thread or unifying identifier among Black women. Black feminist thought was developed from what Collins (2000) terms the dialectic or opposing relationship between the oppression Black American women face due to their identities and the need for activism to combat their oppression. Black feminist thought is ultimately interested in studying the entirety of Black women's experiences, as explained by and for Black women (Collins, 2000).

Scholars continue to build research connecting observations on Black women college students to Black feminist thought. Porter et al. (2020) developed Porter's model of identity development in Black undergraduate women to both explain the process of identity development of Black women students and to connect a model to Black feminist thought. With Porter's model, the identity of Black undergraduate women is molded and solidified through the conflict of American society, through familial and community nurturing, and through gendered expectations (Porter & Dean, 2015; Porter et al., 2020). The presence of role models and the media acts as an influence for Black women students (Porter et al., 2020). The process of identity development is nonlinear but includes different environments and foundations that contribute to identity development such as personal foundations, precollege foundations, socialization during college, and the articulation of identity (Porter et al., 2020). Porter's revised model highlights how intersecting identities and interactions with other people influence identity development and influence how black women navigate the college environment (Porter et al., 2020).

In a qualitative study analyzing the college experiences of high-achieving Black women college students, Haynes (2019) connected the study to both Black feminist thought and Black

feminist geographic theory to test both identity development and associations with spaces on a college campus. Haynes (2019) found that Black women college students in the study identified feeling both energized and excited to be in the classroom environment but simultaneously experiencing feelings of marginalization, negativity and microaggressions. Apugo (2019) used a qualitative synthesis of the literature approach to analyze literature on Black college women while using Black feminist thought as a guiding theoretical framework.

Historically academic scholars that consider critical discourses and paradigms often look toward critical race theory as a framework to analyze phenomena concerning race relations in the United States (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Collins, 2000; Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Critical race theory (CRT) as a framework offers a counternarrative of history, oftentimes omitted from historical research and institutional accounts (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Foundational tenets of CRT include the belief that racism in society is a permanent fixture and intertwined with every institution in the United States (Crenshaw et al., 1995). CRT focuses on telling the story of the oppressed by amplifying their voice and focusing on the marginalized point of view (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Solorzano et al. (2000) used focus group interviews in a study to analyze microaggression experiences among Black college students. Black women, as a subgroup of Black Americans, are connected to the historical struggles of oppression, racism, and disenfranchisement (Collins, 2000; Porter et al., 2020).

The Black College Woman: Stereotypes and Archetypes that Shape Perception

Understanding Black woman stereotypes and archetypes helps lay the foundation for exploring themes around Black women's student leadership and motivations to take on leadership roles during college. The research highlights how society views Black women and how Black women view themselves as organized depictions of both stereotypical images and

archetypes (Apugo, 2019; Collins, 2000; Jones & Pritchett-Johnson, 2018; Porter et al., 2020).

Jones and Pritchett-Johnson (2018) discussed Invincible Black Woman Syndrome in a study

analyzing Black women college students seeking counseling. Invincible Black Woman

Syndrome is characterized by a need for a Black woman to maintain the façade of strength

despite potential harm or danger they may be facing themselves (Jones & Pritchett-Johnson,

2018). Invincibility is seen as a necessity for Black women's survival and to protect their loved

ones through an enhanced sense of duty to lead and serve their families (Jones & Pritchett-

Johnson, 2018).

In Patricia Hill Collin's (2000) book *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge,*

Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment, Collins illustrates a historical account of a

Black woman named Nancy White who denoted that she, as a Black woman, could never take

part in "lying on a 'flowery bed of ease'" as compared to her White woman counterparts thus

illustrating a need and perceived requirement to be strong (p. 11). Like the Invincible Black

woman archetype, the "Strong Black Woman" archetype is grounded in the belief that Black

women are capable of withstanding any challenge that lies before them and that they have an

innate superior strength to deal with issues (Apugo, 2019; Collins, 2000).

The concept of the Strong Black Woman can be seen as a source of racial pride, with

modern depictions evolving into other popular cultural iterations of the term, such as

#BlackGirlMagic (Apugo, 2019). Both #BlackGirlMagic and the Strong Black Women

terminology led to a narrative where Black women can be high achievers, successful in their

careers, entrepreneurial, breadwinners, independent, social justice warriors, fierce competitors,

heads of households, and champions to move the Black race forward (Apugo, 2019). A common

theme in Black student leadership literature involves connecting leadership to a sense of duty and

serving the community (Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, 2014). These concepts have led to Black women in recent decades achieving model minority status as this subgroup is viewed in a different light than Black men (Apugo, 2019).

Although the Strong Black Woman archetype can be perceived as a positive moniker and source of strength and motivation for persistence for some Black women college students (Porter et al., 2020), this archetype has negative consequences such as dehumanizing effects, increased stress, mental health issues, increased physical health risks, and silencing impact (Apugo, 2019; Collins, 2000; Haynes, 2019; Jones & Pritchett-Johnson, 2018; Shahid et al., 2018). In addition to stereotypes of Black women being characterized as strong, Black women college students are also impacted by negative stereotypes rooted in historical systematic oppression and racism. Negative stereotypes of Black women include labels such as loud, sassy, angry, hypersexualized, non-feminine, lazy, and ignorant (Apugo, 2019; Collins, 2000). Haynes (2019) noted that Black women students feel anxiety and pressure to fight to disprove negative stereotypes as an inseparable part of the campus life experience, which coincidentally serves as a motivation to strive for student leadership positions.

The College Environment for Black Women

The college environment at predominantly White institutions for Black college women creates unique challenges and barriers to student success. In an historical perspective, Collins (2000) highlighted the outsider looking in concept in Black feminist thought as a concept where Black women were granted access to certain service sectors that placed them in proximity to White people or upper and middle social classes through the domestic jobs they served. In higher education, Haynes (2019) noted that Black women college students were allowed to attend universities, however due to societal covert racism, Black women were unable to be fully

welcomed at predominately White institutions. Black women are allowed in the door, but their participation in the environment is limited through social and institutional barriers; for example, silencing of voices, lower expectations of student leadership and intelligence, and microaggressions and perceived stereotypes (Haynes, 2019).

As noted by Strayhorn (2012), sense of belonging in college "refers to students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by and important to the group… or others on campus" (p. 3). Higher education researchers study sense of belonging when it comes to understanding environmental factors that keep students retained and progressing through college. Black women college students across multiple studies reported a lack of sense of belonging at predominately White institutions (Apugo, 2019; Haynes, 2019; Porter et al., 2020). Bartman (2015) referred to the lack of a critical mass of Black women students as a reason for a continued chilling effect in the environment: "This translates into fewer Black female students on college campuses than is optimal to provide community, support, and a sense of belonging for these students" (p. 4).

Black women report feeling both highly invisible to others on campus and feeling under surveillance, resulting in perceived feelings of not being truly seen or heard (Kelly et al., 2019). Predominately White institutions run the risk of cultivating environments where Black women students feel intimidated to speak up or share in their classes (Haynes, 2019). Black women in PWI's face isolation in multiple arenas due to a lack of critical mass, such as dorms, classroom discussions, group assignments, and certain student organizations (Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, 2014). Black women college students across multiple studies reported a lack of sense of belonging at predominately White institutions (Apugo, 2019; Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, 2014;

Haynes, 2019; Porter et al., 2020). Greyerbiehl and Mitchell (2014) claimed that Black students at PWI's "report having inadequate social lives, having less than satisfactory relationships with faculty, feeling left out of the curriculum, and dealing with racial issues that permeate the campus climate" (p. 283). These feelings could potentially cause students to develop coping mechanisms to survive the campus environment (Apugo, 2019; Haynes, 2019); however, Black women students also report having increased levels of stress and anxiety, leading to increasing concerns about mental health issues (Jones & Pritchett-Johnson, 2018; Shahid et al., 2018).

Discourse on Student Leadership and Black College Women

Student Leadership in Student Affairs

Leadership development programs are recognized in student affairs as an important component of student development and learning (Arminio et al., 2000). Student leadership development programs traditionally started out as experiences connected to career development and often related to concepts in business education (Komives, et al. 2011). Additionally, leadership development programs traditionally included student involvement in a position of power or authority (Bryd, 2009; Komives, et al. 2011) As student affairs continued to evolve, along with the student populations on their campuses, student leadership activities and programs began to take on more modern themes such as a focus on the student's personal journey in leadership, developing a leadership identity, understanding how multiple identities shape how an individual experiences leadership, and understanding the role of the individual in serving the community (Arminio et al., 2000; Jones et al., 2016; Komives et al., 2011; Komives & Wagner, 2017).

Leadership development can be further defined as programs, activities, or experiences organized with the intention of helping students develop qualities such as interpersonal skills,

relationship building, and understanding themselves in relation to groups/teams (Jones et al., 2016). Leadership models such as the Social Change Model helped leadership development programs refocus campus efforts toward leadership focused on the individual, promoting multiculturalism, and leadership focused on community engagement (Komives & Wagner, 2017). These activities continue to evolve to incorporate cultural competencies, intercultural effectiveness, difficult dialogues, and expanded conceptions of what it means to be a good citizen while also catering to increasingly diverse student populations on modern campuses (Friesen et al., 2020; Soria et al., 2019). Student leadership activities are positively associated with students' perceived development of leadership skills and multicultural competency (Soria et al., 2019). Leadership development in higher education includes experiential activities that both formally and informally train students on leadership skills and give students an opportunity to serve in leadership positions sponsored by college organizations and groups (Komives et al., 2011; Priest & Jenkins, 2019). Campus leadership development includes activities and experiences such as student government, university ambassador programs, civic engagement, academic groups, religious organizations, affinity/identity-based groups, service-oriented groups, campus student employment, and fraternal organizations (Hotchkins, 2017; Roland, 2021; Soria et al., 2019; Zúñiga et al., 2015).

Institutions of higher education are tasked with both developing future leaders and reforming practices to create and sustain leadership development programs that are relevant to their ever-changing and diverse student populations (Komives & Wagner, 2017). Priest and Jenkins (2019) discuss a framework for professional development in which leadership educators can analyze their competencies in the domains of foundational knowledge of leadership, teaching and learning, scholarship, and understanding identity. However, a problem with leadership

development programs (and other functional areas in student affairs) is the continued framing of perspectives and practices from a dominant culture point of view, such as White, cis-gendered, and male (Jones, 2020; Museus et al., 2019; Museus & Jayakumar, 2012).

Leadership activities and programs continue to teach concepts framed from a majority White American culture perspective which may ignore the specific context of lived realities of students of Color (Arminio et al., 2000; Museus et al., 2019). In a narrative inquiry study of students of Color participating as student leaders at a PWI, Jones (2020) conducted a study where students shared experiences and counter-narratives of student leader experiences from the lens of a person of Color. The field continues to expand its understanding of multicultural competence and leadership development experiences (Soria et al., 2019). Higher education researchers in recent years have been making strides in research centering on student leadership and various identities such as race, sexual orientation, and gender (Arminio et al., 2000; Domingue, 2015; Dugan et al., 2009; Jones et al., 2016; Miller & Vaccaro, 2016; Museus et al., 2019). In leadership development, new frameworks, such as Leadership for Liberation, are being developed to center marginalized identities and frame leadership education with an understanding of how systems of oppression impact leadership activities on campus (Harper & Kezar, 2021).

Black Women as Student Leaders

Historical studies of the traditions of Black women's leadership can be linked back to narrative accounts of slavery, the Reconstruction Era, and the Civil Rights Era (Collins, 2000; Domingue, 2015). Black woman leadership has roots in leading and stabilizing households and communities during turbulent times of war, oppression, and racial violence that left many Black men absent or incapable of being present (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw et al., 1995; Domingue,

2015). Due to the unique realities of gender, race, and social class in the pre-civil Rights era United States, Black women experienced unique situations of employment in White society that afforded them positions of trust, such as housekeepers, assistants, and nannies (Collins, 2000). These positions of trust in White society left Black women with information and resources to bring back to their communities (Collins, 2000; Domingue, 2015). Research on Black women student leaders continues to be grounded with such theoretical frameworks as Black feminist thought that help illuminate cultural and narrative contexts that are missing from higher education research (Domingue, 2015; Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Haynes, 2019).

To continue contextualizing Black women's experience in leadership, research on Black women leaders in corporate America working in predominately White organizations further illuminates additional challenges to leadership roles (Byrd, 2009). Challenges include restrictions in authority to carry out the actions of the leadership role based on how identities of race, gender, and social class may play into the situation (Bryd, 2009). Black women college student leaders face similar challenges to that of Black women leaders working in predominately White organizations. Obstacles could include limits to social networking circles needed for success in obtaining leadership positions, lack of access to positions of formalized power, and issues of perceived ability to exercise power from position due to social and environmental factors stemming from oppression, marginalized identities, or systematic racism (Byrd, 2009; Hotchkins 2017; Jones, 2020).

Black women college student leaders on campus must contend with the challenges experienced by Black women college students overall from the campus environment of predominately White institutions (Domingue, 2015; Haynes, 2019; Hotchkins, 2017; Jones, 2020; Roland, 2021). Black women college student leaders are more likely to experience the

phenomenon of Double Jeopardy or oppression based on the two identity statuses of gender and race (Haynes, 2019; Hotchkins, 2017). Black women student leaders can experience threats of stereotyping and perceptions of their voices and opinions as marginalized (Haynes, 2019). Black women student leaders also develop unique ways to practice their own styles of leadership incorporating their contextualized experiences (Domingue, 2015; Hotchkins, 2017; Jones, 2020). Black women college students navigate assimilating into predominantly White student organizations and leadership groups (Arminio et al., 2000; Hotchkins, 2017; Jones, 2020).

When reviewing literature involving student leadership roles and activities for Black women college students, engagement efforts include programs focusing on communal support, culturally relevant programs, personal development, and leadership development (Apugo, 2019; Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, 2014; Haynes, 2019; Jones & Pritchett-Johnson, 2018). Apugo (2019) noted the concept of Africultural coping strategies, a group of culturally based intervention strategies rooted in Black traditions and cultural mores of community, spirituality, and rituals. Africultural coping strategies include support services that draw upon group and communal processing for mental and emotional support (Apugo, 2019). Campus engagement opportunities, such as leadership activities, are beneficial to students of Color when the activities engage in culturally relevant co-curricular programming (Museus et al., 2019).

Leadership activities supporting Black women on campus include memberships in Black Greek Letter Organizations, mentoring opportunities between faculty and students, and safe spaces for students of Color (Bartman, 2015; Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, 2014; Porter et al., 2020). Several qualitative studies showed that Black women felt at ease in what is termed Sister Circle groups, which are peer support networks in which Black women students can share experiences and feelings about campus life with other Black women (Apugo, 2019; Jones & Pritchett-

Johnson, 2018; Porter et al., 2020). Black women college students show an orientation toward student leadership opportunities and achieving in the classroom (Haynes, 2019). Co-curricular activities provide a unique opportunity for Black college women to display leadership abilities and talents in a safer environment (Haynes, 2019).

The scholarship also notes that Black women college students participate in traditional student leadership roles such as resident assistant positions (Roland, 2021). Roland (2021) conducted a phenomenological study on Black women who served as resident assistants at a historically White institution to examine how these students perceived various environments on campus. The research is framed through a lens of intersectionality and campus ecology theory. The qualitative study featured interviewing and photo elicitation to capture thoughts, feelings, and emotions the resident assistants experienced about the campus while reflecting on their intersecting identities (Roland, 2021). This study provided new knowledge due to the gap in the literature on how campus environments impact Black college women serving in campus leadership/student employee positions such as resident assistants. Roland (2021) discussed the need to understand what constitutes a supportive environment for marginalized groups with intersecting identities, such as Black women who experience oppression due to both systematic racism and gender. Black women college student leaders develop their own ways to resist oppression and cope with the campus environments of PWIs (Domingue, 2015; Haynes, 2019; Hotchkins, 2017; Roland, 2021).

Thriving as a Measure of Student Success

Student success has been measured in multiple ways, including retention, progression, and graduation rates (Schreiner, 2010a). The term retention in higher education is typically defined by the percentage of a cohort of first-time, full-time freshman students returning for their

second year (Kim, 2015). The research states various factors that impact retention, including sense of belonging, institutional attachment, levels of engagement, level of academic preparation before college, personal motivations, study habits, and use of resources while in college (Cholewa et al., 2017; Connolly et al., 2017; Kim, 2015; Strayhorn, 2012; Williams et al., 2020). Another way to measure student success that considers traditional factors while looking at a developmental approach to student success is examining how students thrive while on campus (Schreiner, 2010a).

The concept of thriving has also been studied from multiple standpoints, including psychological, spiritual, and survival relating to marginalized populations on college campuses (Garriott et al., 2019; Morgan et al., 2018; Schreiner, 2010a). Schreiner developed the Thriving Quotient as a tool to measure student experience, drawing from the field of positive psychology (Schreiner, 2010a). The sense of thriving concept involves analyzing whether students can thrive academically, interpersonally, and intra-personally while on campus. The sense of thriving concept is based on the premise that students need certain internal and external characteristics relating to their personal lives to thrive. Thriving can also be further defined by the ability to flourish or grow developmentally in several aspects of a student's life, such as academically, interpersonally, and intra-personally (Schreiner, 2010a). Schreiner studied the concept of flourishing, stating, "flourishing individuals have an enthusiasm for life, are productively engaged with others and in society, and are resilient in the face of personal challenges" (Schreiner, 2010a, p. 4). A sense of thriving can lead to personal satisfaction on campus for students, which could contribute to students deciding to continue enrollment and progressing toward obtaining their degrees.

Thriving students focus not only on improving themselves through academic studies but also on what they can do to improve their communities and networks (Schreiner, 2010b). They use positive interpersonal relationships to engage in community building. A major component of student leadership development activities centers on engaging and serving a community to make a difference (Arminio et al., 2000; Jones et al., 2016; Komives et al., 2011; Komives & Wagner, 2017).

Methodologies Used on Black College Women and Black Women Student Leaders

Frameworks used often to situate research on studies involving Black students include Black feminist thought and critical race theory. Legal scholars and academics developed the critical race theory (CRT) guiding framework to analyze institutions using narratives, short stories, and excerpts from historical, sociological, or anthropological perspectives (Crenshaw et al., 1995). CRT involves rhetoric and argumentation as it is derived from legal studies (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Methodology also includes qualitative case studies and observational research (Crenshaw et al., 1995). A critique of CRT is that higher education is not the focus and that student affairs researchers must craft models to connect back to the CRT framework (Dumas & Ross, 2016).

Similarly, Black feminist thought as a framework uses narratives, observational research, historical accounts, and political context to analyze the experiences of Black women (Collins, 2000; Howard-Hamilton, 2003). As a model developed in applicability to Black feminist thought and higher education research, Porter's model of identity development was tested using qualitative methodologies in studies examining undergraduate Black women (Porter & Dean, 2015; Porter et al., 2020). Porter et al. (2020) conducted a focus group with five students at a PWI, interviewing the students on socialization before and during college. The study confirmed

that Black college women needed safe spaces for dialoguing about identity issues and that Black women as a group are not monolithic, meaning socialization processes are unique to individuals considering multiple influences like other identities and backgrounds (Porter et al., 2020). Porter and Dean (2015) conducted a phenomenological study of four Black college women at a PWI to study socialization and identity.

In a qualitative study analyzing the college experiences of high-achieving Black women college students, Haynes (2019) connected the study to both Black feminist thought and Black feminist geographic theory to test both identity development and associations with spaces on a college campus. Haynes (2019) found that Black women college students in the study identified feeling both energized and excited to be in the classroom environment but simultaneously experiencing feelings of marginalization, negativity and microaggressions. Haynes (2019) conducted open-ended interviews with 20 Black high-achieving undergraduate women students.

Through capturing pictures on cellphones, the participants in the study captured spaces and buildings on campus that felt like a barrier, cold and unwelcoming such as academic classrooms, faculty offices, and academic advising centers (Roland, 2021). Participants reported discomfort with being the only Black woman in a particular class and feeling unsupported or neglected in the academic environment (Roland, 2021). One student notably in the study changed their major from a STEM major to African American Studies to "manage and respond to stereotypes, microaggressions, and racialized and gendered expectations regarding self-presentation" and to have a voice in their academic world (Roland, 2021, pp. 6-7).

Shahid et al. (2018) conducted a quantitative study using a survey instrument sent to 129 Black women college students. Shahid et al. (2018) used this study to test variables relating to the Strong Black Woman concept and Africultural coping mechanisms. Results of the study

indicated mixed results on whether Africultural coping mechanisms serve as a moderating factor with racial stress and tension; however, the study did confirm the presence of stress in Black college women due to tension of racial issues (Shahid et. Al., 2018). Apugo (2019) used a qualitative synthesis of the literature approach to analyze literature on Black college women, including analyzing literature on coping mechanisms, stereotypes, and Black feminist thought.

In this study, I seek to use narrative inquiry to gain a better understanding of how Black women student leaders view sense of thriving while participating in their leadership experiences on campus. Exploring the study through a narrative inquiry methodology continues to add to the literature approaches that incorporate qualitative research that seeks to elevate the voices of marginalized groups of students, such as Black women college students. Connecting with the intentionality of using narratives as previously laid out with foundational research (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw et al., 1995; Howard-Hamilton, 2003), narrative inquiry allows participants and the research to tell a story from a unique perspective. This study will seek to add to the literature by using narrative inquiry to gather data on how Black women college student leaders conceptualize their sense of thriving at a predominately White institution.

What Remains to be Explored

More research needs to be conducted to understand the experiences that lead to thriving and positive campus life experiences for Black college women. Beyond focusing solely on grades as a measure of student success, Schreiner (2010) suggested that a measure of thriving or flourishing be applied to higher education research to encompass more information relating to the emotional, psychological, and social health of students as well as measuring their connectedness to and engagement with the community. Research has indicated the calls for culturally relevant interventions to support the needs of Black women college students in terms

of sense of belonging and identity development (Apugo, 2019; Haynes, 2019; Porter & Dean, 2015; Porter et al., 2020; Shahid et al., 2018).

The higher education literature frames the Black women's campus experiences in terms of racial and gender oppression and environmental conflict (Apugo, 2019; Haynes, 2019; Howard-Hamilton, 2003). However, more research is needed to explore how Black college women at predominantly White institutions: (a) decide on relevant social support to support their own sense of thriving; (b) articulate what supports are needed for their success; (c) identify experiences on campus that allow them to thrive. These areas of needed research are relevant for higher education professionals looking to create programs, services, or policies to aid the success of Black college women.

Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the literature surrounding Black women college students who participate in student leadership activities. The literature review addressed how Black feminist thought influences scholarship on Black women college students and serves as a theoretical framework. Additionally, various aspects of the literature on Black women college students included discussion on the perception of Black women college students on campus, including stereotyping, intragroup perceptions, and how the college environment impacts Black women college students. Campus activities such as student leadership development programs and activities were discussed in relation to Black student leaders on predominately White college campuses. This chapter also discussed literature around the concept of thriving as a measure for student success and sense of thriving. In the next chapter, Methodology, we will delve deeper into the research questions, research paradigms and theoretical perspective, and research design of the study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative narrative inquiry study aimed to examine thriving among Black women college students in leadership positions to understand better how they navigate life at a predominately White institution. Thriving can be defined as a state of flourishing where an individual is engaged in their environment, experiences well-being on multiple levels (i.e., emotional, social, physical, etc.), and can manage challenges and obstacles (Schreiner, 2010a). Looking at the support strategy of student leadership positions and activities, I examined how this type of experience impacts the ability to thrive in Black women college students through the context of examining undergraduate Black women who actively participate in student leadership positions at a public 4-year large institution in the Southeast United States. With those aims, I explored the following research questions:

1. How do Black women student leaders define thriving in college for themselves?

    a. What are some barriers to thriving in Black women college student leaders?

2. How do Black women college students describe their experiences in student leadership positions?

3. What do Black women college students perceive to be the impact, if any, of student leadership activities on the experience of thriving?

Research Design

This qualitative study used narrative inquiry methodology for the research design due to the unique opportunity to tell the story of Black women college student leaders as they articulate their sense of thriving. The narratives derived from this research captured the lives of Black

women student leaders journeying through campus life experiences at a predominantly White institution. Narrative inquiry coincides with both the critical and constructivist research paradigms used in this study to both help analyze the lived experiences of the participants through an understanding of power dynamics and systematic oppression and to construct meaning out of individualized stories (Jones et al., 2022a; Stewart et al., 2022). Narrative inquiry explores the lives of a small number of participants in their "personal, social, and historical context" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 71).

Using Black feminist thought as a theoretical framework, I connected the framework's ability to center Black women's narratives in a creative, captivating, and personally authentic way to inform research (Collins, 2000). Additionally, using Schreiner's (2010a) thriving quotient, a theoretical model that analyzes students' sense of thriving using multiple dimensions, I gained a deeper understanding of perceptions of thriving with a small sample of participants from the minoritized student population of Black college women. Schreiner (2010a) stated that understanding how a student thrives while in a campus environment or activity can potentially impact how scholars interpret student success. The sense of thriving provides a more holistic view of student success, and narrative inquiry could help to interpret how individuals articulate and construct a sense of thriving on both interpersonal and intrapersonal levels (Schreiner, 2010a).

I analyzed the participants' individualized stories with narrative inquiry as a methodology and looked for patterns and themes as data unfolded (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Narrative inquiry has been used in several studies in higher education to gather data on marginalized groups and shine a light on voices that could be missing from more dominant, mainstream discourses (Chávez et al., 2012; Ganss, 2016; Porter et al., 2021; Stewart et al.,

2022). Chávez et al. (2012) used narrative inquiry methodology with narratives of Hispanic and Native American students' experiences with learning. Chávez et al. (2019) used individualized interviews to capture the story of the students in their own words and the participant's own worldview. Additionally, Porter et al. (2021) used narrative inquiry in their study while connecting to the theoretical framework of Black feminist thought to explore narratives of Black college women and the impact of #BlackGirlMagic on their lives. Narrative inquiry has also been used to analyze the lived experiences of Black women student leaders as they navigated their leadership experiences at a predominately White institution (Hotchkins, 2017).

The study focused on the participants as the main characters in the study as the story unfolded specifically with attention to the participant's identity and conceptualization of how the participant sees themselves thriving on campus (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moen, 2006). The study is further defined by time, context, and the understanding of temporality as data represents the participants in their time and moment (Creswell & Poth, 2018). With this qualitative methodology, I analyzed data in terms of chronological events as important to telling the story and framing past, present, and future in data representation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This narrative inquiry research design contained features such as plot and cross-comparisons of participants to look for themes of significance, similarities, and differences (Moen, 2006; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Research Site, Sampling, and Recruitment

The following plan details the research site, sampling plan, recruitment plan, and data collection plan. The research site selected for this study was Mountain State University (a pseudonym for this study (MSU). MSU is a large public research university located in the Southeastern United States. It serves a diverse student population, with close to 50% of the

student population identifying as students of Color (Anonymous, 2022b) [The identity of this citation is listed as anonymous to protect the identity of the participants and the institution involved in this study]. According to MSU's institutional research data, Black student enrollment makes up about 23% of the total student population, and Black women college students comprise of over 50% of the Black student population (Anonymous, 2022b). At MSU, there are many opportunities for students to participate in student leadership positions through the Student Affairs units, academic departments, diversity offices, and enrollment services units (Anonymous, 2022a) [The identity of this citation is listed as anonymous to protect the identity of the participants and the institution involved in this study].

This site was selected due to the high involvement of Black women students in various student leadership roles, such as resident assistants, orientation leaders, campus activity programming boards, student government, student organizational leaders, and other department-based student leader roles. The research site will include MSU's two main campuses, a liberal arts campus and a STEM campus.

The participants of the study meet the following criteria to be selected: (a) identify as a Black woman associating with African American, African, Caribbean, or other African diaspora descent; (b) be a currently enrolled MSU undergraduate student classified as sophomore, junior, or senior; (c) be between the ages of 18 and 24; and (d) hold an extracurricular student leadership position in the university (i.e., student organization executive board leader, resident assistant, orientation leader, career ambassador, peer advocate, peer mentor, or department-based leadership positions). Exclusion criteria include students who did not go through an official process for their leadership position, such as an election, application process, screening, or interview process.

Due to the qualitative nature of this study, purposeful sampling was used to gain meaningful, targeted, and information-rich participant data (Jones et al., 2022b). Purposeful sampling was used to deliberately select participants who would be considered experts in the subject matter the researcher is seeking to investigate (Jones et al., 2022b). For this study, I used snowball sampling to recruit four participants. A defining characteristic of snowball sampling is using gatekeepers or individuals with access to specific populations as access points to connecting with potential participants (Jones et al., 2022b). Researchers use snowball sampling to target populations that may be more challenging to recruit or reach (Jones et al., 2022b). When conducting their study, Stewart et al. (2022) gathered participants through snowball sampling to reach a specific population and better enhance data gathered from the study.

To recruit participants for this study, I enlisted the help of student affairs administrators and staff advisors of student leaders at MSU to send names of students who fit the criteria of the study. I created a flyer (see Appendix A) and email (see Appendix B) advertising the study for the administrators and staff members to pass along to students whom they believe would fit the criteria of the study. I additionally prescreened participants (see Appendix C) to ensure that they matched the criteria of the study for credibility. I practiced reflexivity during the recruitment process to ensure that I was aware of my identities that could have impacted the recruitment process (Thurairajah, 2015).

The original goal of the study proposal was to recruit between three to six participants. I initially recruited six participants during the prescreening process, but two participants decided not to continue the interview process. The four participants in this study have completed the prescreening process, the semi-structured interview process, and the photo elicitation process.

Data Collection

With narrative inquiry as a methodology, I used the methods of individual interviews and photo artifacts to weave together a cohesive and co-constructed story through both the researcher and participants interactions and engagement with the study (Clandinin & Caine, 2008; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stewart et al, 2022). The participant interviews were conducted using a semi-structured questionnaire (see Appendix D). Each interview lasted up to 1 hour. A semi-structured questionnaire provided flexibility in the interviewing process through offering guiding questions to get the conversation started, but also offering the flexibility for questions to be modified as the conversation develops (Biddix, 2018). There were guided questions, however, participants were encouraged to drive the conversation. Interview sessions were completed using a virtual platform Microsoft Teams and recorded so that a transcript can be coded and analyzed.

In addition to the interviews, I asked the participants to submit photo or video artifacts for more detail and in-depth conversation about their campus life experiences, sense of thriving, and leadership positions on campus (see Appendix E). Scholars note the unique opportunities for authentic and deep storytelling with participant-generated visual methods (Kortegast, et al. 2019).

Data Analysis Plan and Trustworthiness

Merriam and Tisdell (2015) contended that data analysis aims to make sense of the collected data and construct a path toward answering the research questions. The data collection and analysis process was inductive due to the qualitative nature of the study and constructivist research paradigm; however, the theoretical framework of Black feminist thought, the theoretical model Schreiner's thriving quotient, and the critical research paradigm helped to guide the analysis in the search for themes that help categorize and articulate the story of the Black women

college student experience (Jones et al., 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Schreiner, 2010a).

Schreiner's thriving quotient (2010a) was used to help organize and articulate the themes as data

was analyzed. Due to the immense amount of data collected during the process, I analyzed and

organized data as I collected it. To make the data analysis process more manageable, data was

analyzed after each participant interview and analyzed while comparing participants as the data

accumulated (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

For the individual participant interviews conducted with semi-structured questionnaires,

guided questions were developed based on the themes of the study. The interviews lasted

between 45 minutes to 1 hour, and each participant received one interview session. Interviews

were conducted virtually, recorded, and transcribed using the platform Microsoft Teams. I

additionally took notes on relevant themes actively during the interviews. Jones et al. (2013)

describe memo writing to provide additional layers of analysis as the researcher's notes become

part of the analysis. Additionally, participants were asked to submit photos based on their student

leadership experience and describe what the photos mean to add context and story.

Data from the interviews and participant-generated visual methods was coded by features

and themes and organized into categories during the data analysis process. When coding data

from the study, I used reductionist coding techniques such as constant comparison coding. I

compared incidents in the data and drew comparisons to the theoretical framework Black

feminists thought (Jones et al., 2013). Thematic analysis was used as an approach to organize

data as themes began to develop from the participants (Chávez et al., 2012; Creswell & Poth,

2018; Jones et al., 2013). Scholars such as Chávez et al. (2012) used thematic analysis in their

study, noting that "emergent analysis of themes or patterns enables researchers to see what is

there and not be constrained by existing models" (p. 786). As themes and patterns from data

began to emerge, I compared the data to the theoretical framework of Black feminist thought. Using Black feminist thought as a framework, I can compare participant data to see if common themes arise from the unique experience of being a Black women student leader at a PWI. Additionally, I compared data to Schreiner's Thriving Quotient to see if the sense of thriving can be applied to Black women's student leaders.

Trustworthiness is crucial in maintaining quality research. I incorporated several strategies to ensure that the study meets the standard of trustworthiness. I practiced reflexivity during the data analysis process to ensure that I was aware of the identities that I hold that may impact how I analyze, code, organize, and interpret findings (Thurairajah, 2015). I maintained awareness of potential biases in how I understand data.

In addition to reflexivity, I cross-checked data with the participants to ensure that the interpretation of the data was consistent with the analysis. As narrative inquiry involves co-creating stories articulated through both the researcher and the participants, it was important to have the participants authenticate their data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Stewart et al, 2022). In addition to member checks, researchers have also employed peers or professional staffers to review data to ensure that themes and categories are consistent in description and to review the consistency of analysis from the transcripts (Ganss, 2016).

Subjectivity and Positionality Statement

When conducting qualitative studies, scholars note the importance of a researcher being reflective, open, transparent, and ethical about how the identity of the researcher can have an impact on the entire process, including framing the study and interpreting the results (Dixson & Seriki, 2013; Wickens et al., 2017). As the researcher of the study, the identities that I hold have an impact on my worldview and thus have an impact on how I view the subjects of the study.

I identify as a Black American woman. I view both my identities as a Black American and a woman as two important and prevalent identities and serve as piquing my initial interest in seeking out this study. Growing up as a Black American woman who is both a descendant of enslaved Africans and free Africans, I am well-versed in the history and teachings of the Black American culture and community. I have first-hand experience with racial discrimination and have witnessed racial oppression among family, friends, and community members. As a woman, I have first-hand experience with sexism and have witnessed gender-based oppression in my community. I grew up in a diverse metro Atlanta community, attended a Black Christian church, and volunteered often in my community serving youth of Color. I grew up in a working-class neighborhood during my formative years. These experiences and identities have shaped my worldview and provided a basis for analyzing phenomena through a critical lens.

My educational background and professional experiences also influence how I view the study and my overall worldview as a scholar-practitioner. As a young Black woman undergraduate student, I attended a PWI and participated in various student leader roles. I have served as a student affairs professional for over a decade and worked with various student populations, including Black college women. I have advocated for students of Color and Black women, including working on policies to better serve Black students on campus. I have studied Black women and students of Color as my central focus in my doctoral program and throughout my career.

I considered strategies to remain conscious of my subjectivities and positionalities when conducting the study. Although I am a Black woman and have been an undergraduate student at a PWI in the past, it is important to note that my experience is not representative of all Black women's experiences on the undergraduate level. My experiences are uniquely my own, and

every Black woman student has unique experiences and identities. Black women are not a monolith (Collins, 2000). Considering the theoretical framework of Black feminist thought, I seek to elevate the participants' voices, opinions, and ideas to promote the continued research of Black women telling their narratives in their own voices (Collins, 2000). In addition to the positionalities, I reflected on how my other identities could impact the framing and process of my study, including ability status, age generation, class, marital status, sexual orientation, family background, and physical appearance. Thurairajah (2015) discussed establishing strategies to practice reflexivity over the course of a study. I kept a journal to update my positionalities throughout the course of the study. I analyzed my motivations behind framing questions or interpreting results. I considered the input of the study participants to confirm the meaning of data collected from their narratives.

Research Paradigm and Theoretical Perspective

Reflection on worldview, research paradigm, and theoretical framework are key to understanding the study's design, process, and interpretation. Much of the literature on Black women college students is framed using a critical lens with an understanding that the experience of Black women is inseparable and heavily impacted by societal power dynamics and systematic oppression (Apugo, 2019; Haynes, 2019; Porter & Dean, 2015; Porter et al., 2020; Shahid et al., 2018). Critical to the analysis of the lived experiences of Black women college students is the understanding that this demographic is studied through both gendered and racial realities (Apugo, 2019; Haynes, 2019; Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Although a critical lens was used in this study, a theoretical borderlands approach for the research paradigms was additionally used to analyze the nuances of research on Black women, as not all phenomena can be explained solely through one paradigm (Abes, 2009). Abes (2009) argued that using a borderlands approach

allows researchers to explore multiple paradigms simultaneously, which could lead to an enriched interpretation of data. The research paradigm and theoretical framework of the study are further articulated below.

Jones et al. (2022a) stated that while situating qualitative research, scholars should articulate how philosophical understandings impact how research is framed. Scholars must explain how research connects to values and ethics, conception of reality, construction of knowledge, and ways of thinking concerning existence (Jones et al., 2022a). Axiology refers to how ethical concerns and values will be upheld in the study (Jones et al., 2022a). With the critical paradigm, the study is oriented toward social justice and concerns of elevating the voices of Black women students on campus. Dismantling systems of oppression will always be a central focus and motivation behind the critical paradigm, with values tied to racial justice and equality. Additionally, with the constructivist paradigm, ethical considerations include minimizing harm with interview questions, verifying/confirming participant responses, and properly interpreting results based on both individual and cultural information.

Referring to ontology, or conception of how reality is understood, I used both a critical and constructivist paradigm to explore the lived realities of Black women college student leaders (Jones et al., 2022a). With the constructivist paradigm, the perceived realities of Black women student leaders can be analyzed through how the students interpret their world in relation to themselves and others. The critical paradigm focused on how structures can impact the students' view of reality and how they view their experience at a PWI. In terms of epistemology, or how knowledge is understood and gained, both a critical and constructivist paradigm are used (Jones et al., 2022a). With the constructivist paradigm, the knowledge gained from the study is a co-creation between the participants and the researcher, as the researcher cannot be a separate,

objective observer of the study (Jones et al., 2022a). Knowledge gained from the study is critical in nature as the study was analyzed against the theoretical framework of Black feminist thought to understand how structures and systems impact the participants.

Black feminist thought as a framework uses narratives, observational research, historical accounts, and political context to analyze the experiences of Black women (Collins, 2000; Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Using a critical paradigm, Black feminist thought as a theoretical framework supports the need for Black women to tell their own stories, promoting the belief that Black women have a unique perspective and experience that is not experienced by Black men or White women students on campus (Collins, 2000; Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Porter et al., 2020). Using a constructivist paradigm, using Black feminist thought as a theoretical framework also acknowledges the diversity of experience in Black women due to other identities that they hold associated with class, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, and generation (Collins, 2000; Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

Delimitations

In planning this study and constructing my research questions, I made certain choices to focus the scope of the study. With the participants, I decided to recruit traditional-aged college students who are at least sophomore, junior, or senior students for the study due to having more collegiate experience than freshman and more stories to tell in terms of student leadership due to more time spent in college. For the research questions, I have centered the study on the concept of thriving and how students conceptualize thriving around their student leadership roles.

Limitations

Although narrative inquiry as a research design can provide data-rich and quality information, there are potential challenges with this design. Limitations of the narrative inquiry

research design include potential weaknesses surrounding the data collected from the participants. One potential challenge is that participants could potentially view the researcher as an insider due to racial or ethnic identity, which could cause the participants to answer questions in a particular way (Hotchkins, 2017). With the nature of storytelling, it is possible for participants to exaggerate the details of their stories, which can skew the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, participants could have the urge to change details or modify information in their stories to make their stories more palatable to the interviewer. Another limitation is the fact that participants must rely on their own memory and thought processes to bring forth relevant data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). With the use of purposeful sampling comes the limitation of drawing participants from a small selection of the population; thus, the results will not be generalizable to the entire population of Black women college students.

Chapter Summary

This chapter covered the methodology of this narrative inquiry study beginning with the purpose statement and research questions. The study seeks to explore Black women college student leaders and their conceptualization of thriving while participating in student leadership experiences at a predominately White institution. Additional sections included the research design, the role of the researcher and positionality, research procedures, concerns of trustworthiness and validity, delimitations, and limitations. The next chapter will focus on the results and findings of the study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry study was to examine thriving among Black women college students in leadership positions to better understand how they navigate life at a predominately White institution. The following research questions were explored:

- RQ1: How do Black women student leaders define thriving in college for themselves?

    o RQ1a: What barriers to thriving do they identify?

- RQ2: How do Black women college students describe their experiences in student leadership positions?

- RQ3: What do Black women college students perceive to be the impact, if any, of student leadership activities on the experience of thriving?

The findings of the study are outlined below in this chapter. The anonymized participants who represent the main cast of characters in this narrative inquiry are described below in descriptive tables and a summary. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four participants from Mountain State University. Additionally, the participants submitted photo elicitations to illustrate further their thoughts on student leadership and thriving. This chapter explains emerging themes from the analysis of narrative data. The study is guided by the theoretical framework of Black feminist thought to frame the analysis of the storied realities of Black women college student leaders. The model of Schreiner's thriving quotient (2010a) was used to analyze the sense of thriving among Black women students. Black feminist thought and Schreiner's thriving quotient are analyzed together in this study to see if a sense of thriving is relevant to the experiences of

Black women college student leaders as they articulate their own stories. Figure 1 depicts how I

viewed Black feminist thought as a lens to analyze how sense of thriving is constructed among

Black women student leaders in the study.

Figure 1

Diagram Showing Study Theoretical Framework and Model Analyzed Together
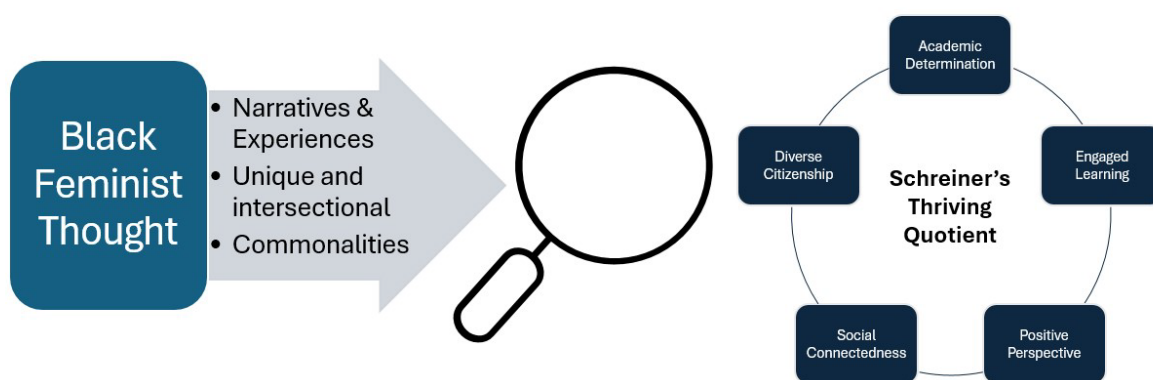
(Collins, 2000; Schreiner, 2010a)

Participants

Below are the details of this study's participants. This section includes a description of

participant demographics and a summary of participant characteristics. The names of the

participants and the names of student leadership organizations have been anonymized for this

study.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

Participant Name	Class	Racial/Ethnic Identity	Gender Identity	Age
Kelly	Sophomore	African American/Black and White	Black Woman	19
Camryn	Sophomore	African American	Black Woman	24
Alex	Senior	Black/First Generation African	Black Woman/ Transwoman	21
Tasha	Senior	Black/African American/Southern	Black Woman and Non-binary (Identify as both)	23

Table 2

Student Leadership Activity Breakdown

Participant Name	Years Serving as Student Leader on Campus	Campus Organization(s)	Leadership Role(s)	Previous Leadership Experience in College
Kelly	1	Campus Ministry Organization, Admissions	Social Media Coordinator, Student Brand Ambassador	No previous experience
Camryn	1	Mountain State Black Computing Association	Event Coordinator	No previous experience
Alex	3	Game Design Department, Game Design and Development Organization	Research Assistant	Peer Mentor
Tasha	4	Campus Multicultural Alliance Center	Student Peer Advocate	Student Athlete, Community Organizer

Kelly, who identifies as a Black woman, also stated that she was of Black and White descent. She was raised primarily with the African American side of her family. Kelly strongly identified her Christian faith as one of her core identities as a religious image. Figure 5 represents her photo elicitation about her leadership experience. She credits her faith-based

student organization as central to her sense of thriving: "Definitely surrounding yourself with the right people who will encourage you and just keep you on the right track in order to thrive". Kelly served as a Student Brand Ambassador for the Mountain State Admissions Department and as a member of the executive board of her Campus Ministry Organization as Social Media Coordinator. Kelly had to go through an application process for both leadership positions and was interviewed. Kelly is a public relations major and will minor in sports entertainment marketing with sports administration in the future. She was excited about participating in her student leadership experiences and looked forward to continuing more leadership experiences in the next school year.

Camryn identifies as a Black woman and African American. Camryn is a 24-year-old transfer student who took a break from attending school for a year before deciding to attend MSU. Camryn began as an Art major at her previous institution but later became interested in a STEM career. Her artistic side was captured in Figure 4 as she submitted an image of an ornate flower bed representing her thoughts on leadership and community. At MSU, Camryn is now enrolled as an Information Technology major. Camryn is a commuter student and wants to become more involved on campus. Although Camryn mentions that her current leadership experience did not really contribute significantly to improving her social life, Camryn remains hopeful about the future as a student leader: "I think it would give me a lot more confidence to participate in other things, which I'm hoping to do once the fall comes along… like [joining] a press program." She serves as an event coordinator in an executive board role for the Mountain State Black Computing Association. Camryn was part of the inaugural executive board of this organization. For this student leadership position, Camryn participated in an application process and a screening process involving a group interview.

Alex identifies as a Black transgender woman and a first-generation African immigrant. Alex is a senior with several years of student leadership experience. Alex talked extensively about her identity as a Black person who identifies both as a woman and transgender and how navigating her identities has positively impacted her campus involvement journey. As a student leader, Alex loves challenging herself and believes that failure is an important part of learning to thrive in college: "Put yourself out there as much as you need to… because I feel like if you haven't failed, and you haven't learned." She submitted an image of Superman in Figure 3 representing the character that she would like to aspire to as a student leader and demonstrating her love for comics and nerd culture. Alex is a Computer Engineering major interested in video game design. Alex currently serves as a Research Assistant for a research organization under the Game Design Department and is also a member of the Game Design and Development Organization on campus. Alex obtained her leadership position through an application process and an interview with a faculty member.

Tasha identifies as Black, African American, and regionally Southern Black American. She also identifies both as a Black woman and as non-binary to describe her identities in a more holistic way: "I live my life as a Black woman, identity as a Black woman, understand the struggles of Black women, and people see a Black woman when they look at me; however, I also identify as non-binary as well" Tasha felt that gender can be expressed in both fluid and dynamic ways and that she embraced the journey of self-definition. Tasha has served in various student leadership roles throughout her tenure at both Mountain State University and her previous transfer institution, including being a student-athlete on the women's basketball team. Tasha, who also considers herself an advocate for diversity, submitted an image represented in Figure 2 of the harmony and unity of nature as an analogy of her ideal campus environment. She is an

Interactive Design major with a minor in Sociology. Currently, Tasha serves as the Student Peer Advocate in the Campus Multicultural Alliance Center at MSU. She had to submit an application for the position and was interviewed by a student affairs staff member.

Narrative Themes Surrounding the Journey of Black Women Student Leaders

The following themes came out of the data analyzed from the study: (1) Reflecting on Being a Black Woman and Student Leader, (2) Managing Challenges and Obstacles to Thriving, (3) Aiming for Academic Thriving as a Goal, (4) Reflecting on Intrapersonal Thriving and the Leadership Journey, and (5) Building Community and Interpersonal Thriving. The findings align with conceptions of Schreiner's (2010a) sense of thriving and constructs of thriving. The theoretical framework of Black feminist thought (Collins, 2000) is highlighted throughout the findings section as the participants explore their lives through the lens of being a Black woman on campus. Participant-generated photos are also presented in these findings. As mentioned in Chapter 3, photo-elicitation was used as another avenue for participants to continue their stories with a visual representation of their world or thought processes around student leadership and thriving (Kortegast et al., 2019). The participants were asked to submit an image that represents their leadership experience, with the image signifying a time or image when they felt a strong connection to their leadership experience, an image that represents thriving, or an image that they believe is connected to their campus journey. Participant photos are presented in the Reflecting on Intrapersonal Thriving and the Leadership Journey theme because all the participants reflected introspectively about their own positive conceptions of thriving while focusing on what student leadership means to them.

Reflecting on Being a Black Woman and Student Leader

Black feminist thought is a theoretical framework used to analyze how Black women conceptualize their world as they navigate their identities (Collins, 2000; Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Black feminist thought as a framework also provides an opportunity for researchers to look for the commonalities between Black women to see if there is a shared experience and where experience may diverge depending on how other salient identities intersect. The participants expressed different views while reflecting on being a Black woman student leader on campus. All participants acknowledged that the identity of being a Black woman played a role in how others perceived them on campus and how they moved in their roles as student leaders. However, some participants connected more strongly to the idea of Black woman identity, whereas other participants acknowledged being part of the group but had little reflection on identity beyond that.

Reflecting on what it means to be a Black woman student leader on campus, Kelly stated, "For me, it means a lot just because of just being in that minority group." Kelly noted that Black women attend college in fewer numbers than the majority group, White students, whether male or female. Kelly considers herself a representation of Black women in college:

> It's just like kind of showing that now I'm in college. I'm like beating the odds, I guess. And I'm also involved, and I'm pretty much thriving here in college, so I feel like It's very doable for anyone as long as they have their priorities in order and just kind of stay on the right track.

However, Kelly stated that she had no further reflections on what it was like being a Black woman college student and student leader. Kelly appeared hesitant to add additional thoughts about being a Black woman.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, Tasha highlights several times how her identity as a Black woman interacted with her campus life experience inside and outside the classroom. Tasha's identity played a role in why she decided to get involved in student leadership: "Long before my initial university, just my experience and my identity growing up in Savannah being who I am [lead her to become more active in student leader roles]." Tasha further reflects on her identity, growing up in the deep South of the United States, and her journey to process these identities: "It kind of gave me the realization that a lot of things were unjust, not just for people in my identity, but just like other organizations, other groups, and walks of life." Tasha highlighted some themes of racial injustice and prejudice while growing up in the Deep South.

Tasha was a computer engineering major before switching to interactive design. Tasha's experience on campus in a STEM program was impacted by belonging to a small group of minoritized students who were STEM majors. Her experiences in tech classes have been impacted due to her identity, "In the tech world, we're already the minority, and it's not even us putting pressure on ourselves. We are outliers." She felt misunderstood as she participated in classes and appeared to approach her narrative experience with hypervigilance and a sense of paranoia that her classmates and professors paid close attention to everything she did in the classroom. Tasha recants an experience that she had on campus where she believes that her classmates and professor perceived her to be angry:

> I am new to coding, and I just needed additional help. Not related to because I'm a woman but go off. Then, of course, with microaggressions, in terms of like how I present. Whether it's my hair, how I talk, or the tone of my voice, that all has an impact on how professors perceive me and how other students perceive me. How they may say this, 'I

don't want to say this, because this might make the angry black woman come out.' When

I'm just telling them to correct this part of the code. I wasn't angry.

While serving in her student leadership role, Tasha often felt that she had to take on a defensive stance to protect her voice and speech from external forces on campus, such as administration figures or opposing student groups, while participating in her organization, the Multicultural Campus Alliance Center. To capture some of the challenges relating to identity and her student leadership position, Tasha also mentions that she feels uneasy about negative responses from students who hold counter-viewpoints to her views:

Of course, in the same breath of like being focused, being open to the masses at a public

university, is going to open the door to the other side viewing things as well.

Other students who would have not so open-minded stances, also come up and state:

'You know, I don't like that. You know, I don't like this.'

When reflecting on being a Black woman and a student leader, Tasha states, "It takes more." She further expounds, "It takes more whether it's mentally, physically when it comes to doing the work or just being present in class, being present outside of class." Tasha juxtaposed what she perceived to be her experience as a Black woman student leader with that of a non-minority-identifying student leader. She felt that being a Black woman student leader carried the additional weight of stress resulting from microaggressions and stereotype threat. Additionally, Tasha stated that she suffers from imposter syndrome and second-guesses herself while doing academic tasks.

What drew Camryn to her organization was the idea of organizing a student association that catered to Black STEM students on campus. In a similar way to Tasha, Camryn acknowledged difficulties being a Black woman in a STEM major on campus, specifically

acknowledging feelings of isolation and feeling like an outsider in her classes of mostly White

identifying students and male students. When reflecting on starting an organization for Black

STEM students on her campus, she stated, "I found that it's very comforting to be in a group of

people who share similarities to you, you know, not just race but also majors." For Camryn,

being a Black woman on campus meant being exposed but also being held as an example for

others:

> I think being a black student woman leader just means putting yourself out on the front
>
> lines. Being kind of the first to do a lot of things for other people who come from the
>
> same community as you. Not only that shows that you know the strength and the power
>
> in what I'm doing, even with my disability, even me being like a person of Color; it might
>
> help other women of Color or Black women do the same thing, hopefully.

Camryn noted that it was a good experience to form an organization with other Black women in

STEM: "It's a very nice experience to be able to meet others like me." She was searching for a

like-minded community of students who shared a similar experience to what she faced as a Black

woman college student.

Alex also had similar views, noting that few Black women in STEM were on campus.

Alex shared commonalities with both Tasha and Camryn, with the experience of acknowledging

the lack of representation of Black women in the STEM majors on campus. However, Alex

reflected on the opportunities available to Black women in STEM:

> As a black woman student leader on my campus, especially since we are in a STEM
>
> campus, there has been a large push to get a lot of women, specifically black women, into
>
> STEM fields. So, I feel like being able to say that, hey, black women are able to have

jobs in these fields, and we are able to thrive, and these are our interests, too, as much as any other person.

Alex shared a common thread with Camryn on the need for more community and gatherings for Black women STEM majors. Alex believed in the importance of using leadership opportunities to elevate her status as a Black women college student. Alex additionally had the additional layer of identifying as transgender, which she termed "figuring out my gender identity." Differing from the other participants, Alex's experience was unique as her Black womanhood includes the intersecting identity of gender expression.

Managing Challenges and Obstacles to Thriving

Important to the concept of thriving is understanding that students will face challenges but must have coping mechanisms in place to continue to flourish in their environment (Schreiner, 2010a). Due to the gender and racial identities of Black women in the U.S., it is possible for Black women student leaders at predominately White institutions to face unique challenges associated with membership in this group (Domingue, 2015; Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, 2014; Haynes, 2019). This theme involved the participants looking at issues pertaining to their journey as black woman student leaders. Two participants had more explicit connections to racial/ethnic and gendered challenges of being a Black woman on campus. In comparison, the other two participants did not explicitly link being a Black woman to their struggles or obstacles to thriving. The participants considered internal and external factors they struggled with as student leaders while explaining strategies to overcome the challenges. All participants experienced challenges to thriving in their student leader positions or in campus life in general to varying degrees. Some barriers to thriving were centered around academic concerns, while others were social or personal in nature.

Kelly's challenges to thriving took on a more individualistic outlook rather than connecting to a common thread of issues that are unique to Black women as a subgroup (e.g., stereotype threat, angry Black woman, strong Black woman, microaggressions). For Kelly, balancing extracurricular activities and schoolwork was a challenge at the beginning of her leadership experience, "It did kind of take a minute for me to get adjusted to the college lifestyle and also being heavily involved." Kelly's struggles with time management are an example of the often-noted struggle of many college students, regardless of racial/ethnic or gendered background, as they seek to become acclimated to their studies, additional activities, and newfound independence (Cholewa et al., 2017; Connolly et al., 2017; Kim, 2015; Strayhorn, 2012; Williams et al., 2020). Kelly stated that her grades started to fall in her classes because of becoming involved with multiple organizations:

> I had extra things outside of classes, so at one point, my grades did slip up, but I had to learn. I had to kind of communicate with the people that I was involved with, 'like, hey, I need to take some time to myself and let me get my priorities straight.' Then I'll reach back out and just get back together once everything is together with me.

Time management was the main challenge that Kelly discussed as an obstacle to thriving as a student leader. Her conversation tended to stay positive-focused as she viewed her leadership positions, whether serving as a Brand Ambassador for the school or participating with the Campus Ministry Organization, as opportunities to work on any shortcomings, such as the need to branch out more socially or improve communication skills.

Camryn's challenges can be connected to some common tread challenges faced by Black women college students, such as feelings of isolation and perceptions of being an outsider looking in. Camryn's connection to the overall theme of managing challenges and obstacles is an

example of a unique personality struggle of trying to fit into an environment while not being as social as other students and being a member of a minoritized group in a largely predominately White major. Personally, Camryn's challenges centered around struggles with forming friendships and social connections on campus both while participating in her leadership position and in general campus life:

> I am not a very social person. I don't really join programs. This is the first time I've done this in my entire life, in my school career. Previously, I was not interested in joining organizations. I just went to class and came home. Sometimes it's hard to jump into something, right?

Camryn also identified in herself a personal challenge that she struggles with speaking up for herself or voicing her opinion, "Of course, participating in any program, you have to, you know, be vocal and voice your opinions about certain things you know, and I find that a little bit harder." One of the reasons she decided to become a student leader was to gain confidence in speaking to other students. Black women students can often experience environments that promote a silencing effect. Camryn did not feel comfortable speaking up in classes as she expressed that she was one of the only Black woman students in her classes. She wanted to learn more skills in voicing her own opinions:

> I guess mostly just to challenge myself on things that I wasn't so confident in. Like, you know, being a leader itself was kind of a push for me. I just decided I need to start putting myself more out there to make sure that I see all the opportunities that I could have as a student.

> Tasha's experiences perhaps connected the most to the overall themes of Black feminist thought. With her conversation came themes of racial battle fatigue, the strong Black woman

archetype, and a sense of advocacy for herself and others who belonged to marginalized groups.

Of all the participants interviewed Tasha seemed the most anxious or burdened with the campus

environment and the university's views on diversity and inclusion. Tasha's challenges during her

student leadership experience centered around social advocacy issues for underrepresented

groups. Tasha views the school's administration as a barrier to thriving due to policies restricting

certain programs and a chilling effect on discussing diversity and equity issues openly:

> To start with challenges from outside forces, I don't see degrading as the proper term.
> But minimizing, making it seem like this [diversity programming] is not needed. Like
> you're making your own problems. People like me, we need community. People like me
> need to be heard. Like, I'm going to sit out here on campus and hold up this sign so
> people see that this needs to be relevant.

Though Tasha expressed frustration with challenging the administration's views on policies of

voicing diversity issues, she felt accomplished standing up for what she viewed as

underrepresented voices, "It feels good, though. It's like, yeah, I was part of this community,

and I got to see students smile." A big part of Tasha's coping mechanism to struggle with

thriving is putting herself into advocacy work and challenging powers and structures that she

views as oppressive.

Like Kelly, Alex takes a more individualistic look into her challenges by connecting

managing challenges and coping with obstacles to a positive outlook on learning. Alex named

challenges both to the leadership position and regarding her personal life. For the leadership

position, her main challenge was learning an entire subject that she had not previously studied

regarding the Research Assistant position: "My research project was to help my professor

develop a game, so I had to learn a lot of systems by myself." Alex went on to discuss that with

the research project that the team worked on, she was responsible for learning new information and for training other new team members on information that she was unfamiliar with:

> I think one of the biggest challenges in my leadership position specifically was that I'm not someone who is a game development major. I feel like there was a hole that I didn't have filled yet. So, figuring out how to fill that and to the level to where I had to teach other people and lead other people. That was probably the strongest or the hardest challenge or thing that I'd had to face.

Alex's connections to Black feminist thought appeared to be on an implicit level, as she defined her own unique journey, which can be further analyzed through the complex intersecting identities that Alex holds. On a personal level, Alex struggled with mental health issues and navigating campus life as a transgender woman. Alex stated that she is a high-performing student and struggles with anxiety relating to pressure to perform at a high standard, "[It is a challenge] figuring out how to like to manage everything on top of anxiety and just manage all my classes and manage my social life." It was important to Alex to be seen as her identity as a woman:

> That's something that has also been taking a lot of time out of my day. Figuring out how am I going to express my true self, … [and figuring out] how am I going to make sure I'm being seen as I want to be seen. Maintaining gender-affirming healthcare.

Alex copes with her personal struggles by regularly attending therapy, having a strong friend group, having good relationships with professors on campus, and using campus support resources.

Aiming for Academic Thriving as a Goal

One of the themes that emerged from the study was how the Black woman student leaders in this study viewed academic thriving. Academic thriving can be seen as a connecting

theme to Black feminist thought due to the common theme of Black women college students striving for academic success to garner overall career and financial success and overcome societal oppression (Haynes, 2019). This theme included the subthemes of Academic Determination and Engaged Learning (Schreiner, 2010a). All participants connected to the idea of succeeding academically and connected academic thriving to their overall success. Participants view academic success as leading to their future career success. While Academic Determination became prevalent as a subtheme, the subtheme of Engaged Learning was evident in two participants.

Academic Determination

Reflecting on their conception of thriving, all participants considered academic success an important component of thriving. Academic determination is related to the time commitment students place on balancing both academic and extracurricular activities while making a concerted effort to prioritize academic success (Schreiner, 2010a).

When thinking about what it means to thrive as a college student, Kelly quickly reflected on how academics are connected to her concept of thriving. Kelly remarked on her academic focus, coming to college with several Advanced Placement credits and viewing academic success as an important step toward her career goals. She views succeeding academically as just as important as making connections socially when reflecting on her concept of thriving:

> To me, thriving is pretty much like excelling academically, as well as socially, too. Meeting new people and just really getting involved. Being able to keep that balance of schoolwork throughout your years of college.

As a commuter and transfer student, Camryn focused on academic success as the main goal of going to school. Though attending college for several years, Camryn has only recently

begun participating in student leadership experiences. She views participation in student leadership activity as gaining more skills to aid her academic pursuits, "I guess [I joined this organization] to just have more confidence in myself and in my degree program." Camryn initially viewed thriving through the lens of having the necessary support resources for her to do well in her studies. She connected her concept of thriving to her need for accommodation for a vision impairment disability. Camryn views thriving as associated with support; she shared, "Having the basic support that I would need because of my disability. Having school support and some type of structure in my life too."

Tasha connects thriving academically to an end or transactionally in service to getting a job in the future. She also views coursework as a necessary step to connecting with future opportunities and views connections with professors as important to thriving academically on campus. When reflecting on the necessary experiences to thrive, Tasha focused on the relationship between professors and students:

> Generally, in classes, it ranges from professors that help you and professors who don't help you. Professors who actually show you what the real world is like in that field and professors that don't. Also outside of the classroom, experience their mentor relationships, the good and the bad.

Engaged Learning

Engaged learning happens when a student is psychologically invested in the learning process experience (Schreiner, 2010a). Alex was highly motivated by academic challenges, especially due to her student leadership experience as a research assistant for a game development project. Although a computer engineering major, Alex wanted to gain more knowledge of gaming design and development and enjoyed the challenge of learning a new skill.

Alex regularly met with her faculty advisor and other student leaders on the project, seeking feedback for improvement.

> In the game that we were developing, there were puzzles that we had to make for the players to solve. They get a piece of something that they need to complete the game. So, coming up with those puzzles with my team was something that was very challenging. I felt like we thrived in personally because it's a lot harder to make a puzzle than it is to solve them.

Another participant who demonstrated engaged learning was Camryn. Camryn felt highly motivated in her leadership position when she was tasked with creating a logo for her student organization. The theme also highlights her experience creating the logo, reflecting interpersonal thriving below.

Reflecting on Intrapersonal Thriving and the Leadership Journey

Thriving interpersonally can be viewed as an individual having a healthy self-concept, having self-confidence, believing in their own abilities, and generally possessing a positive perspective when it comes to moving through the world (Schreiner, 2010a). Through the lens of Black feminist thought, the concept of interpersonal thriving can look different to individuals, and background could have a potential influence on how a student views interpersonal thriving. For Black women negotiating environments that were not originally built for them, Collins (2000) discussed the Black women's need for self-definition in a society that attempts to define what it means to be a Black woman and for Black women to seek out their own path toward empowerment. The participants all had varying degrees of how they viewed their own intrapersonal thriving. Three participants strongly identified serving as a student leader as a positive experience leading to strong feelings around thriving, whereas one participant felt that

their leadership experience was mostly unremarkable but was still able to articulate what they needed to feel as though they were thriving interpersonally.

Reflections on Positive Perspective

Alex views student leadership as an opportunity for self-improvement and growth. Alex associated the words "personal satisfaction" when first reflecting on what thriving means to her, "I think having personal satisfaction is really good if you want to consider yourself as a thriver." Alex viewed learning new things in the leadership position as a positive experience and caused her to reflect on her own abilities and accomplishments during the journey in her current position as a research assistant:

> I do like to do things outside of my comfort zone a little bit. There are definitely some skills that I have learned in being in this position, so it's just always realizing that something that you may think you could be good at is something that you're not necessarily that good at. But that doesn't mean that you're not suited for the position. That just means that, hey, maybe that there's something that you got to learn. I kind of like getting out there. I feel like it's fun. I feel like we're only in college for how many years, might as well learn.

When reflecting on how she knows when she is thriving, Tasha smiled and shared, "When I'm proud of myself, and I'm very hard on myself, I would say." Tasha, who took an analytical and methodological approach to answering all her questions, paused and reflected deeply on how the leadership experiences contributed to her thriving. Very important to her conception of thriving were the terms "comfort" and "comfortability". Tasha felt that her environment needed to be a place where she could feel comfortable being able to express herself and her voice opinion:

There's a part of me where I want to give credit where it's due. I love giving credit where it's due whenever I can. Yeah, because with this leadership position, I gained confidence. I gained skills in public speaking. It's like the skills were there, but I will say it gave me the platform and the opportunity to strengthen it. I feel like I already had skills, but the experience just amplified it or strengthened it.

Tasha also reflected on how she felt while organizing a leadership event for students at the Campus Multicultural Alliance Center. She thought about how pulling off a successful event program made her feel accomplished:

I was in charge of making that event here, and in making it, I was confident. I didn't expect that many people to come, but the event had a really nice turnout. So that was like the thriving moment for me.

Some of the phrases that Kelly associated with thriving were "excitement" and "very positive attitude." When focusing introspectively on her leadership experiences, Kelly stated that her participation in student leadership activities gave her more confidence in approaching people and speaking up, "[One of the skills developed] definitely communication being able to communicate with people and also just being more outgoing." Kelly also stated that she developed into a better overall student gaining skills in time management and organization:

Honestly, I feel like I have more time management skills with just being able to make sure I'm on track. So, I now have like a little agenda, and I write down due dates for assignments. Also, upcoming projects that we may have for like brand ambassadors or just whatever I'm really involved in. So, I feel like time management has improved a lot more compared to when I was like in high school and stuff.

For Camryn, participating in her student leadership experience had some positive aspects but did not lead to a definitive sense of intrapersonal thriving: "I don't think I really developed in one specific skill in my leadership experience, but I hope to in the future though". When considering continuing in student leadership activities for the future, Camryn maintained a positive attitude and hopeful disposition for more fruitful experiences. Camryn stated that the student leadership activity did improve her overall campus experience,

> I think it [the student organization] definitely did kind of increase my campus experience, if that makes sense. I don't really do much on campus if it's not related to my classes; even when I live on campus, I really don't even go out and explore things that are going on.

One moment that Camryn did feel like she was thriving was when she was able to tap into her creative skills in graphic design and also voice her opinion: "Like for a while, I think we were trying to figure out what our logo was going to be and stuff like that." Camryn was able to provide input on the logo design and also helped develop the voting system for the organization.

Building Community and Interpersonal Thriving

All participants relate to the theme of building community and interpersonal thriving. Thriving interpersonally involves the ability to form relationships with other people. In the context of college students, thriving interpersonally involves social connectedness, which is experiencing a community for sense of belonging and practicing diverse citizenship, which is being able to relate to others who are different (Schreiner, 2010a). The participants all expressed a need to seek out a community and establish social connections. An important common theme in Black feminist thought is the central idea that Black women thrive when they can tap into an affirming community (Collins, 2000). This theme includes analysis from both the interviews and

the photo elicitation. The participant-driven visual methods were situated in this theme due to the participant's connections with the theme of diverse citizenship and how the participants viewed their leadership experience.

Social Connectedness

For Alex, personal relationships and social connectedness were central to her sense of thriving, "I have a really strong friend group, and I really love my friends!" Keywords that she associated with thriving were "teamwork" and "collaboration." Alex described herself as a people person, "I'm a very friends-focused, like social-focused, team-focused type of person." In her student leadership position, Alex fondly recants the excitement of having to pull an all-nighter to get a project done that the team needed to present. Although she did not enjoy losing sleep, Alex was happy to work with her teammates to accomplish the goal of the project,

Alex attributes much of her success with her current leadership position to the relationships she was able to acquire while on campus: "I don't think that I would have been in the position I am today [without friend connections]." She named some friends who inspired her to get involved in the Research Assistant position. Additionally, she was influenced by a faculty member as well.

> It's important to have, like the social aspect of making sure that you're tapped in around your campus and that you have a good social life. You're making good friends and just keep your mental health well overall,

Kelly felt that interpersonal relationships were important to her campus experience as a student leader. Her experience as a Student Brand Ambassador with the Mountain State Admissions department helped her lead groups of incoming freshman students: "Meeting the upcoming freshman and them asking me questions and being able to like direct them and what I

recommend to incoming freshman." This experience allowed Kelly to improve her communication skills and mentor newer students.

The Student Brand Ambassador position also helped Kelly make social connections on campus. Not only was Kelly able to increase her social network on campus, but she was also able to lay the foundation for networking for future leadership positions in other organizations:

> It impacted my social life heavily because I know so many people now. Compared to the other students [who are not involved in student leader activities], it's kind of easy to meet friends. It's much easier being involved because you don't only meet students, but you also meet upperclassmen. You kind of just build a name for yourself, and you have connections.

One of the connections that she highlighted made due to her leadership experience with the Student Brand Ambassadors was the head basketball coach: "So having that type of connection really helps trying to go into that field that I want to work in."

As for influential people who helped guide Kelly toward the decision to become a student leader, she mentioned two friends, Michelle and Jack (names also anonymized for the purpose of this study). Jack was a key connector for getting Kelly involved in the Campus Ministry Organization:

> I feel like my friend Jack; he knew quite a bit of people coming in and he was like a part of the Campus Ministry. He was like, 'Hey, I feel like you should be part of this organization as well and become involved with the media team.' Then made me like the head of media and everything.

Michelle served as a mentor to Kelly in the Student Brand Ambassadors. Michelle was available to give information on how to do the role, gave advice, and was highly accessible to Kelly: "I was always like texting her, asking her questions."

Camryn joined her organization, Mountain State Black Computing Association, in an effort to meet more people on campus; however, she stated that "it hasn't had much of a huge effect in as far as my social life goes." Camryn holds meetings with her organization about twice a month but does not always see the students in the organization regularly. However, one relationship that was notable to her sense of interpersonal thriving was a staff advisor who helped the group get organized and chartered, Heather (name anonymized for purposes of study).

> She was the one who actually sent out the emails to us [in order] for us to build the
> program itself. But once we [the students] got together and developed the program, you
> know, she kind of just lets us do our own thing, make our own decisions, and stuff like
> that.

The staff member, Heather, helped Camryn organize the materials and paperwork to charter the organization with the campus's Student Affairs department. Heather was helpful with navigating the procedural aspects of forming an organization and served as a sounding board for the students when it came to developing ideas and vision for the organization.

Diverse Citizenship and Reflections on Interpersonal Thriving Through Images

Tasha connects with the diverse citizenship aspect of interpersonal thriving. Of all the participants, Tasha largely drew on her identity as a community organizer and activist:

> If I don't do it, I'm not seeing anybody else do it, so I'm going to be part of movements.
> If I'm by myself, if I find an organization who's going to do this type of stuff, I'm going to
> join them, or I'm going to be by myself.

Individuals who were helpful in the development of her leadership experience include other student leaders and community organizers who serve as activists in emerging issues.

Tasha thrives on creating spaces for other students to come together and have dialogue. Her leadership position with the Campus Multicultural Alliance Center gives her the opportunity to channel her interest in advocacy for marginalized groups, learning about other cultures, and providing a space for other students to thrive. When reflecting on why she got involved in student leadership:

> I wanted to create a space that I wish I was there for me. Well, that kind of made me have a realization. Then also I just wanted to create the space, not so necessarily just because I wanted it, but because people need this. Like whether they openly have the ability to say it or show it, people need spaces like this.

Figure 2

Tasha's Image Representing Reflections on Student Leadership

Tasha's image was a photo of a tree, its branches, and the leaves of a tree that was located near the student center on campus. When reflecting on the image, Tasha stated, "Just have a

plant, but it's the leaf of a tree, but life, if you can piece together like my other answers, is analytical and philosophically… well sociology minor here." For Tasha, the image represented life on campus, and how, regardless of station, we are all part of nature. She drew an analogy of how her life and experience as a student leader on campus is just like any other student existing on campus as a way to emphasize unity in experience.

> Regardless, with all the complications of systems that have been implemented in several
> societies where there, you know, highlight Georgia specifically, the United States, and
> ultimately the world, the bare bones of life where we come from. The beauty to
> appreciate it. I mean, it's life. I feel like plants or an example of that.

Figure 3

Alex's Image Representing Reflections on Student Leadership

Alex decided to share an image from a popular American comic book hero, Superman, as her representation of her thoughts on student leadership. "Okay, so Superman is one of my favorite characters in any piece of media ever, and that is because of what he represents and what he does." What Alex likes about Superman is that this character inspires the other heroes and

civilians in the story to be their best selves, "And that's something that I would really want to do because in any sort of setting, making sure that you are hopeful about yourself, making sure that you stay positive about the future is important." Alex is interested in inspiring or motivating other students to reach their goals.

> You can join something, but if you feels like you're not going to do well, or if you feel like you are lacking, or if you feel like you're a burden to the team, you're probably not going to put your best foot forward. You can try and be a leader, but if you don't feel like you're cut out for the job, you're not going to think you can lead other people.

As a senior student leader, Alex hopes to be "that friendly face, that face, that that inspires confidence" when working with new student leaders.

Figure 4

*Camryn's Image Representing Reflections on Student Leadership*

Camryn's image was a photo of a globe sculpture and flower mound on campus. For Camryn, the flowers represent individual students coming together to make a more complete picture, "The world is kind of like all the little flowers, and the flowers are kind of like the

different students." Reflecting on nature and how flowers are visually appealing and not harmful, Camryn believes that student leaders can look to nature when focusing on organizing their thoughts about leadership, "They're only doing more good for the world, if that makes sense, so hopefully this group will be like a really good like these flowers."

Figure 5

Kelly's Image Representing Reflections on Student Leadership
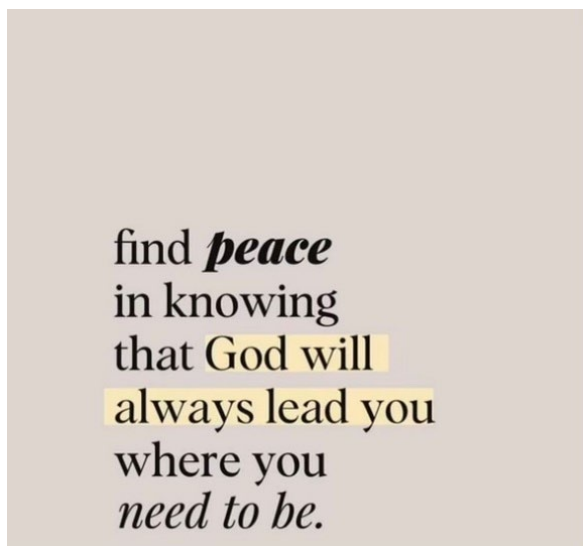
Kelly's image is of a quote with religious significance stating, "Find peace in knowing that God will always lead you where you need to be." A big part of Kelly's student leadership experience was her being able to connect to a faith-based organization, Campus Ministry Organization, where she was able to tap into the spiritual side of thriving. Kelly described going on a missionary trip into the community with her organization as one of the defining moments of her school year:

> We all like went to a church down in [a small town in the Southeast] and just had people from like the organization and community come and just like worship. It was really nice just being able to meet all the other college students in the same boat. That was really fun.

Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed the findings of the study. Discussed in this chapter was a breakdown of the participants and themes that resulted from the data analysis. Semi-structured interviews and participant-generated photos were used to capture the participants' narratives in the study. The findings were analyzed through the lens of Black feminist thought, and the themes were strongly connected to Schreiner's (2010a) thriving quotient. The main themes that emerged out of the narrative data analysis were the following: Reflecting on Being a Black Woman and Student Leader, Managing Challenges and Obstacles to Thriving, Aiming for Academic Thriving as a Goal, Reflecting on Intrapersonal Thriving and the Leadership Journey, and Building Community and Interpersonal Thriving. The final chapter will summarize the interpretation of key findings, compare the meaning of the findings to existing research, and discuss the study's implications and potential directions for future research on this subject.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This study examined the experiences of Black women student leaders on a predominately White campus and their conception of thriving. Connecting back to the research problem of this study, more research is needed on how Black women student leaders decide on relevant social support resources to encourage their own sense of thriving. Additionally, more research is needed on how Black women student leaders articulate what support is needed for their success and how they identify experiences on campus that allow them to thrive.

The study focused on students who participated in the student support strategy for student leadership positions and activities. Student leadership positions and activities are part of the functional area of student affairs and student leadership development, and they involve activities and experiences that enhance leadership skills while developing critical competencies employers seek from future employees (Komives et al., 2011). The functional area of student leadership development also connects students with other dimensions of development, such as understanding leadership identity, understanding the sense of self and strengths, and developing a sense of service to a greater community (Komives & Wagner, 2017). Over several decades in higher education, there have been strides toward understanding how programmatic interventions such as student leadership programs and activities have impacted marginalized groups (Friesen et al., 2020; Hotchkins, 2017; Museus & Jayakumar, 2012; Roland, 2021; Soria et al., 2019). With this study, I wanted to add to the literature by exploring the potential connections between Black

women college student leaders and their sense of thriving while also connecting to the unique

way Black women tell their own stories.

   With narrative inquiry as the methodology, I could examine the lives of a small sample of

college student leaders by exploring their social lives, analyzing their historical context as

current college students, and taking a deeper look into personal artifacts. Interview questions and

photo-elicitation were used to weave together the narratives and draw out the story of four

participants. The previous chapter presented the findings from the participants in this study and

highlighted the emerging themes from the narrative data analysis. Table 3 depicts the connection

between the themes and my research questions. This chapter summarizes the findings and

interpretation of the research results. Additionally, this chapter compares the connections

between the findings and the existing literature. The discussion further reviews the implications

of the study, exploring lessons learned and recommendations for future research.

Table 3

Themes and Subthemes Containing Data Related to Research Questions

Research Questions	Themes
RQ1: How do Black women student leaders define thriving in college for themselves? RQ1a: What barriers to thriving do they identify?	Managing Challenges and Obstacles to Thriving Aiming for Academic Thriving as a Goal Subtheme: Academic Determination Reflecting on Intrapersonal Thriving and the Leadership Journey Subtheme: Reflection on Positive Perspective Building Community and Interpersonal Thriving Subtheme: Social Connectedness Subtheme: Diverse Citizenship and Reflections on Interpersonal Thriving through Images
RQ2: How do Black women college students describe their experiences in student leadership positions?	Reflecting on Being a Black Woman and Student Leader

RQ3: What do Black women college students perceive to be the impact, if any, of student leadership activities on the experience of thriving?	Reflecting on Intrapersonal Thriving and the Leadership Journey
	    Subtheme: Reflection on Positive Perspective
	Building Community and Interpersonal Thriving
	    Subtheme: Social Connectedness
	Aiming for Academic Thriving as a Goal
	    Subtheme: Engaged Learning
	Reflecting on Intrapersonal Thriving and the Leadership Journey
	Subtheme: Reflection on Positive Perspective
	Building Community and Interpersonal Thriving
	    Subtheme: Social Connectedness
	    Subtheme: Diverse Citizenship and Reflections on Interpersonal Thriving through Images

Identity, Leadership Experience, and Barriers to Thriving

Black women see themselves as both a representation and representative of that group. This claim means that Black women are not only seen as group members, but also, due to their minoritized status, they can be seen as examples for the entire group. One of the core themes of Black feminist thought is to look for commonalities among the group (Collins, 2000). Porter et al. (2020), who draw on Black feminist thought with their Model of identity development in Black undergraduate women, considered how the conceptualization of identity and interactions with other people help to influence how Black women navigate the campus environment. The participants considered their identity in the context of how they were situated in the campus environment compared to others. This assertion is evidenced in the data by Kelly's statement, "For me, it means a lot just because of just being in that minority group," when speaking about what it means to be a Black woman student leader on campus. Tasha also recognized being a part of this minoritized group. She went further by stating, "It takes more," a statement she made

about both acknowledging membership in the Black woman identity group and describing her feelings around being a member of that identity group, along with alluding to a sense of oppression that may come with belonging to this group. For Camryn, being a Black woman student leader "means putting yourself out on the front lines," showcasing her concept of being a representative of a Black woman student on campus. Alex also showcased her sense of being a representative with her statement, "I feel like being able to say that... Black women are able to have jobs in these fields, we are able to thrive, and these are our interests too as much as any other person."

The findings reveal that the participants felt hyper-visible as all participants claimed to be a representation of Black women on campus due to the prominence of their student leadership position. Because Black women see themselves as a representation of the group, there is a speculative claim that can be made about the potential that this reality of being part of a doubly minoritized group puts pressure on them to perform. This claim aligns with the literature concerning Black women college students being considered a model minority and exhibiting pressure to be an example while disproving negative stereotypes (Apugo, 2019; Haynes, 2019). All participants showed an elevated sense of importance in obtaining a student leadership position. Scholars in the literature noted that Black women college students gravitated toward student leadership opportunities (Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, 2014; Haynes, 2019). The participant findings connect to the literature concept of the Strong Black Woman or Invincible Black Woman, where added pressure exists for Black women to perform tasks and accomplish results to avoid feelings of failure (Apugo, 2019; Collins, 2000; Jones & Pritchett-Johnson, 2018). Kelly reflected, "I'm in college... I'm like beating the odds," as a statement reflecting on her doing well in school and while representing Black women on campus. Camryn acknowledged the weight of

"Being the first to do a lot of things for other people who come from the same community as you." Tasha further elaborated on the feelings of pressure stemming from being a representative of the minoritized group of Black women while also trying to maintain academic excellence:

> Then of course with microaggressions, in terms of like how I present, whether it's my hair, how I talk, the tone in my voice, that all has an impact on how professors perceive me, how other students perceive me. How they may say this, 'I don't want to say this, because this might make the angry black woman come out.'

With the participants acknowledging that they feel pressure to perform, from the findings, I speculate that pressure has the potential to cause negative impacts, such as a focus on hypervigilance, anxiety, and other mental health issues, as other researchers have found in the literature (Kelly et al., 2019; Pritchett-Johnson, 2018).

Another assertion that can be drawn from the findings is that while some Black women associate strong feelings of being a member of the minoritized group of Black women, Black women can also relate to other salient identities such as religion, gender identity/expression, or ability status. The finding supports the claim from the literature that Black women are not a monolith (Porter et al., 2020). This claim can be connected to one of Black feminist thoughts' core themes of seeing Black women's individual experiences as intersectional and unique (Collins, 2000). Alex identified with being a Black woman but also identified with the gender identity of being transgender. Her experience is uniquely punctuated by how gender identity and gender expression work to both complicate and nuance her salient identities. Tasha highlighted other identities in addition to being a Black woman, including stating that she feels a fluidity in gender expression and gender identity by connecting with non-binary as another identity. Alex and Tasha both focused on regional and ethnic identities, with Tasha noting that she grew up in

the deep South of the United States. Alex stated that she is a first-generation African and is considered Nigerian American. Camryn identified with the identity of ability status and acknowledged her disability as important to her journey. Kelly identified strongly with her religion and had the duality of having both a Black and White background. Because Black women are not a monolith and have other competing identities and characteristics, another claim from the data is that other identities can also impact the student leadership experience and how the student conceptualizes thriving. Being a Black woman is just one factor or identity that impacts how a student may experience an activity on campus life.

The findings highlighted that Black women are capable and interested in telling their own stories to express their wants, desires, and needs further. This assertation is highlighted with the photo elicitations as all participants described ideals around thriving either focusing on the type of environment that they believe is aspirational for unity in student leadership/campus life or describing for a personal motivational figure or faith in which to aspire. Black women experience student leadership opportunities in unique and different ways (Collins, 2000). When exploring the theme, Managing Challenges and Obstacles to Thriving, Black women student leaders' stories are connected to Schreiner's (2010a) sense of thriving when focusing on barriers to thriving for college students. Their stories are also linked to Black feminist thought, as experiences around obstacles to thriving can be nuanced based on the unique experiences of Black women college students (Collins, 2000). In the case of the findings, the barriers to thriving differed with each participant.

Adding to the literature on Black women college student leaders and conceptions around thriving and barriers to thriving is the assertion that barriers to thriving should not be generalized but evaluated individually. This claim connects with the Black feminist thought

theme of showcasing unique and intersectional perspectives from Black women. Black women college students are not a monolith when it comes to experiencing barriers to thriving. All of these examples from the findings can be related to the Black feminist thought core theme of the Power of Self-Definition with respect to the subtheme of Self, Change, and Personal Empowerment (Collins, 2000). Self-definition involves the ability to define and articulate your own reality rather than having another individual, especially individuals with a power hierarchy, describe it for you (Collins, 2000). With self-definition also comes the opportunity for Black women to experience change and seek ways to personally empower themselves to succeed in their environments (Collins, 2000). The participants sought out ways to define their own issues in their leadership journey, analyze shortcomings in their lives, and were intrinsically motivated to overcome challenges.

All participants experienced challenges to thriving in their student leader positions or campus life in general to varying degrees. Some barriers to thriving while participating in student leadership positions were centered around academic concerns, while others were social or personal. Kelly was an example of someone who struggled to balance student leadership duties and academic coursework: "It did kind of take a minute for me to get adjusted to the college lifestyle and also being heavily involved." Camryn struggled with being socially awkward: "I am not a very social person… this is kind of the first time I've done this [joined student organization] in my entire life, in my school career." Alex's challenge stemmed from personal issues of mental health issues, and navigating campus life as a transgender woman. Tasha's obstacle to thriving stemmed from social differences of opinion when it came to her stances as a student leader versus the stances on policy of the school administration. Tasha viewed the

school's administration as a barrier to thriving due to policies restricting certain programs and a chilling effect on discussing diversity and equity issues.

Although barriers to thriving should be evaluated with care individually, there remain some common threads of literature on Black women college students that connect to overarching themes of barriers to success and challenges of attending predominately White institutions. Black women can experience feelings of hyper-visibility and invisibility due to the environment (Kelly et al., 2019). The literature highlights some key themes of how the environment at college campuses impacts Black women students, noting that Black women often feel like outsiders looking-in (Haynes, 2019). This could be illustrated through Camryn, Alex, and Tasha, as all three participants experienced feelings of being an outsider in different ways. Camryn experienced difficulties connecting socially to others on campus and noted that she held a different major identity than most of her classmates, prompting her to seek out a more supportive environment with the student leadership organization. Alex's outsider looking-in moment is more nuanced than other participants as she is an outsider looking-in as an individual working on a project outside of her major, as a Black woman in predominantly White STEM courses, and as a transgender woman seeking gender-affirming acceptance. Tasha's outsider-looking-in moment stems from the challenge of external forces, such as the school administration and other opposing student groups, as she navigates advocacy for diversity and inclusion issues.

Schreiner's (2010a) thriving quotient model mentioned that college students must develop skills to thrive. In the findings, all participants discussed strategies to cope with their challenges. Kelly practiced time management and communication of needs to other group members to balance her coursework with student involvement activities. Camryn joined her organization to gain confidence in speaking to other students. She wanted to learn more skills in

voicing her own opinions. Tasha challenges her obstacle by using her voice for advocacy, "I'm going to sit out here on campus and hold up this sign so people see that this needs to be relevant." Alex confronted her challenges with attending therapy, having a strong friend group, having good relationships with professors on campus, and using campus support resources. The student leaders in the study developed their own unique ways of practicing their leadership styles while navigating their experiences, relating to the literature on Black women student leaders (Domingue, 2015; Hotchkins, 2017; Jones, 2020). Also connecting to the literature, the participants sought out resources that included programs focusing on communal support, culturally relevant programs, personal development, and leadership development (Apugo, 2019; Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, 2014; Haynes, 2019; Jones & Pritchett-Johnson, 2018). These findings also connect with BFT's themes of The Power of Self Definition and Politics of Empowerment due to the participants using their own voices to cope with challenges or seeking out ways to define their issues on their own terms (Collins, 2000). Tasha's challenge can be seen as an embodiment of Black feminist thought with the theme Politics of Empowerment, meaning Black women find ways to challenge oppressive power structures while finding strength in their own voice and power (Collins, 2000). Tasha used her student leadership role as a mechanism to actively protest for her beliefs.

Black Woman Student Leaders' Conceptions of Thriving

Schreiner's (2010a) thriving quotient comprises three main components: academic thriving, intrapersonal thriving, and interpersonal thriving. As the data came together, it became apparent that themes were aligned with Schreiner's (2010a) thriving quotient as the participant defined thriving around areas of academic success, personal motivation, and connecting to a community. When reviewing the findings under the theme, Aiming for Academic Thriving as a

Goal, a claim can be made that Black women believe it is important to succeed academically. Additionally, Black women student leaders use participation in student leadership activities to boost their academic thriving. The literature highlights that for Black women college students, college is a space to thrive and succeed (Haynes, 2019). The findings support that all four participants viewed attending college and participating in student leadership activities as positive. The literature on Black women college students and the findings support that Black women student leaders view co-curricular student leadership activities as a way for Black women to showcase leadership ability and talents (Haynes, 2019; Hotchkins, 2017).

According to Schreiner (2010a), thriving academically is one key component for student success and thriving overall on campus. This assertion can be supported by the participants' conceptions of academic thriving as they all communicated that academic success was key to their focus on thriving when they were defining thriving for themselves. Kelly viewed academic success as an important step toward her career goals. She views succeeding academically as just as important as making connections socially when reflecting on her concept of thriving. Camryn, who mentioned the need for support resources for her disability, viewed thriving through the lens of having the necessary support resources to do well in her studies. She also viewed participation in student leadership activities as gaining more skills to aid her academic pursuits. Tasha mentioned that relationships with professors were key to academic success and career success. Alex used her experience to connect engaging learning and high-impact learning. This study coincided with the literature on Black women student leaders using their academic pursuits in the classroom to demonstrate their goal of excellence, thus connecting with the literature on Black women becoming a model minority group in perception (Apugo, 2019; Haynes, 2019).

The theme from the findings, Reflecting on Intrapersonal Thriving and the Leadership Journey, drew on connections between Black feminist thought's core theme of reflecting on the narratives of Black women and Shreiner's (2010a) intrapersonal thriving. The findings show some connections between themes of Black women student leader literature and the intrapersonal thriving journey. The literature highlights that predominately White institution campus environments were not originally constructed with the needs of marginalized groups in mind, especially regarding student leadership activities (Domingue, 2015; Haynes, 2019; Hotchkins, 2017; Roland, 2021). A claim can be made that Black women student leaders may have unique opportunities to develop their own motivation systems and empowerment practices (Collins, 2000; Haynes, 2019). Highlighted in the literature on Black college women students are the concept of the Strong Black Woman archetype and a newer incarnation such as #BlackGirlMagic (Apugo, 2019; Porter et al., 2021). The "Strong Black Woman" archetype is grounded in the belief that Black women can withstand any challenge that lies before them and that they have an innate superior strength to deal with issues (Apugo, 2019; Collins, 2000). This archetype can be found in at least two participants with the photo elicitation in Figure 3, as one literally used Superman as a reference to being an aspirational figure for others, and another participant constantly made references to standing up for marginalized groups and providing safe spaces for others. However, more information would be needed to draw this conclusion across all participants.

In the interpersonal thriving theme, the participants were able to articulate what thriving means to them on a personal/internal level connecting back to the Black feminist thought theme of the Power of Self-Definition (Collins, 2000). Three participants strongly identified serving as a student leader as a positive experience leading to strong feelings around thriving, whereas one

participant felt that their leadership experience was mostly unremarkable but remained hopeful for the future, demonstrating that she is still able to describe what thriving intrapersonally means to her despite not feeling it in the moment, "I don't think I really developed one specific skill in my leadership experience, but I hope to in the future though". When considering continuing in student leadership activities for the future, Camryn maintained a positive attitude and hopeful disposition for more fruitful experiences. Some phrases that Kelly associated with thriving were "excitement" and "very positive attitude." When focusing introspectively on her leadership experiences, Kelly stated that her participation in student leadership activities gave her more confidence in approaching people and speaking up, "[One of the skills developed] definitely communication being able to communicate with people and also just being more outgoing." Tasha Very important to her conception of thriving were the terms "comfort" and "comfortability". Tasha felt that her environment needed to be a place where she could feel comfortable expressing herself and her opinions. Alex views student leadership as an opportunity for self-improvement and growth. Alex associated the words "personal satisfaction" when first reflecting on what thriving means to her, "I think having personal satisfaction is really good if you want to consider yourself as a thriver." Alex viewed learning new things in the leadership position as a positive experience. The findings align with the literature in highlighting that Black women college students will seek out environments and activities where they can safely explore their self-confidence, talents, and abilities (Apugo, 2019; Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, 2014; Haynes, 2019; Jones & Pritchett-Johnson, 2018; Roland, 2021).

Additionally, there are connections between experiencing and coping with challenges/obstacles and thriving intrapersonally. Black women student leaders can use the experience of challenges to internally motivate them toward their goals. Challenges as a source

of motivation are supported in the literature by Schreiner (2010a) on the sense of thriving and with studies on Black women student leaders facing challenges linked to microaggressions and personal struggles (Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, 2014; Haynes, 2019; Porter et al., 2020). This evidence is in the findings, as illustrated through Tasha, Camryn, and Alex's journeys. Tasha discussed finding her force to challenge the administration to support marginalized student voices. Camryn mentioned stepping out of her comfort zone to expand social connections on campus, develop communication skills, and practice voicing her opinion. Alex challenging herself academically by learning more about a content area outside of her major. Black women see student leadership as an opportunity for self-improvement and growth and for them to shine (Haynes, 2019).

With the theme, Building Community and Interpersonal Thriving, the claim can be made that Black women seek to find community in groups. The claim can be further enhanced to include the speculation that Black women student leaders seek out a community to alleviate the pressure or stigma of being part of a minoritized group. The findings in this theme showcased both narrative responses and visual image storytelling perspectives. When conceptualizing what student leadership means to them, two participants, Tasha and Camryn, submitted images that signify nature, diversity of thought, and unity in that students are all in this experience together. The other two participants, Kelly and Alex, focused on internal motivators such as connecting to spirituality or inspirational/aspirational figures as a way of showing how they seek to connect with others or inspire others. The literature highlights that students often seek out community to help with their personal development but also to help contribute to the development of a community as a whole (Arminio et al., 2000; Jones et al., 2016; Komives et al., 2011; Komives & Wagner, 2017; Schreiner, 2010b). The findings connected with the subtheme of diverse

citizenship in Schreiner's (2010a) thriving quotient as the participants sought out opportunities to serve their communities through the leadership experience.

The literature points to a sense of belonging as a key component of the enjoyment of campus life experiences for students of Color (Strayhorn, 2012). Alex, whose keywords that she associated with thriving were "teamwork" and "collaboration," stated, "I don't think that I would have been in the position I am today [without friend connections]." Kelly noted that being a student leader dramatically enhanced her social connections: "It impacted my social life heavily because I know so many people now. Compared to the other students [who are not involved in student leader activities]". Camryn noted under a different theme in the findings, Reflecting on Being a Black Woman and Student Leader, that she thought it was important to find community among other students who looked like her in her major.

Black women feel safe in student organizations. Black women join student organizations for their safety and well-being. The literature states that Black women college student leaders develop their own ways to resist oppression and cope with the campus environments of PWIs (Domingue, 2015; Haynes, 2019; Hotchkins 2017; Roland, 2021). In the findings, Tasha made the statement, "I wanted to create a space that I wish I was there for me" which highlights how she believes that community among student organizations can create a sense of belonging. Supporting characters play a role in the leadership experience. The findings support the claim that supporting players help Black women student leaders to thrive. Camryn credited a staff advisor for helping establish her organization and motivating students to create an organization to cater to Black STEM students. Another student leader helped Kelly to join and take on a leadership role in her faith-based student organization. By developing social connections, Black women student leaders can learn more about their own interests, motivations, and desires. Kelly's

connecting with students in religious organizations helped her connect more to spiritual fulfillment. Alex's experience as a Research Assistant helped her develop further interests in game design.

The literature contends that Black women college students can experience feelings of isolation while attending predominately White institutions (Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, 2014). However, most participants did not connect with the theme of feelings of isolation, as three of them found close-knit communities of friends. One participant experienced a lack of social connectedness, which could potentially be linked to feelings of isolation. The findings did not conclude that all participants felt invisible, although at least one participant felt that they needed to fight to be viewed as visible and for their voices to be heard.

The literature also highlights the issue of Black women college students encountering negative stereotyping while attending predominately White institutions (Apugo, 2019). Only one participant connected with the literature pertaining to negative stereotypes impacting the environment for Black women college students, which could be seen as a challenge to interpersonal thriving. More questioning on views of negative stereotyping and environment may draw out more connections with this point in the literature.

Implications for Practice

This study has a few recommendations for student affairs practitioners and administrators working with Black women student leaders on predominately White campuses. Student affairs administrators should assess their campus programs to see a demographic breakdown of students participating in student leadership activities. If certain student populations are missing from activities or reflected low in the overall breakdown of the demographics, then student affairs administrators should make conscious efforts to increase participation with marginalized groups.

Important to evaluating the current student leadership programs and opportunities, administrators need to assess whether their environments in these leadership programs and activities are safe for Black women college students and other marginalized groups. The literature and findings of the study support the theme that sense of belonging and community remain an important factor in the successful acclimation to campus life (Strayhorn, 2012). Black women college student leaders rely on community as a support for their sense of thriving (Apugo, 2019; Haynes, 2019; Hotchkins, 2017; Roland, 2021)

Further implications could include student affairs administrators considering thriving as a qualitative measure of student success in their assessment of campus programming. This practice could be implemented by inserting questions on thriving in satisfaction surveys after a program or using thriving in a rubric to evaluate a student leadership experience. Student affairs administrators should consider interviewing student leaders or holding focus groups on their experiences with their programs as it could provide valuable information on what is meaningful to the student experience. In predominately White institutions, more voices and perspectives need to be heard from marginalized groups.

Recommendations for Future Research

With this narrative inquiry study on Black women college student leaders' sense of thriving, the implications for research include more knowledge on how subgroups of students of Color view and define thriving for themselves. The participants in this study identified largely with Schreiner's (2010a) thriving quotient. They largely organized their conception of thriving around succeeding academically, being personally motivated intra-personally, and establishing healthy social connections and community. This study can be further used and reframed to fit Black women college student leaders in different regional contexts or various institutional

contexts. With a study focusing on how Black women conceptualize thriving, we have added to the literature on Black women narrating their own experiences without deficit language or stigmatization. This study can contribute to the building of literature on Black women college students using Black feminist thought as a theoretical framework or lens.

Narrative inquiry is a good method for telling the stories of underrepresented groups. However, I recommend some considerations for future researchers on the topic of thriving when it comes to Black women student leaders. One of the recommendations for future research will include expanding the size of the participants for a study. This study focused on four participants at a predominately White institution in the Southeastern United States. Although recruitment efforts were made for the staff to recruit students who fit the criteria of the study, the recruitment generated six initial students, with four students who followed through with the interview process. One way to consider expanding the number of student participants is to conduct the study in a specific organization or student leadership group. Having a direct partnership would increase the number of participants. However, it would also create another limitation of focusing on a specific leadership group, which could have an impact on the data. This study had students from various types of student leadership organizations including academic, departmental, race/ethnic group-based, faith-based, and multicultural. Possible considerations for future research would be to consider how the type of leadership group could impact the sense of thriving for students. Additionally, some considerations should be made to examine Black women student leaders in predominant Black student leadership organization in comparison to a non-Black student leadership organization while analyzing sense of thriving. Leadership context could potentially make a difference on the findings.

Another recommendation would be to expand the interview questions to include more components of identity as the experience of Black women college students can be highly impacted by the salient identities that they have. Although the primary focal point for identity was the gendered and racial identity of being a Black woman, other identities were mentioned and were highly relevant to the participants, such as religion, ethnicity, gender expression, and ability status. More research is needed around understanding how intersecting identities can impact the experience of Black women college students on campuses, especially predominately White campuses.

Connecting back to the limitations mentioned in Chapter 3 of this study, future researchers may want to consider the voice modulation and tone in how questions are asked and what follow-up questions to consider minimizing potential participant exaggeration of details that could cause skewed data. The participants in this study appeared relaxed and confident in their conversation as they were participating in the narrative interviews. Both the researcher and the participants identified as Black women. Identity can potentially impact how the participants communicated about their experience and how data was interpreted. However, it should also be noted that shared identity traits could potentially lead to participants revealing more personal or culturally nuanced information leading to unique discoveries.

Chapter Summary

This chapter involved a discussion of the findings. The chapter included a summary of the themes that emerged from the study, the interpretation of the findings based on the theoretical framework and model, connections to the literature, implications, and recommendations for future research. With this study, I embarked on a journey of observing and researching how Black women student leaders thrive at a predominately White campus. The findings support the

core belief asserted from Black feminist thought that Black women are the authors of their own experiences and understand how to communicate their needs, wants, and desires. Additionally, the study mostly supported Schreiner's thriving quotient as the participants largely agreed with the themes of thriving on a college campus being tied to academic thriving, intrapersonal thriving, and interpersonal thriving. More studies need to be done on Black women college students to continue to understand this emerging student population on our campuses.

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APPENDIX A

Flyer for Recruitment of Participants

APPENDIX B

Email to Staff and Advisors of Student Leaders for Recruitment of Study

Email Subject title: Seeking Student Participants for Doctoral Study

Greetings,

My name is Nicole Simmons, and I am a doctoral candidate with the University of Georgia currently working on my doctoral dissertation study, "Black Women Student Leaders Thriving at a Predominately White Institution: A Narrative Inquiry". I am reaching out to you because you work with college student leaders. I am currently seeking participants for my study, and I would like to request your assistance in recruiting students for my study.

The purpose of this study is to examine the sense of thriving among Black women college students in leadership positions to better understand how they navigate life at a predominately White institution. I am seeking participants who are interested in sharing their campus life experiences as a student leader. [IRB Approved PROJECT00008441, Principal Investigator: Dr. Ginny Boss].

Please let me know if you would be interested in assisting in the recruitment process for this study. I am attaching a flyer for distribution to potentially interested students. Additionally, interested participants can access the Preliminary Survey for Prescreening Study Participants at this following link: Preliminary Survey for Prescreening Study Participants (office.com). Please reach out to me if you would like to discuss this study further. I can be reached at the following email address: **Nicole.Simmons@uga.edu**.

Criteria for Participants

- Identify as a Black Woman

- Be classified as a sophomore, junior, or senior undergraduate student

- Between the ages of 18-24

- Hold a student leadership position on campus

Best Regards,

Nicole Simmons

Mary Frances Early College of Education

Doctoral Candidate, Student Affairs Leadership

Pronouns: She/Her/Hers

e: nicole.simmons@uga.edu

APPENDIX C

Questions to Prescreen Participants

The survey will be conducted using Microsoft Forms. The link of the survey can be found here:

https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=HmwhqGNNUkOMO1D6HxR1sdaDVus

uukZGsEL1IavtKYlUM1RRWVdPUUpLVFRJU1hTMThDVkE3VzJEVS4u

Survey Title: Preliminary Survey for Prescreening Study Participants

Survey Description: Below are prescreening questions for the doctoral dissertation study, "Black Women Student Leaders Thriving at a Predominately White Institution: A Narrative Inquiry". The purpose of this prescreen process is to help identify participants that meet the criteria of the research goals and interests of this study. For questions, please reach out to Nicole Simmons, Doctoral Candidate at University of Georgia at Nicole.Simmons@uga.edu. [Once IRB is approved, include that information here]

Questions:

1. What is your Name?

2. What is your major?

3. What is your current class level (i.e. freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior)?

4. Please list your best contact email and phone number.

5. How would you describe your race/ethnicity?

6. How would you describe your gender identity?

7. What is your current age?

8. Have you previously been involved as a student leader on campus?

9. Do you currently participate as a student leader on campus?

10. How long have you served as a student leader?

11. What is your current student leadership position(s)? Please list the student leadership positions that you are currently involved in.

12. What group/organization/department on campus is the leadership position affiliated with?

13. Can you describe the process for obtaining the leadership position (i.e. election process to executive board, application process, interviewing process, screening process etc.)?

APPENDIX D

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Research Problem: The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry study is to examine the

phenomenon of thriving among Black women college students in leadership positions to better

understand how they navigate life at a predominately White institution.

RQ1: How do Black women student leaders define thriving in college for themselves?

- What are some words that you associate with thriving?

- In your own words, describe what it means for you to thrive as a college student?

- What are necessary experiences needed for a college student to thrive?

- How do you recognize thriving in your own experiences?

RQ1a: What are some barriers to thriving in Black women college student leaders?

- Can you describe any challenging or difficult times you had while serving in your

  leadership position?

- Can you describe any challenges or barriers that you may have had to interfere with

  serving out your student leader duties?

RQ2: How do Black women college students describe their experiences in student

leadership positions?

- Describe in your own words, what it means to be a Black woman student leader on your

  campus?

  o Do you have any reflections on being a Black women college student and a

    student leader?

- Why did you decide to become a student leader? What led up to the decision for you to become involved on campus?

- What does your leadership experience mean to you?

- Name two meaningful events that happened while serving your leadership position?

- Can you describe how the student leadership position impacted your social life on campus?

- Can you describe an individual or individual(s) that was helpful in the development of your leadership experience?

RQ3: What do Black women college students perceive to be the impact, if any, of student leadership activities on the experience of thriving?

- Describe experiences you may have around thriving as a student leader?

- Name an example of an experience where you felt like you were thriving as a student leader.

- How has your leadership experience contributed to your overall campus experience?

- What are some skills that you developed from your leadership experience?

APPENDIX E

Prompt for Photo Elicitation

Please submit a photo or video from your experience as a student leader that is a representation of a time (a) that you felt a strong connection to your leadership experience, (b) you felt like you were thriving either during or because of the experience and (c) you believe this photo or video is connected to your campus journey. The photo or video can be taken using your phone or electronic device.

The photo or video cannot contain a personal identifiable image of yourself. This includes any personal identifiers such as personal image and personal documents. The photo or video cannot include any location identifiers including names of buildings or addresses.

APPENDIX F

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
CONSENT FORM
Black Women Student Leaders Thriving at a Predominately White Institution: A
Narrative Inquiry

You are being asked to take part in a research study. The information in this form will help you decide if you want to be in the study. Please ask the researcher(s) below if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

Principal Investigator:	**Co-Investigator:**
Dr. Ginny Boss	Nicole Simmons
Counseling and Human Development Services	Counseling and Human Development Services
ginnyboss@uga.edu	nicole.simmons@uga.edu

We are doing this research study to learn more about thriving in Black women college student leaders. The purpose of this study is to examine thriving among Black women college students in leadership positions to better understand how they navigate life at a predominately White institution. This study is being conducted for the purposes of doctoral dissertation coursework. Black women college student leaders will be the participants of this study.

Research Questions central to the study:

1. How do Black women student leaders define thriving in college for themselves?
    a. What are some barriers to thriving in Black women college student leaders?
2. How do Black women college students describe their experiences in student leadership positions?
3. What do Black women college students perceive to be the impact, if any, of student leadership activities on the experience of thriving?

You are invited to be in this research study because you meet the criteria of the study.

Eligibility Criteria for Study:

- Identify as Black Woman
- Be classified as a sophomore, junior, or senior undergraduate student
- Between the ages of 18-24
- Hold a student leadership position on campus

If you agree to participate in this study:

- We will collect information about your experiences as a student leader, campus life experiences, thoughts around thriving and thoughts around your identity as a Black woman college student leader.
- We will ask you to answer questions in a virtual interview format using Microsoft Teams. It will take about 120 minutes (about 2 hours).
- We will ask you to submit a photo or video about your student leader experience.
- We will follow up between 2 weeks to 1 month by virtual meeting to confirm your answers to the interview questions.
- The interview will be recorded, and all information will be handled with confidentiality. The data recorded and any personal identifiable data from the interview will be stored in a folder accessible only to the investigators of this study.

Participation is voluntary. You can refuse to take part or stop at any time without penalty. A decision to refuse or withdraw will not affect any benefits you are otherwise entitled to or other activities that are otherwise conducted. Your decision to participate will have no impact on your participation in any campus student leadership programs or positions.

There are questions that may make you uncomfortable. Questions include reflections on race and gender identities as well as challenges you may face as a student leader which have the potential to bring up uncomfortable memories or thoughts. You can skip these questions if you do not wish to answer them.

Your responses may help us understand how to better serve Black women college students in leadership development programs and student affairs activities through learning about how Black women college students express their sense of thriving. This study can aid in collecting more research on students of Color in higher education.

We will take steps to protect your privacy, but there is a small risk that your information could accidentally be disclosed to people not connected to the research. To reduce this risk, we will store data in a password protected storage system. The information collected from you will include information that identifies you directly and indirectly.

Information such as your name, phone number, email address, and age will be used to schedule the interview session. A coding system will be used to assign a number for each participant and after scheduling the session, all information will be identified by the number codes. Identifying information, master list of codes, and audio recordings will be stored separately. Photo and or video information will be collected for research analysis purposes only. Once the initial data collection phase is completed, all identifying information will be destroyed. Until that time, the investigators will have access to identifiable data.

Internet Data Collection

This research involves the transmission of data over the Internet. Every reasonable effort has been taken to ensure the effective use of available technology; however, confidentiality during online communication cannot be guaranteed.

Please provide initials below if you agree to have this interview recorded on Microsoft Teams or not.

_____ I give my consent to have this interview recorded

Confidential or personal identifiable information will not be used or distributed for future research. De-identified data will not be used for future research. De-identified data will not be distributed for future research.

Please feel free to ask questions about this research at any time. You can contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Ginny Boss at ginnyboss@uga.edu or the Co-Investigator, Nicole Simmons at nicole.simmons@uga.edu. If you have any complaints or questions about your rights as a research volunteer, contact the IRB at 706-542-3199 or by email at IRB@uga.edu.

If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign below:

Name of Researcher	Signature	Date

Name of Participant	Signature	Date

Please keep one copy and return the signed copy to the researcher.