LIFTING EVERY VOICE: EXPLORING HOPE, HEALING, AND LIBERATION NARRATIVES AMONG BLACK UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS AT

PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

by

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(Under the Direction of Brandee Appling)

ABSTRACT

This qualitative narrative study explored the narratives of Black undergraduate students at Predominantly White Institutions, and their stories of hope, healing, and liberation. A semi structured interview process was employed in conjunction with photo-elicitation to gain insight regarding the participants' experiences. The researcher aimed to center the voices of Black undergraduate students in order to provide a broader perspective of how Predominantly White Institutions can better support Black students. This study utilized BlackCrit as a lens through which the participants' experiences navigating Anti-Black environments could be understood. This study positioned Black students as experts, and presented implications for Predominantly White Institutions as well as K-12 school systems. The findings of this qualitative study indicated that Black undergraduate students at PWIs exercise their unwavering hope in pursuit of healing and liberation.

INDEX WORDS: Hope, Healing, Liberation, BlackCrit, Anti-Blackness, Predominantly White Institution (PWI), Narrative, Photo elicitation

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DEDICATION

"This is our Ph.D." I dedicate this dissertation to my guardian angels, my maternal grandmother, Ruth Louise Purter, and my brother and best friend, Derek Demetri Love. Grandma and Derek, you were literally my biggest supporters.

Grandma, I'll never forget how proud you were to tell everyone about my accomplishments. I'll always remember you asking me during my first fall semester of the program, "Phillip, have you gotten your Ph.D. yet.??" I laughed because I had so much further to go, but I appreciated your eagerness. You were so excited to see me become a doctor. Derek, we've been talking about this moment since our senior year in high school. You would constantly ask me, "So when are you getting OUR Ph.D.?" We talked about what we were going to do to celebrate when I finished. You were probably even more excited that I was about me reaching this milestone.

Grandma and Derek, I never would have imagined losing both of you within weeks of one another during my second year of the program. For a while I thought, "How am I supposed to finish without my two biggest cheerleaders?" I was devastated that you two would not be there to see me reach the finish line. But eventually, I had an epiphany. I was never without you, and I never will be. Your spirits live within me, and within this work. You two have continued to guide me and watch over me in ways I never would have imagined. Grandma and Derek, we got OUR Ph.D.

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educator, and you operate from the core of your beliefs. Your mentorship and guidance have strengthened me; not only academically and professionally in the realm of counselor education, but holistically as a person. There were so many moments when I felt too exhausted to continue this journey. There were moments when reaching the next deadline or milestone felt impossible. But you never doubted me or my ability to keep progressing. Whenever I found myself at a sticking point, talking to you would literally energize me and lift my spirit. I knew that if Dr. Appling said I could do it, I could do it. Thank you for believing in me, and helping me see what you see in me. You have made a lasting impact on my life, and I am forever grateful to have had the opportunity to learn from you. I am honored to have been your first advisee at UGA, and I will continue to seek opportunities to learn from you.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I am a Black man. When I began my undergraduate career at a large PWI in the southeast, my racial identity became more salient than ever. As I began to navigate campus culture, I started uncovering aspects of my identity related to race and ethnicity that I had never explored. I also encountered racialized experiences that I had never encountered before. I had begun to develop racial salience in my senior year of high school, but my experiences in my undergraduate career would certainly serve as a catalyst for that development. I grew up in racially diverse environments, and I came to college with intentions of forming lifelong friendships with both men and women of all backgrounds. I knew how to appreciate differences and co-exist with others regardless of where they came from. Unfortunately, I found that many of the students at my PWI did not appreciate differences like I did. Tradition seemed to be more important than equality. I knew that after being called a racially derogatory term on two separate occasions by groups of White fraternity men on campus, that making connections with men in Interfraternity Council (IFC) organizations at my institution would be difficult for me. As I became increasingly cognizant of the state of race relations on campus, I became more aware of the fact that I had been dealing with internal conflicts involving race all of my life. The oppression I saw and experienced was not new, it just felt more overt. I do not ever remember being called a racial slur prior to college, but I had experienced a fair share of microaggressions and macroaggressions. My social conditioning

taught me to just sweep those experiences under the rug. But I felt a shift happening. No longer was I able to suppress those conflicts; I now had to give them a voice. I had spent my whole life trying to defy stereotypes. The unfortunate truth was that no matter how hard I tried, there were always going to be people who would choose to categorize me without even knowing me. The guys in the white pickup truck who called me the "n word" my first weekend on campus did not care about my background or upbringing. It did not matter to them that I grew up in an upper-middle class environment, or that my family was likely more educated than theirs.

I had an epiphany. All of my life, I had been using my upbringing as a qualifier to justify my existence in spaces where I felt I didn't truly belong. Upon these reflections, I decided that I would no longer allow my desire to defy stereotypes take precedence over my desire to build community with people who shared my cultural values and experiences. I shifted my focus. Though the campus environment was hostile, I decided to create my own environment within. This change of perspective was my motivation behind joining some of the organizations that I became a part of; including the Afro-American Gospel Choir, and Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Incorporated. In those groups, I was able to commune with like-minded people who shared similar goals and values. There was diversity within those groups, but the members were never divided by difference. The oppressive institutional climate for me as a Black man is what led me to join those groups. Although the circumstances in which I found those groups were painful, they led me to spaces that were a means of survival, and ultimately became spaces where I found hope, healing, and liberation.

In examining the history of colleges and universities within the United States of America; from inception to present-day, the state of race relations within those institutions of higher

learning reflects the larger societal landscape of racial dynamics in this country. Initially, opportunities to pursue higher education were limited to elite White men; primarily clergymen (Eckel & King, 2007). Since then, the scope of higher education in the U.S. has expanded to provide more opportunities for people within racially minoritized groups to pursue postsecondary education. In 1823, Alexander Twilight became the first Black person to graduate from an American college (Congressional Record Vol. 166, No. 121). Twilight's accomplishment was remarkable; as he faced extreme discrimination and the risk of being kidnapped and sold into slavery throughout his academic tenure (Congressional Record Vol. 166, No. 121). In subsequent years, many other institutions focusing on collegiate education and training for Black Americans, later becoming known as Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCUs), were developed. HBCUs not only provided avenues for educational advancement, but they also helped create opportunities for Black Americans to expand career opportunities and build social capital (Freemark, 2015). In a societal framework that was built on the oppression of marginalized groups, largely by withholding educational opportunities, the genesis of HBCUs ignited a new era.

As society further progressed, a call for the integration of public colleges and universities emerged (Freemark, 2015). Black Americans would eventually gain access to institutions formerly designated as exclusively White. Historically, this cultural shift is seen as a marker for progress. However, this perceived progress is not devoid of a history of challenging implications for the very people that were supposed to benefit from these changes. Racial disparities continue to disproportionately impact Black college students pursuing education at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs).

Statement of the Problem

Although there is extant research regarding experiences of Black students navigating racially oppressive institutional climates at Predominantly White Institutions (George Mwangi, Thelamour, Ezeofor, & Carpenter, 2018; Karkouti, 2016), there is a dearth of research that centralizes the unique, individualized stories of Black students navigating these obstacles in their aims of completing their undergraduate education. There is no institutional theory for Black students' success (Harper, 2009). For as long as Black students have been permitted to attend Predominantly White Institutions, they have been required to find their own ways of navigating their negative racialized experiences.

Although research on the experiences of Black students at PWIs in the past decade has increased, most studies position Black students as a unit of analysis, rather than focusing on Black students' experiential knowledge and positioning them in the center of inquiry (Lewis & Shah, 2021). The absence of Black students' voices regarding their experiences at PWIs is a significant gap in the research around Black students' experiences. However, research does inform us that even with the progression of time and with the advancement of civil rights, little progress has been made in terms of reducing Black students' experiences with racism and identity devaluation at PWIs (Boyd, 2021). Black students continue to navigate oppressive institutional climates, and research continues to exclude their voices. It is imperative that faculty, higher education administrators, counselors and counselor educators centralize the voices of Black students to better understand their unique experiences navigating PWI environments.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Black undergraduate students and their narratives around hope, healing, and liberation as they navigate oppressive institutional climates at PWIs. This study served as an opportunity to elevate the voices of Black students and

aimed to understand how systems and institutions can better support them in their academic endeavors. This study focused on undergraduate students to provide perspectives on Black students' introductory experiences to the collegiate landscape at PWIs. While every Black student has a unique story, this study presents a thematic, collective narrative composed of the participants' stories.

This study provides insight regarding the persistence of Black undergraduate students attending PWIs and their journeys of hope, healing, and liberation. This qualitative study employed a narrative inquiry methodology, and involved participants telling their stories using semi structured individual interviews, and photo elicitation.

Research Question

I utilized a BlackCrit lens to explore the hope, healing, and liberation narratives of Black students at PWIs. This exploration was guided by the following research questions:

Question 1: How do Black students at Predominantly White Institutions define hope, healing, and liberation?

Question 2: How do Black students at PWIs describe their journeys of hope, healing, and liberation while navigating oppressive institutional climates?

Theoretical Framework

This study utilized BlackCrit as a framework to understand how racial identity and inherent racism are interwoven into the lived experiences of Black students at PWIs. Historically, systems of Anti-Blackness in the US have worked in concert to present challenges for Black students seeking advancement through higher education; and these systems continue to

present challenges for Black students today. BlackCrit was the most effective lens with which to conceptualize the experiences of Black individuals because of the nuances that are associated with Blackness and Black livelihood in education, and society in general. In the realm of education specifically, ideological and material inequities are perpetually manifested against Black students (Dumas & Ross, 2016). These manifestations show up in myriad ways such as the unequal distribution of resources, regressive curricula, inequitable policies, and environmental and institutional abuse (Coles & Powell, 2020). BlackCrit was used as a lens to explore and further understand the experiences of Black students in predominantly White collegiate environments. For this study, BlackCrit was utilized in lieu of CRT, as Black Crit directly addresses elements of Black lived experiences that CRT does not. While conversations about Anti-Blackness were foundational in the creation of CRT, the theory does not explicitly centralize Blackness; thus perpetuating the underdevelopment of research around Black students' experiences (Dumas & Ross, 2016). Utilizing a Black Crit framework for this study allowed for a closer examination of how Black-identifying students navigate predominantly White collegiate environments, as the most prominent race-based theories (including critical race theory) do not center Black experiences as it relates to navigating anti-Blackness.

Significance of Study

My undergraduate experience was one of the most transformational journeys of my life. As a Black student at a PWI, I learned more about myself and the world than I could have ever imagined. My experience is a part of what inspired me to pursue a career in higher education. My endeavor is to support students and help them tell their stories.

There continues to be a dearth in empirical research on the experiences of Black students at PWIs as informed by the voices of Black students. This study will contribute to the literature on Black students at PWIs, but will present a unique lens as a study focused on hope, healing, and

liberation narratives. This work is significant to the field of higher education, as administrators, counselors, counselor educators, and policy makers will have implications for increased attention and support to the specific needs of Black students at PWIs. Additionally, this study expands the application of BlackCrit, an emerging theoretical framework centered on Black experiences and the specificity of Blackness. Using BlackCrit as a methodology, this study used students' voices to explore hope, healing and liberation in Black communities on predominantly White college campuses. These stories provide a greater understanding of how Black students navigate the unique challenges presented to them at PWIs, and provide insight regarding how systems and institutions can create better, more supportive environments for Black students.

Key Terms

Black- A person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa (NCES, 2017). *Anti-Blackness*- Anti-Blackness, as a social construction, as an embodied lived experience of social suffering and resistance, and perhaps most importantly, as an antagonism, in which the Black is a despised thing-in-itself (but not person for herself or himself) in opposition to all that is pure, human(e), and White (Dumas and Ross, 2016, p. 416).

Hope- Hope as a constructive category has something to do with theological imagination – the projection of what can be (as if the ability to imagine it is to construct it)- (Pinn, 2021)

Healing- the process of becoming whole in the face of multiple forms of oppression (Lee, et al., 2021)

Liberation- Individual healing and societal change (Lee, et al., 2021)

Predominantly White Institution (PWI)- Institutions of higher education in which enrollment of White students exceeds 50%.

Delimitations

There are a number of delimitations to consider in conceptualizing this study. First, Black students represent a diverse range of experiences and this study will not capture or represent the experiences of all Black students at PWIs. This study focused exclusively on Black undergraduate students' experiences, and did not incorporate the experiences of Black students in graduate or professional schools at PWIs. Additionally, this research focused exclusively on stories of Black students, and does not provide insight on hope, healing, and liberation of other racial identities. This study was conducted from a qualitative approach, allowing the participants to lead the research with their stories as opposed to focusing on statistical data.

Summary

This exploration of the narratives of Black students at PWIs centered Black students and their experiences. Through the voices of Black students, implications are presented regarding supporting Black students on their journeys of hope, healing, and liberation at PWIs. This study elevated the voices of Black students by centering their individual and collective perspectives about their collegiate experiences. I positioned this study within the theoretical framework of BlackCrit (Dumas & Ross, 2016), which centers the livelihood and experiences of Black people. In the following chapters, I will provide a contextual overview of Black students at PWIs while bringing attention to the lack of research involving the voices of Black students and their unique narratives. This narrative inquiry allowed me to collect and analyze the responses of the students and will be followed by a discussion, implications, limitations, future research, and recommendations for higher education administrators, policy makers, counselors, and counselor educators.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Dating back as early as 1619, The United States of America has strategically positioned people of African descent as inferior. As evidenced by centuries of enslavement, dehumanization, and discrimination, Black people have been viewed and treated as second-class in this country (Lloyd & Prevot, 2017). While Anti-Black racism is not confined to the United States, this country remains at the forefront of modeling Anti-Black sentiments, rhetoric, and even violence (Jung & Vargas, 2021). In considering the prominence and global stance of this country; which can be largely attributed to the labor and contributions of Black people, the United States plays a fundamental role in perpetuating the marginalization of Black people across the globe by driving notions of White superiority and Black inferiority through policies and procedures that center White people and position Black people as "other" (Lloyd & Prevot, 2017).

The alienation and disenfranchisement of Black people permeates every aspect of society, including education. A plethora of research exists around Black students' experiences in higher education, dating back to the admittance of the first Black Americans into collegiate institutions, to legal segregation, and spanning across decades to today (Lewis & Shah, 2021). In the same ways that Black people are marginalized in society at-large, Black students experience marginalization and isolation in higher education environments. Namely, Black students experience faculty incivility, unpleasant academic interactions, and collegiate environments that devalue their Blackness (Lewis & Shah, 2021). Historically, Black students, particularly at

Predominantly White Institutions, have mobilized to voice their experiences with racism and advocate for change through activism and other forms of resistance (Jones & Reddick, 2017). Black students have always been keenly aware of institutional and structural inequities in higher education, and continue to be at the forefront of advocating for change while persisting in spaces that are not designed for them (Biondi, 2012). To develop an understanding of the inequities that Black students on college campuses face, requires an understanding of societal barriers that have existed for Black people for centuries. Research on higher education and Black students' experiences informs us that even with the progression of time and with the advancement of civil rights, little progress has been made in terms of reducing Black students' experiences with racism and identity devaluation at PWIs (Boyd, 2021). It is imperative that faculty, higher education administrators, counselors and counselor educators view their Black students through race-based epistemology to better understand the unique experiences of Black students navigating PWI environments.

Theoretical Framework

Critical race theory (CRT) asserts that racism is veritably interwoven into the fabric of American society, and is both consciously and subconsciously integrated into the lived experiences of all Americans (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017). The dynamics of racism have and continue to determine the ways in which power and dominance are distributed in American culture. The development of CRT was inspired by Critical legal theory (CLT), a movement designed to critique the ways in which societal norms perpetuate oppressive structures (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017). In the 1980s, a group of legal scholars, including Derrick A. Bell, Jr., Charles Lawrence, Richard Delgado, Lani Guinier, and Kimberle' Crenshaw, began to critically examine how laws and legal systems perpetuate racism and oppression in society (Lynn & Adams, 2002;

Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2009). As the pioneers of critical race scholarship, these scholars sought to identify and disrupt perpetual racial injustices and make advancements in civil rights that were hindered by existing laws (Manning & Muñoz, 2011; Stanley, 2006; Yosso, 2002). In its infancy, CLT challenged a perceived stagnancy of progress achieved through the Civil Rights Movement. Early CLT scholars believed that in order to truly address the issue of systemic racism, a transition from peaceful protest and assimilation into "frontal attacks on the norms and structures of Whiteness" was required (Zorn, 2018, p. 203). As CLT continued to evolve, leaders in various arenas such as politics and education began to consider how CLT tenets could be applied to the causes of advancing their respective fields. As scholars and critical thinkers in other arenas outside of law began to explore the ways in which systems, policies, and laws perpetuate systemic racism, CRT became a movement; a means of investigating and eradicating racial issues in society at-large.

Early CRT scholars describe "The critical race theory (CRT) movement as a collection of activists and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power" (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017, p. 3). CRT explores many conventional civil rights and ethnic studies matters, but from a broader perspective that considers factors such as history, implications, emotions, and consciousness (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017). CRT challenges the notion of incremental progress often associated with civil rights discourse, and dissects the very principles and structures established to create liberal order (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017). In the field of education particularly, critical scholars often draw from CRT's foundational legal scholarship, ethnic studies, and the seminal work of Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) and Solórzano (1998), the scholars whom first introduced CRT to K-12 and higher education, respectively. CRT is an increasingly important mechanism in P-16 education for critically assessing school climate, equity, representation, and pedagogy (Burrell-Craft, 2020). As a

framework, CRT examines the "unequal and unjust distribution of power and resources along political, economic, racial, and gendered lines" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 1). CRT is a multidisciplinary, multi-faceted approach to addressing systemic racism **(**Patton, Ranero, & Everett,

2011).

There are a few key tenets within CRT that are essential in understanding the intersectionality of racial dynamics and higher education. The first tenet, the permanence of racism, posits that there is an established centrality of racism in America that shows up in every facet of culture and society (Delgado & Stefanic, 2012). The second tenet, objection to ahistoricism, highlights CRT's resistance to revisionist history told from dominant narratives (Daftary, 2020). The third, Race as a social construction, presents the idea of race as a socially engineered phenomenon (Delgado & Stefanic, 2012). The fourth tenet, interest convergence, implies that advancements in racial equality are only made when they benefit the White majority (Bell, 1980). Lastly, the fifth tenet, counter-storytelling, centralizes lived experiences of people of color through experiential knowledge and counternarratives (Delgado & Stefanic, 1993; Bell, 1995).

While CRT is credited as a foundational theoretical framework that examines society and culture while specifically centering race, critical scholars critique CRT for its lack of comprehensiveness regarding the experiences of specific racially marginalized groups (Ross & Dumas, 2016). Because many of the racist laws and policies explored in the formation of CRT disproportionately impact Black people, many initially concluded that CRT was decidedly a Black theory. However, CRT does not "theorize Blackness or the Black condition" (Ross, 2016, p. 16). As it relates to the experiences of Black people specifically, CRT is critiqued for its failure to explicitly name and explore the pervasiveness of *anti-Blackness*, which can be

summarized as the global systemic marginalization and dehumanization of Black people (Jung & Vargas, 2021). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), "the scholars who introduced CRT to the field of education, once quoted Cornel West in saying that "Race Matters" following with another quote from a fellow scholar that states "Blackness matters in more detailed ways" (Ross, 2019, p. 2). These critiques acknowledging critical components missing within CRT created a pathway for the development of Black Critical Theory, also known as BlackCrit (Ross & Dumas, 2016). BlackCrit, a theorization of the identities and experiences of Black people, helps us understand the historical and transtemporal nature of global Anti-Blackness (Busey & Dowie-Chin, 2021). BlackCrit builds on CRT while intentionally emphasizing the specific ways that Blackness is salient as Black people navigate an anti-Black world (Ross, 2019). Also drawing from *Afropessimism*, which asserts that Black people continue to be mentally and ontologically marked as slaves (Poll, 2018) Black Crit identifies "the endemic structural, cultural, and psychological manifestations of the dehumanization of Black people" (Tillis, 2018, p. 313). BlackCrit scholars assert that "In drawing from BlackCrit, we suggest that the world operates on the premise that to be human is to be distant from Blackness, and thus, to be citizen is also to be distant from Blackness" (Grant et al., 2020).

BlackCrit is the most effective lens with which to conceptualize the experiences of Black individuals because of the nuances that are associated with Blackness and Black livelihood in education, and society in general. In the realm of education specifically; ideological and material inequities are perpetually manifested against Black students (Dumas & Ross, 2016). These manifestations show up in myriad ways such as the unequal distribution of resources, regressive curricula, inequitable policies, and environmental and institutional abuse (Coles & Powell, 2020). In the current study, BlackCrit is utilized in lieu of CRT, as Black Crit directly addresses

elements of Black lived experiences that CRT does not. While conversations about Anti-Blackness were foundational in the creation of CRT, the theory does not explicitly centralize Blackness; thus, perpetuating the underdevelopment of research around Black students' experiences (Dumas & Ross, 2016). Therefore, the researcher will use BlackCrit in this study as a lens to explore and further understand the experiences of Black students in predominantly White collegiate environments. Utilizing a Black Crit framework for the current study allows for a closer examination of how Black-identifying students navigate predominantly White collegiate environments, as the most prominent race-based theories (including critical race theory) do not center the Black experience as it relates to navigating anti-Blackness. Black Crit helps "explicate the underlying anti-Blackness of prevailing student development theories and grant compliance requisites that position Black students as a problem in need of intervention" (Tillis, 2018, p. 313). In the educational arena, Black Crit challenges us to dissect notions of monolithic experiences among students of color, giving attention to the specificity of the impact of Blackness on Black students' educational experiences and development (Ross, 2016). BlackCrit encompasses three framing ideas that guide the direction of this study. The first framing idea is the notion of the endemicity of anti-Blackness in both historical and current political and economic contexts, and every other dimension of life (Ross, 2019). In alignment with CRT's tenet around the permanence and normalcy of racism, this framing idea adopts the notion of the deeply pervasive nature of Anti-Black racism, and how it influences every dimension of human life (Ross & Dumas, 2016).

The second framing idea of BlackCrit highlights tensions between Blackness and "neo-liberal cultural imagination" (Ross, 2019). After the Jim Crow era, the United States began to separate itself from overtly racist laws and policies, and began to implement diversity initiatives on federal, state, and local levels (Ross & Dumas, 2016). However, as evidenced by the continued

disenfranchisement of Black people today, many of these diversity initiatives have proven to be performative and not useful in addressing the unique barriers positioned against Black people specifically (Roos & Dumas, 2016). The "neo-liberal cultural imagination" is the false notion that because we say racism is bad, it no longer exists.

The third framing idea suggests that space should be created for Black liberatory fantasy and the resistance of revisionist history that erases White people from a history of racial dominance and violence against non-White people (Dumas & Ross, 2016). This idea creates space for Black people to envision themselves as free from the relentless grip of Whiteness. Black liberatory fantasy is unique to individuals, and allows Black people to conceptualize what freedom, liberty, and decolonization looks like on their own terms. Ultimately, Black liberatory fantasy resists revisionist history and serves as a ray of hope for larger systemic change (Ross, 2019).

BlackCrit and its framing ideas are easily situated in the context of higher education in the United States and society at-large. Higher education environments are prime vessels of the perpetuation of Anti-Black sentiments and culture. The next section will provide a more in-depth examination of the history of Anti-Blackness in the United States, followed by a section on the implications of Anti-Blackness in higher education.

Anti-Black Racism in the United States of America

To understand how systems of racial oppression work in the United States, one must understand the basal principles of anti-Blackness that drive these systems. The Atlantic slave trade, the foundation on which this country was established, was a system through which millions of enslaved Black people across the continent of Africa were exported to the Americas (Jung & Vargas, 2021). This mass exchange of people as property marked the beginning of a storied trajectory of Anti-Blackness in the United States; complete with a myriad of structures established to maintain its perpetuity. The framework of the United States was established on the

premise that Black people were not to be considered people, as evidenced by the debates and ultimate ruling of the ⅗ compromise, determining that only ⅗ of the enslaved population would be acknowledged in determining taxation and representation within the House of Representatives (Augustyn, 2021). That very ruling exemplified the notion that Black people were subhuman. While the founders of the United States of America declared that freedom, liberty and justice for all were foundational principles, those principles were not intended to be applicable for people who were not considered White. The United States of America was never intended to be a place where Black people would be seen as equals. A recent study found that today, "More than 150 years after the 13th amendment was ratified to end slavery, nearly 3 out of 4 Black adults and more than half of White adults describe race relations as "bad," and that the legacy of slavery still has a considerable impact on Black people in American society" (Jones, & Nichols, 2020, p. 2). The plight of People of Color, especially Black people, in the United States continues to evolve as racism takes different forms and shows up in various societal structures. It was only a little more than 50 years ago that White Supremacy was still written into many parts of American law. After the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968, laws became "race-neutral", and it became illegal to discriminate on the basis of race. The initial purpose of these laws was to advance the causes of civil rights and to realize everything that was promised post-civil war in terms of granting full freedom to Black Americans (Jones, & Nichols, 2020). However, the ways in which these acts have manifested result in perpetual discrimination and oppression even today. Heitzeg (2015) characterizes the aforementioned legal acts as mere performative measures; expressing that:

> These strokes of the pen, of course, could not remove bigotry long steeped in racist archetypes; nor could this legislation remove the structural barriers of nearly 400 years of white racial preference and cumulative advantage in the

accumulation of wealth and property, access to education and housing, health and well-being, and all matter of social opportunities. Racism, as both white supremacist/anti-black ideology and institutionalized arrangement, remains merely transformed with its systemic foundations intact. Segregation in housing and education persists at levels beyond that noted in Brown v. Board of Education, racial wealth gaps grow, and racial disparities in criminal injustice proliferate at a pace that has led to the label "The New Jim Crow". (p. 54-55). Changing the legislature to appear less discriminatory against Black people created opportunities for racism to evolve from a very overt structure to one that is covert, thus making it easier to deny the existence of racism today. The notion that race no longer matters from a legal standpoint gave way for a "colorblind" paradigm which, for many Black people in the United States, exacerbates their feelings of invisibility, and for White people excuses their internalized racist ideologies and practices (Jones, & Nichols, 2020). In *The Problem with the Disney Version of History* (2019), Julia Delacroix analogizes racism with water, suggesting that it will take the shape of whatever structure will hold it, whether those structures be laws, policies, practices, or individualized actions. As racism continues to show up in different ways in our society, a growing body of research emerges focusing on the continued legacy of slavery, and its influence in contemporary US settings (O'Connell, Curtis, & DeWaard, 2020). Through educational inequities, economic disparities, and other aspects of systemic racism, the lingering effects of slavery continue to manifest in ways that impact the lived experiences of Black people more than 150 years following the abolishment of slavery (O'Connell, Curtis, & DeWaard, 2020).

Anti-Blackness in Higher Education

One of the primary ways in which the legacy of the oppression of Black people continues to show up in the US is through educational systems. In the realm of post-secondary education specifically, foundational inequalities continue to place Black Americans at a disadvantage in their pursuits to achieve equity in society through higher education **(**Kelly & Vargese, 2018).

Systemic racism pertaining to the education of Black people in the U.S. emerged as early as the 1700s (Warren, 2005). Many U.S. states enacted laws prohibiting the education of both enslaved and free African Americans. In the 1800s, after several rebellions led by educated slaves, legislation was enacted to further restrict the education of slaves. The new legislative acts often made the instruction of slaves and free African Americans punishable by death or life in prison (Warren, 2005).

As one might imagine, the first collegiate institutions in America were not inclusive of Black students. Harvard University, The United States of America's oldest institution of higher learning, was established in 1636. However, it was not until the 1800's that educational access and opportunity began to extend beyond the demographic of wealthy White males (Pasque, et. al, 2016). With the progression of time, educational access for Black Americans seeking higher learning has increased, and there have been several historical incidents that contributed greatly to this progression. Some of the most monumental incidents that contributed to the advancement of opportunity for Black Americans in higher education are: The Morrill Act of 1890, The Civil Rights Act of 1964, and The Higher Education Act of 1965. Each of these events was a significant factor in changing the landscape of higher education in America for Black college students (Congressional Research Service, 2021).

The Morrill Act of 1890

As Americans sought to establish a place in post-civil-war American society, it was critical that they were able to pursue opportunities to further their education in pursuit of social and economic advancement. The first Land-Grant Act of 1862 was proposed by Congressman Justin Morrill, with the intent to teach agricultural and mechanical arts; primarily to promote industrial professionals that benefitted the economies of respective states (Morrill Act of 1890, sec. 4). The Land-Grant Act of 1862 was beneficial for expanding educational access for White Americans, but there was no focus on expanding access for racially minoritized communities. However, the act would serve as the precursor for The Second Land-Grant Act; which would focus more on providing opportunities for Black Americans to attend college through government funding that was used to build separate educational institutions for Black people living in states in which they were not allowed to attend the same institutions as White citizens (Lee & Keys, 2013). Unable to attend most of the colleges and universities that already existed; Black Americans created their own institutions of higher learning in order to strive for social and economic advancement (Patton, 2015). Governmental support was required to establish and sustain these educational structures. This support would come in the form of The Morrill Land Grant Act of 1890, also known as the Agricultural College Act of 1890, or The Second Morrill Act of 1890 (Lee & Keys, 2013). This enactment incited the creation of agricultural and mechanical curricula for many of what are now known as the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) (Lee & Keys, 2013). Finally, many Black Americans were then afforded additional opportunities to obtain a college education. Some of the states had already established institutions for Black students, but it was not until the Second Morrill Act of 1890 that many of these schools received adequate funding to support their educational missions (National

Academy Press, 1995). The Morrill Act of 1890 was not a complete solution to the disparities in educational access and opportunity between White and Black Americans, but it was a significant step in educational reform for Black Americans in the United States.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Higher Education Act of 1965

With the expansion of educational opportunities for Black students, there was a natural increase in enrollment numbers of Black Americans at colleges and universities in the United States. In the wake of much social unrest regarding equality for Black Americans and other minoritized people in American society, there was much discussion amongst political leaders and members of society about how to make things more just for all races. In addition to addressing many other equality-related issues, The Civil Rights Act of 1964 addressed the discriminatory admissions policies of many institutions, barring or severely limiting the number of Black students that would be admitted (Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42). Title VI of The Civil Rights Act of 1964 specifically addressed the issue of discriminatory practices at American colleges and Universities. The title states,

> No person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination in any program receiving Federal financial assistance (Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42).

Because most institutions of higher learning receive federal financial assistance, this act had a tremendous impact on the procedures of colleges and universities and their admissions policies (Safranski, 2015). Collegiate institutions could no longer choose not to admit students solely because of their race. This meant that Black students were able to be more selective in the college choice process because there were more institutions that were accepting them. In

conjunction with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, The Higher Education Act of 1965 was a major factor in expanding educational access for Black Americans. The Higher Education Act of 1965 extended financial assistance to many Americans who were in need of financial aid to attend college. This act also allocated billions of dollars to developing institutions, many of those being Historically Black Colleges and Universities (Brock, 2010). Prior to this, college was not as accessible to the average American who did not make enough money to cover the cost of a college education out-of-pocket.

Campus Climates and Institutional Racism

As evidenced by the aforementioned historical timeline, there have been significant advancements in expanding access to higher education for Black Americans. With these advancements, some might suggest that racism in higher education has significantly decreased or even completely dismantled. Many institutional practices adopted postures of racelessness as if there is not a critical need to continue to explicitly disrupt racism and White supremacy in higher education (Patton, 2015). However, with the progression of time also comes the continuation and development of oppressive strategies that work to minimize the success of Black Americans in post-secondary education. It is well-known that there are no longer laws making it punishable by death to educate Black Americans like there were during slavery, or laws explicitly prohibiting admission of Black people at educational institutions like there were during the Civil Rights era. However, systemic barriers continue to present challenges to Black people in the United States seeking educational advancement, especially those pursuing higher education (Harris, 2018). The notion of endemic racism within BlackCrit acknowledges current challenges such as discriminatory admissions processes at colleges and universities, unbalanced distribution of funding and other resources, and the ability for institutions of education to uphold practices of

segregation (Patton, 2016). To insinuate that racism in higher education is eradicated, is to suggest that said barriers do not exist. Black people in particular continue to face unique forms of discrimination solely based on their race; in conjunction with other forms of discrimination tied to other social identities such as socioeconomic status (Jones & Nichols, 2020). While Black students may be admitted to Predominantly White Institutions, they are not given the tools, resources, and support needed to succeed once they arrive (Harris, Barone, & Davis, 2015). Institutions of higher education are frequently challenged to create safer, more welcoming environments for their Black students, but often fail to adequately do so. Even Black students who appear well adjusted in their PWI environments often report being stereotyped and being othered (Katz, Grant, & Merrilees, 2019). Because PWI faculty and staff often do not equip themselves with adequate knowledge and resources to support Black students, Black students are tasked with finding their own sense of community and support (Raymundo, 2021). Research shows that in comparison to Black students attending HBCUs, Black students at PWIs are less connected to African history and culture, and experience more negative adjustments to their collegiate environment (Katz, Grant, & Merrilees, 2019).

Prime examples of racism in PWI environments are often seen in campus activities such as athletics. Black people are often recruited to colleges and universities to contribute their athletic talents and abilities, but are not truly positioned to be successful in the classroom and beyond college (Nefos-Webb, 2015). In 2015, The University of Missouri gained national media attention when students insisted that the university meet their demands for addressing some of the social inequities on campus. When the Black student football players joined the cause by refusing to play until the demands were met, the controversy intensified. There was an outpouring of anger and rage against the Black players from people across the country who were affiliated with the institution and others who had no affiliation whatsoever. Eventually, many of

the demands were met, and the Black football players began to play again. However, there were many conversations in which the athletes were continuously ridiculed and deemed ungrateful for everything that the university had done for them. These sentiments insinuated that equity for Black students should be leveraged as a bargaining tool, a prime example of interest convergence. The following section presents an in-depth overview of persistence among Black students as they navigate unwelcoming PWI campus climates.

Black Students' Persistence at PWIs

Despite a continued trajectory of racism and disenfranchisement on predominantly White college campuses, Black students have shown insurmountable perseverance. The earliest documented graduation of a Black college student at a state school is from Newark College (The University of Delaware) in 1836. However, there are no other documented graduations of Black students from state schools until after the Civil War ended in 1865 (Slater, 1996). Since that time, Black students continue to boldly and courageously navigate unwelcoming PWI environments.

The year 2021 marks only 65 years since Autherine Lucy made her first attempt to integrate The University of Alabama, the last flagship state institution to graduate a Black student (Slater 1996) . Lucy was expelled for "her own safety" just a few days later. While most Black Americans interested in pursuing postsecondary education at that time attended an HBCU by default, Autherine Lucy wanted the opportunity to study a discipline that was not offered at any of the HBCUs that were accessible to her. In her attempts to simply matriculate through her first week of classes, Lucy was met with incredible opposition and resistance from White students and staff. A Journal of Blacks in Higher Education article by McWhorter (2001) highlights some of Lucy's experiences that week:

At the University of Alabama, the Monday morning after the riots, some 3,000 assembled at sophomore Leonard Wilson's urging to greet Autherine Lucy. After her first class, as Lucy was whisked out a back door, the eggs came at her. They splattered the car she ducked into. A brick shattered the rear window. Ten or 15 men charged the car. As Lucy ran inside Graves Hall for her next class, an egg hit her back. "Let's kill her, let's kill her,"

the crowd yelled. Gun barrels flashed. A mob of around a thousand shouted, "Hey, hey, ho, ho, where in the hell did that nigger go?" For three hours she remained locked in Graves Hall, praying for the courage to face death. Finally**,** she was bundled by the state highway patro**l** and taken to the armed sanctuary of a black barbershop.

Shortly after Lucy's horrific encounter with the angry mob, she was expelled "for her safety and the safety of other students." It would take seven more years plus the intervention of the President of the United States along with the Deputy Attorney General and US Marshals to force the institution to open its doors to another admitted Black student.

Lucy's experience was not an isolated incident, as Black students continue to experience marginalization at PWIs more than 50 years later. A number of studies around Black students' experiences in PWI environments attempt to understand how they are able to persist despite having to navigate racism on their college campuses (Patton, 2015; Raymundo, 2021). Black students often feel isolated with no structured support to help them be successful, yet many have proven successful in their aims of persistence despite numerous barriers. A recent study revealed that almost 800 incidents of white supremacist activity were reported at Predominantly White Institutions between 2016 and 2018 by the Anti-Defamation League and the Southern Poverty Law Center (Nelson, 2019). Such incidents continue to marginalize and terrorize Black students as they aim to progress academically.

Research suggests that Black students' experiences and feelings of "social receptivity" impact their learning experiences (Sinanan, 2016, p. 159). In order to navigate these feelings and experiences regarding social receptivity, Black students often find themselves engaging in compromise and *identity negotiation*, a concept that alludes to the evaluating of identity in the context of group membership, in order to survive (Ting-Toomey, 2017). A participant in a study about Black male leadership experiences shared that engaging in leadership experiences as a Black male proved his unwavering stability to navigate the challenges of life (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015). Black students are consistently placed in scenarios in which they are required to endure the psychological and/or physiological costs of racism (Boyd, 2021). Speaking about the oppositional stances that people often took against him as president of a predominately White student organization, one Black student leader stated that by serving as president he was "resigning himself to a place devoid of cultural understanding and congruence where although acceptance was not an option, leadership development was the preferred achievable outcome" (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015, p. 34).

Negotiations in which Black students are forced to choose between challenging the status quo, and quietly withdrawing, are commonplace. Such scenarios challenge Black students to compare the cost of silence with allowing themselves to be authentic in their respective spaces. Black student leaders on college campuses report that their identities as leaders influence their behaviors, in that they want to be a positive representation for Black students on campus, and want to avoid reinforcing negative stereotypes (Hotchkins, & Dancy, 2015). It is likely that Black students who choose to focus on avoiding negative stereotypes and presenting a "likeable" image are choosing to do so based on their perceptions of the cost of doing otherwise. Research shows that Black students who possess a stronger sense of racial pride and identity are likely to experience racial discrimination and discomfort more frequently than their Black counterparts

who do not present strong expressions of Black identity (Thelamour & Mwangi, 2019). For many Black students, identity expression is a balancing act, as they may choose to assimilate with White norms on occasion, but elect to demonstrate higher levels of Black identity expression if the psychological cost of assimilation is too high. This act of negotiation can be damaging for Black students, as it forces them to choose between being their authentic selves and being accepted by dominant identity groups.

Black students are consistently challenged to engage in dissonance about how they will present themselves. Hotchkins and Dancy (2015) present two concepts of self-preservation amongst Black students: *Reactive Visibility* and *Responsive Interest Preservation*. Reactive Visibility refers to the practice of viewing experiences with racism and discrimination as situational. In reactive visibility, students choose to "relinquish organizational power in various forms" (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015, p. 35). Reactive Visibility is a state in which Black students choose to retreat because they determine that exerting energy to combat racism is not worth the expense (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015). Withdrawing allows them to protect their energy and shield themselves from the exhaustion associated with challenging norms (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015). Responsive Interest Preservation refers to seeking support from people within dominant identity groups who serve as allies (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015). Engaging in Responsive Interest Preservation enables Black students to be their authentic selves while also engaging with select members of dominant identity groups (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015).

As previous literature indicates there are not adequate resources and support for Black students combating racialized experiences at Predominantly White Institutions (Patton, 2015). There is also a lack of holistic knowledge about what resources and support are necessary. Studies show that accessibility to Black faculty as mentors can improve challenges with social adjustment and navigating racialized experiences; however, there are disproportionate ratios of

Black faculty to Black students (Krupnick, 2018). These disproportionate ratios can cause fatigue of Black faculty and less visibility for Black students, and literature supports the need for more Black faculty to share in the work of supporting Black students in PWI spaces (Griffin, 2015). Black students are most often left to their own methods of navigating their environment with little support or guidance. The absence of social support is proven to have a significant impact on campus engagement and academic success (Harper, 2016). A recent study noted that "social engagement increases the likelihood that Black students are more connected to peers, faculty and staff who express concern for their academic performance and who may be more willing to provide assistance in achieving their educational goals" (Beasley, 2020, p. 8). Because faculty support may not be an option for every Black student, it is critical that there are opportunities for them to find other support mechanisms in order to persist in oppositional environments driven by racism. Current scholarship on Black student experiences explores the relationship between Black student success and their psychological, social, and cultural experiences (Beasley, 2020, p. 2). Viewing the Black student experience at PWIs as an intersectional triad of psychological, social, and cultural experiences is critical in understanding how Black students navigate their respective spaces and vacillate between different identities (Beasley, 2020).

Illuminating Black Students' Counternarratives

As we seek to better understand Black experiences in higher education, we must lean into the narratives of Black students. To understand the centrality of racism in education is to acknowledge that narratives around education are most often told from dominant perspectives. While we often engage in discourse about the triumphs and milestones in fighting discrimination in higher education, we leave out the gruesome details of the battles that the marginalized are forced to fight. We also fail to include the voices of the marginalized. Yosso advocates for "challenging notions of 'neutral research or objective researchers and exposes deficit-informed

research that silences, ignores, and distorts epistemologies of people of color" (Yosso, 2005, p. 73). The parameters of neutrality and objectivity are often determined without including the perspectives of marginalized people.

There is a long tradition of research centered on the healing of oppressed people. This research is derived from critical methodologies that "incorporate social justice and liberation, including critical race theory, decolonization methodologies, feminist methodologies, and emancipatory methodologies" (Ogunfemi, Neville, & Tettegah, 2021, p. 2). A number of studies on Black healing and liberation emphasize the importance of Black perspectives and epistemologies (Ogunfemi, Neville, & Tettegah, 2021). Hearing those perspectives creates space for Black imagination and ideals. In *Mapping violence, naming life: a history of anti-Black oppression in the higher education system,* Jalil Bishop Mustaffa coined the term *education violence* to describe the limitations and violence committed against Black lives in education (Mustaffa, 2017). In his work, Mustaffa also raises a liberative framework that demonstrates disruptions against education violence. *Black life-making* is a term used to describe spaces of liberation and self-definition in Black communities that have the power to interrupt education violence (Mustaffa, 2017). Racially minoritized individuals in educational environments are often presented with obstacles in which they are forced to decide to internalize oppression or to present an alternative ideology. Alternative ideologies serve to demonstrate courage, provide hope, and challenge structures that inhibit well-being (Reyes, 2019). For Black students in higher education, there is power in being able to develop and adopt alternative ideologies. Experiential knowledge, also known as counter storytelling, highlights the importance of providing a platform for the narratives and resistance of marginalized people. Critical scholarship recognizes the importance of learning about the lived experiences of people of color in educational environments in order to understand the impact and scope of racial subordination in education

(McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). Resisting neoliberal-multicultural imagination, a framing thought within BlackCrit, provides space to hear the realities of Black people as opposed to other peoples' perceptions of their realities. In the realm of education, hearing such stories has the ability to "identify objects of transformation, and in turn alleviate the distress of familial, group, or community suffering" (Jani & Ortiz, 2010, p. 197). Hearing the stories of marginalized people provides opportunities not only for knowledge and discovery, but for healing and empowerment as well (Jani & Ortiz, 2010).

Chapter Summary

More than a century after the first Black student was admitted to a US institution of higher education, research demonstrates that there are still deeply-ingrained systemic barriers that Black students face on Predominantly White college campuses today (Lewis & Shah, 2021). BlackCrit helps us understand the ways in which Blackness is centralized as a part of the experiences of Black students. The United States, and the higher education therein continuously disenfranchise Black students pursuing higher education. However, Black students remain committed to overcoming the obstacles presented to them in collegiate spaces. Although research exists around Black student experiences at PWIs, there appears to be limited literature regarding the specific ways that Black students continue to persist while faced with institutional racism and unwelcoming environments that work against their successful matriculation. Research does however, inform us of a storied history of hope, healing, and liberation in Black communities (Ginwright, 2016). The goal of this study is to explicate the ways in which Black students find hope, healing, and liberation while navigating oppressive environments at PWIs.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

A review of the literature yielded several studies that focus on Black students' experiences at PWIs, and the unique challenges presented to Black college students (Patton, 2015; Jones & Reddick, 2017; Boyd, 2021). However, research fails to depict the specific ways in which Black students overcome the barriers they face while navigating racially oppressive PWI environments. The literature provides perspective on the ways in which Anti-Blackness impacts the lives of Black people nationally and globally. Experiences with racism and Anti-Blackness continue to present challenges to Black Americans in their aims to navigate American society. Higher education, specifically PWIs, are a part of a larger complex system that works to continuously oppress Black people because of its failure to attend to the specific needs of Black students navigating PWI campus cultures.

While studies highlight the negative experiences of Black students, few studies utilize the voices of Black students to explore their resilience and tenacity as they aim to succeed in environments that are hostile and unwelcoming to them. In order to understand how to support Black students in their successful matriculation through PWI environments, their voices must be heard. Black students are subject matter experts on their own experiences. However, the literature does not center Black students' voices as a guide to address systemic and institutional barriers impacting their experiences.

The purpose of this study was to understand how Black students find hope, healing and liberation while navigating Anti-Black structures within PWI environments. This study utilizes

an asset-based approach to address a dearth in research on Black student success, with implications for higher education administrators, counselors, and counselor educators. This study also provided an opportunity to elevate the voices of Black college students and provided space for them to reflect on moments of hope, healing and liberation based on their own interpretations of those terms.

This chapter will present an overview of the study, including the research design, methodology and theoretical framework. I will begin by discussing my rationale for the use of qualitative, narrative research design. I will then provide an explanation on how BlackCrit informs my understanding of Black students' experiences and creates space for me to center and learn from their stories as the researcher. Finally, I will detail the data collection and analysis procedures, followed by a discussion on researcher reflexivity and its presence in the research process.

Qualitative Research Traditions

Qualitative Research provides a pathway to obtain information through the collection of non-numerical data. One characteristic of qualitative research is that it is highly focused on participants' meanings as opposed to finite, commonly understood or agreed upon principles (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Qualitative research is exploratory in nature and is utilized to understand experiences. This type of research is used to make meaning of what is happening in a particular context, how to make meaning of phenomena, and/or how to explain a theoretical ideology (Silverman, 2000). Qualitative research is characterized as experiential, situational, and nonlinear. Qualitative research is experimental in that studies are highly investigational and seek insight. Qualitative approaches require researchers to be flexible and open regarding what might be discovered as they engage in their research (Johnson & Christensen, 2017). Qualitative

research is situational in that there are no prescribed constructs in which participants are expected to be confined. Two participants with seemingly identical identities and predispositions could have completely different experiences. The nonlinear aspect of qualitative research is attributed to the fact that sometimes exploration leads the researcher on a cyclical, non-successive path to discovery.

Qualitative research can be understood from multiple worldviews, also known as paradigms. Worldviews reflect values, beliefs, and techniques shared by a given community (Johnson & Christensen, 2017). In research, worldviews focus on beliefs and assumptions of methodological communities that serve as a guide for conducting research (Johnson & Christensen, 2017). The participants in this study were guiding voices and key contributors of knowledge. The participants' worldviews were centralized in this research, as opposed to conducting the study from a prescribed worldview. As qualitative research seeks to provide pathways to discovery, imposing limitations on potential outcomes would have been counterintuitive.

Narrative Inquiry and Analysis

To gain insight regarding my research questions, I engaged in a process of narrative inquiry and analysis as informed by the framework of BlackCrit. Narrative inquiry is a common type of qualitative research that focuses on lived experiences through the stories of participants (Kim, 2016). In the narrative inquiry process, rather than focusing on the essence of experiences or phenomena, the researcher helps participants construct a narrative account of their storied experience (Johnson & Christensen, 2017). The purpose of using narrative methodology for this study was not only to further my knowledge around hope, healing and liberation narratives of Black students at PWIs, but also to provide space for these students to engage in the construction and composition of their narratives. It appears that current research does not focus on the voices

of Black students as a primary means of insight. Therefore, institutional and systemic responses to injustices against Black students at PWIs are often rooted in Whiteness (Paton, 2015). It is important that Black students play an integral role in shifting the culture at PWIs. The BlackCrit framework centers the voices and experiences of Black people (Dumas & Ross, 2016) . The participants were a part of the analysis process by providing feedback on the themes that emerged.

This study provided a platform for policymakers and higher education administrators to learn from the experiences of Black students, and hear from them directly. Narrative inquiry and analysis serve not only as methods of uncovering individual meanings, but they also serve as a means to better understand human experiences and how cultures maintain collections of individual narratives (Kim, 2016). Through this study, I aimed to extend the narratives of Black students beyond their own culture, and into the culture of higher education, prompting those in power in higher education to lead as informed by Black students. In this study, I heard the storied experiences of each of my participants in efforts to make meaning of the stories that they shared through their unique lenses. In different ways, each of the participants' reflections contributed to my knowledge of Black student experiences at PWIs.

Theoretical Framework

BlackCrit served as the conceptual framework for this study through which the lives and experiences of Black students at PWIs are understood. The utilization of BlackCrit in this study allowed me to ground the research in the understanding that American institutions of higher education are a part of a larger anti-Black society which "implicates all people, structures, and institutions within it, and that we must center the Black voice specifically in research that aims to address and dismantle the violence of anti-Blackness" (Coles & Powell, 2019, p. 118). This

work situated the lives of Black students in the center of efforts to dismantle Anti-Black racism at PWIs, empowering them as contributors and disseminators of knowledge.

As a Black doctoral student currently attending a PWI and having also matriculated through an undergraduate experience at a PWI, I sought a framework that would allow me to illuminate the stories of Black students currently navigating a PWI while also sharing and reflecting on my own experiences when appropriate. All of the reflections and sharing of stories focused on the specificities of Blackness. The use of narrative inquiry as a research method aligns strongly with BlackCrit, as BlackCrit centers Black expression of voice (Coles & Powell, 2019). BlackCrit serves as a tool to more incisively analyze Anti-Blackness in higher education and how Black students become marginalized, disregarded, and disdained in higher education (Dumas & Ross, 2016). Listening to Black students' stories was the most effective way to understand their experiences around Anti-Blackness. Thus, I found the research method and theoretical framework to be culturally congruent as I engaged in this research process.

Procedure

IRB

Based on my engagement with human subjects in this study, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval is required. IRB committees are responsible for ensuring that research proposals are acceptable and meet ethical standards (Johnson & Christensen, 2017). Upon my dissertation committee's approval of my proposal, and my defense of the dissertation prospectus, I summited an IRB application. When the application was approved, I moved forward with following the IRB protocols for engaging with my participants.

Recruitment and Sampling

In this narrative study, I used a combination of two sampling techniques: convenience sampling and snowball sampling. Convenience sampling involves the researcher selecting participants who are readily available and easily recruited for participation in the study (Johnson & Christensen, 2017). To employ the convenience sampling approach, I recruited participants through various social media platforms by posting information about my study, and invited willing participants to be a part of the study. Additionally, I leveraged my network of fellow professionals in higher education to assist with disseminating information about the study to qualified participants.

I also utilized a snowball sampling approach. Snowball sampling involves research participants identifying additional people who qualify to participate in a study. While I anticipated that the majority of the participants in this study would come from convenience sampling, I invited participants to be involved in the recruitment process by providing recommendations about other potential participants.

Participants

I interviewed 10 individuals who met the criteria for this study. Through the convenience sampling approach, I identified 10 students from different institutions in various regions of the United States. While qualitative research does not specify a specific number of participants, I determined a minimum sample size with the goal of reaching saturation (Butina, 2015; Patton, 2002). Each of the participants provided their individual perspectives, and contributed to this learning experience. The criteria for participating in this narrative research study were as follows: The students were required to be 18 or older, identify as Black or African-American,

they must have been currently enrolled as an undergraduate student at a Predominantly White Institution, and they must have been willing to share personal experiences around leveraging hope, healing and liberation while navigating racism on campus. After prospective participants expressed interest, I contacted them to clarify the intent of the study, determine their interest, and confirm their eligibility based on the criteria. After those steps were completed, I had the participants complete an official consent form.

Data Collection

As I engaged with my participants, I employed multiple methods of data collection. These methods included: a demographic questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and photo elicitation. The following sections will describe the data processes and provide insight regarding the specific details of each process.

Demographic Questionnaire

To collect data, I began by having each participant complete a demographic questionnaire to provide information about their racial and ethnic identity, gender, hometown major, classification, and the institution at which they are enrolled. This information was useful in confirming the prospective participants' eligibility to participate in the study, and also provided context regarding their unique backgrounds and experiences.

Semi-Structured Interviews

After completing the questionnaire, I conducted a one-hour one-on-one semi-structured interview with each participant. The interview questions presented to the participants were centered on their experiences as Black students at PWIs. Prior to conducting interviews with the

participants, I conducted two pilot interviews with Black alumni of PWIs to gather feedback about the interview protocol.

The semi-structured interview approach created space and flexibility for the participants to share their unique stories and for us to engage in conversations that were authentic and organic. Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher and participants to engage in intentional dialogue pertaining to participants' experiences (Clandinin, 2006). Semi-structured interviews provide more flexibility than structured interviews, and allowed me to have more meaningful dialogue that is centered on the participants as individuals. The semi-structured interview approach aligns with the BlackCrit framework, as the flexibility in conversation allows participants to have agency and ownership in sharing their narratives as they deem appropriate. BlackCrit methodology creates space for Black people to lead their own narratives (Dumas & Ross, 2016). Thus, the questions asked were guided by the participants' engagement and responses throughout the conversation.

Interviews were conducted via the video conferencing platform, Zoom. While conducting interviews via Zoom does not allow for the same level of interpersonal interaction as in-person interviews, interviewing candidates via Zoom presents a number of advantages. As we navigate the Coronavirus pandemic, video conferencing allowed the researcher and participants to engage in this study without jeopardizing their health. Additionally, conducting interviews through this video conferencing platform allowed me to reach a broader range of participants that I otherwise would not have had access to due to limitations on travel. Video conferencing is regarded as the best alternative for replicating in-person experiences for researchers and participants who are geographically separate (Krouwell, Jolly, & Greenfield, 2019).

Photo Elicitation

Photo elicitation is a method of data collection that focuses on storytelling and deriving contextual meanings through photographs and other visual objects (Harper, 2008). Photo elicitation is a commonly used qualitative approach, as it allows for a special kind of subjective exploration based on the descriptive data and analysis process (Bodgen & Biklen, 2007). To learn more about my participants and obtain rich details on how they make meaning of their experiences, I employed the photo elicitation method. Photo elicitation allowed me to explore participants' values, beliefs, and experiences, and to elevate their voices through their selection of images (Richard & Lahman, 2014). In this study, the participants' photos reflected their personal experiences and provide perspective about how they navigate campus climate.

Prior to engaging in the photo elicitation process, I provided the participants with detailed instructions regarding the process and how it relates to the overall purpose of the study. During this process, I asked them to present 3 photographs that depict significant components of their journeys as Black students finding hope, healing and liberation while navigating racism at their respective institutions. To ensure that I have a digital copy of each photo, I asked the participants to send their photos to me via email prior to our interview. During the interview, I asked the participants to present the photos they submitted. Following the presentation of their photos, I engaged the participants in a series of questions regarding their photos. The questions attempted to uncover the meaning of each photo and what particular reactions or reflections emerged when they saw the photos. Their individual accounts gave me further insight and allowed me to understand their unique stories on a deeper level. For many of the participants, showing their photos was a vulnerable process, and they were only willing to show particular photos if they were not going to be displayed in this document. The photos presented were not included in this

document to preserve the authenticity of the participants' responses. The BlackCrit theoretical framework supports this method of data collection in that photo elicitation allows the participants to focus on their own liberative experiences and present "disruptions to power dynamics that become rays of hope for larger systemic change" (Dumas & Ross, 2016, p. 431).

Data Analysis

Qualitative research analysis consists of examining raw data, utilizing coding processes to synthesize the data into themes, and ultimately presenting the data in a consolidated research text (Kim, 2016). Narrative data analysis is used to understand the meanings participants give to themselves and their environments through storytelling (Kim, 2016). In my data analysis process, I centered the stories and lived experiences of Black students at PWIs. I facilitated this study from two positions: one as researcher, and the other as "narrator" (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014). As researcher, I gathered information shared by the participants and engage in an analysis process that focuses on their experiences and the insight they provide regarding the research questions and goals of the study. As narrator, I presented the narratives upon analysis and interpretation (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014). Through this restorying process, I organized the stories in a manner that is thematically coherent.

For my analysis of the data, I followed a sequential, multi-step process. The process consisted of five primary steps: organizing the data, reading the data, coding, generating themes, and finally representing the data (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). The analysis process included the use of a research team. The research team was comprised of two doctoral students and myself. Using an inductive coding process, we individually coded two interview transcripts, and agreed upon codes that emerged. After identifying the codes in the first two transcripts, I individually coded the remaining transcripts, and generated themes. While there are no set

procedures for narrative analysis, the analysis process I am presenting is consistent with qualitative research practices in general, and is demonstrated in other narrative studies which tend to focus heavily on thematic analysis (Butina, 2015).

Organizing the data. As I engaged with my participants, it was important for me to take detailed notes as we interacted with one another. As I asked questions and the participants provided responses, I utilized note-taking to capture their responses and make note of my reactions to their responses. My interview sessions with the participants were facilitated on Zoom, and I utilized the recording feature. Recording the interviews offered a number of advantages. One advantage is that recording the interviews allowed me to go back and review the interviews exactly as they were. Another advantage of recording the interviews is that it alleviated the pressure to try to capture every detail in my note-taking during the interview, allowing me to focus more on organic and authentic interactions with the participants during the interview sessions. After interviews were complete, I transcribed and stored the data on a password-protected computer.

Reading the data. After organizing, I took time to be intentional with the data by reading it for the purpose of identifying messages or general ideas (Saldaña, 2016). At this time, I not only examined the recorded responses from my interview with participants, but I also examined my notes. I gave careful attention to each student's narrative.

Coding the data. After organizing and reading the data, I began the process of coding the data. This process entailed thorough examinations and reexaminations of the data. I then bracketed the data into categories (Saldaña, 2016). Ultimately, the participants' stories and experiences were categorized into codes and themes that aligned with the framing ideas of

BlackCrit. The framing ideas of BlackCrit are as follows: The first framing idea is the notion of the endemicity of anti-Blackness in both historical and current political and economic contexts, and every other dimension of life (Ross, 2019). In alignment with CRT's tenet around the permanence and normalcy of racism, this framing idea adopts the notion of the deeply pervasive nature of Anti-Black racism, and how it influences every dimension of human life (Ross & Dumas, 2016). The second framing idea of BlackCrit highlights tensions between Blackness and "neo-liberal multicultural imagination" (Ross, 2019). The third framing idea suggests that space should be created for Black liberatory fantasy and the resistance of revisionist history that erases White people from a history of racial dominance and violence against non-White people (Dumas & Ross, 2016).

Generating a description and themes. As I coded the data, I began to develop descriptions and identify any possible emergent themes. In qualitative research, developing descriptions involves constructing detailed renderings of people and environments in a given setting (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014). These descriptions are especially useful in narrative research studies (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014). Based on the codes that were identified, I provided comprehensive descriptions of the students and their experiences as well as their perceptions of their environments. As I developed the descriptions and themes, I was be mindful that the students bring diverse perspectives, and the goal was not to create a common or generalized summary of their thoughts or experiences.

Representing the data. After organizing, reading, coding, and generating themes from the data, the final stage in the analysis process was to present the data cohesively. This qualitative narrative involved chronologies of events with themes, illustrations, and quotations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This portion of the analysis process is presented in a way that

demonstrates how the data addresses the research question. The presentation was constructed based on the students' stories, and included individual narratives as well as a comprehensive narrative that demonstrated the stories collectively.

Trustworthiness

While the concept of "validity" is often associated with quantitative research, qualitative researchers have an obligation to ensure the quality and authenticity of the data they are presenting (Maxwell, 2013). For this study, I utilized the term "trustworthiness" to describe my process of legitimizing the data and ensuring I mitigated the threats to the integrity of the research (Johnson & Christensen, 2017). To ensure trustworthiness, I employed a number of measures including: member checking, peer review, rich thick description, and source triangulation.

Member checking. One of the strategies I used to ensure trustworthiness in the research is member checking. Member checking in qualitative research refers to the process of the researcher allowing the participants to review data for accuracy; particularly related to my perceptions of their realities and meanings during the research process (Clandinin, 2006). I allowed the participants to analyze their transcript and make corrections to any inaccurate conclusions that I draw from my interview with them. I also allowed them to provide feedback on the themes that emerged.

Peer review. The second method that I employed for trustworthiness is peer review. During this process, I consulted with colleagues in my field who also conduct research on Black college students. I shared my perceptions and interpretations of the data and solicited their feedback.

Rich, thick description. Rich thick descriptions are an important component of trustworthiness in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Holloway, 1997). These descriptions are important because they provide detailed information that helps convey a holistic picture. A quality rich thick description has the ability to create elements of shared experience (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Holloway, 1997; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this study, I used rich, thick descriptions as I engaged in the research process.

Source triangulation. Source triangulation is the process of using multiple data sources to examine evidence and strengthen the justification for the conclusion of particular themes (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). While I did not intentionally look for particular themes or commonalities in the students' narratives, the triangulation process was utilized to identify themes that may exist. The process was also guided by a BlackCrit conceptualization. In analyzing the data, the use of a research team during the coding process strengthened the trustworthiness of the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Through my utilization of photo elicitation and individual, semi-structured interviews, I provided multiple data sources that were used to justify my conclusions.

Reflexivity

Researcher reflexivity was an important component of this study. Through this narrative approach, my reflexivity served as a secondary but integral source of data (Goldstein, 2016). As I conducted this study, I remained mindful of my own biases and experiences. As a Black man who attended a PWI for all levels of education and has spent his entire career thus far working at PWIs, it was important that I engaged in self-reflection throughout the process. This reflexive

approach is known as one of the core characteristics of good qualitative research (Holmes, 2020). I kept a reflexivity journal throughout the process to document my thoughts and reflections.

Conclusion

This study explored the hope, healing, and liberation narratives of Black students navigating oppressive institutional climates at PWIs. This qualitative, narrative approach conducted through the lens of BlackCrit centered the participants and their Black identities, while allowing them to share their stories in the ways that felt most authentic to them. In conjunction with a photo elicitation process, I engaged in conversations with the participants through semi-structured interviews. As I received and analyzed the data, I employed a number of measures to ensure the trustworthiness of the data. The participants' stories provided useful insight for people and institutions seeking to support and understand Black students navigating PWI environments.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Black undergraduate students and their narratives around hope, healing, and liberation as they navigate oppressive institutional climates at PWIs. Additionally, the study sought opportunities to elevate the voices of Black students, and aimed to understand how systems and institutions can better support them in their academic endeavors. This qualitative study employed a narrative inquiry methodology, and involved participants telling their stories using semi-structured individual interviews, and photo elicitation. I used photo elicitation as a tool to provide visual representations of hope, healing, and liberation amongst the participants during the undergraduate journeys at their respective PWIs. To avoid influencing participants' choice of photos, relevant photos are described rather than shown in this study. The following research questions guided this study:

Question 1: How do Black students at Predominantly White Institutions define hope, healing, and liberation?

Question 2: How do Black students at PWIs describe their journeys of hope, healing, and liberation while navigating oppressive institutional climates?

I conducted semi-structured interviews and a photo elicitation process with 10 individuals who identified as Black students at a PWI. Before each interview began, participants selected a pseudonym for the study to maintain confidentiality of their identities. Each participants'

narrative contributed knowledge and meaningful insight in the exploration of hope, healing, and liberation among Black students at PWIs. Their stories revealed challenges facing Black students at PWIs as well as persistence and determination factors. In this chapter, I provide narrative descriptions of the participants through 10 major themes: *Racially Traumatic Experiences*, *Isolation, Silenced Black Voices*, *Insufficient Institutional Support*, *Interest Convergence*, *Limited Representation & Mentorship Opportunities*, *Community*, *Cultural Pride*, *Hope as a Constant,* and *Future Generations.* Data analysis, member checking, journaling, and the utilization of a research team revealed that the themes that emerged from this study aligned with the framing ideas of BlackCrit. BlackCrit comprises three framing ideas: The first framing idea is the notion of the endemicity of anti-Blackness in both historical and current political and economic contexts, and every other dimension of life (Ross, 2019). In alignment with CRT's tenet around the permanence and normalcy of racism, this framing idea adopts the notion of the deeply pervasive nature of Anti-Black racism, and how it influences every dimension of human life (Ross & Dumas, 2016). The second framing idea of BlackCrit highlights tensions between Blackness and "neo-liberal multicultural imagination" (Ross, 2019). The third framing idea suggests that space should be created for Black liberatory fantasy and the resistance of revisionist history that erases White people from a history of racial dominance and violence against non-White people (Dumas & Ross, 2016). This idea creates space for Black people to envision themselves as free from the relentless grip of Whiteness. Black liberatory fantasy is unique to individuals, and allows Black people to conceptualize what freedom, liberty, and decolonization looks like on their own terms. Ultimately, Black liberatory fantasy resists revisionist history and serves as a ray of hope for larger systemic change (Ross, 2019). These framing ideas offer perspective on the experiences of Black undergraduate students at PWIs. The participants in this study provided narratives highlighting the endemic nature of Anti-Blackness, tensions between

Blackness and "neoliberal-multicultural imagination", and the importance of Black liberatory fantasy.

In this chapter, I will present the themes and subthemes that emerged from analysis of the data, and I will offer my reflections on those themes. Additionally, I will highlight components of my participants' narratives, and connect them with the BlackCrit theoretical framework. The following section will introduce the participants in the order in which they were interviewed. First, a table will be presented with general information about each participant. Next, I will present a written description of each participant. The written descriptions will consist of information about the participants' backgrounds and upbringings, as well as their perceptions of what Blackness means to them, and what it means personally for them to be Black. I will conclude my introduction of each participant with a personal reflection of my interactions with them. These reflections are based on my journaling during and after each conversation. In the reflections, I will also describe some of the photos that were presented during the photo elicitation process.

Table 1:

Participants' general information

Pseudonym	Pronouns	Age	Classification	Institution Description
Hannah	She/Her	19	Sophomore	Small Private in the South
Alexander	He/Him	22	Senior	Midsize Private in the South
Marcus	He/Him	21	Junior	Large Public in the North

Jay	She/Her	21	Senior	Midsize Public in the South
Major	He/Him	22	Senior	Midsize Private in the South
Faith	She/Her	21	Senior	Large Public in the North
Suavé	He/Him	20	Senior	Large Public in the Middle Atlantic
Marie	She/Her	21	Senior	Large Public in the North
Chris	He/Him	22	Senior	Large Public in
				the South
Reba	They/Them	22	Senior	Large Public in the Midwest

Hannah

Hannah is a 19-year-old woman. She is a second-year student majoring in Linguistics and Psychology. Hannah identifies as racially "mixed", having an Ethiopian father and a White mother. In her early years, she lived in Texas, but spent her latter years living in Northern California. She attended a high school that was approximately 80% Asian American (including East & South Asian) and there were very few Black students. She mentioned experiencing culture shock when she came to college because, although her college isn't very diverse, it is more diverse than what she has seen or experienced.

Hannah shared hardships in her upbringing related to her multi-racial identity. Hannah's maternal grandparents did not approve of their multi-racial family, so her parents decided to

sever the family's relationship with the maternal grandparents. She also spoke about what she feels is a cultural disconnect between herself and other Black Americans stating:

> My dad is not very culturally Black, to be completely honest with you, I would say that I myself am not very culturally Black, but I mean, appearance wise I very obviously am. And I think that has been what has influenced people's perspectives of me the most, at least coming here in college."

Hannah spoke from the perspective of being a child of an Ethiopian immigrant, and her dad's focus on assimilating into American culture rather than focusing on Blackness. She shared:

> It's never been a race thing with my dad. My dad sort of cuts that out of the equation every single time. So, it's very interesting how he sees things. I don't think that we agree on stuff like that because I think that he more so tries to ignore it than I do.

When asked what it means to be Black, she expressed that she believes Blackness is defined by people's perceptions:

> I think it's sort of difficult for me. I've had a lot of issues especially since coming here about what it means to be Black and who gets to be Black on this campus. And to me, I think being Black is being perceived as Black. I don't get any of the benefits really, well, I definitely do have privileges because I'm mixed. So, I won't say that I have no privileges because of that. 100% the fact that I have lighter skin, that my hair isn't as tightly coiled as other people's hair, the way that I talk, all of that, I think that really has impacted the way that people interact with me. But as for being Black, I don't get the same privileges that someone who is only White gets. And so, if someone were to look at me and say, yeah, she's Black, then I think that makes me Black.

Researcher Reflection

Much of Hannah's narrative centers on uncovering and making meaning of the complexities of her racial identity. During the photo elicitation process, Hannah recalled her first-time seeing cotton fields, and the feelings that emerged as she thought about her Black identity. From childhood, she has navigated nuanced experiences as a multi-racial Black person, and it appears that those experiences have made her racial identity development challenging. However, Hannah seems committed to further exploration of what racial identity means for her, and how it impacts the ways in which she shows up in the world. My conversations with Hannah prompted me to think about the ways in which Anti-Blackness manifests differently for different Black people. As a multiracial Black person, Hannah navigates anti-Blackness not only within social spheres, but within her own family. I could tell some of the topics we covered were challenging for Hannah to discuss, so I really appreciated her willingness to be vulnerable and share her story.

Alexander

Alexander is a 22-year-old man from Chicago, Illinois. He is a senior majoring in Human Health on a Pre-Med track. When asked about his family dynamics, he spoke about the importance of faith, perseverance, and family. He grew up in a two-parent household, but his father passed away a little over a year ago, causing his family to come together to support one another in an unprecedented way. Being from the West side of Chicago, Alexander was taught to lean on his values of faith, perseverance and family, as he grew up in a community that he described as underserved with limited resources:

> The values that were instilled in us, I would say first and foremost, just the idea of perseverance. We came from the west side of Chicago. It's not a very pretty area. It's not necessarily the safest or the most widely available to have like food resources and

> medical resources and stuff like that. It's very much still a very underserved area filled with mostly Black people, and of course, some Brown people and stuff like that. So definitely just the idea that we can push through no matter what. Persevering through anything. That's probably the first value that I was always taught to hold near and dear to myself. And then second, well, actually, perseverance will be the second one. The first would be faith. Holding true that God's got us no matter what. My family and I are Seventh Day Adventists, and I think we're a few generations in as Seventh Day Adventists now, starting back from when the family was down in Mississippi. So, we are still holding true to those Christian Protestant values. So, faith, perseverance. And then I think the last one, honestly, I would probably say family honestly. No matter what, if you don't have anything, you have your family. And even before my dad passed, we spent a lot of time just getting in trouble. As kids like y'all shouldn't be arguing like this, you never know what can happen. And then tragedy did strike us. And ever since then, we've had to relearn how to re-patch things together and kind of not be speaking ill to each other, speaking to each other like we don't have any sense. Because family, while it is forever, individuals are not forever. So that's probably the last value that was definitely very near and dear to our hearts.

When asked about what it means to be Black, Alexander spoke about having a sense of pride. He also talked about having the ability to overcome obstacles:

> To be Black? It means everything honestly…I think just to be Black is to just have this sense of pride. I know I can overcome anything because that is our nature to naturally overcome stuff. And while it's not fair that we always have to be the ones climbing a mountain, I have no doubt that I would find myself at the top of it.

Researcher Reflection

Alexander has a story of resilience and pride. He uses challenging lived experiences to become stronger and wiser. Despite having faced many obstacles in life, Alexander continuously overcomes any barriers he faces. He was eager to engage in a conversation about his values and life experiences. Coming from an underserved community, he is determined to excel and make his community proud. Connectedness seems to be very important to him. Many of our conversations were about family and what his family means to him. In addition to his love for family, Alexander has a strong passion for advocacy. In our conversations, he shared many examples of advocating for Black and other students of color on his campus. I believe that wherever Alexander goes in life, he'll uplift others so they have opportunities to reach the same heights.

Marcus

Marcus is a 21-year-old man from Brooklyn, New York. He attended an all-boys academy dedicated to fostering leadership, character, and academic excellence among young men of color. Marcus was born into a single-parent household, but eventually gained a stepfather who, according to Marcus, provided a lot of structure and guidance within the household. Marcus shared that between the academy and his household, most of his values were developed. Among those values were knowing his identity, and knowing the power of his voice and presence. He was also taught that higher education was important because many before him did not have the opportunity to go, and it would provide him with foundational experiences that set him up for success in the future. He talked about being a representation of his community, and the responsibility that comes with that. Marcus's love for his community inspires him to create opportunities for others. He has his own virtual talk show as well as a clothing brand which both highlight others making an impact in the community. Marcus's talk show and clothing brand

give community members a platform to amplify their voices. When asked what it means to be Black, Marcus defined Blackness as beautiful. He described being Black as "being a part of a culture and a group of people that are like the originators." In his studies at his university, Marcus has developed a sense of pride and discovery around the rich history and global contributions of Africans and Black Americans. He expressed, "So, I think that being black is a part of being the originator. It is beautiful. It comes with power. Those are the three words I use for what it means for me to be Black".

Researcher Reflection

Marcus is determined, responsible, and dedicated to uplifting his community. He has high ambitions, and he is committed to representing his family and his community well. One of the traits that stood out most to me about Marcus is his high level of focus. He talked about siblings and cousins who chose different paths and their troubles within the legal system. At a young age, Marcus decided that he wanted to follow a different path, and has excelled socially and academically. Role modeling seemed to be an important aspect of who he is. He shared examples of leadership within his fraternity and his friend group. The photos Marcus shared during the photo elicitation process were reflective of his desire to love and lead people. Through his leadership, he strives to inspire change in his communities and the world. Based on our conversation, I believe he is an effective leader, and change agent who will naturally find himself in leadership roles throughout the course of his life. I was inspired by his story.

Jay

Jay is a 21-year-old woman from Northern Alabama. She is a senior nursing major. In our introduction, Jay talked a lot about her parental influences. She was raised in a two-parent household. Her mom is a college graduate and attended an HBCU not far from her hometown

where she received a bachelor's and a master's degree. Her mom highly values education, and had a long-time career in special education. Jay's dad works for the city in which they live. When asked about her values, Jay emphasized the importance of education and hard work:

> One thing that was instilled in us was independence, hard work, make good grades, just be a better you. Yeah, at a young age, I could tell my foundation was very strong with my family values because, I don't know, I've been independent pretty much since I was young. In school, I've had that solid foundation.

Jay comes from a blended family, and noted the difference in dynamic between her half siblings and herself. She also talked about how she and her siblings were parented differently in terms of expectations around attending college. She shared that she was expected to go to college, but her brother was given an option. Jay was okay with the expectation for her to go to college because she believes that higher education is a key factor in her success:

> My beliefs about higher education, knowledge is power. The more knowledge you have, the more of a weapon you are to society. You understand things more. You're exposed to bigger opportunities.

When asked about what it means to be Black, Jay expressed a sense of pride about the contributions of Black people in society:

> Being Black... It's honestly a blessing. We're kind of the blueprint of everything. Like when people do stuff, it's like, oh well, we did this first. A lot of stuff that we have now is because of us and our ideas. I don't know, we're the blueprint, and I just love that I'm a part of the Black community.

Researcher Reflection

Jay is committed to service and academic excellence. From childhood, her family instilled in her that she would excel, and I could see manifestations of those impartations. Most of our conversations were centered on her experiences in the classroom, but Jay is also a key student leader on campus. Jay has a calm, quiet demeanor, but she holds a lot of knowledge. As one of the few Black students in a large Nursing program, she lends an important voice to conversations about how to improve the experiences of Black students who do not feel represented or adequately supported in academic spaces. I believe Jay will continue to be a positive example to others, and serve her community well even beyond her undergraduate career.

Major

Major is a 22-year-old man from a large metropolitan area in Georgia. Major is a senior double majoring in Biology and Theatre Studies. Throughout our discussion, Major spoke a lot about the importance of family. He was born to teen parents who did not have a lot of financial resources. However, his parents worked very hard to create pathways and opportunities for themselves and their children. Major's mom was a nontraditional college student, and obtained her undergraduate degree while Major was young. He spoke extensively about the ways in which his parents supported one another through hardship. He also spoke about the values of servitude and determination:

> So, from a very young time as a child, my parents were teen parents. They didn't have much except faith and prayer. And on that they built a foundation and a legacy. I saw my dad working two, three jobs to support my mom through college. And I saw my mom going to college to get a degree, better her life, and better ours. And then unfortunately, my dad got pneumonia. And while he was in the hospital, he ended up losing his job. And so, the roles reversed where my mom became the sole breadwinner for the house.

> And through it all, I just saw how they supported each other, and they continued to serve. They served different communities. They volunteered for the American Red Cross, volunteered for my football games, basketball games, whatever it needed. They were there. And they always instilled values of servitude in my life. Your parents go from struggling to now being managers of departments and having their own departments created for them. I think that's just a testament to their determination.

When asked about what it means to be Black, Major spoke about the ways in which Blackness is one of the most salient parts of his identity. He also spoke about some of the challenges and rewards that come with being Black:

> I think it {Blackness} literally encompasses everything and every moment in my life. I think to be Black is both beautiful and scary. It is a culture that I would not change for the world. It is accepting. It is loving. It is incredible.

Researcher Reflection

Major was incredibly inspiring. He was excited to share his experiences with me, and I learned a lot just by listening to him. Major holds a wealth of knowledge about the bureaucracy of universities, and spends a lot of time fighting systems within his own institution that are unjust to people of marginalized communities. Major is committed to improving not only his own experience, but the experiences of Black faculty and staff, as well as future students. The photos he showed during the photo elicitation process were of the people that inspired him to keep fighting for change, i.e., his fraternity brothers, mentors, and fellow Black students. I was inspired by his determination, his commitment to advocating for Black voices, and his incredible leadership. What excited me most was his commitment to continuing to fight for Black students even after he graduates.

Faith

Faith is a 21-year-old woman from a small town in New York. She is majoring in Medicinal Chemistry and Neuroscience. She was raised in a very family oriented environment, and was raised exclusively by her mother, as her father passed away when she was two years old. She talked about how her extended family stepped in to help raise her because her mother was older and was not expecting to have another child. Faith talked about her family's common values of being loving, caring people:

> We're very big on just giving back to our communities. So, we volunteer at nursing homes, whether that's caroling to the elderly. We visit homeless shelters and hand out Christmas cards. Or even if it's just us walking down the street and we see somebody we know or somebody we don't know, we give them a hi, give them a hug, check in and make sure they're okay. So those values really stuck with me from when I was young to the person that I am now. And I see them in the way that I go about navigating my life. I look for ways that I can be of an asset to the community, whether that's the community where I go to school, or the larger outside community. So, I always find ways to just do that.

When asked what it means to be Black, Faith talked about the strength and resilience of Black people:

> The first word that comes to mind is to be resilient. I touched upon this, I was writing a personal statement or something, and it had mentioned why it wanted me to speak about why I thought came from an underrepresented group or something like that, something along those lines. That was the prompt. And it just made me think about all of what we as

> Black people go through. Like all of the oppressive structures that we have to constantly live through. All of the hateful speech that we always have to endure. Everything that is just bad that we endure, we still persevere, and we still come up on top regardless of it all. And just knowing that in every facet of life, just seeing Black people just continue to flourish the way that we do, it's just some sort of innate resilience that we all have. And that's what it means to be Black for me is to have an innate resilience to just succeed. And we just do it with grace too. We just do it. It's so dope.

Researcher Reflection

Faith is a humble, powerful spirit. She is self-determined, resilient, and focused on her goals. We had many conversations about her faith. Her belief in God is a central aspect of her identity, and guides the ways she lives her life. Faith provided an informative perspective about experiences of Black women in STEM, and the unique challenges they face. During her time in college, Faith has developed a passion for role modeling and being a positive example for other Black students interested in pursuing careers in the medical field. I can see many Black students being inspired by her journey. The photos she shared during the photo elicitation process were reflective of the most meaningful victories she has achieved on her journey as a Black woman pursuing a career in STEM. I know she will continue to be a role model for young women and men who look like her as she transitions into a career in medicine.

Suavé

Suavé is a 20-year-old man from a small, predominantly Black town in Maryland. He is a senior majoring in Psychology. He shared that he considers himself a scholar, and education is a big value in his family. As he spoke about other values his family holds, he talked about the values of hard work, and always doing things to the best of his ability. When asked about what it means to be Black, he shared a variety of thoughts:

> For me, being Black has a lot more to do with the culture than the race aspect, if that makes sense. I don't necessarily think it has to do too much with the genetics. If you have a certain amount of melanin in you, you'll be looked at and perceived as Black. But I feel like when you say, what does it mean to be Black? I don't think you can leave out the cultural aspect of it, and I think that comes with everything from style, to the music, to the clothes, to the environments. I think it has a lot more to do with where you are and what you're immersed in than it has to do with just the racial aspects of it. For example, soul food or carry out. Specific type of carry out, a specific type of soul food, you know what I mean? Those are the things that I feel like you only experience when you're immersed in the culture, not the race. So, I think that's important. I think it also means that you exist within that social perception of what it means to be African American or Black. And I think that has plenty of disadvantages as well as some advantages. But I think the disadvantages probably outweigh the advantages. So, I think that there's just little things like caution of driving, code switching when you go to a job interview so people don't think that you're ghetto or uninformed. I feel like being Black has a lot of layers. A lot of them are cool. I feel like once you start to mix it into a social context that goes outside of other Black people, it's not as fun, but it's pretty cool.

Researcher Reflection

Not only is Suavé extremely witty and charismatic, he's also incredibly intelligent. At just 20 years old, he is preparing to graduate college, and is making plans to matriculate through a doctoral program in Psychology. I enjoyed talking with him about the profession of mental health, and his future goals. While Suavé shared a number of stories involving racialized experiences, the focus of our conversations was on his optimism and positivity. He is determined

to maximize his life experiences and be the author of his own narrative. He shared with me that he plans to become a professor after obtaining his Ph.D. I believe Suavé will be a great example and advocate for future generations of Black students.

Marie

Marie is a 21-year-old woman from a large city in the state of New York. She is the youngest of 10 siblings, and comes from a blended family. Marie was taught to always lift others as she pursues life endeavors, and to create opportunities for others to succeed in the same ways. Marie was raised as a Christian in the Baptist church, and still leans on her faith as one of core values. Marie's educational journey consists of varied experiences and exposure. Her elementary and middle school experiences were in predominantly Black schools. She then transferred out of that school system and went to a private, Catholic high school, which was predominantly White. Both school systems provided Marie with special opportunities to advance her education:

> {In high school} I was able to have access to a college coach, which helped with the application process. And it's crazy because my middle school is like this Promise Neighborhood Scholarship Initiative. So, my cohort was the first. And with that, it helped provide the scholarship to attend the private schools {for high school}. And then the college coach, I guess, came with that type of package to help us streamline into going into college. So, a lot of my peers that's a privilege in itself, getting a scholarship, being able to attend a private school, and then getting assistance with filling out the FAFSA, college applications, writing those personal statements. In addition to my participation in Buffalo Prep and Med Step, which is like another state funded program for those who are interested in STEM in high school. So, I think those all of those outlets, all those support networks really help create the foundation to how I got to where I am now.

In addition to high scholastic achievement in middle school and high school, Marie was actively involved in extracurricular activities as well. These experiences served as a strong foundation for her success in college. When asked about what it means to be Black, Marie shared:

> To be Black means that I am African American. Unfortunately, I do not know my historical roots. I do not know what part of Africa, which country I came from. All I know is that my biological father, he came from Mobile, Alabama. And then my mom was born and raised in Buffalo, so I am a combination of them and a product of what became of them. And that's the thing with my university, there's so many, like, Haitian American, Caribbean Student Association, African Student Association. There's so many things where sometimes it's hard for me to find those communities or properly fit in just because I'm Black. Like, I Don't know where, but I am a part of the overall diaspora. I am what you are, even though I don't know exactly where to pinpoint it.

Researcher Reflection

Marie is a great model for Black student success. She is committed to academic excellence, and she is extremely driven. Marie is focused and goal-oriented. Although she is a first-generation college student, and many of her family members did not go to college, Marie has a community of support that invested in her academic success and ensured that she went to college. In the same vein, Marie commits herself to supporting and investing in others pursuing higher education. Marie talked a lot about her student leadership experiences and the roles she plays on campus. She focused a lot on being an example for younger Black students. I believe Marie will continue to inspire Black women in STEM, and she will excel despite the challenges she encounters.

Chris

Chris is a 22-year-old man from a large metropolitan area in Tennessee. He is a senior majoring in Civil Engineering. He spoke about his upbringing and how he was taught to always be mindful of how he treats people, ensuring that the way he treats others reflects how he wants to be treated. He comes from a large family with many biological siblings, but he was raised as an only child. However, he was always surrounded by cousins and other extended family.

Chris is a first-generation college student, as his mother and father did not attend college. However, he has two older sisters and an older brother who went to college. Chris is actively involved on his college campus and spoke to his experiences working and being a student leader:

> I feel like I have a pretty well-rounded experience on my campus. I definitely had different experiences of living on campus for a while. I've had an experience of working on campus. I've had an experience of really being involved in organizations on campus, being heavily involved in community service near the campus. Even being a part of Greek life on campus and kind of building relationships with faculty. So, I would definitely say I have a pretty well-rounded experience.

When asked what it means to be Black, Chris shared:

> I don't know, I kind of grew up around people who looked like me as far as going to school. Like I said, I'm from Memphis, Tennessee, so I grew up around people who look like me really my whole life. Was typically in public school districts, attending predominantly Black schools. I mean, to be Black, I really can't say why. I don't know. It's just kind of immersing myself in that culture that comes with being African American.

Researcher Reflection

Chris is someone who is committed to lifting as he climbs. I enjoyed hearing about his journey; from being an extremely introverted first-year student, to being one of the most prominent student leaders on campus. He spoke a lot about the connections he made his first year, and how they have inspired and sustained him throughout his collegiate experience. Based on our conversations, Chris has a heart for uplifting others, and he believes that when others succeed, he succeeds. Chris spoke a lot about the pressures that come with being a Black student at a PWI, but he spoke more at length about the power and joys of being in community with other Black students on campus.

Reba

Reba is a 22-year-old non-binary individual from a large metropolitan area from Georgia. Reba is double majoring in creative writing, African American Studies with a minor in Social Justice, and a double emphasis in Business and Race and Gender Equity. Reba is a proud member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated, and is graduating this spring. After graduation, they will be pursuing a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing with a concentration in Africology before pursuing a PhD, with the plan to implement programs to diminish the school to prison pipeline in Southern public schools. Reba shared insightful information about their background and upbringing:

> I grew up with two gay parents. My mother and father were both gay, dad was gay, but they were still very ultra-Christian, like they had a lot of internalized homophobia. So, I think that was one of the driving things that brought me to come to a school like this because of how progressive it was. And it reminded me of my hometown, of how progressive they are when it comes to queerness. I grew up always believing in the arts, which I think is really special, especially for Black kids. I grew up with two creators,

> both of them sang, both of them wrote. They met at an HBCU. I grew up very low income, so I definitely had to learn how to grind and get it from a very young age. I was watching my sister's kids as a toddler when she was battling with drugs. I've had to help uncles overcome heroin addictions. I've had to be there for my mom's alcoholism. I think actually my upbringing was very hardening, and I think that it reinforced in me this idea of the strong black woman. And that's who I felt like I always had to be, always had to be. And then I came to college, and Whiteness required that of me, and I realized that's not who I was. So, I think my time in college has been learning to unlearn and dismantle things that don't serve me and create counter systems that do. So, I think that's what I'm all about.

When asked what it means to be Black, Reba expressed:

> To me, being Black means that I hold the universe inside me. Like I don't think there's anything that has touched this world that wasn't because of a Black person, even if it was a Black person inspiring someone else to do something. I feel like Black people have done it all.

Researcher Reflection

Reba is a powerful individual who prides themselves in being an inspiration to others, and fighting for equity. Reba was required to grow up fast, as they were exposed to many of the harsh realities of life at an early age. Many people in Reba's life depend on them for various things. Reba conveyed that they are committed to pursuing a life of healing and liberation for themselves and others. During the photo elicitation process, Reba showed photos of people and things that embodied their idea of healing, and what they wanted to achieve in terms of their own healing and liberation. Reba shared stories of personal struggles as well as triumphs. Reba's matriculation through college is a dream realized. Reba was extremely excited and energized to

share their experiences as a Black student at a PWI. During our conversation, Reba shared that no one had ever asked them about their experiences as a Black student at a PWI. Their statement continues to sit with me. Reba's statement is a testament to why I did this study. When our conversation was complete, I felt completely enlightened, and inspired to continue in this work.

Discussion of Themes

In alignment with principles of narrative research and BlackCrit, I began this chapter with the stories of my participants. Participants' backgrounds were shared as well as their ideas regarding what Blackness means to them individually. In analyzing the data, 10 significant themes emerged. Using the three framing ideas of BlackCrit as a guide, the themes were categorized into one of the three framing ideas. The themes coupled with their respective framing ideas are as follows: Framing idea 1: *Endemicity of Anti-Blackness* (Themes: *Racially Traumatic Experiences, Isolation, Silenced Black Voices*) Framing idea 2: *Blackness exists in tension with neoliberal-multicultural imagination* (Themes: *Insufficient Institutional Support, Interest Convergence, Limited Representation & Mentorship Opportunities.)* and lastly, Framing idea 3: *Creating Space for Black Liberatory Fantasy* (Themes: Community, Cultural Pride, Hope as a Constant, Future Generations). (See Table 2).

Table 2: Categorization of themes

Framing Ideas	**Themes**
Endemicity of Anti-Blackness	*Racially Traumatic Experiences, Isolation, Silenced Black Voices*
Blackness exists in tension with neoliberal-multicultural imagination	*Insufficient Institutional Support, Interest Convergence, Limited Representation & Mentorship Opportunities*
Creating Space for Black Liberatory Fantasy	*Community, Cultural Pride, Hope as a Constant, Future Generations*

The themes that emerged from the data are further discussed below.

Endemicity of Anti-Blackness Themes

Racially traumatic experiences. BlackCrit posits that Anti-Blackness is pervasive and permeates every facet of society (Dumas & Ross, 2016). This stance is supported by the stories and experiences of the participants in this study. *Racially traumatic experiences* emerged as a prominent theme as participants shared personal anecdotes about racist experiences they have personally endured or been in close proximity to. The participants spoke on topics ranging from police brutality and violence to microaggressions. Many of the stories shared were during formative years and shaped the participants' understanding of what Anti-Black racism is. When asked about a defining moment in terms of understanding racism, Major shared:

> The most defining moment came when I was in 8th grade. A car passed by my house. It was like we're sick of y'all n words living in our land and breathing our

air. Picked up somebody else and drove back again. And to set the picture up for you, it was Georgia's little snow blizzard, snowpocalypse. What year was that?

That had to be 2013. And it was in January. We were all supposed to be in school. This is right before they started their online schooling programs within the different counties throughout Georgia, because we were out of school for almost a week because of the snowpocalypse. And they were about to push school back for a whole another week and make us stay longer. But we were home, and there was a lot of snow. We were having snowball fights. And my brothers and I decided we wanted to have some friends over and play football in the snow. So, my brothers plus 8 of their friends came and I was the ref. And so, there's 10 of us, or 11. 10 of us were Black, 1 was white. And so, when the car drove past again, they had another passenger who had a gun, pointed it at middle schoolers and high schoolers. And they only said the words bang, bang, bang. But those words have stuck with me. I still remember the exact feeling that I had. That panic, that fear, like, oh, my God. But then also that disappointment that came afterwards. So, when we ran into our house, told my parents, parents called the police. The police took the statement of one person and left and didn't even come and knock on our door. They took the statement of somebody else. And so, the person they happened to take the statement of, their neighbors, both of them were police officers. So, when they saw the police leaving his house, those police officers went over to check in. And we told them and told them how nobody took down everyone's stories. And the person who was working for us, worked for the Special Victims Unit, which is around sexual assault and harassment, not what we

> were dealing with. And so, she gracefully took down a report for something she wasn't even bound to. And she was the one who really tried to make sure we were okay. But to see that twice in a moment where, first, we have someone pointing a gun at us and calling us slurs. Then as a victim, the police officers didn't care enough to even get our statements. That was kind of that defining moment for me. And I really understood what my parents were teaching me about.

As an adolescent, Major endured a traumatic racialized experience that will be permanently ingrained in his memory. Similarly, Hannah shared experiences that happened during her formative years that she will always remember. While her experiences are different from Major's, they have shown to have a lasting impact on her. Many of Hannah's earliest memories of racism involve people she's related to. Hannah spoke about her experiences with racism from White family members as a biracial individual:

> I had issues with my White half of my family growing up because I am mixed, so there's that. But my grandparents didn't like the fact that we were mixed, and because of that, we cut contact with them very early on. And so that never was a part of my life.

Hannah became emotional when she shared a story about her White grandfather and the impact it had on her perception of self:

> And then eventually my mom told me about how when she was much, much younger, she remembered her dad was friends with a lot of cops. And one time one of those friends came over and they were laughing about how they had pushed a disabled Black man down a flight of stairs. And so, I think that's when I

> realized that there was something wrong with being Black, and that's what I just associated with was just not having my grandparents there, and that's why.

In their stories, both Hannah and Major shared experiences with law enforcement neglecting or abusing Black people. Marcus was also exposed to racism by law enforcement at a young age. When asked about how he became aware of Anti-Black racism, Marcus shared:

> I remember I was really young when my cousin was killed by law enforcement. And I remember the cops came to the house and they actually had like News 12 and everybody in the crib. They set up cameras and everything. So that was a time in which I did start to understand what it means to be Black in America.

Like Major, Hannah, and Marcus, Reba shared traumatic racialized experiences from her childhood. Reba witnessed and experienced racism from local authorities and was exposed to horrendous acts:

> So, I remember the first time I saw Black people hanging from trees. I was seven years old, and I was in Forest Park, Georgia, which is notoriously Klan country. And by Klan country I mean I lived three doors down from a KKK headquarters. A lot of the police chiefs, the mayor had fathers and such who were a part of the Ku Klux Klan. I had been called picaninny, a nigger, Blackie, tar baby, all of those things.

Reba continued to expound on her experiences with racism, sharing stories of things that have happened to her on her college campus. She shared a number of stories about her trauma and racialized experiences at her institution:

> So, my first semester I had a classmate call me a Black bitch for saying that reverse racism doesn't exist. And I spit on him and my teacher didn't say anything. And then at the very end of the semester, she came up to me and was like you're so strong. That's one incident. And then I was the RA of the youngest in the Black living learning community, which is a floor on campus dedicated to people of African descent so that they could come home to their folks and regroup and have peer to peer connection, build that bond, that type of thing. And one day, someone had drawn KKK hoodies and swastikas on our dry erase board and was having complaints called on us. We damn near were in a race war with the floor right below us. I had had one of my Black female friend's body found in the bottom of a lake after she went to hang out with a group of her White female friends, and none of them have been investigated still and it's been two years.

The *racially traumatic experiences* theme describes the journeys of the 10 participants in this study as they came to understand realities of Anti-Black racism. Each shared stories about how they personally became aware of the hardships imposed by Anti-Blackness. BlackCrit highlights the endemic nature of Anti-Black racism, and the stories of the participants aligned with those notions.

Isolation. In addition to sharing racially traumatic experiences in their upbringing and at their respective institutions, the participants talked about feelings of isolation on their campuses. Their stories reflected what research indicates about PWIs' failure to create welcoming multicultural environments that reduce feelings of social estrangement among Black students (

Campbell, Carter-Sowell & Battle, 2019). This literature, along with the participants' reflections about isolation, align with BlackCrit's notions regarding the antagonism against Blackness (Ross & Dumas, 2016). When asked about her experiences on campus, Reba shared:

> I think, for one, we don't realize how freaking lonely it really, really is. I watch these college shows and there are people who can just walk around campus and just have groups of friends. Black students don't have that. Even some Black students are so indoctrinated and in love with Whiteness that the idea of properly engaging in blackness, it's hard for them. They still perpetuate Whiteness in Black spaces. And then there's such a small percentage of Black student leaders who are plugged in and involved, right? So, you might be at a school like my school where we're already only 3% of the population. And out of that 3%, only 2.5 make it to junior year, and only 1% of those actually wants to be involved on campus. So, it's really hard to find each other. It's really hard to feel seen by others. It's really hard to feel like you matter. It's so hard.

Faith also talked about being one of few Black students, but focused more on isolation in academic spaces. Faith shared similar feelings of isolation and struggling with visibility in the classroom:

> But freshman year and sophomore year, they were big lecture sized rooms. I was 1 of 5 Black people in a room of 200 students, and that was intimidating. First couple of weeks, I was like, okay, Faith, you know you need to be seen. You know you want the professor to see you, because that's going to be a letter of recommendation you need down the line. So how are you going to navigate this space and make sure that you're comfortable? So, then I started thinking of ways just to ease the discomfort. So, I would sit towards the front of the class, so I would feel like no one is looking back at me.

Faith's reflections presented a paradox of feeling unseen, but also feeling like she stood out too much. She felt like she had to be strategic about where she sat because she didn't want to bring too much attention to herself. Major also talked about navigating isolation as a Black student. He highlighted the low representation and retention of Black men:

> For example, there's 26 Black men who started here with me. And I can guarantee you not all 26 of us are left, which means that less than 26 Black men are going to be walking across that stage in May. And it's sad when your graduating class is over 1,400 people. It's isolating, it's lonely, and it's frustrating."

Marie's perspective about isolation was slightly different from Faith, and Major's. However, there were some similarities between what she and Reba shared. Reba talked about feeling isolated even amongst other Black students:

> And that's the thing with my school, there's so many, like, Haitian American, Caribbean Student Association, African Student Association. There's so many things where sometimes it's hard for me to find those communities or properly fit in just because I'm Black. Like, I don't know where, but I am a part of the overall diaspora. I am what you are, even though I don't know exactly how to pinpoint it.

A part of the work of Anti-Blackness is to assault basic needs such as sense of belonging (Jung & Costa Vargas, 2021). The stories of the participants and their experiences with isolation in their collegiate environments highlight the pervasiveness of Anti-Blackness in the context of higher education, particularly PWI environments.

Silenced Black voices. As Black students navigate feelings of isolation at PWIs, they are also challenged with being silenced and not having their voices affirmed. Black students are

often forced to choose between challenging the status quo, and quietly withdrawing. Such scenarios challenge Black students to compare the cost of silence with allowing themselves to be authentic in their respective spaces. BlackCrit acknowledges the historical trajectory of the silencing of Black people, alluding to notions of Black people's limited rights to "live, breathe and move for themselves" (Dumas & Ross, 2016, p. 429). Black students on college campuses must weigh the cost of attempting to leverage their voices. Black students at PWIs report that they are careful about when and how to use their voices because they want to be a positive representation of Black students on campus, and want to avoid reinforcing negative stereotypes (Hotchkins, & Dancy, 2015). However, participants in this study revealed that even when they attempt to utilize their voices, they are not heard. For many, the silencing of their voices was a motivating factor for participating in this study. The participants spoke to the importance of taking advantage of chances to have their voices heard, because of the scarcity of opportunities to do so. They shared their frustrations with not truly being heard. When asked about why he chose to participate in this study, Marcus shared why he believed it was important:

> Yeah, I feel like whenever there's opportunity for me to speak upon my experience as a Black man within a predominantly institution or predominantly white spaces, it's important that that is shared because it's a lot of people that can relate to it. But not all students feel comfortable being in an interview that's recorded and actually speaking upon it. But your experience can help somebody else. And I feel like if we don't speak about it, we leave it up to those that don't know what it means to be Black in America to speak for us.

Alexander also saw this study as a chance to have his voice heard. He wanted to capitalize on this opportunity because he believes that narratives like his are ignored:

> I saw that you're doing a PhD thing and you're asking about our experiences here and stuff like that. And I think, one, getting a firsthand narrative of an experience in college, especially for a BIPOC student who can tell the story of coming from an underserved area and stuff like that, that is so important because that narrative is often ignored.

Marie's reflections were different from Marcus and Alexander's perspectives. It appeared that Marie had already been engaging in reflection about her identities and internalized Whiteness. As a component of a class, Marie conducted a study on Black student experiences at PWIs. She saw this study as an opportunity to share her own perspectives as a Black woman at a PWI:

> Yes, because I wanted to share my experiences here, and I conducted similar interviews for a research project I did last year. It's part of one of my African American studies research methods where I was asking similar questions like, why did you choose this institution? Why not HBCU? And I think for me, as far as my high school, I attended a predominantly white, Catholic, all girl high school, and I was able to get a scholarship from there to go and attend. And I think for me I had some internalized, I guess, racism in a way where I'd always straighten my hair, put on this perception, put on a certain voice so that I can maintain this type of poster child, which I didn't realize was unhealthy until I got to college. So, I think that's why I wanted to participate, just to contribute to the conversation and your research.

Jay wanted to participate because she felt like people never truly care what she has to say as a Black student. She elaborated on frustrations with faculty and staff at her institution pretending to listen, but not truly hearing Black students' voices stating, "Well, when I read the flyer or whatever, I was like, oh, this is something I'm interested in. Because, I mean, oftentimes, being

an African American on a PWI campus, your voice is not really heard.” She further elaborated by saying:

> I feel like they say they listen to us, but I need them to listen to us. You say you're going to do something, but you don't. You ask for our opinions, but then when it's time to reveal what we voted on and what we talked about, it's the complete opposite. I just need them to take responsibility and take accountability for if you're going to say you're going to do this for us, do it for us.

Major’s thoughts aligned with Jay’s perspectives about university administrators not listening to Black people. Major described an ongoing fight to create space for Black voices and following up:

> Well, recently I've been working a fight at my campus, a fight about protecting black spaces and black voices, because I don't feel like it's something that's done. We have a black student alliance house, and there are white people who live in that house. So, is it really the black student alliance house anymore? And just understanding the struggles of being black at a PWI. My school prides itself on its diversity numbers. But then if you look at how many people are in each of those numbers, it's like, yeah, they have the culture represented, but there's not a lot of them.

Major then went on to discuss perceived indifference in validating Black voices on college campuses. He discussed failure to listen to Black employees’ voices as well:

> When we hear from Black employees about how their working conditions aren't what they should be, it's frustrating and it makes it seem like they don't care. When we have to go revisit our blacklist of student demands from the 90s because we recognize that the

> demands that Black students requested in the 90s is not fully being validated. It's frustrating because we know there are people who care in administration, but as a general, we're not really seeing yet. And so, I guess that's kind of why, just to speak a piece from a Black student's perspective at a PWI." "I think the top priority should not just be hearing Black voices, but actually acknowledging them. Wow, I never actually put that into words. Yeah, not just hearing black voices, but acknowledging them. Yeah, I was going to say that means not just asking us how we feel and putting us on committees. And saying like, oh, we recognize this, that, and the third. Or, oh, but do you see we're doing good in this manner and we're hiring more Black faculty? Let's focus on the task at hand and really recognize the struggles that we're going through.

The participants offered varying perspectives on the ways in which their PWI environments fail to create space for their stories. The status quo at PWIs within higher education allows Whiteness to silence the voices of Black students, faculty and staff (Bistodeau, 2019). The participants' experiences substantiated this claim as they shared stories of being silenced or ignored, or disregarded.

Tension with Neoliberal-Multicultural Imagination Themes

Insufficient institutional support. Many Black students at PWIs excel academically despite navigating racist campus climates and an adverse sense of belonging (Mills, 2021). These oppositional institutional climates indicate that Black students' success cannot be attributed to the efforts of their institutions. The participants in this study shared a wealth of experiences regarding their respective institutions' insufficiencies pertaining to the support of Black students. Although they have managed to persist, all participants clearly demonstrated areas where their institutions were failing to support Black students. The participant's stories aligned with the

literature regarding PWIs' lack of proper knowledge, resources, and support to help Black students navigate PWI environments (Patton, 2015). Their stories also supported BlackCrit's notion of tension with neoliberal-multicultural imagination, as their institutions "efforts" to create safe environments for Black students were inadequate (Dumas & Ross, 2016)

There is a gap in comprehensive knowledge regarding necessary resources and support for Black students, and this lack of support is proven to have a significant impact on campus engagement and academic success (Harper, 2016). A recent study noted that "social engagement increases the likelihood that Black students are more connected to peers, faculty and staff who express concern for their academic performance and who may be more willing to provide assistance in achieving their educational goals" (Beasley, 2020, p. 8). Current scholarship on Black student experiences explores the relationship between Black student success and their psychological, social, and cultural experiences (Beasley, 2020, p. 2). Viewing the Black student experience at PWIs as an intersectional triad of psychological, social, and cultural experiences is critical in understanding how Black students navigate their respective spaces (Beasley, 2020). Among some of the challenges mentioned by participants were: lack of financial resources and insufficient mental health support. Reba spoke on both of those issues:

> We have some of the highest amount of people who get first year scholarships and the lowest retention rate out of any demographic on campus. So, it's like you're getting all these students in saying we want Black kids, and then you take the money away, or you don't give them proper mental health resources. Or you make them rely on debt until it cripples them. So, I think it's fun and beautiful when you can afford it. And I think it's really sad and effed up based on the type of country that we live in.

Chris also talked about financial hardships. Like Reba, Chris mentioned the limited terms on which many Black students receive scholarship and financial aid. Chris's reflections also highlighted the struggles of Black students to afford basic necessities when their scholarships are taken away:

> But {state funded-scholarship} has a certain limit on how long you can use it. So, this year was rough for me over the summer and over winter break as well, just gearing up for both semesters as far as trying to find funding. Trying to find out really like, how am I going to make it through these last couple of courses and just how am I going to pay for them? I'm also balancing life, balancing things you want to do, but things you also need to do, like groceries. A lot of people come to college to get away from their home, so they probably go somewhere that isn't 30 minutes up the road or 15 minutes up the road or just a school in their hometown. So, when you're on your own like that, yes, you have your parents support, but you can definitely run into troubles when it comes to finances.

Reba talked about the layered challenges of not having enough financial support along with not having proper resources to maintain their mental health:

> And that is an emotional and mental battle. To be able to lack and dealing with anxiety and depression and food insecurity and money insecurity and still make it to graduation, that's a huge deal. And we don't talk about that enough. You know, the fact that that should not be an exceptional thing. It shouldn't, but it is because we're starving. We're starving for friends and family. We're starving for finances. We're starving for mental health assistance.

Major mentioned several of the elements around lack of institutional support that were shared by Reba and Chris, but he also shared a recent example of what he felt was an insufficient response to a racist incident that happened in his residence hall. In his reflections, Major indicated many ways in which Black students are suffering and not being properly supported:

> Students are suffering, they are suffering in silence. They're afraid to speak. And I know because I was that. I was suffering in silence, afraid to really speak. I just want to start with two examples right away. This month being Black History Month, I'm a residential advisor, and I wrote on my whiteboard right outside my room, Happy Black History Month. And we have a Black History Month figure of the day. So, it was MLK. So, I wrote his name right under the message. And I come back to my room and it is scratched through, not fully erased. Just scratched through multiple times to where you can't even see what the word said. And I see streaks of fingerprints of the marker on the wall. So, someone intentionally came, erased the message, and left their fingerprints on the wall. It's sick. And the fact that I am a residential advisor, so the person who is supposed to be supervising and overseeing the floor is experiencing this. I can only imagine what other Black students are experiencing. And it took a lot out of me. It actually threw me back because I felt safe in this building for a while. But then I had to realize people still think the same way even though we go to this liberal arts school. I also wanted to bring up that many Black students this year have their financial aids dropped drastically. Mine was dropped by $8,000 less than a month before we had to pay it. And that resulted in more loans. So, the accumulation of more debt with no extra assistance from the university, and that is not uncommon. I talked to a good

> chunk of Black students and we all had our financial aids dropped. And then I talked to some students who were not of color and they're like, no, my financial aid is still the same. And so, I'm praying that it was just we're looking at certain demographics to take it away, but not necessarily race. But I can't say that in good faith. And that's sad. It is sad because colleges should be assisting students and making them understand that they have a support system and help to accomplish what they need to accomplish. I think the biggest thing is that they're suffering in silence because things like this are happening. But that fear of retaliation is something real. That fear of if I say something, I'm not going to get the degree that I'm supposed to. Or if I'm in an RA and speak out against the way that housing does something, I may get fired.

Many of the challenges the participants' described were a testament to their respective institutions' failure to properly support Black students. These institutional inequities are consistent with literature about the lack of support for Black students at PWIs (Patton, 2015). Most of the participants described financial challenges, and all participants mentioned a lack of mental health support specifically for Black students.

Interest convergence. BlackCrit is a derivative of Critical race theory, and thus, elements of Critical race theory emerged in this study. Interest convergence emerged as a key theme as participants shared their experiences. Bell (1980) argued that dismantling of racial barriers were not a result of the morality or altruism of White people, but rather, the converging interests of White and racially minoritized people. The participants in this study spoke about their experiences with feeling like they were being exploited, taken advantage, or deceived for the benefit of their institutions. Reba expressed:

> But I also think that for white kids, college is extended high school, and for Black kids, college is the start of your life. And it's really hard to imagine now that I'm 22, like one of my freshmen, having to make the type of decisions that I had to make when I first came to college. So young, so naive, so trusting. These schools tell you we'll give you these scholarships, we have these resources for you, and they don't tell you how quickly those resources run dry or how expendable you are after they get the percentage when you come as a freshman for diversity.

While Reba spoke about Black students being recruited for the sake of fulfilling diversity quotas, Chris spoke about his experiences with being tokenized as a Black student leader. He shared his frustrations with being expected to be a perfect example of a Black student at all times:

> We're expected to be the representation a lot of times, but also be like the flawless representation. We're expected to be the representation in situations where we're not looking to be the representation. And then when we are expected to be the representation, it's expected that nothing is going to go wrong at all.

Alexander also shared stories being used as an “example”. He referenced his institution’s tendency to use Black student’s stories of overcoming to make the institution look good. He also talked about not :

> I know that schools love to put forward their straight A students that come from the hoods and stuff like that. However, I feel that they are basically fetishizing that dream or taking advantage of that dream to show their support for people in these lower income areas. How can we create more welcoming and supportive environments for Black students? Stop making it so obvious that it is an anomaly for you to ask that question. By

> making it so very clear that the only reason you have me speaking at this big event is so that I can give my broke boy from hood city story.

Hannah and Alexander had similar experiences with tokenism. Hannah also described experiences in which she was asked to speak on behalf of Black students for special events or being asked to be a part of what felt like superficial collaborations:

> Sometimes it really does give me the tokenism that white people want me to be a part of. Really the way that people come up to me too during Black History Month and are like, hey, so do you want to collab on this? It's like, well, where was this energy not in February? So, I don't know. Another thing too is just like sometimes when people who are higher up at my institution, like staff and faculty, when they talk to me, specifically the deans, and they would like me to do something for the school. I don't know, a lot of the times it just feels like they want me to do it because I'm Black and not because I actually have any sort of knowledge of the situation.

The participants in this study passionately conveyed their frustrations with their institutions' exploitation of Black students. As they reflected on many of the opportunities presented to them, they shared how those opportunities were really connected to advancing the image or interests of the institution, and not the advancement of Black students. The participants problematized being "put on display" to make their schools look good, when actually they were failing to support Black students. *Interest convergence* was a fitting title for this theme, as it demonstrates the ways in which PWIs advance their own agendas behind the facade of helping Black students.

Limited Representation & Mentorship Opportunities. Mentorship is a valuable method of helping Black students as PWIs navigate social and academic contexts (Booker & Brevard, 2017). The participants all mentioned the value and importance of seeing people who looked like them be successful in their matriculation through the collegiate environment. Participants spoke about the importance of seeing themselves represented not only in the student body, but also in the faculty and staff on campus. Some of the most meaningful relationships described by the participants were with faculty, staff, and other Black students. There was a clear desire for more opportunities for exposure to other Black people navigating academia. Reba spoke about her desire for more Black student groups as well as her desire for mentorship by Black alumni:

> We need more of everything. We need more YGBs. There should be a YGB on every single PWI because it changes so much. It's amazing. And we need to give incentives for Black alum to come back and visit the school. Because a lot of Black graduates be traumatized and out of here, and I get it. I understand it. But someone also needs to know that they existed on this campus and that what they're up against isn't new and what things did you do to make it through. We be needing mentors, you know? You need someone to care about you and guide you and be there for you and look you in the eyes. So Black alum and staff, we need them to start coming back.

Similarly, Marie emphasized the need for more mentorship from Black alumni:

> Because a lot of them are like doctors, lawyers, working at Fortune 500 type companies and stuff like that. So, making sure that we're bridging the connection between the now and the past, because they've already been here and done that. And by having those mentors and people to look up to, we can have that hope, healing, and liberation because we see that they did it.

Like Reba and Marie, Faith discussed the importance of mentorship opportunities. While Reba and Marie focused on Black alumni, Faith talked about the need for more professors of color:

> Definitely having professors in all disciplines that resemble the makeup of the students that they're teaching is very vital. Mentorship is important too. So, having those connections for students of color, especially since a lot of us tend to be first gen, definitely having that for students.

Reba, Faith and Marie all talked about having guidance and wisdom from Black people who had already navigated the undergraduate experience. For Hannah, the most important aspect of representation was within the current student body. Hannah talked about the importance of seeing other Black students succeed on campus:

> I think for me, part of what it was, was seeing Black people succeeding on this campus. And so, I do think that that is important is just having people who are Black around. I guess because I know that especially for me, one of the big reasons why I wanted to be working in the position that I work that you know about on this campus is because I really wanted to show other people of color on this campus that they could succeed too. And that we were here and that we were present.

Chris conveyed thoughts that were similar to Hannah's in regard to seeing other Black students as examples on campus. He emphasized the importance of Black students seeing Black students in leadership positions:

> So, representation is a big piece. They need to see students that look like them. They need to see students succeeding that look like them. They need to see Black student leaders.

> That positive reinforcement is what really helps push people and push that hope into people.

Marcus shared thoughts that synthesized the other perspectives. He spoke about the lack of representation within both the student body and university administration. He provided perspective on his personal challenges with not feeling represented on campus:

> Yeah, one, we always say increase diversity within the undergraduate body. But I also think that it takes addressing certain lack of representation within administration. I think there's going to be some issues that's going to arise that's inevitable, some challenges that you're going to face. But then I think there's some things that only occur because there's a lack of representation at the tables when it comes to creating these policies and different legislations that are needed to build a framework of an institution. There are just certain things, and not seeing a representation of yourself when you walk around. You don't see your friends unless you intentionally make arrangements to see each other. When you transition from class, you're only seeing white people. I'm not too big of a fan. I love inclusivity, but I also would like to see more of people that look like me in different spaces.

While Reba, Faith, Hannah, Marcus and Chris talked about the lack of representation and mentorship opportunities, Major highlighted a positive experience in which he was able to find rapport and support from a Black staff member on campus:

> My advisor, he's Alpha Phi Alpha. He's one of the professional staff, and he's the adviser for three of the different organizations that I'm in. And he's the one who's always going to keep it real with you, lets you know where you messed up, and lets you know how to

> progress and be better. But he's also going to be there to support you. And so, I think the only issue that I have is that all the names that I named are Black, because that's where my primary support comes from.

Suavé also expressed a desire to see more Black faculty and staff, and he spoke on how having Black faculty and staff positively impacts campus climate. He believes that Black faculty and staff play an important role in creating welcoming environments for Black students:

> Hire more Black people. People that aren't of color always want to try and imitate things that people of color do to make people of color comfortable. Hire Black people, that's it. If you want to increase diversity, you want to bring more Black people into your university. You want to make them feel welcome and comfortable, have somebody that looks like them that can relate to them, that they might feel more comfortable. That's how you facilitate comfort.

The *Limited Representation & Mentorship Opportunities* theme highlighted the participants' longing for more connections with other Black people on campus. Whether through relationships with other students, or faculty and staff, being able to learn from other Black people was a commodity. The participants recounted moments in which their experiences as Black students at a PWI were enriched by the knowledge and support imparted by other people on campus who shared their racial identity. It has been documented that access to Black faculty as mentors can improve challenges with social adjustment and navigating racialized experiences; however, there are disproportionate ratios of Black faculty to Black students (Krupnick, 2018). Literature supports the need for more Black faculty to share in the work of supporting Black students in PWI spaces (Griffin, 2015).

Black Liberatory Fantasy Themes

Community. Black students at PWIs tend to find a sense of safety in being in spaces with other Black people, where they are able to be unapologetically Black and freely in community with one another (Ohito & Brown, 2021). The participants in this study spoke about the ways in which being amongst other Black people on campus, whether faculty/staff or students, enriched their lives. BlackCrit acknowledges "the place of Black liberatory fantasy in the collective Black struggle" (Dumas & Ross, 2016, p. 431). In our conversations, the participants reflected on how being in community helped them endure their struggles. They shared the things they learned from their community members as well as the ways in which community members uplifted them. Chris described his experiences connecting with other Black students on campus by stating: I

> was just meeting a lot of people who were teaching me things. Teaching me things that were really helping me professionally, helping me just mentally navigate through college because, I mean, it's a big shift. And also, even just meeting them on just a fun level that has nothing to do with business. So those connections are something early on that I built, and they really helped guide me through the rest of my college journey. I feel like there's a lot of things I would have missed out on, a lot of places mentally I am now. A lot of things I've accomplished that I wouldn't have done without some of the people I've met, not even to begin a list. But, yeah, that's definitely been my biggest source of support, just meeting those other people in my community and really like using each other to uplift each other and help each other excel. That's awesome. A big thing about my experience has been how the Black community here is so tiny and we rely so much on each other because we're at a PWI.

Major's community consisted of students, as well as Black faculty and staff. He considered one of the Black staff members on campus as an especially important part of his community: One of my direct supervisors, for my residential advisor role. She's been more than an advisor and a supervisor. She's been a big sister. She checks in. She gets to know me, can read me like a book. Cares about my family and the things that are important to me. Goes

> above and beyond to come and support me at different events that I have. And just knowing that you are not alone as a student, but you have your friends in that administration who are looking out for you, who are caring for you.

Jay described the Black community collectively as her biggest source of support: Source of

> support? Honestly, it's not small, but it's kind of small, but the Black community here. Everybody supports everybody. We know we can support each other. Nobody else on this campus supports us. We support each other. So, I'd say the Black community.

Marcus depicted his idea of community through a photo of an event that was hosted by his fraternity. The event brought the Black community together in a safe, supportive space:

> So, we had various singers and everything. It was a beautiful day. And I also thought that was a form of healing because it's called Soul Café. Being that we were able to be in one space together. We had poetry, people speaking about their experiences through spoken word. People singing about their trauma and just acknowledging being Black in America, owning their identity. And now that I'm reflecting, that was a big space for healing. Liberation in that space, we felt free there to be. Free of the expression, to let everything be heard. We felt like we were heard.

While some of the participants talked about the Black community collectively, Faith talked about a small group of intentional relationships that she has. She described her community as her group of close friends:

> I'd say my group of girls. Yeah, we're all women of color. We're all pursuing STEM related fields. If not STEM related fields, then we all have very big and ambitious goals that we're striving for daily. And despite our paths, we can all just come together and just like chill, kick back, talk life. And just those restorative moments where we let our guards down and have some wine or have some food and just go out to eat, those have been very vital in my development here. Just moving back to freshman year, there was a point where I think all throughout freshman year I wanted to transfer. I was like this is not it. I could not find a community, but I had three girls. We're all STEM, but my girl group has grown since then. But freshman year it was these three girls and these three girls, they've been my friend since freshman year. But we've always checked in. We've always just had talks and just let it all out. And that's been very helpful. And just reminded me that I do belong here, just like they belong here. And we all are going to make it, and it's going to be challenging, but we got it.

For Reba, other members of Black Greek organizations were among the most important members of their community. Throughout the interview, Reba alluded to the connections and meaningful relationships they had with other Black Greeks. Reba expounded on their experiences with Greek students and staff on campus:

> And there were just a bunch of freshmen and sophomore girls who saw my letters and was like we will follow you off a bridge. We trust you, you're a Black leader, we look up to you. And it just fueled me so much. So not only did I get

> community from other Black Greeks and Greek life, but it also afforded me the opportunity to be who women always were for me to other young students. So definitely my org, ride or die I will say. And almost every Black administrator on my campus is a part of a Black Greek organization, and most of them pledged in the south. So, they're amazing, like amazing. And they really take a special interest in who you are as a person. They try to help you brainstorm programming that you and your counsel care about. They really see us for who we are as human beings. They advocate for us, they fight for us, and it's really hard to do that here. I could say without a shadow of a doubt, if something really happened to us, I believe that they would risk their jobs to make sure we were okay. I love them. I love them. I really do.

Conversations with the participants revealed the joys of Black students being in community with one another. When asked the people that make up their support systems, the participants overwhelmingly spoke about other Black students and university staff whom they deemed a part of their communities. Their communities were a place, although not always physical, where they felt safe from the perils of their Anti-Black collegiate environments.

Cultural Pride. All participants shared that they were proud to be Black, with most of the participants in the study being emphatically proud of their Blackness. The participants were asked the question "What does it mean to you to be Black?", and most participants beamed with pride as they shared admirable attributes of Blackness. Their expressions of cultural pride align with BlackCrit's notions regarding the rejection of majoritarian narratives and the devaluation of Black lives (Dumas & Ross, 2016) Research shows that Black people with healthy racial identities demonstrate pride in their heritage and reject White Supremacy (French, et al., 2020).

The participants spoke proudly about the contributions of Black people to society, the ability of Black people to overcome obstacles, and the overall intelligence of Black people. Reba shared:

> To me, being black means that I hold the universe inside me. Like I don't think there's anything that has touched this world that wasn't because of a Black person, even if it was a black person inspiring someone else to do something. I feel like Black people have done it all. We made it all. Every time I look at a tree or a building, I can feel my ancestral connection to everything. And I also think that being Black means that I am held to the expectation of a job I never asked for. I'm held to the expectation of being exceptional all of the time. I'm held to an expectation of being presentable all of the time, professional all of the time. Worrying about my danger with the expectation that no one else will, you know? And that is definitely hard, but I love it. There's nothing in this world like a Black person smiling. Like our art, our history, our joy, our jokes, our music. We can't help but to burst through the seams with the amount of the universe that we keep inside of us. I love it.

While Reba spoke about the intelligence of Black people, Faith spoke about the resilience of Black people:

> The first word that comes to mind is to be resilient. I touched upon this, I was writing a personal statement or something, and it had mentioned why it wanted me to speak about why I thought I came from an underrepresented group or something like that, something along those lines. That was the prompt. And it just made me think about all of what we as Black people go through. Like all of the oppressive structures that we have to constantly live through. All of the hateful speech that we always have to endure. Everything that is just bad that we endure, we still persevere, and we still come up on top regardless of it all. And just knowing that in every facet of life, just seeing Black people just continue to

> flourish the way that we do, it's just some sort of innate resiliency that we all have. And that's what it means to be Black for me is to have an innate resiliency to just succeed. And we just do it with grace too. We just do it. It's so dope.

Alexander's sentiments were similar to Faith's. He spoke proudly about Black people's ability to overcome obstacles:

> And then honestly, I think just to be Black is to just have this sense of pride. To know that no matter what, no matter how limited the education about myself is, no matter how the news is trying to flip stories and use this picture to represent that, then no matter how many microaggressions and macro aggressions, I know I can overcome anything because that is our nature to naturally overcome stuff. And while it's not fair that we always have to be the ones climbing a mountain, I have no doubt that I would find myself at the top of it.

Marcus described the beauty and originality of Blackness:

> What does it mean to me to be Black? I know to me I define Black as it's beautiful. I think it's being a part of a culture and a group of people that are like the originators. I think a lot of people try to duplicate or try to emulate what it is that we do as black people, but we don't necessarily get the credit. So, I'm taking African American studies for African politics in Africa. The one thing that we're taught is that everything originated from Africa. There are different books out here that you can read from, like Stolen Legacy, that speaks upon Europeans and German people being credited for what they discovered in Africa, but never was necessary contributed to us. So, I think that being Black is a part of being the originator. It is beautiful. It comes with power. Those are the three words I use for what it means for me to be Black.

Jay's expressions were similar to Marcus's, as she talked about the originality of Black people. She used the same verbiage as Marcus to describe Black people:

> Being Black, it's honestly a blessing. We're kind of the blueprint of everything. Like when people do stuff, it's like, oh well, we did this first. A lot of stuff that we have now is because of us and our ideas. I don't know, we're the blueprint, and I just love that I'm a part of the Black community.

For Major, Blackness is one of the most salient aspect of his identity. He talked about how Blackness is intertwined into all aspects of his life and his identity. Major used poetic language to describe Blackness:

> Everything. I think it literally encompasses everything and every moment of my life. I think to be Black is both beautiful and scary. It is a culture that I would not change for the world. It is accepting, it is loving. It is incredible. It's like a superpower almost. And so being Black is like an encompassing of all that intelligence, all that grace, all of the different takes within the culture. The food, the music, even the way we dress, and we talk. Because when I think about being Black, I think about not just my own experience, but those who came before us and seeing how they congregated with each other and supported each other. Since the beginning of times, it's always been about supporting each other and growing and continuing to grow. And so, I first want to say being Black is like my strength.
>
> It's like a hidden talent. Not everybody can do it. But I also think it's a Kryptonite. And it's not a Kryptonite from the perspective of a Black person, if that makes sense. The Kryptonite comes because it's powerful and people are afraid to

> educate. People are afraid to give opportunities. When we look at it, they took slaves from Africa speaking different languages, tied them to chains, and put them in rooms where 100 plus slaves were all just chained together. They brought them to this new world, separated them, dehumanized, and uneducated them. And yet the sheer determination of Black people to go get educated on how to read, to understand a new language, and then to advocate for themselves and why what is occurring is wrong. That is sheer power and determination. It's literally unheard of outside of that. I guess being black is everything that I could imagine.

The *Cultural pride* theme highlights the participants' reflection on their Blackness and what it means to be Black. Throughout the study, the participants acknowledged the challenges that come with being a Black student at a PWI, and being Black in general. Our conversations about cultural pride were an opportunity for the participants to revel in the joys of being Black. Most participants in this study demonstrated immense pride in being Black, and seemed energized by the opportunity to share what they love about being a part of Black culture.

Hope as a constant. Ginwright (2011) describes hope as an essential prerequisite for social change. Each participant in the current study conveyed a sense of hope. Hope emerged as a key persistence factor not only in the context of higher education, but in life in general. The participants in this study believed in the power of hope. While their inspiration of hope came from different sources (i.e., faith, belief in self, familial motivation), all participants demonstrated a hopeful posture regarding the future. Their expressions of hope aligned with the liberatory design of BlackCrit, as they were able to envision their own realities (Dumas & Ross, 2016).

Major shared the influence of hope on his persistence:

> Hope, I'm hopeful every day. I don't think there's anything that's ever been able to take away my hope, because I believe that hope is one of few things in life that no one can take away from you. Hope is an individual thing. You will either decide to be hopeful or you won't, depending on the circumstances that you're in. And for me, I always know that even at my worst, if I'm positive, I at least got something to hold on to. That one thing to look forward to in the day. The one thing that says, just keep pushing. For me right now that's these 85 days, I'm hopeful about graduation, hopeful about leaving. But also hopeful about the connections that I will make with future students through the alumni channel that I will be in.

Spirituality and faith were key values for Faith, and they guided her approach to life. She talked about the influence of her faith on hope:

> I feel like for me, hope and faith I use them interchangeably. And I don't think I would have said this any point earlier. Well, because I started reading my Bible kind of religiously every day since the beginning of this year. And just growing my relationship with God and really tapping into his word and tapping into what I think his promise his or his purpose is for me, I guess hope is just like a comfort. I would define hope and faith as a comfort in knowing that things are going to work out. And there is a future, there is a destination that is already set for me.

Marcus also talked about the connections between faith and hope:

> Yeah, I would say that being a part of certain classes or certain spaces where I don't feel largely represented is a certain challenge that's mentally or physically. The hope and faith in God, I know that he wouldn't put me in no situation, that wouldn’t actually equip me

> with tools that's needed. I do have the hope that I will become what I am destined to become. I think it's important because not a lot of students will have a lot of hope unless they start to see something that's affirming that or giving them that positive affirmation that it is possible. My hope is pulled from my faith in God.

For Chris, hope was inspired by seeing other Black men in leadership roles on campus. He shared a photo that depicted the role that hope has played in his experience as a Black student at a PWI.

> It's representative of hope because it's a group of men, Black leaders, all who've came through like Kennesaw State's campus and were able to find a way to elevate themselves while also looking back and reaching back to us, the younger brothers and still helping us develop and grow as men and grow as leaders. It's like an example of Black leaders feeding off of leaders before them.

While other participants talked about people or things that inspired their hope, Reba described an innate sense of hope that lies within. She shared how hope pulled her out of a dark place:

> I think hope is the light that you find inside when there's no other light inside. Hope, sometimes I see it as a desperate thing. I'm going under, I'm grasping at straws. The only thing, the only thing I have is what's inside me. And I think that's what hope is to me. Hope has helped me because if I didn't see myself in my cap and gown, I would not have made it. There were certain times where I just wanted. Okay, fun fact. I spent a semester not going to a single class in the entire semester. And I was just like, I'm through. I'm not doing this anymore. It's over. It's done. So much had happened that year, I was just through, and I was used to being the super kid all my life. So, I was tired, and I didn't realize that I was tired. I was like why do I randomly not want to get out of bed at all?

> Why do I randomly not want to do anything motivated at all? You know what I mean? I was like because I'm done. And the night before finals week started, the version of myself that was in my graduation cap and gown, picked up the version of me from kindergarten and was walking into sunset where I was like, shit, okay. So, I emailed all my professors like give me a chance. Give me one more chance. Just give me a D, girl. So, I definitely the hope of my parents knowing that this is the dream that they had when we were living in cars. This is the dream that they had when we were hopping from house to house. This is the dream that they had when we couldn't afford to keep the lights on.

Hope presented itself as an unwavering aspect of the participants' lives. As they pushed through their tribulations, they found motivation in what was on the horizon for them in the future. The participants spoke about what inspired their hope. For some it was the promise of their impending graduation. For others, it was seeing other Black students succeed. Some mentioned their faith. Hope is what drove the participants to move forward in their journeys.

Future generations. All participants in the study conveyed an interest in investing in future generations of Black students. They believed that it was important for them to persevere and continue the fight for equity for the sake of future Black college students at PWIs. As research on healing in communities of color posits, Black students at PWIs believe that their struggles are not in vain (Ginwright, 2016; French et. al, 2020). The participants shared experiences in which they pushed themselves to persist through their challenges to inspire future generations. Faith shared a photo of an experience at a research conference:

> And while it was a little scary, like presenting my research for the first time, I felt comfortable, and I felt confident in knowing that this is going to go a long way.

> This is going to help me in the long term. And this is giving hope to other students of color seeing me here, just seeing my presence here, and seeing me do the work and navigate this field. Just giving them that same encouragement that they can do
>
> it too.

Like Faith, Alexander expressed sentiments about the importance of pushing through individual discomfort for the betterment of future generations:

> Then I look at the children, I think, even more into hope and healing because Black children are amongst the most neglected when it comes to healing and trauma and stuff like that. But then I go back to my hope and I'm like, this is our future. These are people we need to take care of first and foremost, because the youth are quite literally the people who decide things next. I'm very anticipatory of what's next, but it's a good anticipation because I have so much faith in the Black kids around me and around this world.

As previously conveyed by Chris, mentorship is a strong value of his. In our conversation, he reflected on the moment he realized how important it was to mentor younger Black students:

> My first position on campus was becoming a mentor. And when I was mentoring, I just kept ending up with Black students. And I think being in that role where I'm like, okay, they're looking at me for guidance. It helped shift my thinking into, wow, the things I do really do impact people, and it shapes how their future unfolds for them. So, it really shifted my framework to be more intentional and more impactful. And that's kind of the stuff I live by today in my senior year.

Marcus also alluded to the importance of making things better for rising Black college students. He shared his thoughts on preparing for future generations:

> So, I think the hope and the better future also comes at the expense of those that are in the current situations to build something for those that are coming after us to have the hope of a better future. Because any work that we have left undone will be tasks that they are left with. So, I think that's the most important part of it.

The *future generations* theme was indicative of the participants' collectivist, community-oriented socialization. The struggles and sacrifices they endured were for the benefit of others. They saw supporting and uplifting younger Black students and prospective students as an investment in the future. Throughout the study, many participants acknowledged the hardships their ancestors endured in fighting for more equitable experiences for Black people in higher education. Similarly, supporting future generations was their way to contribute to the advancement of future Black students at PWIs.

Additional Findings

***Healing and liberation defined: a*spirational processes.** The purpose of this study was to explore hope, healing, and liberation narratives among Black undergraduate students at PWIs. From the analysis of the data, *Hope as a constant* emerged as a common theme amongst participants. Healing and liberation however, were more individualized concepts. In each semi-structured interview, participants were asked what healing and liberation meant to them. They each provided different answers, and shared the ways in which healing and liberation have been a part of their journeys at Black students at a PWI. All 10 participants were in agreement that while

hope remains a constant, healing and liberational are aspirational, as they experience moments of healing and liberation, but they are not indefinite. Healing and liberation are goals for which they must continuously strive. Healing and liberation begin with hope. These findings are supported by literature on healing and liberation (Ginwright, 2011; French et al., 2020).

Hannah provided insight about her healing journey by stating:

> I definitely think that healing has played a role in a lot of my life. But since coming here, yeah, I think that I'll do a lot more healing in the future, to be completely honest with you. It's sort of hard to heal when it feels like I'm still sort of in the thick of it. But I think there are definitely things that happen that do make me feel better about the experiences that I've had. And being able to see that I'm not alone in the experiences that I've had definitely has helped. Having friends who are there, like I said, who know what I'm going through is really important to me. But yes, I think that definitely more healing will be done once I'm gone from here.

While healing for Hannah involved others, Marcus had a slightly different philosophy on healing:

> Yeah, so for me, healing is both internal and external. Internal goes to accepting who we are, finding that beauty in being Black. That's a big part of healing. Because there's certain things from the household, to even outside the household, that made us feel that being Black was a burden. But as you stated, it's not the color. It's actually the oppression and the subjugation that comes and being attached to being Black in America and being part of institutions that try to degrade you into something of like property. So, I think healing first comes at the

> acceptance of who we are, but then healing also comes from those that's outside of who we are to acknowledge what has been done and finding ways to not only include our voice, but also our presence at the table to build legislations and laws that will affect people that look like us.

Jay's reflections were similar to those of Hannah's, as she spoke about the healing that will come after graduation. Both Hannah and Jay indicated that graduating from college will be significant components of their healing processes. Jay reminisced on the healing that it took for her to make it to her senior year:

> I was hopeful when I was going into the nursing program, but now just a couple months away from graduating. So, I feel like that healing process, like okay, you've gone through that, but you're here and you're still here. You're still graduating. You're still going through one of the hardest programs as a Black student. So, I still feel like I'm going through it. But I can tell like, okay, this is good.

Alexander shared that healing has been a big part of his journey. He described healing as a perpetual process:

> Absolutely, unequivocally, for sure. Yeah, as a Black student at a PWI, healing is every day honestly. You're healing every day because you're dealing with more Black trauma and you look at the world around you. Black trauma is a big thing that is thrown into our faces a lot. Because for some reason, I feel like the world thinks we like to see ourselves being hurt as if we don't already know what's going on. So, we're continuously healing. We're perpetually healing from that. We're perpetually healing from people telling us we didn't belong here. We're

> healing from all of our different experiences in our homes and our families. We're perpetually trying to keep ourselves afloat like Black people do, you know?

Like Alexander, Reba described how trauma has shown up in their everyday life. They described their process of learning how to heal:

> Healing, oh wee, that motherfucker is something else. Healing was such an uphill battle for me because I don't like being vulnerable at all. When it comes to my poetry and my art and my essays and the work that I do on behalf of Black and brown kid, I'm okay with being vulnerable in those things because I've already accepted what made me who I am in those ways. And it's easy to be proud of that. But things I'm not proud of, and things that I didn't even realize were traumatic when I was younger. And then I would get in a relationship and someone would touch me in a certain way and I'll be like, oh God, we're still hung up on that. I think healing for me now is allowing those memories to come in and telling my younger self it's okay. And knowing that there's no destination. I used to dream of the time where I would get to the point when I would be like, you made it, that shit don't shake me no more. It's always going to shake me because of how bad it was. And you deserve to feel that, you know what I mean? You deserve to feel it. And robbing yourself of the experience of feeling it, robs you of any type of vulnerability and tenderness. You start to lie to yourself so much that your own feelings become inauthentic to you. So, healing has been for me just telling myself the truth. You're sad, you're not having a good day today. You don't feel like going somewhere today and we'll get them tomorrow. But we can't get them tomorrow if you're lying today.

Faith's perspective on healing did not focus on trauma, but on building confidence in her presence as a Black woman. During the presentation of her photos, Faith shared a picture depicting what she described as a liberatory moment that she would carry with her:

> Yeah, that one, I believe I tied to liberation. So, I was asked to be a co-mistress of ceremony for, they had a kickoff Black History Month event in 2019. So, it was February of 2019, and that was the end of it. And I guess leading up to it, I was a little anxious. I was like I don't know what this crowd is going to look like. I don't know how they're going to respond to my presence. But going through it, or actually, when I first started, when I first entered the stage, I felt the weight lifted off of me. I saw the crowd was mostly like Black people. They had just had food, soul food, on the sides. And it was just very much giving Black excellence. We support all Black people in this space. And I felt liberated in that moment. I felt like nobody could stop me. I felt like my presence was being acknowledged. My presence was being respected. And it made me feel like, yes, I'm at this PWI, but this same feeling I can take into the classrooms. I need to remember that I am meant to be here. So, remember this smile in this pretty red dress and just feeling good when going into classrooms.

Marie described her journey to liberation as a quest to becoming comfortable being her authentic self:

> Being unapologetically me in all spaces in which, honestly, I'm at this point where I feel more confident in what I say and how I say it. Because my friends used to point this out to me all the time, like, oh, Marie you have your white girl voice on. I don't try to cover anything up in a way where my voice sounds different. Like

> you hear me what I'm saying, and this is Marie. And I think just being confident has really helped me with doing all of that. And having that sense of liberation because it's like I know my ancestors didn't get that far just for me to stay stagnant.

Marcus described liberation as something he aspires to achieve:

> So, I would think liberation is today's having a control over the consequences that come behind your actions. Being in a position where you can feel free to speak and have your opinion heard. I think that's a form of liberation right now and just being able to exist. In my policy in Africa course, it's called ontology, the study of existence or just being. As Black people, we don't really have that ability to just be. It's always something that we got to think about, what it is that needs to be done. Walking into space if you know you Black, oh, man, okay, I know where this is going to go. I think it's something I'm aspiring to get to. I don't think I have the freedom of choice or that thought to just be.

Major shared a photo of his fraternity brothers and himself spending quality time:

> And I think in that same manner, it was also liberating. It is so liberating with them. I feel like we all just feel as if we can be our free selves around each other, which is a liberating experience. Not having to worry about other misconceptions or judgments. We just get to be us. And that is something that not everybody gets the luxury to do.

Jay shared that she believes liberation will come later in life:

> Liberation. I feel like liberation will come once I graduate honestly. Just, all right, I did this. It's like all the things that were against me, I just feel like it won't

> happen until I actually graduate. I feel like that's why, yeah. I'm an African American student at a PWI going through one of the most prestigious nursing programs, and I graduated. A lot of people cannot say that.

Reba described liberation as a process of dismantling oppressive systems rooted in Whiteness:

> And liberation, I don't think anything matters without liberation. I just don't think it matters. Sometimes I don't even engage in racial conversations anymore because I'm like we're in elementary schools getting locked up right now. Why do I care that this white person called me the n word? So many horribly traumatic things have happened in college to me and to the people that are around me, that that doesn't hurt me as much as the racist white guy being the congressman. Liberation to me is not about not making white people racist because they're not worth the amount of work that would make white people not racist. They're not. It would exhaust us, run us dry, and they still won't learn the lesson. It is about dismantling the systems that enslave us still. It's about making sure that those racist white people do not have the power to take futures from us and our kids. That's where liberation lies. Liberation doesn't lie in the mentality-chasing. Liberation lies in the political capital shifting

While the achievement of healing and liberation did not emerge as a common theme amongst all participants, the participants were unanimous in their belief that healing and liberation are achievable for them. The participants spoke about their individual journeys of healing and liberation, and expressed hope for continued healing and liberation in the future.

College prep programs. Historically, many school systems have failed to provide Black students with the proper tools for college readiness (Bryant, 2020). However, it is known that

college readiness programs are essential in helping students prepare for the academic rigor and social adjustment to college (Conley, 2010; Bryant, 2015). In discussing how Black students can be better supported in their adjustments to college, many of the participants shared their experiences in college readiness programs, and talked about the advantages they had over their peers who did not have access to similar programs. Reba shared her experience being taken out of her school system and being placed in a gifted program that was geared towards college readiness:

> At maybe eight or nine, people started really realizing, oh, this child is talented, this child is gifted. So, it's like I was one of the poor Black kids plucked out and put into private schools and all that type of thing. So, by the time I came up here, I was able to intellectually compete with the people who had always had those things.

Like Reba, Alexander was taken out of his public school system, and matriculated through a gifted academic secondary education program. He spoke about his experience in a program geared towards college readiness:

> I will say my college education, my college readiness education, I went to one of the, I think, they call them selective enrollment schools in Chicago. So, it was like I had to test into it. And it's a very competitive school with a decent mix of kids. It's not the best mix of kids, but it's okay, I guess. We oftentimes have to take that lowest common denominator. But I would say that my college preparedness was a little bit heightened because of that experience. Watching kids who knew what they wanted to do already, I kind of pushed myself to be like them, and was kind

> of trying to make sure I knew what it was, what opportunities I had around, and stuff like that. So, I will say that I did get that experience, yeah.

Marie matriculated through a mix of school types, but like Alexander, she ultimately landed in a private school that had special resources for college prep:

> So middle school was predominantly Black. High school, predominantly white, Catholic private school. And with that, I was able to have access to a college coach, which helped with the application process. And it's crazy because my middle school is like this Promise Neighborhood Scholarship Initiative. So, my cohort was the first. And with that, it helped provide the scholarship to attend the private schools. And then the college coach, I guess, came with that type of package to help us streamline into going into college. So, a lot of my peers that's a privilege in itself, getting a scholarship, being able to attend a private school, and then getting assistance with filling out the FAFSA, college applications, writing those personal statements. In addition to my participation in Neighborhood Prep and Med Step, which is like another state funded program for those who are interested in STEM in high school. So, I think those all of those outlets, all those support networks really help create the foundation to how I got to where I am now.

Marcus also attended a private school focused on college readiness. Additionally, he was a part of a state funded program that underrepresented college students could enter during their first year of college. He talked about the ways in which the program he was a part of prepared him for collegiate success:

> All right, so I actually am a higher education opportunity student, so I'm part of the Higher Education Opportunity Program, which is HEOP. And I would say that the administration and advisors did serve as they created a space that served as a safe space where we as Black students could remove the masks that we always have to wear as we navigate those white spaces, definitely in classrooms. So, having a certain conversation and dialogue. But I also will say that many of us go into these white institutions are like first generation students. So, to the extent in which we don't have formal guidance at home to educate us on how to navigate a collegiate space, because a lot of our parents, prior to us, never been a part of it. Of course, they can speak upon something, but they never experienced it to be able to pull from prior knowledge or pull from experience really. So, I think that HEOP in a way served as that, but also just being around other students that come from environments like myself.

The participants in the study who were a part of college readiness programs demonstrated clear advantages in the utility of those programs. Although they still experienced significant challenges as Black students in a PWI environment, they felt more prepared to navigate the collegiate landscape because of their exposure and preparation for college life.

Chapter Summary

This chapter explored the narratives of 10 Black undergraduate students at PWIs. This study was guided by two research questions. The first question was: How do Black students at Predominantly White Institutions define hope, healing, and liberation? The second question was:

How do Black students at PWIs describe their journeys of hope, healing, and liberation while navigating oppressive institutional climates? The data collection process consisted of semi-structured interviews, and photo-elicitation.

From the analysis of the data, 10 themes emerged. Each theme was categorized into one of the framing ideas of BlackCrit. Framing idea 1: *Endemicity of Anti-Blackness* (Themes: *Racially Traumatic Experiences, Isolation, Silenced Black Voices*) All participants shared accounts of racially traumatic experiences at their PWIs and throughout the course of their lives. They also spoke about feeling isolated and being silenced by their institutions. Framing idea 2: *Blackness exists in tension with neoliberal-multicultural imagination* (Themes: *Insufficient Institutional Support, Interest Convergence, Lack of Representation)* Participants shared accounts of their institutions' failure to support them, the ways which Black students were taken advantage of for the interests of their institutions, and the scarcity of Black representation. Finally, within Framing idea 3: *Creating Space for Black Liberatory Fantasy* (Themes: Community, Cultural Pride, Hope as a Constant, Future Generations), participants demonstrated the power of being in community with other Black people on campus, their pride in being Black, and their commitment to future generations of Black college students at PWIs.

The participants' detailed narratives provided insight regarding areas of opportunity for increasing support mechanisms for Black students navigating PWI environments. The next chapter will provide a summary of the findings from this chapter. Additionally, the final chapter will present implications for practice and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

In the previous chapter, I presented the findings from an analysis of the narratives of 10 Black undergraduate students enrolled at a PWI. The findings in this study provide insight regarding narratives of hope, healing, and liberation among the participants. To gather data, I engaged each participant in a one-hour semi-structured interview in which they answered questions pertaining to their Black identities and experiences at their respective PWIs. As a component of each interview, I employed a photo-elicitation process in which participants shared photographs that represented their journeys of hope, healing, and liberation as Black students at a PWI. Conceptualized through a BlackCrit theoretical framework, this study aimed to answer the following research questions:

Question 1: How do Black students at Predominantly White Institutions define hope, healing, and liberation?

Question 2: How do Black students at PWIs describe their journeys of hope, healing, and liberation while navigating oppressive institutional climates?

A narrative data analysis was conducted to make meaning of the data that was collected. Participants' stories were illuminated through direct quotes that highlighted their experiences. 10 themes emerged from the data collected. Each theme was categorized by one of the three framing ideas of BlackCrit: 1) *Endemicity of Anti-Blackness,* 2) *Tension with neoliberal-multicultural imagination,* or 3) *Liberatory fantasy*. In this chapter, the themes and additional findings are

discussed in the context of the research questions and literature on Black students' experiences at PWIs. Additionally, this chapter will offer practical takeaways in the form of implications and recommendations for future research.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this qualitative critical narrative study was to explore the experiences of Black undergraduate students and their narratives around hope, healing, and liberation as they navigate oppressive institutional climates at PWIs. This study served as an opportunity to elevate the voices of Black students and aimed to develop a greater understanding of how systems and institutions can better support them in their academic endeavors. Every Black student has a unique story. My goal in exploring the individual narratives of Black students at PWIs was to create an opportunity to hear their voices and learn from their experiences. This study presented a thematic analysis of the participants' individual narratives. Upon analysis, this study provided insight regarding the persistence of Black undergraduate students attending PWIs and their journeys of hope, healing, and liberation. BlackCrit was utilized as a framework through which to conceptualize this study. The participants' narratives supported what literature reveals about Black students at PWIs, and their navigation of oppressive institutional climates (Strayhorn, 2012; Patton, 2015).

Discussion of Research Findings

Conceptualizing the stories of the participants through the lens of BlackCrit allowed for a more in-depth exploration of their narratives. Participants shared meaningful insight regarding the unique ways in which they embody Blackness, and how hope, healing, and liberation have been a part of their collegiate experiences. For the purpose of the study, operational definitions of the terms hope, healing, and liberation were provided. However, I created space for participants

to articulate their own definitions of these terms. Collectively, participants spoke about having a foundation of hope, or belief that the future will be brighter than the past. However, they all spoke about fighting for moments of healing and liberation. The findings in this study aligned with the framing ideas of BlackCrit, and its assumptions about the ways in which Black people navigate spaces and places that are unequivocally Anti-Black. The following sections will provide summaries of the 10 themes that emerged from the analysis of the data.

Racially Traumatic Experiences

One commonality that participants in this study shared was a myriad of racialized experiences prior to and after coming to college. While each story was unique, all participants had endured racist experiences that will stay with them throughout the course of their lives. The *Racially Traumatic Experiences* section in the previous chapter illuminates the participants' stories about their encounters with racism, and how those encounters have impacted them. Participants shared stories ranging from childhood to adulthood in which they were subject to overt racism.

Black college students are almost certain to have experienced racism by the time they attend college, and will likely experience racism during their time in college (Hope, et al., 2022). Studies indicate that 88-90% of Black adolescents report having experienced racism, and 80% of Black young adults report having experienced racism within the past year (Anderson & Stevenson, 2019; Hope, et al., 2022). While it is known that Black students experience racism, there is a paucity in research on the negative impact of racism on the development and wellbeing of Black students at PWIs. Research also fails to address the ways in which institutions prepare and implement mechanisms of support specifically for Black students navigating the endemicity of Anti-Blackness (Patton, 2015). Participants spoke to the challenges associated with matriculating through the collegiate environment with the additional layers of marginalization

and oppression based on their Blackness. From being called racial slurs, witnessing criminal injustice, having their spaces invaded, and being othered in academic and social spaces on campus, the participants in this study demonstrated that Black students do not have the privilege of bracketing their racial identities or racial dynamics on their respective campuses. Race and racism show up in every aspect of Black students' collegiate experiences. The experiences of the participants align with the assertions of BlackCrit regarding the presence of Anti-Blackness in all social and cultural dimensions of life (Ross, 2019).

Isolation

As the participants shared their stories of racism and marginalization, they talked about feelings of isolation as they navigated cold campus climates. They described isolating experiences as Black students at a PWI using words such as lonely, frustrating, sad, and uncomfortable. These students' experiences are consistent with literature regarding isolation and cultural dissonance among Black students in PWI environments (Harper, 2009; Patterson, 2018). The participants talked about struggling for visibility as they often felt overshadowed, being one of relatively few Black people on campus. Many of them described moments in which they looked around and felt like they were alone. The participants were keenly aware of the numbers of Black students in all spaces other than their social groups. For example, several of them talked about having few to no other Black students in their classrooms or other curricular settings. Two participants shared feelings of isolation even within the Black community on campus, as they struggled with feeling like they did not even belong in any of the Black subgroups on campus. Another participant described the ways in which she believed some Black students perpetuated Whiteness. She described them as unable to embrace their Blackness because of their indoctrination and love for Whiteness.

BlackCrit literature details the ways in which Black people are in a constant battle of social suffering and resistance in the spaces they are in (Ross, 2019). PWI environments are an atmosphere for social suffering and resistance for Black students because of the inherent attacks on Black students' sense of belonging (Mills, 2021). The participants in this study provided insight regarding the struggles that exist as Black students face isolation, and the different ways in which Black students navigate isolation.

Silenced Black Voices

The silencing of Black voices was another recurring theme that emerged from the data. In addition to feeling isolated on campus, participants described scenarios in which their voices were not heard or acknowledged. When asked about their motivations behind participating in the study, many participants shared that they wanted to participate because they do not often get the opportunity to have their voices heard as Black students at a PWI. One participant shared that he felt compelled to participate because he believes that others try to tell Black narratives when we don't tell our own.

Black students on PWI campuses are often conflicted about vocalizing their experiences because they feel silenced if and when they try to leverage their voices (Logan, Lightfoot & Contreras, 2017). Some participants expressed skepticism about being vocal as a Black student because based on prior experiences, they believed they would be disappointed by the responses of administration and their White peers. Multiple participants shared examples of attempting to speak about their experiences and being ignored or disregarded. As we engaged in conversation about Black students' voices in higher education, one participant began to reflect on the ways in which she had silenced herself and internalized Whiteness throughout her academic career. This study was an opportunity for her to speak up and contribute her voice to the research on Black

students' experiences. Another participant described a fight with university administration to not only listen to Black voices, but fully acknowledge them and take action thereafter. He referenced a list of Black student demands from decades ago that had not been fully addressed by university administration.

As the participants shared their stories, we centered their expressions of voice. Although their voices are often unheard, the participants indicated that they believe their voices matter, and should be heard more. All participants expressed gratitude that I provided them a space for them to share their stories.

Insufficient Institutional Support

Participants unanimously agreed that their PWIs and PWIs in general lack adequate support for Black students. Feelings of inadequate support were tied to their institutions' failure to address critical needs of Black students. Among the opportunities for additional support mentioned by participants were: financial resources, more robust mental health resources, and better responses to racist incidents on campus. Need for additional financial resources, mental health support, and responses to racism are all among issues discussed in literature on Black students' experiences at PWIs (Strayhorn, 2012; Kane, 2019; Anderson, 2020)

Lack of financial support was a recurring issue that was mentioned by participants. Multiple participants talked about limits on scholarship and financial aid. They spoke about Black students being drawn to their institutions with compelling first-year scholarships or financial aid packages, and feeling lost after their first year when they began to receive less scholarship money or financial aid. While the participants appeared to represent a range of socioeconomic backgrounds, many of them talked about having emotional support from their guardians, but little or no financial support. A recent study disclosed that Black students are more likely than their peers to have an understanding of their parent's financial background and how it

impacts their financial aid, as well as the intricacies of financial aid in general and how it applies differently to each student (Tichavakunda, 2017). Participants in this study were consistent with the findings of the aforementioned study. One participant spoke about the specifics of his parents' salaries. Others spoke about what was feasible for their parents and what was not feasible as it relates to financial support. Almost all participants believed that their institutions lacked the appropriate level of financial support for Black students.

Lack of adequate resources related to mental health services was also mentioned by several participants. One participant described the mental and emotional battle that comes with being a Black college student at a PWI. Many others mentioned the absence of Black mental health providers at their respective institutions. Based on what was shared in the interviews, there is a clear gap in the mental health services needed among Black college students at PWIs and the services that are being provided to them.

A third deficiency in student support relates to institutions' responses to racist incidents on campus. Participants shared a number of scenarios in which racist incidents happened on campus, and there was either no institutional response or support offered to Black students. Considering the challenges that Black students navigate on a daily basis at PWIs, participants in this study revealed that there is a clear disconnect between the unique needs of Black students and the support that is being offered at their respective PWIs.

Interest Convergence

Interest convergence, a tenet of critical race theory, describes the principle that people of color will only secure racial equality when it aligns with the interests and needs of White people (Hodler & Maddox, 2021; Bell, 1980). In the context of the experiences of participants in this study, there is a strong application of both *interest convergence*, and BlackCrit's *tension with neoliberal-multiculturalism*, which critiques the complicitness of liberal and neoliberal diversity

and multiculturalism (Dumas & Ross, 2016). Participant's shared multiple experiences in which they felt that their equality was used as a bargaining tool for the interests of their respective institutions. Many also shared experiences in which their institutions' corrective actions against racism were merely performative.

One participant spoke about feeling like they were only recruited to their university to fulfill a diversity quota. They spoke about the abundance of resources that were presented to them during the recruitment process, but felt like they were expendable once they actually came to the university. Another participant talked about the extreme pressure that comes with being a Black student, and the university's expectations of them to be a "model Black student." Other participants shared experiences in which they were "put on display" by their universities as examples of Black students from low-income communities who were being supported by the university. Another student spoke about tokenism, and how university leadership constantly pressures her to be a speaker at certain events. This participant shared that she was even asked by a White administrator to record a video about how much the university does to support Black students.

Prior studies utilize the concept of interest convergence to explore the permanence and endemicity of racism at PWIs (Iverson, 2007, 2012; Harris, et al., 2015; Lewis & Shah, 2021). The participants' experiences align with the concept of interest convergence, as their equitable experiences are contingent on the advancement and maintenance of Whiteness. Additionally, the participants' experiences support BlackCrit's notions about tensions with neoliberal multiculturalism, as all participants problematized their respective institutions' subpar efforts in the realm of diversity and multiculturalism.

Limited Representation & Mentorship Opportunities

The *Limited Representation & Mentorship Opportunities* theme highlights the participants' inability to see themselves reflected in various aspects of social and academic life on campus. They spoke about the lack of Black faculty on campus, the lack of diversity within the student body, and the scarcity of mentorship opportunities from Black alumni. The percentages of Black students at the institutions represented in this study ranged from 3%-22%. Only 17% of the total full-time faculty in the U.S. are people of color, and only 6 % identify as Black (Karkouti, 2016; NCES, 2018). These percentages demonstrate clear disparities in the representation of Black students and faculty. All participants mentioned the need for more Black faculty and staff on their respective campuses. They each spoke about the importance of seeing themselves in the faculty, but felt like there were little opportunities to do so. Participants also mentioned the need for Black alumni to come back and mentor current Black students. One participant provided their inclinations about why Black alumni do not return to PWI campuses, stating that they believe Black alumni are traumatized from their experiences. However, this participant shared that seeing successful Black alumni would give them hope that they could also make it through the difficult journey of being Black on a PWI campus. One participant spoke about the opportunities he had to be mentored by Black staff members on campus, sharing that Black staff are his primary support. It was evident that the participants yearned for more opportunities to interact with not only more Black students, but also more Black faculty, staff, and alumni. Overall, participants indicated that seeing Black people in collegiate spaces serves as a motivating factor, and they believed that more representation is needed.

Community

Despite the challenges the participants faced, they found solace in the communities in which they are associated on campus. The *Community* theme emerged as participants shared expressions of joy as they thought about the people whom they consider a part of their support system as Black students at a PWI. People in their communities served as confidants, uplifters, advocates, and friends. Some of the participants mentioned particular peers, and some simply spoke about the Black community on campus at-large. One participant recalled a time during her freshman year when she felt so lonely and isolated that she considered leaving school and going back home. She then talked about how transformative her experience was when she found a group of three other girls, all women of color, who were also STEM majors. She credits her group of girls for her ability to persist through the hard times when she felt challenged, and didn't feel like she belonged. One participant spoke about the women in their sorority and other members of Black Greek organizations on campus, including university administrators, who advocated for them and took a special interest in their wellbeing. Marcus talked about an event that his fraternity hosted that allowed Black students on campus to come together and build community and freely express themselves through the arts. One notion that stood out about the participants' stories about building community was the urgency and necessity behind building their communities. As Black students on PWI campuses, it was essential that they found people who would support, uplift, and create spaces for them to exist authentically. Being in community was a reminder that they were not alone.

Cultural Pride

All participants expressed pride in being Black. When asked what being Black means to them, the participants proudly shared what they love about their Blackness. They talked about the pride they have in being a part of a community who has overcome so many obstacles. Faith and Alexander mentioned the resilience of Black people and our ability to navigate oppressive

structures. Marcus described Blackness as beautiful. Several participants associated Blackness with originality and ingenuity.

Although Black students at PWIs are continuously forced to navigate marginalization and inequitable processes and structures, they continue to find solace in being a part of the Black community. A recent study explored the concept of Black Joy at PWIs, revealing that the participants in the study "noted the beauty and magic of being with other Black people in a collective and celebrating each other's achievements" (Tichavakunda, 2021, p. 16). Similarly, in my conversations with participants, they spoke proudly and positively about the collective nature of the Black community on campus and beyond. The historical resilience, tenacity, and creativity of Black people were among the traits of which the participants were most proud. Major shared that he was once asked what race he would be if he could be any other race for a day. His response was that he would choose to stay Black. Like Major, the other participants conveyed that they were immensely proud to be Black despite the many challenges they have faced in their lives and as students at a PWI.

BlackCrit creates a pathway in the field of education for the creation of educational fugitive space for Black students through the social production of Black space (Ross, 2019). As the participants in this study reflected on their pride in being Black, they talked about the power of producing Black spaces where they could come together and simply be themselves. Being in spaces where they could proudly celebrate their Blackness were defining moments.

Hope as a Constant

This study was consistent with literature regarding hope in Black communities and the envisioning of a better future (French, et al., 2020; Ginwright, 2011). Participants expressed hope for progress in their own lives and for future generations in the fight for equitable experiences for Black people in America. In the context of the PWI environment, many participants shared that

hope is what helped them persist through the challenges they have encountered as Black students. Chris talked about seeing other Black student leaders on campus who were able to develop and grow despite their challenges, and how that made him hopeful for his own journey. Faith and Marcus discussed how hope intertwined with their faith, and how those elements factored into their belief that they would overcome any obstacles and reach the destinations that God destined them to reach. Major shared that he is hopeful every day, and hope is such an important part of his process because no one can take his hope away. Hope inspires him to keep pushing. Reba described hope as a light that allows her to envision her future self as a graduate; someone who overcame the challenges that were imposed on her as a Black student at a PWI. Reba's successful matriculation through college was not only a hope that she had for herself, it was a hope and dream of her family. Ginwright's study (2011) described the impact of healing and hope in inspiring Black youth to believe in new possibilities. The participants' responses to the question of hope were demonstrative of a strong belief in new possibilities as a result of their hope for the future, and their engagement in healing processes. These reflections were also parallel with BlackCrit, as the participants were able to engage in Black liberatory fantasy as they were able to see themselves beyond their oppressive educational environments (Ross, 2019).

Future Generations

In alignment with the collectivist, community-oriented philosophies demonstrated by the participants, many of the conversations around hope, healing, and liberation were focused on future generations. The *future generations* theme was a culminating theme of sorts, as participants channeled their grievances against their respective PWIs into hope that future generations of Black students would have better experiences. Beyond hope, participants indicated that they have dedicated themselves to actively investing in future generations.

Faith shared an experience in which she was one of the only Black students presenting at a major research STEM research conference. While she was nervous, she remained focused on being an example for other Black students and students of color who would be inspired by her presence. Alexander acknowledged the trauma and neglect of Black children, and emphasized the importance of taking care of Black youth. He then talked about his high level of faith in Black youth, and their ability to be the next generation of leaders. Chris talked about his focus on identifying mentorship opportunities. After realizing his high level of impact on other Black students, he committed himself to intentionally guiding other Black students as they determine their own paths. Marcus mentioned the sacrifices that Black students are making today for the hope of a better future. He shared that he realized any work that was undone would be left for future generations, so it was important for current students to continue building for the benefit of generations to come. BlackCrit creates a platform for Black liberatory futures and encourages social action (Busey & Dowie-Chin, 2021). As the participants in this study shared the ways in which they are investing in future generations of Black students, they engaged in futuring, which can be described as a process of engaging in creative activities to create a vision for the future (Cornish, 2005). The promise of what the future may hold for Black students at PWIs served as a persistence factor for the participants involved in the current study.

Implications for Practice

The implications for this study fall into one of two categories. One implication is for secondary public school systems, and it is a charge to *expand college preparatory programs in K-12 public schools*. The remainder of the implications from this research will apply to Predominantly White Institutions. Among implications for PWIs are: i*mproving mental health services and outreach, hiring more Black faculty and staff, providing assistance with scholarships and financial aid,* and finally, *Listening to the voices of Black students*.

Expand college preparatory programs in K-12 public schools

Several participants in the current study alluded to the importance of college preparatory programs. However, they shared that they were one of few of the Black peers within their communities that received those special opportunities. Robust college preparatory programs should be standard in all secondary public schools. Literature provides insight about the failure of public-school systems to prepare Black students in particular for college (Bryant, 2020). K-12 systems should be more intentional in developing college exposure programs, and increasing college access initiatives. Such programs are critical in preparing Black students for college (Bryant, 2015). College preparatory programs should not be reserved exclusively for gifted Black students. Black students of all socioeconomic statuses and of all levels of giftedness should have opportunities to learn about college pathways, and receive structured support in their endeavors of pursuing higher education if they desire to do so.

Implications for Predominantly White Institutions

Improve mental health services and outreach. The participants in this study spoke overwhelmingly to the lack of sufficient resources for Black students navigating challenges with their mental health. It is recommended that PWIs create and implement models to support Black students as they endure the challenges of matriculating through the oppressive climate of their institutions.

PWIs. As BlackCrit suggests, anti-Blackness shows up in every facet of society (Dumas & Ross, 2016). This holds true for Black students at PWIs. Instances of racism, discrimination, and marginalization are often salient challenges that they must navigate (Strayhorn, 2016). As conveyed by the participants in this study, and as suggested by research, racism has the ability to impact health and mental health (Hemings & Evans, 2019). PWIs must be more intentional about considering how the dynamics of race on their campuses impact the lives of their Black students.

This study revealed that Black students are likely to have personal examples of how racism has shown up in different facets of their collegiate experiences. PWIs should hire Black therapists to work with Black students desiring a therapeutic relationship with someone of the same racial identity. Non-Black therapists working with Black students should be aware that racial identity is often a salient factor that their clients will bring to the therapeutic relationship. It has been shown that when counselors help clients navigate oppressive structures, mental health symptoms are likely to improve (Swartz, Limner, & Gold, 2018). Therefore, it is critical that therapists are prepared to help clients navigate thoughts, experiences and predispositions related to race and racial identity. Therapists supporting Black students should facilitate co-constructive dynamics that create space for clients to reject ideological establishments, engage in their own meaning making, and therefore exercise liberatory practice.

Hire Black faculty and staff. The findings of this study demonstrate a clear need for the hiring of more Black faculty and staff at PWIs. Each participant in the study alluded to the lack of Black faculty and staff and the ways in which the scarcity of representation impacted their sense of belonging. For the participants in this study, it was important to see themselves represented in the faculty and staff as well as the student body. They placed high value on opportunities to connect and build community with others on campus sharing their racial identity. However, opportunities to connect with Black faculty and staff were rare. Participants gave examples of scenarios in which they were the only or one of very few Black students in large academic settings. In those circumstances, the participants often felt extremely isolated and experienced microaggressions. Not having a Black faculty member to confide in, even outside of those particular spaces was challenging. Participants also spoke to the need for the support of Black staff in social settings as they navigated racist incidents on campus. One participant spoke to the strong relationships that Black students on campus had with the culinary and custodial

staff on campus, who were mostly Black. He described those staff as vital in connecting Black students to appropriate resources such as Psychological Services. That example highlights the importance of having Black faculty in staff on campus. It is important that Black students see Black people in a diversity of roles within faculty and administration. PWIs should develop and employ strategic plans to minimally hire a percentage of Black faculty and staff that aligns with the number of Black students represented in academic and co-curricular settings.

Assistance with scholarships and financial aid. The participants in this study disclosed a number of challenges related to the lack of financial resources available to them. Some participants recounted stories of being surprised by what seemed like spontaneous reductions to their financial aid. Others talked about struggling to manage buying essential items such as groceries because they did not have enough financial aid, scholarship money, or financial support from home. One participant shared that he is often told that there is an abundance of outside scholarships available for Black students, but he's never seen anyone he knows actually receive an outside scholarship.

Understanding financial aid is a nuanced process that is individualized and involves a variety of social and cultural factors (Tichavakunda, 2017). It is imperative that PWIs provide education and resources related to financial aid through programming and outreach; especially for students representing marginalized communities. Additionally, as evidenced by the stories of the participants in this study, Black students need more access to both internal and external scholarships. Considering the ways in which Black students have been marginalized at PWIs, institutions should support the persistence efforts of Black students by expanding the accessibility of financial support.

Listen to the voices of Black students. The final, and perhaps one of the most important implications for practice is simply to listen to the voices of Black students at PWIs, and

incorporate their wisdom into efforts for improving their environments and experiences. The participants in this study overwhelmingly expressed feelings of being silenced and excluded from conversations that were pivotal in shaping their experiences as Black students at a PWI. Almost all participants felt like they were being used to promote a positive image of their institutions while not receiving adequate support. It is known that Black students at PWIs often struggle with finding a sense of belonging, and often feel like PWI campus environments are not safe for them (Strayhorn, 2012). Black students work earnestly to build support networks by connecting one another and seeking support from Black faculty and staff. However, as the participants conveyed, building a robust support network is inherently challenging at a PWI. PWI faculty, staff, and senior administration must commit themselves to centering the knowledge of Black students. Black students must be seen as subject matter experts on their own experiences. Leadership at PWIs should work to improve their institutional climates for Black students as informed by Black students. It is recommended that PWIs create official boards composed of Black faculty, staff, and students in which insight can be provided regarding improving the experiences of Black students.

Limitations

There are a variety of limitations pertaining to this study. One limitation is the diversity of ages and classifications represented in the study. While the participants ranged from 19-22 in age, and sophomore to senior in classification, eight of the participants were either 21 or 22. There were no first-year students involved in the study, and there was no one under 19. First year students or students below the age of 19 may have different experiences than students having already reached the status of upperclassmen. Additionally, while this study presented significant variety in location and institution type, there were no institutions from the western region of the United States. It is possible that the experiences of Black college students at PWIs in the Western

region could be different from the regions represented in this study. Lastly, as a qualitative, narrative inquiry, this study did not seek to generalize the experiences of all Black students at PWIs, but rather provide space for Black students at PWIs to share their stories regarding hope, healing, and liberation.

Recommendations for Future Research

While research exists on Black students' experiences in higher education, this study is the first to explore hope, healing, and liberation narratives among Black college students. This work is important for several reasons. The first is that studies on Black students often focus on deficit perspectives, and do not include positive aspects, such as hope, healing, and liberation. The second reason that this work is important is because it centers the voices and experiences of Black students, which research often fails to do.

This study creates a pathway for many additional research opportunities. For example, as mentioned in the previous section, this study does not include any first-year college students. Future research could explore the narratives of Black first-year students at PWIs and discover if their experiences are different from what was presented in this study. Secondly, only one participant in this study identified as a Black, multiracial individual. Future studies could explore hope, healing, and liberation among other multiracial individuals in PWI environments. Also, while each participant in this study had a unique narrative, there were commonalities among the regions and institution types represented: Small Private in the South, Midsize Private in the South, Large Public in the North, Midsize Public in the South, Large Public in the Middle Atlantic, Large Public in the Midwest. Future research could explore the narratives of Black students at different institution types on the West Coast. Additionally, explorations of the narratives of Black students at HBCUs should be considered. Considering the participants in this

study's emphasis on cultural pride and community, the experiences of Black students in HBCU environments would be a great measure of comparison.

Finally, future research of Black students at PWIs should consider the use of BlackCrit as a lens through which to understand the experiences of Black students as they endure endemic racism, resist neoliberal-multiculturalism, and engage in Black liberatory fantasy like the participants in this study. Few studies on Black students' experiences at PWIs utilize BlackCrit. Future research should appreciate the utility of BlackCrit in this context, and incorporate it as a framework.

Conclusion

This study explored hope, healing, and liberation narratives among Black students at Predominantly White Institutions. The study revealed that while the participants are on continuous journeys in the pursuit of healing and liberation, hope is the constant that inspires them to persist in their journeys. Situated in the BlackCrit framework (Dumas & Ross, 2016), this study followed Black students at PWIs as they shared their stories highlighting endemic anti-Blackness, tension with neoliberal-multiculturalism, and Black liberatory fantasy.

10 major themes emerged from the analysis of the data. Each theme aligned with one of the framing ideas of BlackCrit. Among the themes associated with The *Endemicity of Anti-Blackness* framing idea were: *Racially traumatic experiences*, *Isolation*, and *Silenced Black Voices*. These themes gave insight regarding systemic racism at the participants' institutions, and also shed light on some of the traumatic experiences and silencing that they endured. The second framing idea of BlackCrit is: *Blackness exists in tension with neoliberal-multicultural imagination*, and among the themes associated with this framing idea were: *Insufficient*

Institutional Support, Interest Convergence, and *Limited Representation & Mentorship Opportunities.* These themes uncovered some of the ways in which the participants' institutions were failing to meet the needs of Black students, and were prioritizing the interests of the institution over genuinely supporting Black students. Additionally, the themes within the second framing idea demonstrated how important it was to Black students to feel represented in various facets of campus life. Lastly, the third framing idea, *Creating Space for Black Liberatory Fantasy* made way for the following themes*: Community, Cultural Pride, Hope as a Constant,* and *Future Generations.* The themes within the third framing idea were an opportunity for participants to reflect on the joys of being a part of the Black community, profess their hopes, and talk about their investment in future generations of Black students at PWIs.

I will conclude with a reflection of my goals for conducting this research. One goal that I to achieve was to provide a space for the voices of Black undergraduate students as they navigate oppressive climates at PWIs and the constructs within. In my conversations with the participants, I was affirmed in hearing many of them express their appreciation and gratitude that I provided them with an opportunity to share their stories. Another one of my goals was to allow Black students to drive conversations around current issues at PWIs as it relates to Black students' experiences. This study was truly centered on the perspectives of Black students regarding issues facing Black students, and their voices were central in conversations around what's needed to improve campus climates for Black students. I learned some much from the wisdom and the knowledge that the participants held. Another goal of this research was to address the absence of Black students' voices in the research. One participant proudly exclaimed that she was excited to "have her voice represented in the body of literature regarding Black students' experiences at PWIs." This was another affirming moment for me. I felt empowered knowing that I was able to

create a pathway for their voices to be heard, and they appreciated the platform that I provided. This leads me to another goal of the study, which was to situate Black students in the center of efforts to dismantle Anti-Black racism at PWIs. More than anyone, Black student at PWIs know the ways in which their institutions fail them, and they know what needs to be done to address the inequities they face. This study allowed Black students to lead the cause of dismantling Anti-Black racism at PWIs. This study empowered Black students as contributors and disseminators of knowledge. Lastly, this research was meant to create spaces for healing, reflection, and empowerment. My conversations with the participants were marked with every expression ranging from tears of sadness to laughter and tears of joy. Ultimately, I felt like this experience was good for all of our souls.

The remaining question is, "What's next?" I believe that this experience would be in vain if I did not explicitly express the importance of using the insight gained from the participants in this study to inspire and engage in progressive action. Predominantly White Institutions must engage in the work of interrupting Anti-Blackness. This includes presidents, cabinet-level administrators, faculty, staff, and students. The work of dismantling Anti-Blackness should not be limited to any one race, creed, or stature. It is the work of all. Black students will inevitably face challenges in PWI environments, but work can be done to improve campus climates and sense of belonging for these students. As we engage in the never-ending work of fighting anti-Blackness, we must position ourselves as learners, and hear from Black students. We must Lift Every Voice, and then we must do the work.

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APPENDIX A

Recruitment Email

Lifting Every Voice: Exploring Hope, Healing, and Liberation Narratives among Black Students at Predominantly White Institutions

My name is Phillip Sullivan, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services at the University of Georgia. I am currently conducting a research project for my dissertation under the direction of Dr. Brandee Appling, and I would like to invite you to participate in my study. The study is entitled Still, We Rise: Exploring Hope, Healing, and Liberation Narratives among Black Students at Predominantly White Institutions. I am studying Black undergraduate students currently enrolled at Predominantly White Institutions.

The purpose of the study is to explore journeys of hope, healing, and liberation among Black undergraduate students at PWIs. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to participate in a video-recorded interview that will last approximately 60 minutes and take 1-3 photographs that reflect your experiences as a Black undergraduate student at a PWI. The meeting will be held via the Zoom video conferencing platform on a mutually agreed upon day and time. During the interview, we will discuss the photos you have taken and your everyday lived experiences as a Black student navigating a PWI environment.

Participation in this study is voluntary and you are able to withdraw from the study at any time. Your participation in the study will remain confidential. While the results may be published, your identity will be protected. I am happy to answer any questions you may have about the study. You may contact me at phillip.sullivan@uga.edu.

If you would like to participate, please send an e-mail to me as soon as possible. In the email, please include your contact phone number and the best times to reach you. I will call you to further discuss the details of the study.

Sincerely,

Phillip A. Sullivan
Department of Counseling and Human Development Services 256-658-1086–
phillip.sullivan@uga.edu.
Principal Investigator: Dr. Brandee Appling, Ph.D.
bappling@uga.edu

APPENDIX B

Recruitment Flyer

APPENDIX C

Consent Form

I would like for you to be a part of this research study, and I am asking for your participation. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether or not you would like to participate. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will be given to you.

Principal Investigator: Dr. Brandee Appling
Counseling and Human Development Services
bappling@uga.edu

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the narratives of Black undergraduate students matriculating through PWI environments. The researcher, Phillip Sullivan, hopes to learn about the individual narratives of these students, and the roles that hope, healing, and liberation may play in their journeys. The researcher would like to use this information to educate higher education administrators, faculty, and counselor educators on the needs and challenges of Black undergraduate students at PWIs.

Study Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to …

- Meet individually with the researcher for one 60-minute interview. During this interview, the researcher will audio tape the conversations about your experiences as Black undergraduate student at a PWI.
- Take 1-3 photographs that reflect your experiences as a Black undergraduate student at a PWI and provide them to the researcher via e-mail prior to the individual interview.
- Discuss your photograph(s) during the individual interview
- Review your interview transcripts for accuracy or clarification; however, you may waive your opportunity to do so
- Potentially respond to follow-up questions that may arise as the researcher conducts the study.
- Review a draft of the research findings and provide feedback; however, you may waive my opportunity to do so.

- Complete a demographic questionnaire that confirms your age, ethnicity, institution, major, classification, hometown, and spiritual identity.
- The total estimated duration of my participation in this study will range between one and-a-half hours to two hours depending on length of interview, photographs, and any follow-up.

Risks and discomforts

- The research is not expected to cause any physical harm or discomfort. The emotional risk may include uncovering feelings related to your experiences of discrimination or other challenges/barriers you may have or are currently encountering as well as increased self-awareness. If you experience any discomfort, you may elect not to answer any question during the interview without having to explain why, and you may opt to withdraw yourself at any time. If you would like to seek further counseling, the researcher will refer you to other licensed counseling professionals through the University of Georgia's Counseling and Psychiatric Services (706-542- 2273).

Benefits

- While there are no direct benefits or incentives being offered, participants will be provided a platform to share their personal experiences as a Black undergraduate student at a PWI. Participants' contributions may provide institutions with insight regarding strategies to better support Black students in PWI environments.

Audio/Video Recording

- The interviews will be recorded to assist the researcher with accurate transcription of the interviews. All recordings and transcriptions will be stored on a password-protected computer and will only be accessible by the researcher.

Please provide initials below if you agree to have this interview recorded.

_____ I DO give permission to have my interview recorded.
_____ I DO NOT give permission to have my interview recorded.

Privacy/Confidentiality

No individually identifiable information about you, or provided by you during the research, will be shared with others without your permission, unless required by law. You will be given the opportunity to create a pseudonym for the purposes of data collection and corresponding research reports. If you do not select a pseudonym, you will be assigned one by the researcher. The pseudonym code will be maintained in a password protected electronic document in the researcher's computer files and will be destroyed after the final report has been written. The recordings of the interviews, the pseudonym code, and any photographs that are not included in

presentations/publications will be destroyed after the completion of data collection, or no later than June 1, 2022.

Because of the nature of internet communication, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed when email or other modes of internet communication are used to provide photographs. However, the researcher will delete all correspondence from their password-protected accounts after the publication of this study.

Taking part is voluntary

Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your grades and class standing will not be affected by your decision about participation. If you decide to withdraw from the study, the information that can be identified as yours will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information.

If you have questions

The main researcher conducting this study is Phillip Sullivan, a doctoral student at the University of Georgia. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Dr. Brandee Appling at bappling@uga.edu. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu.

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research: To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, and have had all of your questions answered.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date
_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Signature	Date

APPENDIX D

Demographic Questionnaire

Age: _____

Race/Ethnicity: _____

Gender Identity: _____

Institution at which you are currently enrolled: _____

Major: _____

Classification: _____

Hometown: _____

APPENDIX E

Semi-structured Interview Protocol

Introduction

Hello. My name is Phillip Sullivan and I am a doctoral candidate in the Counselor Education and Supervision program at the University of Georgia. I am conducting a research project on the experiences of Black students at Predominantly White Institutions. Specifically, I want to know if and in what ways hope, healing, and liberation are a part of their experiences while navigating PWI environments. It is from my own experiences having matriculated through a PWI as a Black undergraduate student, and the many stories shared with me by other Black undergraduate students or alumni that I am inspired to explore how we individually make meaning out of experiences as Black students at PWIs. My hope is that by sharing the stories of all the participants, institutions of higher education, particularly PWIs, will become aware of the unique experiences of Black undergraduate students. Through this study, I want to provide a platform for you to share your individual experience and enhance the significance of our challenges and successes in the research literature. I appreciate you meeting with me today to talk more about your everyday experiences navigating your institution. Before we begin the interview, I would like to remind you that the information you share during the interview will be kept confidential as explained in the consent form. I will not use your name or any other identifying information about you that might allow someone to figure out who you are. Feel free to skip any questions you do not want to answer and at any time you may end the interview. I anticipate that the interview with take approximately an hour. Though I will be asking you questions, if at any time you have questions throughout the interview, please feel free to ask. Lastly, at the end of the interview we will discuss the photograph(s) that you took. Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

Introductory background questions:

1. Let’s start by selecting a pseudonym for you. What name would you like to go by?
2. Tell me a little bit about yourself.
3. What sparked your interest in participating in this study?
4. Is there any other background information that you’d like to share?

Research Questions:

- How do Black students at Predominantly White Institutions define hope, healing, and liberation?

- How do Black students at PWIs describe their journeys of hope, healing, and liberation while navigating oppressive institutional climates?

Interview Questions

1. What does it mean to you to be Black?
2. What has been your experience as a Black student at a Predominantly White Institution?
3. What are some of the challenges facing Black students at PWIs that need to be addressed?
4. How do you define hope?
5. What role, if any, has hope played in your experiences as a Black student navigating a PWI environment?
6. How do you define healing?
7. What role, if any, do you believe healing has played in your experiences as a Black student navigating a PWI environment?
8. How do you define liberation?
9. What role, if any, has healing played in your experiences as a Black student navigating a PWI environment?
10. If you believe that hope, healing, and liberation have all been a part of your collegiate journey, how would your experience as a Black student at a PWI would be different without them?
11. How can PWIs create more welcoming and supportive environments for Black students?
12. What can be done to inspire hope, healing, and liberation for every Black student at a PWI, and who should play a role in this?

Photo Elicitation Interview Protocol

1. How do these photos represent hope, healing, or liberation individually or collectively to you?

2. What are you feeling as you reflect on this/these photograph(s)?

3. Please tell me why you selected (insert title) as the title for this/these photograph(s)?

Final Question: Thank you for sharing your journey with me. I appreciate the insight you've provided in this conversation. Before we conclude, I want to give you the opportunity to share with me anything else that you would like to add. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Summary Statement: In the interview, I took note of several themes that were noticeable to me. These included (insert themes). Do you think I summarized these correctly? Are there any other things that stand out to you from the interview?

Wrap-Up: Thank you again for sharing your experiences with me. I really appreciate your insight and the valuable contributions you've made to this study. If I have any follow-up questions later, may I contact you again?

APPENDIX F

Photo-elicitation Instructions

Thank you for participating in my research study. To complete this portion of your participation, you will take 1-3 photographs that reflect your lived experiences as Black undergraduate student at a PWI using your own camera device. Please use the instructions provided below to assist you with this part of the research study.

You can submit pictures of anything you feel is appropriate to meet the below instructions. However, because of confidentiality, you CANNOT take or submit pictures of other people. You can submit original photos saved in your photo library, but please do not submit screenshots or images from websites.

Photograph Instructions

- Submit 1-3 photographs that represent hope, healing, and liberation during your journey as a Black undergraduate student at a PWI. The photos can represent any combination of the three terms: hope, healing, and liberation.
- Title each photograph
- Provide me with a digital copy prior to the interview. Once you have taken all of these photographs, e-mail the photographs to me directly. You also have the options of meeting me in person or mailing them directly to me. Please let me know if you would like to send your photos through any other medium than e-mail. If you have questions, please contact me at 256-658-1086 or phillip.sullivan@uga.edu.

APPENDIX G

Categorizations of Interview Questions

Interview Questions

Interview Questions	**Narrative Application**	**BlackCrit**
1. Let's start by selecting a pseudonym for you. What name would you like to go by? 2. Tell me a little bit about yourself. What were your family dynamics? What values were instilled in you? 3. What are your beliefs about higher education and where did those beliefs come from? 4. What sparked your interest in participating in this study? 5. Is there any other background information that you'd like to share?	• Biographical narrative • Retelling	
What does it mean to you to be Black?	Living Sociality Meaning Making	Tension with neoliberal multicultural imagination?

At what age did you come to understand racism particularly against Black people? Were there any defining moments?	Retelling Temporality	Centering antiblackness
What has been your experience as a Black student at a Predominantly White Institution?	Living Temporality Place	Tension with neoliberal multicultural imagination Centering anti-Blackness
What are some of the challenges facing Black students at your PWI or PWIs in general that need to be addressed?	Social/cultural/institutional narratives	Centering Anti-Blackness
What's been your biggest source of support as a Black student at a PWI?	Temporality Social/cultural/institutional narratives	Black liberatory fantasy Tension with neoliberal multicultural imagination
How do you define hope?	Meaning Making	Black liberatory fantasy
What role, if any, has hope played in your experiences as a Black student navigating a PWI environment?	Living Telling Temporality Place Social/cultural/institutional narratives	Tension with neoliberal multicultural imagination
How do you define healing?	Meaning making	Black liberatory fantasy

What role, if any, do you believe healing has played in your experiences as a Black student navigating a PWI environment?	Storytelling Temporality Place Social/cultural/institutional	Tension with neoliberal multicultural imagination
	narratives	
How do you define liberation?	Meaning making	Tension with neoliberal multicultural imagination
What role, if any, has liberation played in your experiences as a Black student navigating a PWI environment?	Temporality Place Social/cultural/institutional narratives	Tension with neoliberal multicultural imagination
If you believe that hope, healing, and liberation have all been a part of your collegiate journey, how would your experience as a Black student at a PWI would be different without them? If they haven't been a part of your journey, how would it be different with them?	Temporality Place Social/cultural/institutional narratives	Black liberatory fantasy
How can PWIs create more welcoming and supportive environments for Black students?	Place Social/cultural/institutional narratives	Black liberatory fantasy
What can be done to inspire hope, healing, and liberation for every Black student at a PWI, and who should play a role in this?	Place Social/cultural/institutional narratives	Black liberatory fantasy

Narrative Dimensions: Place/Sociality/Temporality