DEFYING FAKE DIVERSITY: THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF BLACK WOMEN STUDENTS IN PREDOMINANTLY WHITE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

by

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Predominantly White Higher Education Institutions

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my wonderful parents, Mathieu and Niry, my loving husband, Elio, my sister and brother-in-law Lalaina and Tony, and my nephew Aaron. Thank you for your endless love and support, and for investing in me and my education.

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ABSTRACT

DEFYING FAKE DIVERSITY: THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF BLACK WOMEN STUDENTS IN PREDOMINANTLY WHITE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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This thesis explores the various factors that impact Black women students' career planning in PWIs and the ways these factors continue to impact Black women's post-college career planning. To answer the questions that guide this research, I conducted 17 semi-structured, in-depth virtual interviews with Black alumni of a small private PWI between 2008 and 2018. All participants identified as Black or African-American and identified as a woman at the time they were students. The analysis showed that socio-economic status, academic experiences, career centers and resources and mentorship significantly shaped participants' career planning as students and that these factors were informed by the gendered-racial climate of the PWI. Black women students' experiences with gendered-racial discrimination continued to impact their career planning as alumni by helping them build unique skills, develop clear career goals and build expertise in navigating white spaces. This study emphasizes the importance of developing and

maintaining an anti-racist and anti-oppression campus climate in order to better the short-term and long-term career planning of Black women students and other marginalized student populations. Further, this study provides several recommendations for PWIs and higher education institutions, career centers, faculty and staff members, and future research that can be used to deepen understanding of the lived experiences of Black women students in PWIs and to develop initiatives, policies and practices aimed to enhance career readiness and planning for Black women PWI students.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In the past two decades, higher education institutions have taken an initiative to promote diversity, inclusion and equity in their schools (The U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). These initiatives include adding diversity as a core value in higher education institutions' mission statements and promising to create new opportunities for success and more inclusive learning environments for all students (Association of American Colleges & Universities 2019). Throughout the past five years, the U.S. Department of Education introduced new opportunities such as school assistance, increased funding to diversity-oriented school programs, charter school programs, and grants to foster school diversity (The U.S. Department of Education,n.d.). Also, in January 2017, the Department of Education published a report illustrating various strategies that schools can incorporate in order to increase student diversity (U.S. Department of Education 2017). The report included steps for conducting a diversity needs assessments, strategies to promote, create, and maintain an inclusive school environment (U.S. Department of Education 2017).

The Department of Education's prioritization of diversity is reflected in higher education institutions as colleges and universities have recognized diversity as an institutional value and welcomed groups of students across different backgrounds, including race, ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic status. Several studies have

reported that growing diversity in higher education institutions in terms of enrollment (Association of American Colleges & Universities 2019; Espinosa et al. 2019). In 2016, women made up 56.5 percent of undergraduate enrollment in colleges and universities (Espinosa et al. 2019;). Further, in 2016, 45.2 percent of undergraduate students enrolled in universities were students of color (Espinosa et al. 2019). Although these statistics suggest an increase in enrollment for minority students, various scholars have argued that there is more to diversity than enrollment numbers (Winkle-Wagner 2015).

A plethora of research has paid attention to diversity in higher education, particularly racial diversity, and has questioned higher education institutions' value and promotion of diversity. Past studies have explored the experiences that Black students and students of color and found that these students face many barriers and challenges throughout their time in college (Bentley-Edwards et al. 2016; Strunk et al. 2018). While some studies have only focused on Black students' experiences in a university, other studies have compared Black students' experiences in specific settings including predominantly white institutions and historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and within and outside of classrooms (Apugo 2017; Esposito 2011; Green et al. 2018; Haynes 2019; Vaccaro 2017). Some studies have also examined the role of higher education institutions in perpetuating white supremacy, colorblind rhetoric and embodying institutionally racist practices that oppress and restrict Black students and other students of color (Esposito 2011; Vaccaro 2017). Although there is a large volume of research on the experiences of Black students in universities, only a small portion of

that volume of research places Black women in the center and even fewer studies focus on Black women in PWIs (Winkle-Wagner 2015).

Further, the scarce studies that concentrate on Black women's PWI experiences limit their findings to detailing students' various experiences in PWIs and how they navigate in these white spaces (Winkle-Wagner 2015). Placing all emphasis on the experiences of Black women, however, provides several research gaps. Previous studies that have explored Black women students' experiences in PWIs detail the experiences but few examine the intersections of race and gender and their effects on Black women students' lived experiences (Ireland et al. 2018; Winkle-Wagner 2015). The lack of inquiry on the intersection of race and gender is particularly evident in the studies on Black women students in STEM (Ireland et al. 2018). Further, there is a gap in the research on Black women in PWIs as only very few of these studies examine the reasons Black women persist in PWIs or the lasting influences of these PWI experiences on Black women. It is essential to move beyond detailing Black women's experiences in PWIs and focus on the impacts of these experiences. For example, exploring the factors behind Black women's decisions to persist may provide a deeper understanding of the complex decision-making and meanings that Black women make from these experiences (Winkle-Wagner 2015). In addition, exploring the long-lasting effects of their PWI experiences is crucial because although college may be a temporary reality for these women, their experiences endure and may continue to shape their future trajectories (Winkle-Wagner 2015).

The present research aimed to contribute to the gaps in the literature by exploring the factors that shape women's decision-making regarding their futures, and how these factors continue to influence Black women's lives after college. Since the notion of the future path is broad, this research focused on only one aspect of future trajectories: career planning and development. Focusing on career planning is crucial in research regarding higher education since colleges and universities are designed to train and prepare students for a career. Moreover, by examining the influence of social and academic experiences in PWIs on career development utilizing a gendered-racial perspective, the present research contributed to the literature on college diversity, the literature on the intersection of race and gender, and places Black women's lived experiences at the center of inquiry. Thus, the questions that guided this research are: What factors shape the career planning of Black women students in predominantly white institutions? How do these factors continue to influence Black women's lives after college?

To answer these questions, I conducted virtual in-depth interviews with 17 alumni of a small, private PWI which I will refer to as South East College (SEC). The research participants graduated between 2010 and 2018, and all identified as Black or African-American and as women at the time they attended SEC. Research participants were asked about their experiences at SEC and their career planning as students and as alumni. This thesis details my analysis of these interviews to illustrate the ways that the intersections of gender, race and other systems of power shaped and continue to shape Black women's career planning and outcomes.

The remaining thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter Two reviews the literature related to theoretical approaches for studying the intersections of race and gender in Black women's lived experiences, Black women students' experiences in PWIs, and Black women's experiences with career planning. This chapter reviews empirical findings from previous studies that are important in understanding the context of the study. Chapter three provides an outline of the methods utilized within the study. This chapter outlines the sampling procedure, measurement strategies, ethical consideration, data collection process and the analytical frameworks I utilized. Chapter Four provides a description of the South East College and participants' academic and social experience with daily gendered-racial discrimination. This chapter provides important context to understanding Black women's career planning and development since participants emphasized that their career decisions were informed by their experiences with gendered-racism. Chapter Five presents the findings of the study and provides detailed analyses of the four factors that shaped Black women's career planning and the ways they intersect with gendered-racism: socio-economic status, academic experiences, mentorship and support systems, and career centers. This chapter also outlines the ways Black women's experiences at SEC continue to shape their career planning post-college. Chapter Six provides a discussion of the implications of the study on higher education institutions, public sociology and future research. In addition, this chapter concludes with a list of recommendations for PWIs and higher-education institutions, career centers, faculty and staff members, and sociologist which are informed

by the research findings and aim to improve Black women's experiences with career-planning in PWIs.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a review of various concepts and previous studies relating to Black women's experiences in predominantly white higher education institutions (PWIs) and career planning and are especially relevant to the current research. In this chapter, I begin by presenting two frameworks, critical race theory and intersectionality, which have been utilized to explore the unique lived experiences of Black women and inequities in education. Next, I present a synthesis of empirical findings relating to Black women's experiences in PWIs that guide the current research. The review of empirical findings highlights four central themes that researchers have found are crucial in understanding Black women students' in PWIs: experiences, coping mechanisms, identity construction, and career development.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Black women face a unique set of realities, experiences, and challenges because of the intersection of their gendered and racial identities. These unique experiences have been detailed and narrated by prominent Black women, including Audre Lorde, Maya Angelou, bell hooks, and Patricia Hill Collins. In their writings, these Black women highlighted the impacts of the societal expectation that Black women have to choose between their gender identity and their racial identity. However, these women emphasized that their Black and gender identities were inseparable. For example, in her book, *Ain't I a Woman?* bell hooks documents the exclusion and struggles that Black

women have faced because of their intersecting identities, which included isolation and misrepresentation in various spaces and communities including Black and female communities (hooks 2015). In these communities, the unique issues facing Black women are rarely placed at the center (hooks 2015). One of the spaces where Black women's voices are often silenced is in higher education institutions, especially PWIs.

To avoid the misrepresentation of Black women in Black and female communities, scholars constructed several theoretical frameworks, approaches, and styles of analysis that place Black women at the center, rendering their unique experiences and identity visible. Two common theoretical approaches used by scholars in research on Black women in PWIs are critical race theory (CRT) and intersectionality.

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

The Basic Tenets of CRT. Critical race theory is a theoretical and analytical framework to understanding race, racism and power and eradicating racial and other forms of subordination (Dixson and Rousseau Anderson 2017; Savas 2014). CRT scholars have identified five core arguments of the theoretical framework. First, CRT argues that racism is still present in our society and is an ordinary or normal part of U.S. society (Delgado and Stefancic 2017; Howard and Navarro 2015). In other words, racism is a part of our everyday lives and is central to understanding how American society and its institutions function (Delgado and Stefancic 2017; Solorzano and Yosso 2000). However, discourses of equal opportunity, meritocracy, colorblindness combined with the transition from blatant racism to more subtle and invisible forms of racism have led individuals to believe that racism no longer exists. As a result, racism is rarely

acknowledged and because it takes subtle forms, it is often difficult to address and eliminate (Delgado and Stefancic 2017). CRT challenges white supremacy and other hegemonic ideals and aims to identify and eradicate the ways it is embedded in our society.

The second argument is the notion of interest convergence or material determinism (Delgado and Stefancic 2017). CRT recognizes that there is a social hierarchy in U.S. society built on the ideology of white supremacy (Delgado and Stefancic 2017; Howard and Navarro 2015; Savas 2014; Solorzano and Yosso 2000). This social hierarchy establishes whiteness as the status quo and allows whites to hold a large amount of social and political power and privilege in contrast to persons of color (Savas 2014; Solorzano and Yosso 2000). The concept of interest convergence asserts with whiteness as the status quo and with U.S. society built on white supremacy, U.S. systems serve to advance the physical and material needs of whites. In addition, because of the ways that racism advances the interests of whites, larger segments of society have little incentive to eradicate racism (Delgado and Stefancic 2017).

The third core argument of CRT is the social construction thesis which asserts that race is a product of social thought and interactions rather than biological processes (Delgado and Stefancic 2017). The fourth core argument of CRT is the voice-of-color thesis which emphasizes the values of the voices of people of color as legitimate and critical to developing a deep understanding of the ways our society and its institutions function (Delgado and Stefancic 2017; Solorzano and Yosso 2000). As Delgado and Stefancic (2017) argue, "because of their different histories and experiences with

oppression, writers and thinkers [of color] may be able to communicate to their white counterparts matters that the whites are unlikely to know." (p.11). A final important feature of CRT is intersectionality. While CRT argues that race and racism are central to understanding American society and its functions, the framework also recognizes that no individual has a single, unitary identity (Delgado and Stefancic 2017; Howard and Navaro 2005). Therefore, in addition to identifying the ways that racism is perpetuated in U.S. society, CRT scholars also explore the ways that racism intersects with other systems of power such as gender and to create unique lived experiences (Delgado and Stefancic 2017; Howard and Navaro 2005; Savas 2014). A final important feature of CRT is its commitment to social justice. CRT seeks eliminate racism and other systems of power and argues that social justice cannot be achieved without the empowerment of people of color and marginalized voices (Solorzano and Yosso 2000; Savas 2014).

CRT in Education. Critical race theory is a theoretical framework commonly used in education research and has been utilized to identify the various inequities in the education system. Scholars have relied on CRT to provide a theoretical understanding of Black women in education institutions including PWIs (Esposito 2011; Linder and Winston Simmons 2015; Vaccaro 2017). Studies that have utilized CRT in education research placed people of color at the center of their research and drew explicitly from their lived experiences. For example, scholars have explored the lived experiences of Black women in higher education to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and barriers that Black women face in classrooms, residential spaces, and in regard to campus life (Esposito 2011; Linder and Winston Simmons 2015; Vaccaro 2017). Using CRT,

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education scholars have argued that race and racism are embedded in educational institutions but are hidden by discourses of objectivity, meritocracy, equal opportunity and colorblindness (Esposito 2011; Linder and Winston Simmons 2015). These institutions then legitimate white supremacy and maintain oppressive racial practices and ideologies (Esposito 2011). CRT has been utilized to challenge these dominant ideologies in education research. CRT in education also highlights that students' educational experiences are not race-neutral and many of the challenges and opportunities that students face are informed by race (Savas 2014).

As previously mentioned, CRT is a commonly-used framework to explore and provide a deeper understanding of educational inequities. Since its foundation, CRT scholars have developed core components to guide researchers with exploring racism in education and racial justice (Howard and Navarro 2015; Solorzano and Yosso 2000). Similar to the main arguments of CRT, these five components are (1) centralizing race and racism in education research; (2) challenge dominant perspectives and ideologies perpetuated by education institutions; (3) being action-oriented and motivated by a social justice agenda; (4) legitimizing voices of color and center research on the lived experiences of people of color in order to understand inequality in education and finally; (5) CRT in education research is interdisciplinary and should reflect multiple perspectives (Howard and Navarro 2015; Solorzano and Yosso 2000).

Although CRT has commonly been used to explore the lived experiences of Black women, scholars have criticized CRT in the past for lack of intersectionality despite intersectionality being one of the core components of the framework. For example,

scholars have criticized CRT as a framework to understand the lived experiences of Black women and argued that CRT research places saliency on race and often overlooks gender, thus only focusing on one factor in Black women's lives (Vaccaro 2017; Winkle-Wagner 2015). As a result, some scholars have called for increased attention to intersectionality in CRT research exploring Black women's lived experiences (Haynes 2019; West 2018)

The Importance of Intersectionality. As previously mentioned, one of the core components of CRT is utilizing an intersectional approach by recognizing the ways that racism intersects with other systems of power to inform lived experiences. CRT's focus on intersectionality has significantly increased since the framework was developed especially in recent years (Delgado and Stefancic 2017; Howard and Navarro 2016). However, intersectionality is also a framework that can be used on its own. Intersectionality, which focuses on the intersection of multiple forms of discrimination, oppression, and identities, recognizes that inequality is not caused by a single factor (Collins and Bilge 2020; Crenshaw 1989; Morton and Parsons 2018; Shahid, Nelson, and Cardemil 2018). Rather, interconnected systems of power such as racism, sexism, and classism work together and mutually shape one another to inform people's social conditions and lived experiences (Collins and Bilge 2020; Crenshaw 1989). Moreover, since individuals embody multiple identities, an intersectional approach allows for a fuller understanding of lived experiences (Collins 2015; Collins and Bilge 2020; Crenshaw 1991).

The root of intersectionality is found in studies exploring gendered racism and its impact on Black women. The concept of intersectionality was introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in her 1989 work exploring gendered racism and the ways that Black women's lives are complicated by their gender and race (Crenshaw 1989). Since the concept was introduced, many scholars have applied an intersectional framework on its own or in addition to CRT to capture the full spectrum of Black women's experiences in PWIs. The next section will provide a review of these studies.

REVIEW OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Although colleges and universities have placed institutional value on promoting student diversity, previous studies found that education institutions re-enforce hegemonic ideologies where preserving a racialized and gendered hierarchy is fundamental (Corbin, Smith, and Garcia 2018; Green et al. 2018; Vaccaro 2017). In PWIs, hegemonic ideologies are not only enforced, they are also intensified due to the overly homogeneous student body (Corbin et al. 2018; Esposito 2011). Students of color automatically stand out in these distinctly white spaces. When this sharp racial distinction is combined with the colorblind ideologies that most PWIs embody, the struggles and barriers that Black female students and other students of color face are ignored (Esposito 2011; Vaccaro 2017). Additionally, Vaccaro (2017) found that ideologies such as colorblindness, meritocracy, and equal opportunity are institutionally enforced in PWIs. These ideologies assume and believe that racism no longer exists and that all students have equal opportunities. However, Vaccaro (2017) rejects these assumptions and shows that there are racial and gendered barriers that prevent Black women from succeeding. Further,

these institutional ideologies foster a hostile social and learning environment for Black women students (Esposito 2011; Green et al. 2018).

There are four central themes that researchers have found in their studies on Black women students' in PWIs: unique experiences, coping mechanisms, identity construction, and career development. Each theme is a result of or a reaction to institutional inequalities within PWIs.

The Unique Experiences of Black women students in PWIs

In the classroom. The majority of studies focused on examining what being a Black woman student in a PWI looked like. Studies found that due to the heavily enforced institutional inequalities in PWIs, Black women students are marginalized in the classrooms (Apugo 2017; Hannon et al. 2016; Esposito 2011; Green et al. 2018; Morton and Parsons 2018; Vaccaro 2017; Winkle-Wagner et al. 2019). Black women students' classroom marginalization includes isolation, micro-aggressions, and lack of support (Apugo 2017; Dortch and Patel 2017; Esposito 2011; Green et al. 2018; Vaccaro 2017; Winkle-Wagner et al. 2019). The marginalization of Black women in the classroom is intensified in STEM programs (Dortch and Patel 2017; Morton and Parsons 2018) and graduate programs (Apugo 2017). Previous studies found that Black women students lack representation as Black women students are often the only Black women or Black students in their classrooms (Hannon et al. 2016; Winkle-Wagner et al. 2019). Because of this lack of representation, Black women feel isolated by their peers and their programs (Apugo 2017; Dortch and Patel 2017). A reoccurring example of Black women's isolation

in classrooms is not being invited by their peers to join study groups (Dortch and Patel 2017; Winkle-Wagner et al. 2019).

Studies also found that Black women faced micro-aggressions from their peers and their professors. Micro-aggression from their peers include classmates asking Black women condescending questions such as "Why are you here?" (Apugo 2017) and telling Black women they were only accepted to university because of diversity scholarships (Dortch and Patel 2017). Black women also receive micro-aggressions from their professors as studies found that professors espouse colorblind ideologies and rely on negative stereotypes of Black women (Culver 2018; Esposito 2011; Strunk et al. 2018; Vaccaro 2017). As a result, professors' behaviors and attitudes toward women are often demeaning and oppressive. Such behaviors include interrupting or rushing Black women students when they participate in classroom discussions, refusing to provide help to Black women, and giving Black women lower grades than their white peers even when the works are identical (Culver 2018; Esposito 2011; Vaccaro 2017). Other forms of micro-aggressions that Black women face from their professors include professors' unwillingness to advocate for Black women, even when injustices occur in the classroom (Dortch and Patel 2017; Esposito 2011). For example, Esposito (2011) found that professors view the classroom as a "community of learners" and expect Black women to resist injustices and micro-aggressions because being angry may hinder the learning process and environment for other students. Similarly, Dortch and Patel (2017) found that in some courses, the textbooks that the professors assign portray inaccurate and offensive portrayals of Black individuals and women.

The marginalization of Black women in the classroom results in a multitude of barriers that impede Black women's academic achievements and successes (Dortch and Patel 2017; Vaccaro 2017; Winkle-Wagner 2019). For instance, the marginalization that Black women face can potentially push them to leave their programs (Vaccaro 2017; Winkle-Wagner 2019). Further, in graduate schools, the lack of representation and the microaggressions from professors can make it difficult for Black women to receive funding for their research and to receive any assistantship opportunities, making it harder for Black women to achieve and to be recognized within these programs (Green et al. 2018).

Beyond the Classroom. Various studies also examined the marginalization of Black women in social spaces within PWIs and found that these social spaces are hostile environments for Black women (Haynes 2019; Winkle-Wagner 2015; Winkle-Wagner et al. 2019). In these social spaces, Black women felt hyper-visible due to their racial identities, and studies noted that Black women often felt like an outsider (Haynes 2019). In her study on Black women's experiences in residence halls, the places where students are meant to feel at home, Haynes (2019) found that white students often policed the social spaces in PWIs and ensured that Black women students felt out of place. white students' policing of social spaces created intense hostile environments that made Black women feel isolated, unwelcomed, and homeless (Haynes 2019; Winkle-Wagner 2019). For example, Haynes (2019) found that Black women were treated differently by their RAs. One of Haynes' participants noted how resident assistants (RAs) would greet and hug their white residents but would rarely say "hello" to Black women (2019).

Further, Black women constantly had to resist stereotypes in residence halls and other social spaces on campus. For instance, Black women often received comments and compliments shaped by negative stereotypes about Black women from their roommates, neighbors, RAs, and white friends (Haynes 2019; Winkle-Wagner 2019). Some of the comments insinuated the stereotypes that Black women were loud and uneducated and that Black women were sexual beings (Haynes 2019; Winkle-Wagner 2019). The marginalization and oppression that Black women faced both within and outside the classroom not hinder their academic achievements and success; Black women's experiences but were also emotionally and mentally taxing, and were a constant source of stress (Bentley-Edwards et al. 2016; Hannon et al. 2016; Shahid et al. 2018).

Coping mechanisms

Various scholars have also explored the coping mechanisms that Black women students develop in order to navigate through the hostile environments and social spaces in PWIs (Apugo 2017; Baber 2012; Bentley-Edwards et al. 2016; Corbin et al. 2018; Culver 2018; Hannon et al. 2016; Linder and Winston Simmons 2015; Shahid et al. 2018; Storlie et al. 2018; Strunk et al. 2018). These coping mechanisms were substantial factors that shaped women's decisions to persist in their programs despite the negative experiences and high sources of stress (Apugo 2017; Baber 2012; Storlie et al. 2018). Through these coping mechanisms, women were able to find support in places where they were profoundly misrepresented and ignored (Apugo 2018; Bentley-Edwards et al. 2016). Previous studies found that Black women established various coping mechanisms including "acting white" (Strunk et al. 2018), the development of informal networks of

support (Apugo 2017; Baber 2012), informal mentorships (Apugo 2017; Culver 2018; Linder and Winston Simmons 2015), and relying on external sources of support such as religion (Bentley-Edwards 2016; Shahid et al. 2018; Winkle-Wagner at al. 2019) and family (Baber 2012; Bentley-Edwards 2016; Storlie et al. 2018).

Minimizing Oppressions and Acting White. Studies found that Black students, especially Black women, often cope with race-related stress by adapting to white environments (Hannon et al. 2016; Strunk et al. 2018). For example, in their study that examined the impact of hegemonic ideologies in PWI on Black students, Strunk et al. (2018) found that participants often coped with institutional inequalities and the stress they produce by downplaying their marginalization and through acting white. Strunk et al. (2018) noted that participants would acknowledge their marginalization but would follow up by saying, "but I never experienced direct racism here" (2018:66). Further, participants coped with their marginalization by conforming to hegemonic ideologies through acting white – or acting in a way that was deemed acceptable and was expected by whites. Strunk et al. found that participants would often help younger cohorts adapt to the PWI environment by teaching them to minimize their marginalities and to act white. While Strunk et al. (2018) did not specifically focus on Black women students, their findings are still crucial to the study of Black women students in PWI, especially since they did not find any significant differences in Black men and women's answers.

The Development of Informal Networks and mentors. Another way that women coped in PWIs despite the hostile environments and constant marginalization was by developing peer relationships with other Black women on their campuses (Apugo 2017;

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Baber 2012; Corbin et al. 2018; Winkle-Wagner et al. 2019). These peer relationships

became informal networks of support that empowered Black women and validated their

experiences (Apugo 2017). Peer relationships were also crucial as they served an outlet

where Black women could share their experiences and could talk without being

interrupted or silenced (Apugo 2017; Winkle-Wagner et al. 2019). Peer relationships

could also develop into informal peer mentorship (Apugo 2017). In her study on the

importance of peer relationships for Black women students in PWIs, Apugo (2017) found

that many Black women had a peer that acted as a mentor to them. Apugo (2017) coined

this relationship as a "proxy mentor peer" (PMP). PMPs often shared the same gendered-

racial identity and were often slightly academically ahead of their mentees so they could

provide academic advice. Apugo (2017) found three essential functions of the PMP: to

act as a faculty advisor by providing help with coursework and resources, to act as a

career advisor by helping mentees with their career development, and to be a lifeline or

connection to developing professional relationships and networking. For Black women,

the PMP was salient because they lacked formal mentors (Apugo 2017). Scholars also

found other types of informal mentors, including Black women faculty (even if the

faculty is not from the same department) and student affairs professionals – especially

professionals in student life or multicultural offices (Linder and Winston Simmons 2015;

Winkle-Wagner et al. 2019).

 External Sources of Support. Previous studies also found that Black women

students in PWIs relied on external sources of support such as religion and family. For

Black women, religion and family were sources of support that were already established

before their enrollment in PWIs (Baber 2012; Bentley-Edwards et al. 2016; Shahid et al. 2018; Winkle-Wagner et al. 2019). These external sources of support are highly valued by Black students (Bentley-Edwards et al. 2016) and play essential roles in encouraging Black women to persist despite their struggles and difficulties (Baber 2012; Shahid et al. 2018; Winkle-Wagner 2019). However, in his study on the multidimensional ways of developing a racial identity, Baber (2012) found that family can be both sources of support and sources of stress. Family can become sources of stress when students' shifting racial identities in college contrast the prior racial identities that were shaped and reflected their family's understanding of race (Baber 2012).

Identity Construction. The majority of previous studies that explored the ways Black women construct their identity have focused simply on the construction of racial identity instead of a gendered-racial identity. These studies found that racial inequality in PWIs influences the ways Black women make meaning their racial identity (Baber 2012; Hesse-Biber 2010; Morton and Parsons 2018). For some Black women, the blatant racial hostility in PWIs have made them more aware of their racial identity and have pushed them to reflect on what it means to be Black (Morton and Parsons 2018). Black women expressed the need to constantly resist their marginalization from peers, professors, and college staff, that resilience and self-determination became critical features of their identity, and their understanding of what being a Black woman is like (Morton and Parsons 2018; Storlie et al. 2018. In doing so, Black women redefined what their identity meant to them (Morton and Parsons 2018). Resilience and self-determination were especially embedded in the way Black women in graduate and STEM fields made sense

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of their identity (Morton and Parsons 2018; Culver 2018; Dortch and Patel 2017). Further, the peer relationships and informal networks of support that Black women established as coping mechanisms were also spaces where women affirmed and validated their transformed identity (Apugo 2017).

Previous studies also found that the ways Black women construct their identity vary, thus challenging the assumption that all Black women have the same experiences (Baber 2012; Hesse-Biber et al. 2010). For example, in her study, Hesse-Biber (2010) developed four racial identity groups that her participants discussed: White Enough, Black and Proud, Floaters, and Bridge-Builders. As Hesse-Biber's study shows, Black women make sense of their identities in different ways. The heightened emphasis on race in PWI has raised Black women's awareness and pride in their racial identity. But, other Black women, especially those who are enculturated into white norms or those who are accepted by both Black and white students, find themselves in constant conflict when it comes to racial identity (Hesse-Biber 2010). Previous studies also suggested that Black women's identity construction does not begin in college. Instead, many Black women entered their predominantly white universities with an understanding of their gendered-racial identity (Baber 2012; Hesse-Biber et al. 2010; Morton and Parsons 2018; Strunk et al. 2018). Black women's identity constructions were also shaped by factors external to their PWI experiences such as their communities, the family, and their prior higher educational experiences. These findings further emphasize that Black women's identity constructions are not all the same because it is unlikely that every Black woman

experienced the same experiences before entering PWIs (Baber 2012; Hesse-Biber et al. 2010; Morton and Parsons 2018; Strunk et al. 2018).

Career Development.

The last theme that scholars have explored regarding Black women in PWIs is the ways Black women plan for their post-college lives. While the literature on Black women's career planning in PWIs is scarce, they have identified several factors that inform Black women students' career decisions. One significant factor is Black women students' experiences in PWIs (Bentley-Edwards et al. 2016; Booth and Myers 2011; Storlie et al. 2018). However, there are mixed findings on whether these experiences influenced more positive or negative career developments for Black women. Some scholars found that because of the challenging and negative experiences they faced in PWIs, Black women students were often uncertain about their careers (Bentley-Edwards et al. 2016; Storlie et al. 2018). However, other studies suggest that Black women's experiences led them to strive for professional and academic success as a way to challenge their marginalization and to foster a more inclusive and safer space for future Black women students in academia (Booth and Myers 2011; Corbin et al. 2018; Linder and Winston Simmons 2015). Their goal to challenge hegemonic ideologies and create safer spaces for the next generation encouraged Black women to establish career goals in student affairs - so that they can become formal mentors to Black women students (Linder and Winston Simmons 2015), and in academia - so that they can help diversify their academic fields and provide academic assistance to Black women students who are often ignored (Culver 2018). Another important factor that plays a role in Black women

students' career development is related to identity formation and the ways Black women made meaning of their identity (Byars-Winston 2010; Culver 2018; Storlie et al. 2018). Black women who decided to embrace their marginalized identity and to redefine their identity as symbols of power and resilience were more likely to establish advanced career plans because they aimed to rise from adversity (Culver 2018; Storlie et al. 2018).

Other studies have explored career planning in higher education but are not specific to Black women students or PWIs. However, these studies identify additional factors that influence students' career planning that are worth noting. One important factor is academic performance. Previous studies have found that low academic performance can reduce students' confidence in job competence and in building a career in their academic field which could lead students to change their career paths (Castellanos 2018; Fenning and May 2013; Kim 2014). Another significant factor is mentorship and access to support systems which play important roles in increasing students' motivations and access to career resources (Falconer and Hays 2006; Kim 2014).

Socio-economic status was also found to be a vital factor shaping students' career planning (Castellanos 2018; Titus 2006; Walpole 2008). In a study examining Latina students' STEM-related career decisions, Castellanos (2018) found a significant relationship between socioeconomic status and academic performance which indirectly impacted Latina students' career decisions. Castellanos (2018) found that lower socioeconomic status was associated with lower academic performance and could impact their degree completion and confidence in finding employment in their field. The

relationship between socioeconomic status and degree completion was also found in other studies (Titus 2006; Walpole 2008). These studies have found that students with lower socioeconomic status were less likely to complete a bachelor's degree due to having to work and not having enough time to focus on academics or to seek academic support (Titus 2008; Walpole 2008).

In a study examining the effects of African-American students' socioeconomic status and college outcomes, Walpole (2008) found that socioeconomic status directly impacted African-American students' career decisions including what academic field to select and post-graduation employment options. Walpole (2008) also found that low socioeconomic status limited students' post-graduation options. For example, African-American students with low socioeconomic status were less likely to enroll in graduate school (Walpole 2008). The inability to attend graduate school can impact future income since in many cases, having a Master's or Doctoral degree could lead to higher incomes (Walpole 2008). Studies exploring the effects of socioeconomic status on academic and career experiences all noted the intersection of race and socioeconomic status and recognized that students with low socioeconomic status are also likely to be members of a racial minority group (Castellanos 2018; Titus 2006). In these studies, scholars have recommended future studies to explore the intersections of socioeconomic status and other forms of identities in order to understand students' academic and career experiences.

CONCLUSION

This chapter highlighted some theoretical frameworks and key themes that are important in understanding Black women students' experiences and career planning in PWIs. The section on theoretical frameworks highlights the importance of recognizing the interconnections of racism, sexism and other systems of power and their effects on Black women's lives. In addition, this chapter presented a synthesis of empirical findings which illustrated Black women students' complex living realities in predominantly white institutions. These studies rejected the belief that higher education institutions are becoming more diverse and are promoting student diversity, a belief that is outlined by The U.S. Department of Education (E.D.; n.d.). These studies illustrated that while higher education institutions place institutional value on student diversity, gendered and racial inequalities, were still pervasive within their institutional structures, marginalizing minority students, especially Black women. These gendered and racial inequalities shaped Black women students' college experiences including their career planning.

While the literature provides extensive knowledge on Black women's experiences in PWIs, there is one gap in the literature that is worth noting which relates to Black women students' lives after college. Previous studies have found the ways that Black women's experiences and other factors influence their career planning. While Black women's unique PWI experiences may end when they leave these institutions, there is a possibility that the effects of these experiences will continue. However, the continuing or long-term impacts of PWI experiences and career-related factors on Black women's post-college career planning is rarely addressed in previous studies. However, addressing this gap in the literature will provide us with a deeper understanding of the strength of higher

education institutional inequality and a deeper understanding of the importance of racial-gendered identity construction in PWIs. Guided by the literature, the current study aims to address this gap. In this study, I utilized CRT with a focus on intersectionality to explore Black women students' career planning as students and as alumni. In the next chapter, I outline the methodology I utilized to answer my research questions.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

INTRODUCTION

The current study was guided by two questions, what factors influence Black women's career planning in predominantly white higher education institutions? And how do these factors continue to impact their career planning after college? Data for this study were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with recent Black alumnae from South Eastern College. This study not only explored Black women's experiences at a predominantly white institution, it also focused on the ways Black women interpret and make meaning out of their experiences and whether these experiences shaped their career planning. In-depth interviews proved to be the most fitting data collection method; in-depth interviews are often used to analyze processes, meaning-making, and to answer "how" and "why" questions. In addition, since Black women face unique challenges and are often silenced because of their intersecting marginalized identities, in-depth interviews were valuable because they allow for "thick descriptions" and allow Black women to narrate their experiences and interpret how they make sense of their experiences instead of the researcher interpreting it for them.

The interviews were conducted virtually through WebEx. Virtual interviews, in lieu of in-person interviews, provided several unique advantages. First, virtual interviews reduced accessibility barriers for participants and the researchers (Sullivan 2012). Face-to-face interviews would not have been suitable for all research participants as some participants lived in different states. Second, virtual interviews were time and cost-

effective and eliminated both the researcher's and participants' travel costs and the challenge of finding a meeting venue since virtual interviews do not require the researcher and participants to meet at a physical location (Iacono et al. 2016; Sullivan 2012). Third, since virtual interviews allowed participants to choose any location they want (their home, office, etc.), virtual interviews provided more comfort for participants. Providing participants the opportunity to be interviewed wherever they felt most comfortable was vital as some questions or topics discussed during the interview were difficult (Janghorban et al. 2014).

In this chapter, I discuss the details of the data collection process including the sampling procedure, measurement strategies and instruments and ethical considerations. I describe the interview process including scheduling, conducting the interview, and post-interview emails. After discussing the data collection process, I highlight the analysis and interpretation process.

SAMPLING PROCEDURE

Convenience and snowball sampling methods were used to recruit 17 participants who fit the eligibility criteria of the research. To be eligible for the research, participants had to have graduated from South East College (SEC) between 2008 and 2018, had to identify as Black or African-American and identify as women when they attended SEC. Participants were recruited from two Facebook pages created for SEC students and alumni. After obtaining written approval from the page administrators, a "call for participants" flyer was posted in both Facebook groups by the page administrators. The flyer provided details about the purpose of the research, eligibility requirements,

instructions for participation in the interview process, participant benefits to the research, and my contact information. I also provided participants with a $10 Amazon electronic gift card which was also stated on the recruitment flyer.

Participants were also recruited using snowball sampling. At the end of each interview, I asked participants if they were willing to share information about the research with their friends and to share instructions to participate in the interview if their friends were interested. This method proved to be especially useful as approximately half of the research participants shared that they heard about the research from their friends.

MEASUREMENT STRATEGIES

Interview Schedule I created an interview schedule before beginning the interview process to prepare for and provide structure for the interviews. A copy of this interview schedule is provided in Appendix A. The interview schedule consisted of 30 questions. The majority of interview questions were open-ended to allow for thick descriptions and story-telling. However, there were also some closed-ended questions such as "did you have a mentor in college?" I created sub-questions in addition to closed-ended questions in order to gain more descriptions. For example, the question "did you have a mentor in college?" included three sub-questions including "can you describe this relationship?"

I also created optional sub-questions for open-ended questions in case more detail was needed from participants or if participants needed more clarification for a question. The sub-questions also proved useful in guiding the conversation and encouraging story-telling. For example, when I asked participants the question: "have you ever been the only Black woman in your classes?" several participants answered the question and also

shared their personal experiences. However, for participants who responded with a brief "yes" or "no," I asked the following sub-questions: "what was that experience like?" and "can you give me one or two examples of your own experiences?"

Operationalization The interview schedule included 30 questions that focused on six different topics guided by previous literature: introductory questions, PWI questions, academic experiences, social and residential experiences, support, mentorship and other relationship questions, and career development questions. Introductory and PWI questions included questions about participants' age, graduation date, current occupation, and their own descriptions of South East College and why they attended the college. These questions provided valuable contextual information and a deeper understanding of how participants interpreted and made meaning out of their lived experiences at SEC. I learned from previous studies that context is important and plays an important role in understanding differences in lived experiences. For example, Haynes' (2019) study on Black women's residential and social experiences in PWIs found that Black women students who attended a predominantly white high school have different experiences than their peers who attended more diverse high schools because they may not have as big of a culture shock.

My decision to create sets of questions exploring academic, social and residential experiences, support, and mentorship and other relationships in the interview schedule was guided by existing literature. As noted in the literature review, past studies have found that Black women's experiences in the classroom, outside of the classroom, involvement in campus organization and student life play important roles in shaping

Black women's career decisions (Bentley-Edwards et al. 2016; Booth and Myers 2011; Corbin et al. 2018; Storlie et al. 2018). I chose to further explore these topics, hoping to find a deeper understanding on the relationship between these topics and career development and whether these factors continued to play a role in Black women's post-college career development.

To measure academic experiences, I created five questions that focused mainly on participants' classroom experiences. I chose academic experiences as one topic to focus on because previous studies suggest there is a relationship between academic experiences and career planning. For example, participants who experienced micro-aggressions or lack of representation or lack of support from their professors due to their marginalized identity may choose to leave the program and choose an entirely different major which would change their career paths (Vaccaro 2017; Winkle-Wagner 2019). While the focus was on classroom experiences, the five questions explored different aspects of classroom experiences such as being the only Black woman in courses, feeling supported by professors, and how being a Black woman shaped classroom experiences. I asked these questions to determine whether Black women experienced any forms of micro-aggressions or marginalization in the classroom. I also asked participants about their major and how they selected their major. I asked this question to explore whether academic experiences differ based on the academic field. For example, how did experiences differ for participants who were in STEM and participants who majored in fields such as Sociology or Women's Studies, where race and gender are often discussed? Finally, I asked participants to describe their favorite and least favorite classes to explore

whether participants liked or disliked these courses due to the content or due to how they were treated.

The interview schedule also included two questions that measured Black women's social experiences at SEC. These questions asked specifically about residential experiences and involvement in campus organizations and groups. I asked these questions to examine how Black women navigated SEC and whether these experiences were shaped by their race and gender. Past studies suggest that experiences outside of the classroom may also influence academic performance and students' career planning including their access to career-related resources and support systems (Bentley-Edwards et al. 2016; Booth and Myers 2011; Storlie et al. 2018).

Another topic that I explored was mentorship, support and other relationships. To measure this topic, I asked three questions asking participants if they felt supported in college and what that support looked like, if they had a formal or informal mentor, and whether Black women felt comfortable sharing their unique challenges with their support systems. I asked these questions because having a network of support can be vital in career planning. For example, mentors may play a role in directing students to resources or career opportunities, provide recommendation and reference letters, and provide advice as students prepare to graduate (Apugo 2017; Culver 2018). Moreover, past studies found that support systems were a form of coping mechanism that encouraged Black women to continue with school despite negative experiences and high sources of stress (Apugo 2017; Baber 2012; Storlie et al. 2018).

The last section of the interview schedule asked questions about career development, a crucial element in this research. To operationalized career development, I focused on three aspects: career objectives, resources, and support which all play important roles in career development. To measure career objectives, I created questions that asked participants to describe their career ideas while they were in college including their post-college plans, their career goals, and if there were workplace characteristics that they found important during their job search. To measure resources, I also asked participants about the resources and opportunities they had at SEC to help with their planning including career centers, workshops, and networking events. I also asked participants to share their experiences with using these resources or for more details on why they did not use the resources. To measure support, I included questions that asked participants if there were individuals who assisted or shaped their career development including friends, professors, and mentors.

In the career development section, I also asked participants how being a Black woman, specifically a Black woman at SEC, shaped their career development while they were in college. These questions help me to explore whether there is a link between participants' experiences (including academic, social and support) and their career development. Moreover, since my research also explored post-college career development, I asked several questions and sub-questions relating to participants current career development and asked participants to compare their past and current career development. For example, one of my questions was "what was your career goal?" and

the next sub-question was "has this goal changed since you graduated? if so, what influenced this change?"

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Since the current research involves voluntary participation from human subjects, I made several ethical considerations to ensure that participants were treated with respect, fairness and that participants' safety were not at risk. I also ensured that no recruitment or data collection were made until I obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board. Moreover, I followed the basic ethical principles and guidelines outlined in the Belmont report which was written by the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research for conducting research involving human subjects (The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research 1976).

Following the respect for persons principle of the Belmont Report, I made sure that participants received detailed information about the research and their participation and voluntarily agree to participate. As a result, I made sure to receive participants' consent before starting the interviews. I created an informed consent document which outlined information about the research, the risks and benefits of participating in the research, participants' rights, confidentiality, participation and contact information. The informed consent was sent to participants prior to the interview and I ensured that participants had ample time to read the document and ask questions. In addition, I spent the first five to ten minutes of the interview to go over the informed consent document with participants and to provide a space for participants to ask questions. Since my

interviews were virtual, a verbal consent was obtained at the beginning of the interview in lieu of a signed consent form. The verbal consent included consent to be interviewed, to be video-recorded and to be audio-recorded. Instructions about giving verbal consent was also highlighted on the informed consent document that participants received before their interviews.

I also took several steps to maximize benefits and minimize any potential risks for the research. Moreover, I made sure to communicate the risks and benefits with participants in the informed consent document and at the beginning of the interview. There were minimal risks presented by the research. During the interviews, participants were asked to reflect on their experiences in PWI. Past studies suggest that these experiences can be negative; therefore, one potential risk was increased level of discomfort, stress, or mental health triggers from recounting negative experiences. To address these risks, I informed participants that they can stop the interview or take a break at any time if discomfort or stress arises. Moreover, I informed participants that they can ask to stop recording or turn off their cameras at any time if some stories are distressing or uncomfortable. At the end of each interview, I debriefed with each participant to ensure that they were okay and to answer any of their questions or concerns before ending the WebEx meeting. Moreover, after the interview, I emailed participants with a list of mental health and self-care resources. This list includes numbers of free mental health helplines such as the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), and online resources for self-care and mental health provided by the Dear Black Women movement (Dear Black Women 2018).

Past studies have also noted that virtual interviews can raise some ethical issues, including problems with confidentiality. For example, while communication through video conferencing applications should be encrypted, it is important to note that online forms of communication are monitored continuously by third-party sites, therefore, the interview is not entirely confidential (Iacono, Symonds and Brown 2016; Janghorban, Latifnejad Roudsari, and Taghipour 2014; Sullivan 2012). A statement on WebEx' privacy measures and a link to the application's privacy statement was provided in the informed consent for participants to review and were also discussed with participants before their interviews. To reduce additional confidentiality risks, I took several steps to protect my participants' identities and make sure that the information provided by participants could not be linked back to them and their identities were confidential. For instances, I created a separate email address for the current research and used the email address solely for communicating with participants. In addition, participants' names were not asked or mentioned during the interview and I did not include participants' names in my interview notes and transcripts. Participants' names and any other names that participants mentioned during the interview were replaced with pseudonyms in the transcripts and in my analyses. After the interview recordings were downloaded from WebEx, I ensured the recordings were permanently deleted from the application. Participants' information, video recordings, and interview transcripts were stored in a secured, password-protected electronic folder that is only accessible to me and the principal investigator. I also created a key to determine each participants' pseudonym and other pseudonyms for other individuals mentioned in the interviews which I stored in the

same password-protected electronic folder. Information on the steps taken to protect confidentiality was provided in the informed consent document. In addition, I discussed these confidentiality measures with participants before asking for consent and during the de-brief period after the interview.

INTERVIEW PROCESS

After obtaining IRB approval, I began recruiting participants and conducting interviews. This section outlines the interview process including the sample, scheduling the interview, the interview format, and post-interview steps.

The Sample. As mentioned above, data for this research were collected through virtual in-depth interviews. The interviews were conducted through WebEx and lasted roughly 60 to 90 minutes. Participants were recruited using convenience sampling from research flyers posted in two student and alumni Facebook pages and snowball sampling such as word-of-mouth and participant referrals. To meet the eligibility requirements of the research, participants had to have graduated from SEC between 2008 and 2018 and identify as Black or African-American and woman while they attended SEC.

A total of 17 interviews were conducted for this research. All 17 participants met the eligibility requirements of the research and gave their verbal consent at the beginning of the interview. While all participants identified as woman while they attended SEC, two participants are currently non-binary and "they/them" pronouns will be used when referring to these two participants in the findings chapter. Table 1 provides important information about the sample including participants' graduation date, academic major, and current occupation.

As documented in the table, participants' ages ranged from 24 to 31. Participants' graduation years ranged from 2010 to 2018 however, the majority of participants graduated between 2016 and 2018. This homogeneity is partly due to snowball sampling strategies where participants were referred by their friends, many of whom they graduated with. Research participants majored in various disciplines including humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and applied sciences.

Table 1: Description of Participants

Participant Pseudonym	Age	Graduation Year	Major(s)	Current Occupation(s)
Adelaide	24	2017	Environmental Science	Outreach Coordinator at a Science Institute
Angela	24	2018	Arts Management and French	Administrative Assistant at an Art Museum
Ava	24	2018	Religious Studies	Graduate Student
Briana	30	2012	English	Development Coordinator at a Higher Education Institution
Brittany	31	2011	History	Middle School Assistant Principal
Connie	30	2012	Psychology and Sociology	Social Worker
Eliza	26	2016	Women's Studies	Government Employee
Harriet	25	2017	Archeology	Special Education Teacher's Assistant
Jessica	25	2017	Foreign Language	Retail Store Supervisor
Justice	24	2018	Sociology and Women's Studies	Workers Compensation Adjuster
Kelly	26	2016	Business and Political Science	Assistant Director of Marketing and Membership at an Attorneys Association
Leia	31	2010	Biology	Senior Operations Analyst

Michele	24	2018	Business	Executive Assistant at a Nonprofit Organization
Mona	25	2017	Political Science	Office Coordinator at a Foundation
Raja	30	2012	Biology and Chemistry	Business Owner, Farmer, and Coordinator of Church Relations at a Higher Education Institution
Renee	28	2014	Sociology	People Operations Lead at a Corporation
Vanta	24	2018	Business	Front Desk/Receptionist

Scheduling the Interview. The research flyers and word-of-mouth recruitment methods provided instructions on how to participate in the research and also included the email address to contact me. The scheduling procedure is as follows. When an interest email was received, I responded to the email by thanking individuals for their interest. In addition, I also included four questions for participants to answer in order to determine their eligibility for the research. If individuals were eligible for the study, I sent them an email with the informed consent document attached and asked participants to respond with a statement that they reviewed the consent document and with a list of three or four available dates and times for the interviews. Once participants responded stating they reviewed the consent document and their availabilities, I responded with a specific date and time. Once participants confirmed the date and time for the interview, I emailed participants with a WebEx meeting invitation and instructions on how to utilize WebEx. Individuals who were not eligible for the study were informed via email and were thanked for their interest.

The Interview Format. At the beginning of each interview, I dedicated five to ten minutes to providing an overview of the informed consent document and to allow participants to ask questions. After going over the informed consent, I asked participants if they could provide their verbal consent which I recorded. After participants gave their consent, I asked them if they had any questions before we begin the interview. When participants were ready, I began with introductory questions and followed the interview schedule format. Participants were notified when before moving to a new section of the interview schedule. Throughout the interview, participants were informed that they can

always go back to a question if they needed more time to answer. Moreover, if I noticed signs of stress such as changes in tone of voice, body language, I reminded participants that they can take a break if needed or stop recording. At the end of the interview, I spent five to ten minutes to de-brief with participants and asked participants if they wanted to go back to any of the sections, if they had additional information to add or if they had any questions. At the end of the interview, I also provided instructions including how participants will receive their $10 Amazon e-gift card and self-care resources.

Post Interview Steps. After each interview, I sent participants with an email to thank them for their participation and to inform them that a $10 Amazon e-gift card was sent to their email. In this email, I also attached the list of mental health and self-care resources. Finally, I asked provided instructions and contact information if participants had any additional questions or concerns and asked participants if they were willing to share information on the research with their friends.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORKS

Critical race theory (CRT) and intersectionality were utilized as analytical frameworks to guide my analysis of the various factors that shape Black women's career development in PWIs. As I conducted more interviews, I began noticing an interesting pattern. When participants were asked about diversity and about their overall experiences at SEC, almost all participants began by discussing the lack of racial diversity and their experiences with racism at the college. Throughout their interviews, participants also highlighted the ways that white privilege, color blindness and white supremacy were structurally and culturally embedded and re-enforced at SEC. As I realized that racism

was the most discussed system of oppression, I began relying on CRT to guide further interviews and to guide the analytical processes including coding and finding significant themes.

As noted in Chapter Two, CRT is a theoretical approach is a common theory used in higher education research including studies that explore the experiences of student of colors in higher education and PWI research. CRT has also been previously relied on to provide a deeper understanding of Black women's experiences in PWIs (Esposito 2011; Linder and Winston Simmons 2015; Vaccaro 2017). CRT scholars have identified five core components of CRT in education research however, three are especially important in this research. Fist, race and racism are central to understanding how American society and its institutions function. In other words, racism is still highly prevalent in American society and we are not seeing a complete picture if we do not take into consideration how racism is organized and reproduced in society. Second, CRT challenges hegemonic ideology and the belief that racism no longer exists. Research that has utilized CRT as a theoretical approach have found that color-blindness, race neutrality, and meritocracy are in fact ways that perpetuate white supremacy. Therefore, CRT scholars have worked to challenge these ideals. Finally, CRT acknowledges and values the lived experiences of persons of color as legitimate and critical in providing a richer understanding of the ways that society and its institutions function. CRT has provided a fundamental perspective to this research especially as I began seeing how race and racism have informed Black women's career development. Participants stories have highlighted how racism plays a significant role within SEC's structures and culture. As a result, participants have faced

numerous forms of overt and subtle racism as I will discuss in the next chapter. The racism at SEC has created unique lived experiences of Black women students and made their career development different from their peers.

While racism was the most discussed system of power throughout the interviews, it is important to note that it was not the only system of power that participants highlighted. This research also relies on intersectionality as an analytical tool because while racism was highly prevalent, participants' stories exposed the intersections of race, gender, and socio-economic in shaping their experiences and career development at SEC. Weaving critical race theory and intersectionality, my analysis explored the ways that racism shaped Black women's career development as well as how racism is linked to sexism and classism in shaping Black women's career development. In the next chapter, I discuss the ways that systems of power are embedded in SEC's structures and practices which are essential to understanding Black women's career development.

CHAPTER FOUR: SETTING THE SCENE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides contextual information about SEC and participants' overall experiences on the campus. Information provided in this chapter were taken from SEC's website which is protected due to confidentiality as well as participants' responses to the questions regarding SEC and participants' academic and social experiences. Throughout my analysis, I realized that these experiences are essential to understand the ways that participants understood and made meaning out of their experiences as well was what it meant for participants to be a Black woman at SEC. These experiences directly and indirectly shape Black women's career planning. As a result, it is crucial to gain a deeper understanding of SEC and participants' experiences before discussing their career planning.

As discussed in the previous chapter, CRT and intersectionality are used as analytical frameworks to explore the ways that racism and its links to other systems of power like classism and sexism shape Black women's career development. Both frameworks have been valuable in understanding Black women's experiences and career development at South East College. SEC has committed to preparing its students for academic and professional success and provides a plethora of opportunities to guide its students toward those successes. These opportunities include a career center, personalized career roadmap, "family" feel, and cultural competency. Participants' stories, however, unveil a more complex illustration of SEC. Throughout their interviews, participants

described how they vastly differed from their peers in terms of race and socio-economic status. In addition, participants highlighted the ways that racial, gendered and class inequalities are structured in many of SEC's career-related programs and centers, creating unique lived experiences for Black women and shaping the ways they envision and plan their careers. Participants' stories show that while the successes and opportunities that SEC provides are available to all students, participants' use and access to these resources and opportunities differed from their peers.

SOUTH EAST COLLEGE

South East College (SEC) is a small, private liberal arts college situated in a small Southeastern town and is an exceptionally unique institution. SEC is an undergraduate college with roughly 1,500 students and offers over 50 different areas of study[1]. The college's picturesque 125-acre campus, small class sizes, its four-year degree guarantee, and the high reputation of its career preparation program are highly attractive to prospective students and are among the key reasons that students choose to attend SEC. The college also provides generous financial aid and awards packages for its students, making the private college more accessible and desirable for prospective students. In fact, 99 percent of SEC students, including all the Black alumnae who participated in this research, received scholarships, grants, or financial aid. Most participants reported that due to the generous scholarship and grants they received, attending SEC ended up being more affordable than attending the other colleges and universities they applied to.

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[1] Information on SEC is from the college's website, blinded to protect confidentiality.

South East College takes pride in its cultural competence and the various opportunities SEC students receive to develop their appreciation and respect for different cultures, people and ideas. However, participants' stories illustrate a different picture of diversity, or lack thereof, at SEC. When asked whether they thought SEC was diverse, all research participants disagreed and almost all participants immediately began discussing the lack of racial diversity at the college. SEC is a predominantly white institution; in 2017, 77 percent of SEC students and 85 percent of the college's faculty identified as white. According to most participants, lack of racial diversity was the first characteristic they noticed upon their enrollment. Research participants used phrases such as, "I could name every Black person at SEC" and "where are all the Black people?" to emphasize the lack of racial diversity at the college. Angela emphasized that it was always easy to "pick out and count how many people of color there are standing in a crowd."

In addition to low racial diversity, research participants also shared that SEC lacked diversity in terms of students' socio-economic status, sexuality and mindsets. When describing the lack of diversity at SEC, Eliza, a 2016 alumna said, "everyone walked the same, talked the same, [and] lived the same life." Lack of diversity in income, wealth, and socio-economic status were also brought up by many participants. For example, Brittany shared that being at SEC was the "first time I had ever been in a place where people had, I guess what you would call 'old money' where classism was a reality." Leia also described the various ways that SEC lacked diversity including racial and socio-economic diversity and how the lack of diversity impacted them,

"When I started at SEC there were probably a couple handfuls of Black

people. It was *bad*. Nowadays, there are probably five handfuls… there were very

very few Black people and most of them were football players. Not a lot of Black

women, there was a tiny *tiny* group of queers. Even tinier was a group of queers

like myself who were out. I would say also income diversity or financial. Most of

the students there were pretty wealthy or from wealthy families. At the very least

they were from middle class families and I had problems buying textbooks."

In addition to describing the lack of racial diversity at SEC, research participants

also revealed the ways racism and racial subordination were produced and re-produced at

the college. In addition to racism, classism was another system of power that was most

often discussed by participants and for many participants, racism and classism intersected

to shape their career development. Some participants also highlighted inequality based on

sexism and shared that despite women making up more than 50 percent of SEC's student

body, sexist traditions and behaviors were seen as the norm and tolerated on campus.

Angela, for example, shared how one of their professors was "blatantly openly sexist"

and often made sexist remarks toward his students, who were mostly women. This

professor's sexism is that made his course Angela's least favorite. In other words,

participants' stories emphasized that differences in race, class or socio-economic status,

viewpoints, gender and sexuality shaped students' access to resources and opportunities,

including those that are essential for career development. In the next section, I elaborate

on the ways racism, classism, and other systems of power are organized at SEC and their

effects on Black women students.

Many participants shared their surprise with the lack of diversity at SEC. According to several participants, the SEC they attended was remarkably different from the SEC they saw during their campus visit. When visiting SEC as prospective students, participants described remembering a close-knit, welcoming, and diverse campus. Adelaide shared that the campus tour was a great experience and she "felt like home." Similarly, Justice recalled that it was the special treatment that she received when visiting the campus that made her want to enroll, "I had my own parking space with my name on it… After I left, I received a handwritten note just thanking me for touring the campus. It was just very welcoming *at the time*… I chose them because of the way they treated me."

Participants also remembered being attracted to the college's diverse students, diverse educational opportunities and student organizations. However, when they moved into their new home as incoming freshmen, many participants felt betrayed or surprised as they failed to find the diversity they were promised. Michelle, for example, shared, "I don't want to say they bamboozle you but they make it seem more diverse than what it is." In her interview, Jessica, a 2017 alumna, explained what she coins as SEC's "fake diversity":

> "Don't be fooled by the presentation shown at [SEC]…When I was first
> introduced to [SEC], they provided this beautiful scenery. They showed
> my mother and I PowerPoints of how diverse the school was, how they
> were inclusive and diversified and when I got there, it was the complete
> opposite of that. I was in such shock for my first year of school… I want

people to do their research and not just listen to admissions or advisors or whoever they are talking to. In my opinion, it's heavily flawed."

Similar to Michelle and Jessica, other participants quickly noticed that lack of racial diversity at SEC as well as the presence of racism at the college which, to many, was a major culture shock. Renee for example, was invited a watermelon picking party during her first two weeks at SEC. Brittany also shared her early experiences with racial diversity and the forms of racial discrimination at SEC which were entirely new to her and created a culture shock, "it was the very first place I was ever 'too Black' to do anything. I was at one point denied into a party and that was my first real experience with discrimination as it came to color." In describing their culture shock in their interview, Leia started with a loud laughter with their head down and their hands covering their head, indicating the immensity of their culture shock. Leia began their story saying,

"It was really surprising how unprepared I was. I had never, I mean I'm from a Black country and I've seen white people and interacted with a couple of them but at that point I never really been in a place that had that many white people in it. People were really different. The way people interacted with each other was very different. I had to adjust quite a bit and it certainly wasn't as welcoming or as cool as I thought it was going to be. So that was a letdown."

Within a few weeks of being a student at SEC, participants began to notice the ways that racism took form at the college. It is important to note that while participants

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shared their experiences with racism throughout their interviews, racism and sexism were often interlocked in their stories. In other words, many of the forms of racism and experiences Black women faced were gendered racism. For example, when describing what being a Black woman at SEC was like, research participants stated that the college was a hostile, toxic and dangerous place for Black students, but especially Black women. Michelle, a 2018 alumna, said SEC made it clear that the college "hated Black women." Vanta shared that as a Black woman, "you don't exist. white men and white women are majority so of course they will be seen. Black men are put on a pedestal because they do sport. If you are a Black woman you just disappear." Some of the forms of racism included derogatory remarks and racist parties, isolation and exclusion, and stereotyping.

Derogatory Remarks and Racist Parties.

One form of racism that participants described in their stories was the frequent use of racial slurs and derogatory remarks. For example, Brittany shared instances where her soccer teammates would refer to her as "mulatto," a derogatory term for mixed-race individuals. Justice shared that living in dorms was challenging because "white people don't know anything about me… a girl didn't even know that the inside of my hand wasn't going to be brown." Participants described hearing white students use derogatory and racist slurs including saying the n-word and shared that hearing the n-word used by white students was common. Many participants described instances where they or their friends were called the n-word, or they witnessed white people saying the n-word. For example, Michelle described a night where she and her friends heard a group of white women students screaming the n-word outside of their dorm which was located at the

center of the campus. Mona said "I didn't think that I would ever hear someone say, 'I tried to get into this fraternity party. I'm a Black woman and when I tried to get in somebody called me the n-word with the hard R and dumped a beer on my head.' That's a level of racism that I had been exposed to when I was growing up in the South but it was something I naively hoped people would grow out of."

Participants also shared that parties and events had racist themes including a "build that wall" party and a "watermelon picking event." Participants shared that university administrators tolerated these forms of racism and rarely took actions to create a safer space for Black students, especially Black women. Participants often felt unheard by the SEC administration and as a result, each time racism occurred on campus, participants shared they had to stay silent and accept the circumstances. To participants, these events and the tolerance of racism at SEC made it clear that they were not welcome and did not belong on the campus. As a result, participants often had to commute to nearby cities and more diverse universities in order to have a social life. These illustrations of the sexism and racism on SEC's campus contribute to previous illustrations of racialized and gendered hierarchies in higher education institutions (Corbin, Smith, and Garcia 2018; Green et al. 2018; Vaccaro 2017). These studies have argued that for higher education institutions to fully become diverse, they must be willing to change their structure.

Isolation and Exclusion

   Segregation. In their stories, participants described different ways they witnessed race-based isolation and exclusion. According to Eliza, one of the forms of isolation was

segregation where Black students were only welcomed in certain campus spaces. While other participants did not specifically call it segregation, some participants also noted they could pinpoint the few areas on SEC's campus where Black students and students of color were welcomed. According to participants, these spaces were designated by the college. In her interview, Eliza provided a clear illustration of this subtle segregation:

"There were certain areas where you see people of color, where they're welcome. But not across the entire institution and that's for teachers and students… You would see people of color in the sociology department, the women's studies department the diversity and multicultural house… the sports teams, but not even the whole sports teams, just pockets of the sports teams."

Eliza added that this subtle segregation was also obvious in freshmen dorms. Most SEC students live on campus and most incoming freshmen are not able to select their own roommate or choose their own dorms. Eliza shared that the college intentionally places all Black freshmen in the same dorms:

"We [Black women students] were pocketed on one side of the hall, all the Black girls were on one side… there was only one [white student] and then everyone else was a person of color]. And then, the boys in another hall, all of our Black guy friends were on one side."

Eliza's descriptions of segregated freshmen residence halls were also confirmed in other participant interviews. Justice, Renee, Briana, and Michelle's description of their residence halls support Eliza's claim of segregated residence halls, and they claim their

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freshmen halls were the most diverse, the "minority hall." Moreover, participants explained that this subtle segregation only occurred during their freshman year because as upper classmen, they could choose their roommates and their dorms. Participants noted that while starting their freshman year in a diverse hall was comforting, it also made them feel as though they were stripped of their freedom and made them feel as though these "Black spaces" were the only spaces they were allowed to be in.

Segregation at SEC was not limited to students but was also evident in the college's staff members. Several participants shared with me that staff members of color were only found in kitchen and housekeeping services. For many participants, Black women staff members were a source of support. For Connie, they were like "motherly support" which was really important "especially when you could not go home." Adelaide also mentioned that Black women in the kitchen staff took a "mother role" for her which she found comforting, "we have that sense of understanding, especially when people would do or say something racist or sexist, there was comfort knowing I can go to them." While building connection with Black women staff at SEC was valuable, participants like Eliza and Mona also noticed the segregation and the message it conveyed: "You look at the staff at [SEC], you think all you're ever going to be if you're a person of color is waitstaff. That's all they have is just people of color serving food." Similarly, Mona said, "there wasn't a lot of faculty representation, every Black woman was either cleaning or in the kitchen. There's nothing wrong with those professions but if you wanted to be a faculty member, SEC didn't give you a lot of hope."

Many of these segregated spaces were chosen by the institution which echoes Vaccaro's (2017) argument that PWIs were heavily segregated on a race level, a class level and an intellectual level and this segregation, which is institutionally enforced but are hidden by the perpetuation of the equal opportunity and color-blind ideologies, serve as harmful barriers to Black women's success in PWIs (Vaccaro 2017). Subtle segregation made participants feel isolated and unwelcomed.

Exclusion. Another form of racism that occurred at SEC was being ignored or excluded by their peers and other students. Participants shared that this occurred in various settings such as parties. Participants shared that Black women were often not allowed to enter the campus parties unless they arrived at the party with men or white women or you were an athlete. For example, Ava shared with me that the women's basketball team, which was predominantly Black, "could get into parties and get invited to things if there happened to be an influx of white women on the team… that type of camaraderie." Several participants shared stories of being denied entry at parties. For example, Harriet, recalled a night where her roommate returned from a fraternity party in tears. Harriet shared that her friend was not allowed to enter the party because she was a Black woman and while negotiating with the party hosts to be let into the party, Harriet's friend heard that Black people inside the house were being called the n-word. Harriet's friend was "heartbroken because she was like 'I'm good enough to be in class with you, help you get good grades on your assignments. But I'm not good enough to hang out with you."

In the few times that they could enter the parties, participants shared that they were isolated and treated as though they were invisible. Black women expressed that while their white peers would be friendly with them in classes, outside of academic spaces, their peers often pretended to not know them. In her interview, Justice described the ways Black women were isolated at parties and said, "nobody wanted to dance with you, nobody wanted to talk to you. The only way you get someone to notice you is if you did the splits or do something super outrageous to get attention but mostly, it's like being invisible in a room full of people." Being ignored and feeling invisible was not only limited to party scenes. For example, when asked to share an experience that illustrates what it was like to be a Black woman at SEC, Brittany said, "people wanted to engage with me on a Friday or Saturday night but these same people ignored me in class or the dining hall like we didn't know each other," an experience that Brittany shared happened too often. For participants, being isolated or excluded from campus events was taxing and they eventually gave up. As Ava shared with me, "we had to commute in order to have a social life."

In academic spaces, participants shared that being one of the few, if not the only Black woman student in a class was common. Several participants also reported being the only Black woman in their department or major. Consistent with findings from previous studies, participants shared that being the only Black woman in their classes was isolating. Black women students often felt that being isolated and excluded in their classes invalidated their presence and made them feel like they did not belong (Dortch and Patel 2017; Hannon et al. 2016; Winkle-Wagner et al. 2019). However I found that

Black women students felt isolated due not only to their hypervisibility (physically) but also their difference in perspectives from their peers. Some participants shared that having a different perspective made them feel nervous and kept them from participating in class. Participants also noted that when they chose to share their different viewpoints, they felt invalidated and ignored by their professors and their peers, which made them uncomfortable.

In academic spaces, participants shared that they felt most isolated when topics of race and racial injustice arose in their classes. Similar to Justice's description of being invisible in a room full of people at parties, Angela described the discomfort and lack of acknowledgement they experienced in their classes:

"If the topic of racial injustices or Black people in general came up, I would have to sit there and listen to white people talk about my experiences as though I wasn't a Black person who could talk about them myself and I don't need white people who don't share these experiences to explain them to me or debate them with me because it's not a debate, it's real life. Sometimes it would just be like non-Black students would say things that were racist or insensitive and there would be no repercussions or comments about it to discourage it. It's very isolating and it's just weird to be in classes where people are talking about you but not talking to you."

Many participants also shared that when race became the topic of class discussions, their professors or classmates would ask them to contribute to the conversation or ask for their opinion. While including Black women in race

conversations may be seen as a form of good intention, participants expressed that they felt an inconsiderable amount of pressure and often felt like they were expected to speak for all Black people. Leia, who majored in Biology and Philosophy, shared that they often felt intimidated and disconnected from their STEM program but expressed feeling more uncomfortable in their women's studies and philosophy courses where topics of race often occurred, "in some ways, having people look at me when they talk about something like, not white and them wanting me to share what I think about it. Even though it might feel like you're including me, it felt worse to be singled out to share my thoughts about this one thing."

Stereotypes. Consistent with findings from previous studies (Culver 2018; Esposito 2011; Strunk et al. 2018; Vaccaro 2017), participants shared that many SEC students, faculty and staff relied on stereotypes to create assumptions and expectations of Black women. Participants recognized that due to their hypervisibility, it was easy for them to fall into these stereotypes and spent a significant amount of their time avoiding stereotypes. Therefore, Black women students were always conscious of their actions and behaviors and felt that they had to tread lightly or "walk on eggshells" at SEC. For example, to avoid being stereotyped, participants shared they had to constantly evaluate their behaviors during each class. Adelaide and Eliza shared some of the questions they used as criteria to evaluate their behaviors:

> Am I being too much? Am I being too assertive? I am asking enough without being deemed as aggressive or angry? (Adelaide)

Can I raise my hand? Do I say something? Do I be quiet? How can I engage

in class? Do I engage in this class? If someone says something offensive,

do I respond? God forbid I do respond then it's me against them. Do I report

it? (Eliza)

Being aware of their hypervisibility and how easy it was to be stereotyped; many participants also shared that they had to make decisions in their classes that would reduce their visibility. These decisions included always sitting in the back of the classroom, not participating in class, not asking questions, and never being late to class. For other participants, this meant perfecting their codeswitching skills and learning to "act white." For example, Connie shared that she learned to codeswitch because you "have to be well versed in interacting with white people." Similarly, Harriet shared that "you have to codeswitch at SEC. You have to act one way and present yourself a whole other way around professors. If I were to act like the true me or the person I am when I'm around my family or friends, it may not be accepted. I may be perceived as a stereotype like the angry Black person or she's loud. Being a Black woman, there is two sides." In addition to reducing their visibility, a study by Strunk et al. (2018) found that these actions were also common coping mechanisms to race-related stress.

Tolerance of Racism. Participants shared that both overt and "hidden" forms of racism were tolerated or hidden by the institution. In her interview, Briana shared that "race issues and discriminatory things were swept under the rug like they didn't exist." Ava also shared her frustration with daily racism at SEC and claimed the institution was "choosing to be racist and anti-Black and

anti-Brown… they were literally choosing to allow this to perpetuate." Similarly, Renee shared that the university rarely responded to claims of racism or racial discrimination on campus, "I don't think that was necessarily a priority of theirs… there was a fraternity watermelon picking party, a very high fraternity at school with a lot of financial backing. So pretty much everything they do goes under the radar, they can't really do any wrong."

Raja also found problems with the institution's mode of thinking which was,

> "we know there is a problem but we refuse to say there is really a problem without having hard figures and hard numbers. [The responses] feel like band aid attempts, like 'let's get everyone quiet.' We have so few students of color that the few who are brave enough and understand what is going on speak up, they feel more like a squeaky wheel. It feels like the administration goes into this mode of 'oh that is just that one student's perspective' when there's not enough people in general and not enough people that are going to speak up to make them realize it's a real problem."

The Effects of Racism at SEC. Previous studies have found that racial minority students, especially Black women, experience increased levels of stress, anxiety and depression because of the daily microaggressions and other forms of oppression they face in predominantly white institutions (Bentley-Edwards et al. 2016; Hannon et al. 2016; Shahid, Nelson, and Cardemil 2018). This finding is supported in the current research. In

their interviews, many participants shared that they faced daily microaggressions and discrimination due to their racial and gendered identity. In order to fit in and to make friends, several participants had to internalize those microaggressions. For several participants, these experiences were traumatic and internalizing their experiences and trauma brought increased anxiety, stress and negative mental health impacts. Moreover, for many participants, it took years to fully understand, heal and talk about the trauma they experienced at SEC. For example, in their interview, Angela described the ways their experiences at SEC traumatized them,

"My college experience traumatized me in ways that I did not understand. Something that I really struggled with in college was finding a group of friends who shared experiences with me and loved me. When you're in the situation that you're the only Black person, the only Black woman, you have to let a lot of things slide for the sake of being accepted with the group. And you internalize that, it's really bad. You forgive people for things that. You ignore things for the sake of fitting in and not isolating yourself even more. So I've made a lot of sacrifices for the sake of being accepted in my friend groups and classes and dorms."

Participants also emphasized that social and political events increased their stress and anxiety at SEC. Specifically, eight participants were at SEC when President Trump was elected in 2016. Participants shared that there was a significant increase in blatant racism at SEC since the 2016 elections and many participants were direct victims of this

blatant racism. For some participants, this political event and the increase in racial hostility this event brought to SEC was highly traumatizing.

CONCLUSION

This chapter provided contextual information about SEC and the way that systems of power manifested within the institution. This chapter illustrates the conflicts of a commitment to diversity and practicing diversity at SEC. Although SEC added a commitment to diversity and embracing differences as one of the values the institution holds, participants' stories illustrate a different reality. Participants' descriptions of their experiences at SEC showed that racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination were prevalent and perpetuated in all aspects of the institution including academic, residential and social spaces. Participants' stories challenged SEC's commitment to diversity by identifying the ways that the institutions' practices continue to perpetuate various forms of oppression and inequality. Participants emphasized that the perpetuation of hegemonic ideals and other forms of discrimination have significant effects on their lived experiences at SEC. For example, because SEC is not acting in the interest of Black women and are not creating welcoming and inclusive spaces, participants face a multitude of barriers throughout their college experiences.

Understanding Black women's experiences is important for this research because as I will discuss in the next chapter, the barriers that participants faced due to the racial, gendered and other forms of inequity at SEC include academic and career barriers. In addition, this chapter highlighted that participants faced unescapable forms of micro-aggressions and discrimination due to their marginalized identities and have to constantly

navigate a hostile gendered-racial climate. This is important contextual information because participants' career decisions are informed by these experiences and the ways participants made meaning of their experiences.

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the findings from the current research which explored the factors that shape Black women's career planning in PWIs and how these factors continue to shape their post-college career development. The current research findings were collected from 17 in-depths interviews of Black women alumnae who graduated from SEC between 2010 and 2018. In these interviews, participants were asked questions about their social and academic experiences as a Black woman at SEC, support systems and mentorship, and their career planning during and after college.

Four significant factors were found to contribute to Black women's career planning: socio-economic status, academic experiences, mentorship, and career centers. Each factor shaped various aspects of Black women's career planning including their selection of major, academic performance, academic confidence, career preparedness, identifying career goals, and post-college job exploration. Black women's experiences with perceived or real forms of racism also shaped how these factors contributed to Black women's career planning. For example, as I will discuss in the academic experiences section, facing micro-aggression from professors led some participants to leave their programs, change majors, and ultimately change their career paths. Findings from this study also found two ways that participants' experiences at SEC continued to shape their career development after graduation. Participants shared that they gained unique skills which were shaped by their experiences. These skills increased their confidence and

preparation to navigate in white professional spaces. Participants also shared their experiences cultivated their ultimate career goals which, for many participants, were centered on diversity, equity and inclusion.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

One factor that significantly shaped participants' career planning was socio-economic status. When asked about diversity at SEC, almost all participants discussed the lack of racial diversity. However, many participants also emphasized the lack of financial or socio-economic diversity and shared that socio-economic status made them significantly different from their peers. As noted in the previous chapter, participants described the majority of SEC students as "wealthy," "middle or upper middle class," "having old money," "rich." For several participants who did not have the same socio-economic status as other SEC students, finances were an important factor in their academic and career decisions. One way that socio-economic factors shaped participants' career development was through choosing their academic majors. Many participants initially selected majors that they believed would secure more jobs, higher salaries, and help them become financially independent at a faster rate.

For example, as mentioned earlier, Leia enrolled at SEC as a bio major and wanted to go into pre-med. Leia's academic major selection was also informed by their socio-economic status and not necessarily because it was a major that they wanted. Leia said, "I was just thinking about my position in the world as somebody with no money. I couldn't really afford to think about what I want to do rather than what I need to do and I felt like opportunities for jobs… having a bio major will be helpful." Other participants,

however, were able to find majors that they liked and would help them secure employment after graduation. For example, Angela, who has always had an appreciation for art and culture, majored in arts management because they believed it was "a good in-between where I could secure a 'real job' and doing work that would support the arts." Michelle also chose to major in Business with a concentration in management because "you can go into a lot of different things. I just thought it would be something that would be easily transferable to a lot of different professions."

Briana also initially enrolled at SEC with a double major in math and accounting because she believed those majors would give her "the foundation to be a very successful business woman." However, Briana shared that she struggled with her courses and continually received C's and D's during her first year at SEC and said, "I knew I understood the content but I just could not get through it." However, her sophomore year, she decided to change, "when I kept seeing that trend of C's and D's, I said I've got to do what makes me happy instead of doing what I knew would guarantee me a job." While socio-economic factors initially shaped her decision, after reflecting on her first year, Briana decided that it was more important to find a field that would make her happy.

Another way that socio-economic factors informed participants' career planning was by limiting participants' options in employment decisions as they were nearing graduation. Some participants shared that due to their socio-economic status, they could not take the time to explore employment options, an opportunity that participants felt the majority of SEC students had. Many participants' main goal was to be employed as soon as they graduated even if it was not the employment they wanted or envisioned. In

addition, finding employment that would allow them to be financially independent was salient. For example, Raja said, "I was really focused on the income piece." Justice described her thought process when she was nearing graduation and said,

"I wanted to find a job in my field of sociology or women's studies… but the salary that they offered me was not going to be enough for me to survive on my own… So I got this job as the workers compensation adjuster, which is nothing close to anything I wanted to do in my life. But I did it because I don't have rich parents and I didn't have that transition option that I saw a lot of people had. I didn't have the option to take some time off to party, to go off and find myself spiritually or whatever journey they took, going overseas for a little bit. I didn't have the opportunity because my parents weren't financially there. So I had to immediately jump into something that would pay me a decent wage, enough to live."

Adelaide's main priority when searching for post-graduation employment was also financial independence. However, Adelaide, who has been financially independent since her junior year, shared she did not have the time to be selective. Adelaide said that the only element she focused on was salary, "I need to be able to at least make this amount of money because I live in a city and it's expensive for no reason here. [My job] was the first one that I got that I was like, okay, it's within my pay range. I have to make this work... I'm lucky that I've found a job." Kelly also talked about how finances led her to abandon her ultimate goal of going to law school, "everything changed quickly and I kept thinking, was I willing to put myself in more debt to go to law school?" Eventually,

Kelly decided not to take the law school track and chose to find employment after graduation instead.

The findings from the study contribute to the literature examining socio-economic factors, race, and career development. The link between socio-economic factors and college students' career planning have been explored by past studies exploring college students' career planning, aspirations, and development (Castellanos 2018; Kim 2014; Titus 2006; Walpole 2008). These studies have found that higher economic status led to higher academic achievement, degree completion and significantly better career outcomes in terms of salary and rank. However, past studies have not explored how socio-economic status informs students' academic and career decisions (Castellanos 2018; Kim 2014; Titus 2006; Walpole 2008). For example, Titus (2006) suggested that students with lower socio-economic status may have to work multiple jobs and cannot fully commit to their academics and have a lower chance of degree completion. In addition, students with lower socio-economic status are less likely to engage in courses, ask questions or seek help from faculty which influence academic success. While academic performance is a factor in shaping career planning, this relationship has rarely been examined. In addition, past studies have found that students who report lower socio-economic status are also disproportionately a member of a racial minority (Castellanos 2018; Titus 2006), socio-economic status is not a significant factor found in studies that explored Black students' career planning. Castellanos's (2018) study on Latina students in STEM found that higher socio-economic status led to higher academic performance,

and students with greater academic performance were more likely to pursue a STEM career but does not go beyond illustrating this relationship.

The current research findings contribute to this gap in the literature by highlighting the ways that socio-economic status influence participants' career decisions including choice of major, career goals, and the post-college job search. Participants who reported having a lower socio-economic status than the majority SEC students selected majors that they believed would secure employment, were associated with higher income or would allow them to find employment in various fields. For some participants, being from a lower socio-economic status than their peers placed them in a unique position in terms of career planning. Their lower-socio-economic status pushed them to seek majors and routes that they believed would provide ample financial security. However, the fields that participants believed would lead them to higher salaries, financial and employment security were fields that were predominantly white and male. As I will elaborate in the following sections, many of these fields did not make participants feel welcomed and participants experienced several barriers and challenges that impacted their academic performance and ability to thrive in their programs.

The intersections of socio-economic status, race and gender led many participants to make challenging decisions that impacted their career paths. One decision included, do they want to continue with this field and face alienation, racial discrimination, and no support? Or do they want to leave the program to find fields where they are welcomed, feel safe and feel like their experiences are reflected in the curriculum? For some participants, it was more important to choose a major that would lead to higher income

than choosing to major in a field they were interested in. Due to the intersections of race, gender and socio-economic status, participants had to make challenging decisions in various stages of their career planning. As exemplified by Justice and Adelaide's stories above, socio-economic status made participants' career exploration different from their peers by limiting their options and time they allotted to finding employment. Some participants found they could not be selective in their job search an accepted the first offer they received because of the pressure for financial security and independence.

ACADEMIC FACTORS

Academic factors such as academic performance, classroom environment, and relationships with professors all contribute to the ways that students make decisions about their careers. For instance, academic performance can impact students' ability to continue with their programs and ability to graduate and their career expectations (Fenning and May 2013; Kim 2014; Titus 2006). For example, receiving a low score could lead students to have to re-take the course and could prolong their degree completion. Moreover, if a course teaches specific skills that are necessary for a particular type of employment, succeeding in the course may increase participants' chances of being hired. Research findings support Fenning and May's (2013) finding that college students' self-worth, which was influenced by academic performance, influenced students' confidence in attaining their career goal. Low academic performance reduced their confidence in attaining their goals and made them reconsider their majors and career paths. As I noted earlier, Briana's academic performance led her to change her major from math and

accounting to English, ultimately changing her career goal of becoming a successful business woman.

Justice also had a similar experience and told me about an economics class, which was also her least favorite class during her college career. Justice said, "I ended up getting a D… my first D ever and I didn't know what to do with that. I went to talk to him [the professor] and he was just like, well, this is it for you. Instead of helping me, I just dropped the whole major." For Leia, their academic performance gave them the perspective that they would not be able to continue with their goal of going into pre-med and becoming a doctor, "coming across the job [being a doctor] was going to be difficult and I didn't have the GPA because I screwed that up."

Cultural and social factors such as racism, sexism and classism may also impact students' academic performance which ultimately shapes their career planning (Castellanos 2018; Culver 2018; Esposito 2011; Strunk et al. 2018; Vaccaro 2017). For many participants, racism or perceived racism created challenges to academic success and often led to bad grades or difficulty understanding the material, or feeling disconnected from their programs. Racial discrimination or micro-aggression from professors was especially significant in influencing participants' academic success and career development.

Professors.

The support received from professors played an important role in shaping academic performance. For some participants, a lack of support from professors led them to drop the course, leave their program, or negatively impacted their course

performances. Facing micro-aggressions or discrimination from professors was associated with a lack of support. For example, some participants felt that they were targeted by their professors due to their race and/or gender which led participants to drop their classes or program (Vaccaro 2017; Winkle-Wagner 2019). When asked about her experiences as being the only Black woman in a course, Michelle implied that she felt targeted by her professor who was not understanding. In one particular class, Michelle said a professor "hated my guts. She was really going to fail me for being tardy and I wasn't even tardy, the clock in her classroom was fast and so I had to drop the class." Justice's experience about receiving a bad grade and not receiving support from her professor that I discussed earlier in the section led her to leave the economics program and select a new major. In the same class, Justice said, "every time I wanted to ask a question, I was not called on. It got to the point where I had to ask my white friend to ask those questions for me so he would raise his hand, get called on and ask my questions. He ended up getting a B in the class even though we did the same homework together… he got a better grade." Similarly, Jessica, who was also on the pre-med track and had dreamed of becoming a doctor since she was a child, shared an experience about her professor that made her leave her program.

> "I started at SEC full on as a biology major. Going to professors' offices and talking to them and them not seeing her engaged or wanting to help me – that started to push me away from that department. And then, for a professor to just tell me "why don't you just give up? Why don't you just move to another subject or major?" and I was just like, "okay…." And I

believed them. I thought okay, maybe I should move to a different

department where I am more appreciated and that's how I changed. This is

a small school and I know professors talk so if this is how a professor feels

about me, I'm pretty sure they've talked to their other colleagues about it.

And I've thought about it… every time I go to class [I would think] did

this professor talk to you about me? Now they [other professors] probably

think that I should drop out of all the classes and I'm going to be another

drop out [a common stereotype associated with Black students] and leave

the school because I'm not smart enough to be here."

As I discussed in Chapter Four, participants shared that they were often

self-conscious of their hypervisibility in classrooms and felt their it made them

easily subjected to stereotypes. Past studies have found that professors also relied

on negative stereotypes of Black women in their classes and ways they interact

with students (Esposito 2011; Strunk et al. 2018; Vaccaro 2017). While

participants did not necessarily share with me whether their professors relied on

negative stereotypes, the ways they described their fear and the efforts they took

to avoid stereotyping especially in classroom settings implies that negative

stereotyping from professors may have been a common occurrence.

For Jessica, the fear that all of her future professors would view her as the

"college dropout" stereotype or interact with her in ways that showed she was not

good enough were paramount concerns. And, while there is no way to know

whether the professor's comment was racially charged, the racial hostility and the

ways that racism was embedded in SEC's structure immediately made Jessica think about how she will be stereotyped for the rest of the program. In a racially-hostile environment, perceived racism made as much impact on students' lived experiences as actual/overt racism. For Jessica, racism (or perceived racism) and the fear of stereotyping from professors led her to make the incredibly difficult decision to leave her program and thus ending her dream of becoming a doctor.

Other participants also described that professors' lack of cultural competency made them feel unsupported and negatively impacted their academic performance. For example, Leia shared that at the time they attended SEC, they were one of the two Black women in their program. As a Black woman student, Leia often felt disconnected from their program because the examples used in their courses "were not designed for people like me to really grasp." When Leia sought additional support from professors, they recalled an instance, very similar to Jessica's experience, "a professor told me, yeah, you're not going to go to med school… it was just really dismissive like, this is not going to happen so you should abandon that effort." Similarly, Angela shared that overall, they did not feel supported by their professors and professors expected them to quickly adjust to college, "I was a first-generation college student coming from a low-income background. I didn't have a lot of resources and I struggled a lot. I didn't really feel like my professors created a space for me to learn how to be in college." Raja also shared a specific experience where she had been struggling in the class and the professor was "non-caring. There was another student in the class who the

professor was really close to and he [the professor] would often share my personal business with him. Like he [the student] was aware of my grades and like my personal situations… if he had not cared across the board (about the entire class), it would have been easier to deal with but it's like he just had something out for me and one other woman of color."

Harriet realized her professor's racism after the 2016 presidential election which, according to participants, significantly increased racial tensions and hostility at SEC. In 2016, overt forms of racism increased at SEC which participants believed were shaped by President Trump's racist rhetoric and campaign slogans. When President Trump was elected, Harriet's professor made the class watch the inauguration. Harriet said,

"[my professor] said this is important. Something that's important for history. But I didn't understand how you think it's important when this man that has been elected… everything he spews from his mouth is racist and I'm like, do you not see the repercussions of what is happening on this campus after he was elected? Why do you think I would want to watch this man talk at all? It's not great when the professor makes you watch or talk about politics because it's really personal."

While the 2016 inauguration may have been a historic moment, for Black women, it reminded them of the ways they are oppressed and the way racism and sexism are present in U.S society and at SEC. A lack of cultural competency and extreme insensitivity prevented Harriet's professor from being able to

acknowledge and address how watching the inauguration was difficult and maybe even dangerous for many students. These examples illustrated how a lack of cultural competency created unique challenges for Black women in their classrooms and in their interactions with their professors.

Leia made an argument when discussing their lack of support from professors that is worth noting. Leia argued that their professor may not have intended for their actions to be a form of racial micro-aggression. Moreover, Leia argued that the professor's actions may have been due to ignorance or lack of cultural competency, "he probably didn't think about who I am and what background so the type of support I might have needed certainly wasn't the type of support somebody else with a different background might have needed." Angela's description of not being given the space or opportunity to adjust to college and to learn to be a college student is also related to Leia's argument. This argument supports previous findings that found that by espousing colorblind ideologies, professors' behaviors and attitudes toward Black students can be demeaning and oppressive. Colorblindness or the belief in treating all students equally may prevent professors from seeing the different barriers that create different academic experiences for their students. Colorblindness focuses on equality but not equity and does not address the additional forms of support that marginalized students may need. Colorblindness also fails to recognize the structural and historical inequalities rooted in institutions' policies and practices. Lack of awareness of social factors, a lack of cultural competency and knowledge

of diversity may have led Angela's and Leia's professors to not recognize various factors such as how being a Black woman, a first-generation student, and low-income could impact a college student's experiences and the academic barriers that students faced. Therefore, diversity training and practice among professors along with support is critical for Black women's academic and career development especially since Black women are likely to also come from low socio-economic status and are first generation college students and may face more barriers, confusion and difficulties navigating college (Walpole 2007).

An explanation of professors' colorblindness and lack of cultural competency could be a lack of attention or importance that SEC places on diversity, equity and inclusion. As I discussed in Chapter Four, participants often shared that SEC did not prioritize issues of race and often chose to ignore claims of racism and racial discrimination. The lack of action to address racial injustice on campus could be tied to professors' lack of cultural competency. If the institution does not address these issues, it is possible that faculty and staff members are not adequately trained in recognizing diversity which leads students to feel unsupported, isolated, and discriminated against.

Jessica's, Leia's and Raja's experiences are also consistent with findings from previous studies that explored Black women's experiences in STEM (Dortch and Patel 2017; Esposito 2011). For example, Dortch and Patel (2017) found that Black women faced a double hypervisibility due to being in a predominantly white institution and a predominantly male field and this double hypervisibility

greatly influenced Black women's sense of belonging in STEM. Both Jessica and

Leia shared feeling disconnected or feeling as though they did not belong in their

program. Moreover, other studies have found that the gendered racial

microaggressions Black women students in STEM experienced were often

produced or tolerated by professors to uphold STEM as a white male-dominated

field (Dortch and Patel 2017; Esposito 2011). Esposito (2011) found that "it was

only white men who get taken seriously by chemistry professors." Esposito's

argument is found in Jessica's, Leia's and Raja's experiences. For example, the

ways that Raja's professor violated her privacy and shared her personal

information and grades with other classmates is a clear example that the professor

did not take Raja seriously.

Another potential reason for the lack of support from STEM-related fields

could be that race is not often a topic of discussion in STEM as it would be in

social sciences or humanities. This would explain the one theme that emerged

from the current research which was that when participants shared stories of times

where they felt supported by their professors, the support was found from

professors who taught in social sciences, humanities and languages. Moreover,

Justice and Jessica, who left their programs due to a lack of support, selected

majors where conversations of race occurred more frequently and where they felt

described professors as more understanding and more culturally competent.

However, Justice and Michelle's stories also suggest that the racial micro-

aggression and feeling targeted by professors were not unique to STEM majors.

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Justice had a similar experience as Jessica and Raja where her professor would not help her. Michelle had a similar experience with Raja where both participants felt targeted by the professor and felt as though they were treated differently than their classmates.

What Professor Support Looks Like.

The purpose of the previous section was to highlight the salience of professor support and to show that even one instance of perceived lack of support can have detrimental effects on participants' academic performance and academic and career paths. It is also important to note, however, that while a few participants highlighted the lack of support they received from their professors, this lack of support only occurred in small instances throughout their college career. In other words, none of the research participants shared that they received no support from any of their professors. When I asked participants whether they felt supported by their professors in their courses, many participants shared that overall, they received good support. When asked what this support looked like, students' stories highlighted inclusive course content and advocacy.

Inclusive Course Content. Past studies that explored Black women's experiences and career development in PWIs have highlighted the lack of support and forms of discrimination students faced from professors. One gap in the research, however, is identifying the ways that professors provide support and encouragement to Black women and help Black women navigate racially-tense environments. Past studies have found that mentorship, which included professor

mentorship, were influential in Black women's success and career development, which I will discuss in the next section. This research however, found that participants made clear distinctions between professors and mentors. As I will discuss in greater detail in the next section, when professors maintain long-term interactions with students, they become mentors. Support from professors tended to mainly influence participants' academic performance which indirectly impacted their career development. Mentors and advisors provided more direct career support.

For some participants, professors showed support through course content and ensuring that all students felt represented. Past studies reported that Black women often felt misrepresented, ignored and unheard in their classes (Apugo 2017; Dortch and Patel 2017; Esposito 2011; Green et al. 2018). This study adds to these past findings by illustrating how feeling represented in the course content and in classroom discussions often led to higher academic success because it gave participants a comfortable and safe space to participate and ask questions.

For example, Ava shared that in a Biblical interpretation course, the professor "allowed me to ask questions in class affirming what I can name of, like, a woman's lens on interpretation. But I was also talking about a canon that was about Black women and she allowed me to do that in her classroom which was very reassuring." Jessica, who was originally a Biology major, switched to a Psychology major and shared that she enjoyed the support from her professors especially one professor who allowed Jessica to make her own interpretations in

class and included course material that Jessica could relate to. These actions were important to Jessica and she said, "I felt comfortable with the professor, I didn't feel scared to talk to her or ask for help." Kelly also told me she felt her professors "were willing to bend over backwards to make sure that you understand the material and you have that support outside of the classroom." While Angela did not feel supported by their professors overall, they were able to recall one theatre course where their professor ensured that they felt represented in the plays they read, "we read a lot of plays that discuss racial tensions, the Black experience along with your typical plays. We would discuss what we read and apply that to our lives and everyone could be heard. There was no hierarchy."

Advocacy. Another noteworthy form of support from professors that participants described in their interviews was advocacy. Linder and Winston Simmons (2015) found the importance of advocacy and mentorship in when they explored the role of mentors in student affairs on student of color's career decisions and found that advocacy helped to reduce the barriers created by factors like race and helped students navigate power relations on campus. The current study found similar themes of advocacy in professor support as well. Advocacy included taking the time to listen, showing respect, and reporting or not tolerating micro-aggressions. Renee, Adelaide, Harriet, Vanta, Michelle and Briana shared that they felt supported when professors showed that they cared which included reaching out to check in on them, asking them about their plans and life, etc. One of Adelaide's professors, knowing the financial difficulties Adelaide was experiencing and its

effects on registration, made sure that Adelaide had a fair opportunity to enroll in the courses she needed. Adelaide said, "financial aid was giving me deadlines I couldn't meet and when I reached out, my professor told me, I will make sure there is a spot available for you." Michelle talked about one way her Religion teacher showed she cared was by being accommodating, "She asked me to come into her office and was like, listen, you're super smart and I can see that you are going through some things. Here are some study things and if you do well, this is what you can end up with this in this class. That really helped me out." Similarly, Vanta said her Spanish teacher took the time to work with her, "she was very understanding and could see that I was visibly trying… she's just like, try this and try that and we're going to figure this out together."

Raja also told me a story about the way her professor advocated for her and helped her receive funding for a summer research program.

"When people apply for this research project, they end up doing something under a professor who is already doing the work or similar work. I wanted to do a project that no one was doing, we didn't have the materials for and it was very different. I did my research proposal and was really excited about it and my professor went through it and gave really strong feedback. Then, I turned the proposal in and the person looked at the subject matter and my name and just glazed over it. Just completely did not consider it at all, he didn't even want to open it even though my project had a real purpose. I don't exactly know how my professor found

out but he ended up talking to the head of the research program and was like, can you at least just read it? It's really good. He was like you don't have to approve it but be a decent person and read it. And I ended up getting to do the research project."

Raja shared that without her professor's advocacy, she would not have been able to conduct the research project which she claimed shaped her current career, "the project topic is what I do now professionally."

Briana also shared that one professor was especially supportive and advocated for her when she decided to switch majors which played an important role in her academic and career success.

"She [the professor] was like, I will work with you and support you. I have no idea what the English major requires, that is not my area but I am willing to work with the English department to make sure you are successful. So I tag team between her and the department head for English and the fact that both of them cared enough to sit down with me and talk through my options helped me graduate on time. I know people who have had to take six years or take a year off because of changes to the major like that."

These types of support from professors had positive effects on participants' academic success and their career development. By advocating for their students, participants ensured that Black women and other minorities

received fair chances in course registration, research opportunities, changing majors, etc.

Homophily based on gender is also a significant theme in the type of professor support that participants received. Homophily is the concept of forming connections based on sameness and shared identities (Harris and Lee 2019; Walton Guyton and McGaskey 2012). Homophily in faculty and student interactions has been explored by previous studies which found that students often felt more supported by professors that they shared an identity with (Harris and Lee 2019; Walton Guyton and McGaskey 2012). However, higher student diversity and lower faculty diversity can reduce the likelihood of marginalized student populations, such as Black women, to find professors they share an identity with (Davis, Jacobsen and Ryan 2015). This is especially evident in participants' description of SEC where they emphasized the lack of diversity of faculty members at SEC. In many of the stories that participants shared with me, the professors that they did not feel supported by did not share any form of identity with them; many were white and male. However, in these stories, participants did not only highlight that they felt unsupported but also shared that white male students received better support and treatment. We see this in the way that Raja's professor violated her privacy to her white male peer; we also see this in Justice's story of receiving a lower grade than her white male classmates.

There is also a gendered component in participants' experiences with professor support. For example, the majority of participants felt supported by

women professors. In addition, participants felt most supported in social sciences and humanities fields where there tend to be more women faculty members. This gendered variation in professor support could be explained by differing expectations of faculty members based on gender. Previous studies have noted the gendered disparities in faculty roles where women faculty members are expected to take more nurturing and caring roles such as advising and mentoring (Hanasono et al. 2019; Sprague and Massoni 2005). Further, in their study on faculty-student research mentorships, Davis et al. (2015) found that faculty members in the social sciences mentored more students than faculty members in other fields. It may be possible that social science fields place more importance on mentorship than other disciplines and could explain participants finding more support in social science fields.

Moreover, homophily could also explain the variations in professor support; participants may have felt more supported by women professors because they shared a gender identity. However, because of the gendered histories and organization of academic disciplines, homophily in faculty-student relationships may not always be possible in all academic fields (Davis et al. 2015) which could explain why participants felt more professor support in social sciences than STEM which are predominantly white and male fields. Homophily based on race and gender were not only evident in professor support but also in participants' descriptions of other support systems including mentorship. As I will discuss

throughout the next section, many of participants' mentors shared an identity or characteristics with participants.

MENTORSHIP, SUPPORT SYSTEMS AND CAREER PLANNING

One significant factor in shaping participants' career planning was support systems which varied between participants. In their interviews, some participants shared that the professors who showed long-term support and advocacy toward them took the role of becoming formal academic advisors or informal mentors. When support from professors occurred frequently and continued even after participants completed that professor's course, many participants shared that their relationship transformed into more of a mentorship than just talking to a professor. This finding that mentorships required frequent communication and communication beyond the classroom is consistent with previous findings (Davis and Jones 2020). Mentorship was also a deeper relationship and participants felt more comfortable asking career and life-related questions and advice to mentors whereas participants were more likely to discuss academic-related questions to their professors. Participants shared that providing professors with the role of mentors was a gradual process as participants had to assure they could trust the professors.

Trust was salient due to the racial tensions and daily micro-aggressions that participants faced from their peers, professors and SEC administration. For example, Adelaide said, "there were very few people that I would consider a mentor. What determined them from just being another professor was educating

themselves, making me feel like they got it and heard me and saw me." Eliza's relationship with her mentor emerged in a similar way. Eliza said, "I took the intro class and then talking to [the professor] after classes and having interesting conversations and deeper conversations realizing she didn't just do her job. She actually cared about me as a person and wanted to see me do well." Justice also told me that her mentor "inspired me to dig deeper, be more critical with my thinking and find a power within myself that she knew I had. She was very supportive of me and I graduated on time and I was a double major. She had me in places that I wouldn't have found myself in otherwise." Participants' stories showed professors' advocacy, support, and commitment to participants' development as salient to building trust. Participants' description of the ways their professors demonstrated commitment to their development were also similar to findings from Davis and Jones' (2020) study on research mentorships where the authors identified open and consistent communication as an important factor in developing mentor-mentee relationships. According to the authors, students associated open and constant communication from their mentors with commitment and interest in helping students which increased students' commitment to their research projects (Davis and Jones 2020).

However, not all mentorships were gradual processes. For example, Angela's informal mentor was a theatre professor, and Angela was studying arts management with a concentration in theater. When I asked how their relationship emerged, Angela said,

"I was going to my advisor's office who is in the art history department
and while I was waiting, I was sitting there talking to her [theatre
professor] and we just got along. After that, I emailed her and she was
like, let's meet up together and talk about the theater program here. We
met and talked and from there, we just stayed really close. I was always in
her office talking about our programs and then we started working
together in a formal capacity that same semester for a play."

Although Angela's relationship with her mentor formed more quickly than
Adelaide's, Justice's and Eliza's, I found one similarity in the way trust was
established. For participants, their professor's willingness to provide
opportunities, learn more about them, and to advocate for them outside of classes
was a symbol of trust and led participants to view these professors as mentors.

Many participants, especially those who had campus jobs or were
involved in campus organizations, also found support and career assistance from
staff members. For example, Renee was a resident assistant and her mentor was
her supervisor, the director of residence life. Similarly, Jessica worked part time
at SEC's gym and told me her supervisor became her mentor. Mona, Adelaide
and Michelle all worked part time in student life and shared that their mentors
were student life staff members. Briana worked at a student affairs office and her
colleagues and supervisors were some of her mentors. Whether the mentors were
professors or staff members, participants highlighted that trust was the most
salient factor in mentorship. There were various factors that led to a trusting

relationship between participants and their mentors. These factors included mentors' willingness to provide opportunities, learn more about them, and to advocate for them outside of classes. For other participants, trust was built over time and the longer they had known these individuals, the more likely they considered them as mentors.

Homophily may have also contributed to building rapport between participants and their mentors. Previous studies have found that shared identity can increase the bonds and trust between individuals and allow students to communicate their concerns without worrying about being misunderstood or having to justify these concerns (Harris and Lee 2019; Walton Guyton and McGaskey 2012). A shared gender and racial identity was common in many of the mentorships that participants. For example, nine out of the 14 participants who had mentors at SEC shared their mentors were women faculty or staff members and four participants a mentor who was a person of color. For some participants, a shared identity increased their trust and rapport with their mentors. For example, Eliza shared that her mentor, who is a woman faculty member, did not always have the same lived experiences as hers. However their shared gender identity and very similar personality traits made Eliza feel like "I could relate to her and it wasn't just like talking to my statistics professor where we have nothing in common and nothing to talk about." Similarly, Angela's relationship with their mentor was strengthened by their similar identities as women of color.

In conjunction with findings from past studies, the current study found mentorship to be one of the most influential factors that influenced participants' career planning. Participants shared that these mentors, whether they were professors or staff members, were directly involved in their career planning by offering career assistance. For example, when I asked what type of support participants received from their mentors, Harriet, Ava and Connie said their mentors were always willing to write recommendation letters for them. In her interview, Harriet said, "even when I graduated they [mentors] were like, email me, let me know if you need me for a recommendation for a job, I'm more than willing and would be happy to do it for you." Another level of support that participants received from their mentors was in access to various career opportunities including internships and networking. This finding is similar to findings from past studies. For example, in their study exploring college students' career development, Falconer and Hays (2006) found that mentorship was the most significant theme. Their study participants found mentorship to be a powerful advantage in career planning and "having a mentor equaled access to information, and access to information equaled success" (p. 226). This "access to information" aspect was implied in several interviews. For example, Eliza shared that her academic advisor helped find an internship with a local nonprofit organization during her senior year "after I was asking about volunteer opportunities." Eliza added, "I ended up interning and ultimately a while later, I got employed with them." Briana also shared that her work supervisor helped her find networking and career-related opportunities that helped her career preparedness. Briana said her job and her supervisor helped her to "network with [students'] moms and talk about my interests

and goals and such… I had the opportunity to work some of the events that were catered to donors and alumni" which allowed her to network and make professional connections.

In addition to mentors' increasing participants' access to resources, information and opportunities, many participants also felt comfortable turning to their mentors for career guidance and advice. In their interview, Angela shared that their mentor guided her throughout her career planning, "I owe a lot to her as far as career development opportunities. She really has done a lot for me. I spent countless times in her office trying to think about what I wanted to do with my life when I couldn't figure it out. I went to her when I was going through a really hard time." Briana also told me about her many mentors who she believed not only helped her with her career planning but also invested in her success. Briana's network of mentors included her academic advisors, student life staff, and her supervisors. Briana said, "I consulted with them on most of my major life decisions as far as career or education are concerned. I don't know what I would do if I couldn't talk to them or have their support throughout the entire process." Similarly, Michelle also told me how influential her academic advisors was in providing career advice and helping her set career expectations:

> "I had two advisors because of I was involved in two academic
>
> departments. [The first advisor] gave me sound advice. A lot of his advice
>
> stay true to this day. I often think about what he said to me whenever I
>
> have issues at work, so he really helped with my [career] development.
>
> And [second advisor] told me what to expect. He was like 'this is what

your major is, this is how much you can end up making. Make sure you

make this amount, make sure you value yourself.'"

Ava, who did not find support from the Career center, shared that she had to build

her own task force of people to help, advise and guide her with her graduate school

applications which made planning for graduate school and for her future a "relatively

easy process" because members of her task force helped "get the ball rolling." Ava added

that she was going through graduate school applications and building this task force

while she was studying abroad and said the task force was incredibly helpful and "had

they [other students] decided that they wanted to go to grad school in the middle of their

senior year while they were abroad, that would've been unrealistic and they would have

to wait until the next cycle." Ava's task force proved to be helpful; in the Fall after

graduation, Ava enrolled at an Ivy League school for her Master's in Divinity.

The ability to turn to mentors and seek support and advice relating to career

planning were crucial for participants and contributed to participants' career

preparedness. This was crucial because, as Adelaide told me that at SEC, "there was no

support or guidance on things like this is what it means to get financial aid, these are your

options to not be screwed by debt, here's how to really network and not just go to

cocktails and talk to people." These were questions that participants had and they felt

grateful that they had mentors who could help answer them. This finding compliments

Davis and Jones' (2020) finding that faculty mentors were more than research mentors

but also became viewed by students like family, as friends, and as individuals they could

turn to for life advice.

Other Types of Support. Most participants also found mentors outside of academics and turned to staff members or support. Earlier in this section, I discuss the ways that homophily especially based on gender was documented in professor support and mentorship. For participants, a shared identity was salient and when searching for a mentor, participants sought a person of color or a woman of color or, specifically a Black or Black woman staff member. Past studies have also found that it was crucial for Black women to find Black women role models and mentors, even if these mentors were outside of their programs, because it made them feel represented and demonstrated that Black women can also achieve success (Apugo 2017; Falconer and Hays 2016; Linder and Winston Simmons 2016; Walton Guyton and McGaskey 2012; Winkle-Wagner et al. 2019). According to Ava, "you had to have a Black woman in your corner." However, as I discussed in Chapter Four, participants discussed the subtle segregation that existed at SEC, especially the segregation found in professional staff positions. Similar to participants in other PWI studies, research participants sought support from Black women faculty or student affairs staff, they could rarely find one (Apugo 2017; Walton Guiton and McGaskey 2012). Participants told me that to their knowledge, there was only one Black woman staff member who worked in student life.

Briana, Raja, and Renee shared they felt supported by this staff member. Briana shared that this staff member may have felt overwhelmed and "being the only Black woman staff member, she had to pick up a lot of the slack of trying to

make sure that she supported all Black students." Raja considered this staff member "a friend, I learned a few things [from her]." Renee said, "she's also one person but even though there were not a lot of Black women [staff members] at the school, she was there for all of us at the same time." When participants could not find a Black woman faculty or professional staff mentor, they sought advice and guidance from faculty and staff of color. For Connie, this support was from a Black male professor that she never had a course with. Connie said, "I ran my goals past him and what I specifically wanted to do… he told me there's a lot of different avenues that social workers do and I never heard about these avenues and he guided me to do more research about it. It ended up being a lot cheaper and a lot more obtainable."

Many participants also highlighted that Black staff members were found mostly in housekeeping and kitchen positions. Participants also noted that these positions were mostly filled by Black women. When I asked participants about their support systems, the majority of participants discussed their relationships with the Black women who worked in housekeeping and in the cafeteria. While participants did not necessarily consider these women as their mentors, they shared that the support they received from these Black women indirectly influenced their career development because it helped participants feel more comfortable, feel somewhat "at home" and stay motivated.

For Adelaide, these Black women provided a sense of "comfort in knowing I can go to them." Brittany also had a strong relationship with a Black

woman who worked in the cafeteria. When describing this relationship, Brittany said, "she always supported everything we did, she showed and invested interest in me and I really needed that." Connie also said the staff "absolutely got me through four years. They made a huge difference. They saw us as their own children and grandchildren and it really mattered to them that we were successful. It mattered to them that we have that support we needed. It was really cool to have support like that especially when you couldn't go home." Kelly said she had a good relationship with one woman who worked in the cafeteria and said, "we would just stand there talking about her day or vice versa and she would always ask me 'how was your class today?' that was a lot for me and I appreciated that." Leia also shared that the kitchen staff "were trying to take care of me which made SEC a lot easier because I can relate to these people." When describing the support she received from Black women staff members, Eliza said, "they're checking on you so you knew somebody cared. They were big to me."

Black women's strong relationships with kitchen and cafeteria workers were not found in findings from past literature and may be unique to this study due to the SEC's racial makeup and the subtle segregation highlighted in Chapter Four. However, these relationships highlight what past studies have emphasized, it is essential for Black women to find support from Black women staff, faculty and peers. Receiving support from Black women is not only a coping mechanism but is a motivator; these types of relationships empower Black women, validate

their experiences and provides a sense of comfort (Apugo 2017; Baber 2012; Corbin et al. 2018; Falconer and Hays 2006).

Support as a Privilege. Several participants who found mentors and support systems emphasized that finding academic and career-related support was a privilege that not all Black women had. Many participants shared that unlike their white peers, they had to work twice as hard, be extra proactive, and be overly involved on campus in order to find this support. For example, as noted above, many participants who had campus jobs saw their supervisors as their mentors. However, there various factors that could limit students from finding a campus job. Moreover, not all campus jobs offered participants with opportunities to build strong relationships and to expand their career readiness. As Briana told me, her job was "completely different than working in the mail room or working in the labs. I had direct connections." In addition, even after working twice as hard and being overly involved on campus, finding professional support was not always guaranteed (Strunk et al. 2018).

Moreover, unlike their white peers, professional support was not something that is just offered to Black women; they had to ask, or sometimes beg, for this support (Strunk et al. 2018). For example, Ava emphasized that "No one really asked about your career aspirations [at SEC], no one took the time to help me come to the conclusion of what I wanted to do. So thank God that I was proactive and had people in my life to help me through that." Similarly, in her interview, Justice shared that she felt betrayed by a professor that she used to consider a mentor and she felt that career-related support was reserved for white students:

"I wish it [support from her mentor] would have been more like… you're brilliant and this is the kind of field that you should go in because it will help you expand those talents that I see. Or like, here, this is a connection that I have… and later, I learned that [her mentor] was helping other students. She was basically helping her find colleges to suit what she wanted to do. She was helping her develop and find where you fit in the real world whereas I would just get compliments rather than assistance. You sat here and you watched me [for] multiple semesters. You saw me display certain attributes, but you not once thought to tell me that I may fit in this career field."

These findings were consistent with previous studies that found that Black women in PWIs struggled with finding support from their professors. Because professors often rely on negative stereotypes of Black women, their behaviors and attitudes toward Black women are often demeaning and oppressive (Culver 2018; Esposito 2011; Strunk et al. 2018; Vaccaro 2017). Similar to findings in previous literature, participants described their professors' discriminatory and oppressive actions when discussing the lack of support from faculty. Examples of these actions included giving students lower grades than their classmates even though their work was identical, not validating their class participation, threatening to fail the student because of tardiness, and not providing help when students do not understand the material.

CAREER CENTERS

One of the features that SEC takes pride in is its highly reputable career center

which manages the college's four-year career preparedness program[2]. This program provides many services and opportunities to help students plan for their careers. These services include assisting students in creating a personalized road map, resume building workshops, mock interview opportunities, and an annual career bootcamp. The bootcamp was an event that brought employers, alumni and students together for a professional two-day networking event. In addition, the bootcamp also provided students with professional training including mock interview sessions, resume-building, and etiquette training. However, it is important to note that the career center and the career preparedness program were established in 2014 and were not resources that participants who graduated before 2014 had access to. Before the career center was established, SEC had a smaller office dedicated to career assistance.

The impact of the career center or the career office on Black women's career development differed for research participants. Ten participants found the career center successfully assisted them with their career planning and these participants often utilized the center's resources. Participants found the center's resume workshops and mock interview opportunities to be most useful. Angela, Connie, Raja, Kelly and Harriet all shared that they still use the feedback and resume templates given to them by the center when they edit their resume. For example, Connie said "one useful thing that I did was have them tweak my resume and I still use that today. I felt like when I graduated college, I had a pretty solid, structured resume." Kelly said that she learned to change her resume through the career center and "the resume that I did through them is actually the

2 This information is taken from the college website, blinded to protect confidentiality.

one that I stick to now. Even now I can make changes to it." Raja told me that she visited

the career office several times. "I went the first time because it was mandatory for your

senior year. Then I went back after and they made a few minor tweaks and we just kind

of opened the conversation. Even after I graduated, like a year later, they helped me in

the same way." Angela also frequently visited the career office to utilize their resume-

building resources, "I regularly went to their offices to work on my resume and to work

on my cover letters. I asked if they had any connections with arts organizations which

they didn't but they did try, they really did try."

In a place where they felt vulnerable and invisible, several participants

appreciated the career center's efforts to help students build confidence and learn about

the best strategies to market their skills and experiences during the job application

process. The two-day bootcamp was one effort that participants praised and claimed it

increased their career preparedness. For example, Harriet said, "it was helpful because it

helped me to deal with my nerves and [it] was revealing because I like meeting new

people and talking to a lot of people [but] it makes me very nervous to the point where

my voice starts shaking. But to be able to do the interviews and to figure out how to talk

about yourself and not ramble was helpful." Angela also found the boot camp helpful and

said,

> "There were workshops on how to create a LinkedIn profile, what you want your
>
> LinkedIn to look like. We had elevator pitches about ourselves, we had
>
> networking events with a lot of alumni, which was really cool. We have like a
>
> speed dating type of setup for doing mock interviews and each instance, there was

someone there who would give feedback about what you're doing and how you

can improve. It was a really great experience and it was free."

For Mona, the boot camp was one of the great programs hosted by the Center, "it

helped me build my confidence, get my elevator pitch down, helped people tell me little

things I have like 'you don't make eye contact when you speak to people, make sure you

make eye contact' and they looked at my resume and they fixed it."

However, Mona had mixed feelings about the career center. She noted that "parts

of it were so good [like the bootcamp] and some were so *so* bad." Mona continued to tell

me, "the career center itself was… if I remember correctly they match you with someone

based on what you do. I was with this government person and they were like… my

resume was a mess. They were telling me something completely different from what the

career center told me to do with my resume. So it wasn't very helpful."

Other participants had similar feelings as Mona regarding the effectiveness of the

career center. Some participants noted that while the career center was beneficial, their

events and workshops were not inclusive and centered on male-dominated fields such as

business and STEM. Renee, who wanted to work in higher education, told me the career

fairs could not direct her to any employment or career advice relating to her interests.

However, Renee said, "they were just able to help me in general with professionalism"

which she found helpful. Similarly, Ava shared she used the center's services for resume

building for internships but "when it came to get help with graduate school, they're just

awful." For some participants, the lack of attention placed on majors outside of business

and STEM made participants feel unsupported. These participants stopped utilizing the center's resources because they did not find value in them.

For example, Eliza told me there were no careers or professionals that represented her major (sociology and women's studies) which she found "disheartening". Eliza continued, "if I wasn't so confident it would have definitely taken me two steps back and made me reconsider my major and minor. I ended up talking to the college staff because they wanted me to get networking experience, but they couldn't put me in the direction of anyone who had my majors and minors." Adelaide's major, environmental science, was also not represented in any of the center's workshops and programs. When describing her experiences at the boot camp, Adelaide said, "they would put me with the biology or usually pre-med, not related to anything I was interested in. So I just stopped trying and tried to figure it out on my own." Jessica, who was originally on the pre-med track, shared what when she changed majors, she no longer found support from the career center. Jessica said, "if you weren't in those two departments [biology and chemistry], [the center] could help you map out a plan but it wasn't as intense as the pre-med track. When I was on the pre-med track, I was meeting with them maybe once or twice a month but once I had the major switch it was like well you're not in those departments anymore so good luck to you."

These findings suggest that career centers can be a valuable resource for Black women in PWIs and can help students with career readiness, and build skills and confidence. However, participants highlight that in order for career centers to truly work, they must be intersectional and support all students, majors,

and career fields. Participants highlighted that the lack of representation, attention and support for majors outside of STEM led them to stop utilizing the center's resources and seek career-related support elsewhere.

LONG TERM IMPACTS OF BLACK WOMEN'S PWI EXPERIENCES ON CAREER

In this project I also explored how Black women's experiences at SEC continue to influence their post-college careers and identified four themes. First, participants shared that their experiences at SEC helped them build unique yet valuable skills in their careers. These skills include resilience, being a hard worker, being an expert on white spaces, and the ability to recognize fake diversity. Second, participants' experiences at SEC helped them identify elements within the workplace that are crucial to them as they continue with their career development. Many participants shared they continued to prioritize workplace culture and aim to avoid workplaces that lacked diversity. Third, participants' experiences helped them establish their ultimate career goals. Fourth, participants shared that after graduation, they still felt the need to evaluate their behaviors and actions to reduce stereotypes and minimize gendered-racial forms discrimination. Finally, while not related to career development, participants expressed having the ability to become more vocal after graduation. Feeling less constrained by SEC after graduation, participants shared having the need to advocate and help current and future students of color at SEC.

Unique and Valuable Skills.

In their interviews, participants highlighted that their experiences at SEC gave valuable skills including resilience, being a hard worker, expertise in navigating predominantly white spaces, and the ability to recognize fake diversity. Participants

shared that surviving at SEC made them strong and resilient and helped them become better leaders in their careers. Moreover, because Black women's experiences at SEC included daily challenges and barriers, when they left the college, participants felt equipped to handle any obstacle and difficult situations that may arise in their careers. For example, Justice shared that her experiences at SEC prepared her to manage crises and stressful situations. Justice "doesn't freak out when everybody else freaks out because [she has] seen worse." In addition, Justice's experiences with lacking support and feeling invisible at SEC taught her to always put herself and her well-being first. Justice's new perspective is, "there is nothing that is going to ever put me in a place of defeat. No matter what, I'm going to fight for me."

Participants also expressed that after several years at SEC, they became experts on navigating white spaces. This is especially true for Ava who enrolled in a predominantly white graduate school after graduating from SEC. In graduate school, Ava was determined to not have the same experiences at SEC and felt that she was better equipped to survive in PWIs. Ava explained,

> "[my experiences] made me a shark. Having to go navigate through SEC put me on my toes. It made me very prepared and made me learned about what white people are bringing to the table right now. [I learned about] what they do, how they navigate through this institution that they built. Having to experience SEC once was more than enough for me and I won't let that happen again."

As an expert in navigating white spaces, Ava's graduate school friends often turn to her to learn about navigating PWIs, especially her friends who previously attended Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Similarly, Kelly, a 2016 alumna who now works at an Attorney's Association shared that her experiences at SEC taught her how to navigate and engage in a predominantly white and male office without feeling intimidated. Kelly's experiences helped her define how she fit in that space.

When participant visited SEC's campus as prospective students, the college impressively promoted diversity, inclusion and appreciation of different cultures, people and ideas. However, when participants enrolled at SEC, they felt betrayed after seeing the college's lack of diversity and the way the college perpetuated and tolerated gendered-racial forms of oppression. Participants' current career decisions are shaped by this institutional betrayal. After graduating from SEC, participants shared they were able to differentiate between fake and real diversity, a valuable skill for assessing workplaces. For example, Mona told me that she did not have a lot of criteria for her first job except for employment benefits. However, now that Mona has had more work experience, she is more selective in her job search and prioritizes diversity. Mona shared her method of evaluating workplace diversity including the questions she would ask at a job interview:

> "I'm asking about your culture, why you are hiring in this role, the person
> that was in my role beforehand, did they leave [voluntarily] or were they
> pushed out? Of course, nobody is going to be that blunt with me but just
> trying to tune out the answer to that question. Is this a new role? If it is,
> what is this in response to? What is your understanding of DEI [diversity,

equity and inclusion], what is your personal understanding of DEI? I'm

grilling the hell out of them."

In addition to recognizing fake diversity, Black women used their own experience

at SEC as they try to advance real diversity in their workplaces. In their works to advance

real diversity in their workplaces, participants used their experiences as a guide on what

not to do and were careful about not replicating what is present at SEC. Many

participants shared that they started or were involved in diversity and inclusion projects

within their workplaces. Other participants' commit to calling out fake diversity and

racism in their offices. For example, Kelly, who is an Assistant Director of Marketing in

a predominantly white organization and one of the two Black women in her office,

recounted an experience where she called out fake diversity and started the "race"

conversation in her office. Kelly's organization is a criminal justice organization, and she

works with prosecutors who are dedicated to eradicating systems of oppressions within

the criminal justice system. Kelly shared:

> "They released a statement for George Floyd and even though I'm the
>
> [Assistant Director] in communications, the executive director did not run
>
> it by me. So that led to a colleague and I who are both young African
>
> American females to tell them "yeah, this is unacceptable." So, we ended
>
> up having a conversation and having to lead it. We have several
>
> prosecutors on the call with us because they're part of our board and
>
> basically it was eye-opening for them. And it's just, wow, you're
>
> prosecutors you should be doing this anyway."

Kelly shared that her experiences with fake diversity and with gendered-racial discrimination at SEC shaped her actions. Without those experiences, Kelly shared would have felt intimidated speak against these forms of discrimination in her office, especially since she is dealing with "such head strong individuals" at work. Jessica shared that her efforts to promote real diversity in her workplace is through her daily actions. Jessica shared that she always tries to greet people and make them feel welcome and included at work because remembers the trauma and emotional toll of exclusion and isolation at SEC.

Clear Career Goals.

As noted in Chapter Four, many participants viewed their experiences with racism at SEC as traumatic. Throughout their interviews, many participants described the exhaustion, anxiety and stress they endured while at SEC due to the micro-aggression they faced and the racially-hostile environment they lived in every day. Justice told me that by the time she graduated, she felt defeated because she was constantly reminded of the ways she was oppressed. She explained, "I went there with a certain mindset of Blackness and I left there feeling defeated. I didn't feel powerful. There wasn't anything that influenced me on the campus that made me feel empowered. I was surrounded by racist white people. My teachers weren't teaching anything about Black Excellence. They were teaching me about oppression, which I guess was their job, but I didn't really help me to find myself." Ava also told me that she could not wait to graduate and leave SEC. She said, "I just felt tired. I felt like I needed to crawl tooth and nail to get to graduation because I just did not want to be there anymore. I didn't want to talk to these white

people anymore… It was like escaping. On graduation day people were taking pictures and I was in my apartment. I said 'mom, don't worry, I'll be out in thirty minutes. We can go. We can leave."

Dealing with trauma, exhaustion and extreme stress had various effects on participants' career development. For example, Jessica told me that not feeling supported and validated by SEC made her feel as though she could not ask for help with academics or career-related topics. Vanta told me that race informed whether she would ask for help or not and told me, "most of my professors were white men and frankly, I didn't want to go sit down in some white man's office for extended period of time and ask for help from them." Renee told me she had to go home often to escape the racial tension on SEC's campus. Adelaide also told me that by the end of the college career, "she was treading water. I was depressed and I was struggling so much. So my mom got me my job." Mona also said she did not attend any networking events or workshops because she was heavily focused on escaping SEC, "I was just trying to get out of there."

Past studies have found that dealing with race-related stress and the challenging experiences they had, Black women students were often uncertain about their careers (Bentley-Edwards et al. 2016; Storlie et al. 2018). This study partly supports these findings. Some participants like Leia and Jessica were certain about their career goals but due to their experiences with racial micro-aggression and lack of support in their programs, they graduated from SEC without a clear career path. For example, Leia did not know what they were going to do with their biology degree after knowing they would not become a doctor. Leia moved back home as they tried to find employment. Jessica

who also wanted to become a doctor left SEC uncertain of her ultimate career path after an experience with her professor led her to change majors. Some participants also shared their feeling of exhaustion due to dealing with trauma or stress that they could not find the time or energy to fully plan their careers.

However, many participants shared that their experiences, trauma, stress, and the factors that shaped their career development while at SEC continued to impact their post-college career development. After graduation, participants took the time to heal and reflect on their experiences and shared with me that their experiences at SEC helped them identify their ultimate career goals and the types of workplaces they wanted to work in. For many participants, their ultimate career centered on diversity, inclusion, and appreciation of different identities. Participants shared that their goal was to work at in places where Black women can thrive. For some participants, achieving this goal meant working toward owning their own businesses where they can set the guidelines and make the decision about implementing diversity and inclusion. Jessica stated that starting her own business was her ultimate goal because she "will never work for the rest of my life for someone who does not appreciate who I really am."

For Brittany, reflecting on her experiences after college helped her to identify her ultimate career goal which is centered around helping and advocating for students. Brittany told me that her career goal is "to open a consulting business that teaches teachers how to connect with students that don't look like them, that don't come from places like them. But not doing it in with white fragility but really teaching them to make connections. I also want to work with minority students who want to be teachers." For

Mona, her ultimate career is shaped by her experiences, including her experiences at SEC. Mona said, "just seeing all the nonsense on campus sparked that interest in DEI for me and I saw that I could understand it very well. My experiences led me to want to fix the world because I saw how problematic it was on campus. That has always stuck with me and has been fostered and cultivated by the roles that I've been in." Similarly, Connie shared that her experiences at SEC led her to become a social worker. She told me, "I saw and continue to see how unjust the systems are for people who look like me. And I didn't realize until I graduated that these things happened to me. As I began to realize that I think it further made me want to go into this field."

Similarly, Briana also plans for a career where she can advance diversity and inclusion. Briana shared that her experiences at SEC is one of the factors that shaped her decision to work at the college after graduation. In her interviews, Briana shared that her experiences at SEC were mostly good, she had a strong network of support, she excelled academically, and did not experience a lot of gendered-racial discrimination. However, Briana also recognized the effects of racism and lack of diversity on her campus on her peers. As a staff member, Briana placed it upon herself to advocate for a more inclusive and a safer college for Black students, especially Black women.

> "I know my experience here was not like the average person of color's
> experience here because of my opportunity to work in this office [as a
> college student], because of the people I knew, I could get my hands on
> easily because I had direct connections to VPs. That's not a typical case
> for students… The work that I do now… my biggest reason for working

with students of color more and working with alumni of color is because I want more students to have more experiences to mine and less of the ones that they are having. A lot of my friends who had the same experiences as me feel the same way. We keep thinking, man, if more and more students had experiences like mine, imagine what we could do – imagine how we could transform this institution."

With her career, Briana helped establish connections with Black alumni to create a Multicultural Alumni Association that current SEC students can network with and look up to. Briana also advocates for the celebration of Black Excellence on campus by creating events and workshops that celebrate Black culture and Black education. Briana is also an informal mentor to many students of color. As a mentor, she helps her students navigate through their experiences at SEC and the many difficulties they face including dealing with gendered racial forms of oppression, career development and finding financial support. Briana also shared that her experiences helped her decide on an ultimate career goal, which is to become SEC's first Black woman president. As president, diversity, equity and inclusion at SEC will be her main priority.

"So, I put all of my passions and interest to get to that goal of being a president. Everything that I have been doing the last seven to eight years has been about bridging diversity, equity and inclusion into higher education to fit this concept of "how do I fix education?" [laughs]. I don't know how I'm supposed to do that as president but that is the dream. As

an institution, we do a poor job of listening to our students and they don't

have the tools to be successful. One of the things I hope to do as a college

president is showing the importance that if you don't have happy students,

you don't have altruistic alumni and it will be hard to sustain your

organization. It's not that hard, listen to them, try to care for them and then

they will stay here! [laughs] as you can see, it enrages me that we don't

listen to our students."

These findings highlight how participants' experiences at SEC continued to

impact their career development after college. These findings contribute to findings from

past studies that suggested Black women chose careers where they could help support

and create safer spaces for Black women (Culver 2018; Linder and Winston Simmons

2015). In their study on the effects of student affairs mentors on Black women students,

Linder and Winston Simmons (2015) found that students who received support from

student affairs staff were more likely to pursue a career in student affairs and to continue

to create safe spaces for future Black women college students. Similarly, Culver's (2018)

study on Black women graduate students found that Black women wanted to pursue

academia in hopes to diversify the field, challenge hegemonic ideologies, and provide

mentorship and support for future Black students. Findings from these studies do not

indicate that participants wanted to pursue similar careers as their mentors. In addition,

the current study found that participants' experiences made them eager to leave SEC and

for Jessica, her experiences kept them from going back to school. However, Black

women's experiences continued to shape their career development by providing them

with unique skills and experience in navigating white spaces and by cultivating their career goals which are centered on diversity, equity, inclusion, and advocating for Black women.

CONCLUSION

This chapter provided an overview of findings from the current project which was guided by two research questions. The first research question asked, "what factors shape the career planning of Black women students in PWIs?" The research findings indicate four factors that shaped Black women's career planning: socio-economic status, academic experiences, support and mentorship, and career centers. Mentorship proved to be the most influential factor and mentors were valuable resources for participants as they were able to receive direct career guidance, advice and access to resources and opportunities through their mentors. Participants also highlighted the importance of receiving support from Black women staff members, who at SEC were predominantly custodian and cafeteria workers. Support from Black women staff members were also valuable to participants because it provided them with a sense of comfort, validation which helped them stay motivated in their academic and career planning.

Moreover, this study found that Black women's college experiences continue to influence their career development after college. For several participants, attending SEC was a traumatizing experience and the effects of this trauma do not disappear once Black women graduated. Rather, Black women's experiences continue to shape their current career development. Participants often use their experiences at SEC to guide their career aspirations and goals. Participants were also able to take their experiences at SEC and

transform them into valuable and unique skills. These skills have helped Black women advance and navigate in their workplaces while ensuring that they do not feel defeated again.

These findings also reveal that systems of power such as racism, sexism, classism created unique barriers for participants in their academic experiences, access to mentorship and access to effective assistance from the career center. In addition, a few participants added that having multiple marginalized identities (Black, woman, low economic status and first-generation student) made their career development and experiences unique. These findings emphasize the importance of utilizing an intersectional approach in exploring the career development of Black women in PWIs which allows researchers to explore the ways that systems of power work together to shape individual lived experiences.

These findings also emphasize the need for intersectional practices and diversity and cultural competency training in PWIs and higher education institutions in general. Including a commitment to diversity in a mission statement is not enough, institutions must address the ways that racism, classism, sexism, and other systems of power are embedded in their practices. Without an intersectional practice and acknowledging these systems of power, resources such as the career center and access to mentorship are more challenging to access and utilize for Black women students. In the next chapter, I discuss the implications for these findings on higher education research and practices and public sociology. In addition, I will discuss some recommendations for future research and

recommendations for faculty, administrators, career centers and other predominantly white higher education institutions.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented the various factors that influenced research participants' career planning while at SEC and as alumni. Socio-economic status, academic experiences, mentorship and career center and resources were important influencers of participants' career planning. Mentorship proved to be the most salient factor as participants viewed their mentors almost as gatekeepers to career resources and opportunities. The racial and gendered climate at SEC played significant roles in the ways these four factors informed participants' career planning. Research findings also found that participants' experiences at SEC continued to impact their career planning after college in unique ways. After graduation, participants' experiences at SEC helped them build valuable skills for navigating whiteness, identify clear career goals and have led them to prioritize diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace.

This chapter begins with a brief discussion of the limitations of the study. In addition, this chapter presents the implications of the findings on higher education institutions including a deeper understanding of the ways that diversity, equity and inclusion can be practiced in PWIs and providing insight on the connections of campus climate and career development. This section also presents the implications for public sociology, including the importance of acknowledging Black women as knowledge producers and the value of writing to and for multiple publics to create social change.

Finally, this chapter concludes with several recommendations guided by research findings. I begin by presenting recommendations for future research such as considering additional factors when exploring Black women students' career planning in PWIs. In addition, I provide recommendations for future studies on continuing or long-term influences of Black women's college experiences on career planning including the potential value of designing a longitudinal study. I also provide recommendations for PWIs and higher education institutions. These recommendations primarily focus on eradicating the perpetuation of white supremacy and other hegemonic ideals and various initiatives for increasing diversity, equity and inclusion practices in various spaces including academic, residential and social spaces. I also provide recommendations for diversifying programs and services in career centers and provide recommendations for faculty and staff members involved in mentorship.

LIMITATIONS

One limitation in the current study is low generalizability of the results relating to continuing and long-term impacts of PWI experiences on career planning. While the findings relating to Black women's experiences at SEC and career planning resonate with previous studies, the findings that these experiences have continuing effects on Black women's post-college career planning has not been explored in many previous studies. However, since all participants in the current study were alumni of one small private Southern PWI with predominantly upper income students those findings may not be applicable to broader populations. Future studies exploring long-term impacts of PWI

experiences on career planning after college should increase their population to alumni from various PWIs to increase generalizability.

Another limitation is the method selected to explore the long-term impacts of Black women's experiences on their post-college career development. For this study, I interviewed 17 SEC alumni who graduated between 2008 and 2018 and identified as Black or African-American and a woman when they attended the institution. The choice in sampling was effective in examining whether Black women's experiences at SEC continued to impact their career development after their graduation. Recent alumni were able to clearly recount their experiences at SEC and also had experiences in the post-grad professional world to reflect on their career development and the research findings showed that there were continuing impacts of Black women's experiences at SEC on their career development after graduation. However, the level and length of impact these college experiences have on Black women's career development after graduation remain unanswered. For example, how do the impacts of college experiences differ for older alumni or based on varying levels of career development? Future research exploring the long-term effects of Black women's experiences on their career development should consider broadening their sample population to include older alumni or using longitudinal research methods and data.

Finally, virtual interviews were especially effective in reducing research barriers created by space and time. For example, virtual interviews allowed me to interview participants from various states without concerns about travel. Virtual interviews also provided more flexibility in terms of scheduling the interviews because commuting was

not a factor to consider. However, virtual interviews also introduced some limitations due to technology and connectivity. For example, some calls were dropped due to low signal which may have influenced the rapport between the researcher and participant. In addition, these call drops may have also disrupted the flow of the interview where in some cases, participants had to repeat themselves, lost their train of thought, or were interrupted in the middle of a story. However, despite the limitations, the current study provided valuable contributions for public sociology and higher education research by centering Black women's experiences and amplifying their voices. In addition, the current study provides many opportunities for future research and researchers interested in exploring Black women students' experiences and career development and recommendations for current higher education staff, faculty and administration to enhance diversity, equity and inclusion.

IMPLICATIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Career readiness is an important and expected outcome of higher education. In colleges and universities, students are expected to be able to expand their knowledge and education, build academic and professional skills, create an understanding of who they are and who they want to become, and find access to resources that will assist their career development. However, as previous studies and the findings from the current research suggest, students' college experiences are not uniform. By focusing on Black women's career planning as PWI students and as alumni, the current research findings provide important implications for higher education institutions.

First, the findings from this research identified salient factors that are unique to Black women students' career planning. These factors play significant roles in advancing or creating barriers for Black women's academic and career advancements. For example, several participants within the study identified the ways that gendered-racism was perpetuated at SEC and its impacts on Black women students. Isolation and lack of representation, for instance, made SEC an isolating place for participants and became barriers to participants' access to career resources and services. Isolation and lack of representation restricted participants from engaging with crucial resources such as career boot camps, resume building, and mentorship. In addition, participants' stories emphasized that in a racially-hostile environment and due to their hyper-visibility, perceived racism is just as powerful as "real" racism and have significant impacts on Black women's career planning including a change in career path.

Informed by the findings of this study, higher education institutions should increase their awareness of the unique experiences, challenges and barriers that Black women students face and strive to create programs, services, and initiatives that specifically target the needs of Black women students. These programs, services and initiatives should not be limited to career services but academic and student life programs as well. Career services and programs must examine the ways they offer support to all students. In this examination, career services and programs should identify existing barriers and work on implementing new strategies to reduce those barriers. An example of this is exploring whether career services and programs perpetuate hegemonic and oppressive ideals that isolate marginalized student populations. For example, utilizing a

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colorblind approach to career services does not address the unique lived experiences of Black students and other students of color (Delgado and Stefancic 2017; Savas 2014). The findings from this study highlight career centers that perpetuate hegemonic ideals are not accessible, safe or effective spaces for Black women students. Therefore, it is of utmost importance for career centers to ensure diversity in its practices and programs. Examples of increasing diversity in career services include increasing Black businesses in career fairs and increasing the representation of professional Black women in career boot camps.

The findings from this study also highlight the connections of academic experiences and career planning. Therefore, to improve Black women's career planning experiences, academic programs and fields should investigate the ways they are contributing to creating racialized and gendered classroom environments and focus on developing safer spaces for Black women and other marginalized student populations. In addition, higher education institutions should implement policies and programs that are intersectional and address the effects of intersecting systems of power such as racism, classism and sexism on students. This study illustrated that a commitment to diversity goes beyond enrollment. Thus, higher education institutions who strive to increase diversity, equity and inclusion must listen to the lived experiences of marginalized students.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC SOCIOLOGY

The roots of sociology as a discipline are found in its commitment to social justice and to build a better society by investigating social problems and the complexities of the

social world, to speak critically of societal issues and challenge dominant ideas (Feagin 2000). Public sociology is a sub-field of sociology that asserts that in order to create meaningful social change and social justice, sociology must be in conversation with the general public and focus on issues that are relevant and important to the public (Burawoy 2007; Gans 1989). There are a plethora of ways that public sociology brings sociology into a conversation with publics including by writing for and collaborating with multiple publics, bringing sociological knowledge and tools outside of academia and to more accessible platforms, and by committing to dialogue and issues that are raised by publics (Burawoy 2007; Collins 2007).

The current study makes two important contributions to public sociology. First, this study finds the public as valuable knowledge producers (Collins 2007; Nickel 2010). By placing Black women's experiences at the center of research to better understand the social issues that they face in PWIs, this study was able to identify unique values, challenges and barriers that played significant roles in Black women's career development. The findings from this study can be used by sociologists and other researchers as a foundation to future research on the lived experiences of Black women students in PWIs and on the various forms of challenges and barriers that Black women students face. Sociologists can also utilize the findings from this study to create tools, initiatives and recommendations to better the experiences of Black women students in PWIs. Further, the findings from this study can be used by sociologists to further awareness of the ways that intersecting systems of power inform different lived

experiences and the importance of utilizing an intersectional approach in studying social problems.

In addition, this study contributes to public sociology by amplifying the career planning and overall experiences of Black women PWI students and bringing these voices and lived experiences to multiple publics (Collins 2007). The findings from this study can be used by higher education institutions to create new career-preparedness initiatives to enhance access and support for Black women students. In addition, the findings from this study can be used by higher education and sociology researchers as a foundation or a guide to deeper exploration of the factors that impact Black women's career development in PWIs and their long-term effects. The themes highlighted in this study can also be used by Black women students in PWIs as a form of empowerment and validation to know that they are not alone and their experiences are being heard. By writing for multiple publics about lived experiences that are often ignored or silenced (Collins 2007), the current study is making contributions to public sociology. Finally, the current research contributes to public sociology by utilizing the research findings to create recommendations and action items informed by participants' stories. These recommendations are outlined in the next section.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For PWIs.

The findings from this study illustrate the connections between gendered racism and the career planning and readiness of Black women students. Many of the barriers and challenges that participants faced were shaped by their daily experiences with gendered

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racism while at SEC. Moreover, in their description of SEC, participants recounted various instances where racist oppressions were tolerated or ignored. Therefore, one recommendation to enhance the career development of Black women students is for PWIs and other higher education institutions to commit to anti-racist practices and strive to transform the campus climate. Diversity is not just a point to add to an institution's values or mission statement; it must also be practiced and reflected in the spaces, programs, and communities within the institution.

In their study on Black students' racialized experiences in a PWI, Strunk et al. (2018) make an important recommendation that are suitable for the current research. Strunk et al. recommend higher education institutions to "recognize that inaction and even the most unintentional or subtle slight serves to maintain a campus climate that inculcates students to internalize, justify, and subsequently perpetuate the hegemony of white supremacy" (p. 68). Therefore, it is vital for higher education institutions to assess the ways that racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression are perpetuated and develop anti-racist initiatives, policies and practices to eradicate the perpetuation of racism and other systems of power and to create a safer and more inclusive space for all students. Such initiatives, policies and practices should be informed by the lived experiences of Black women students and other marginalized student populations. Further, PWIs should designate a team of administrators, faculty, and students to develop and regularly assess these initiatives and policies.

Further, to increase diversity, equity and inclusion practices, higher education institutions develop mandatory and regular diversity, equity and inclusion trainings for

faculty, staff and students to increase their cultural competency and awareness of the lived experiences of Black women and other marginalized populations. Another recommendation for PWIs is to increase representation of Black women in academic and professional settings. Several participants identified lack of representation as a challenge and barrier to academic and career resources and overall career planning. Participants also noted their need to find Black women mentors and support systems that they could relate to or who could understand their experiences. Therefore, higher education institutions should strive to increase diversity in faculty and staff members to reflect its growing student diversity. In addition, higher education institutions may benefit from creating mentorship programs with faculty and staff members. This program should connect students to faculty and staff members based on various factors including academic department and career interests. In addition, this program should train and educate faculty and staff members on career resources and services on campus and in the community. In addition, it may be helpful for higher education institutions to create incentives for faculty and staff members to participate in mentorship programs.

For Career centers and Programs in PWIs and Other Higher Education Institutions

The findings from this study show that although the career center had a plethora of resources and events for students to advance their career readiness, some participants did not use these services. Many of the participants who sought support from the career center felt isolated, uncomfortable or found these services ineffective or lacking. Findings from this study identified the several unique factors that are crucial to enhance career readiness and planning for Black women students including lack of representation. One

recommendation for career centers is to create support programs that are specific to Black women and other marginalized student populations.

In addition, career centers may benefit from diversifying their programs such as seeking diverse speakers, diverse mentors and counselors, and diverse professionals in networking opportunities. Another way to diversify a career center is to increase resources and programs for careers that fall outside of STEM. In light of the research findings, many participants chose to major in humanities and social science as participants felt more supported, connected and saw their experiences reflected in these programs. However, the career center's lack of resources and opportunities relating to these fields presented as barriers to participants' career readiness as participants had to seek other forms of career support. While the current study focused on career centers in a PWI, these recommendations can be utilized by all higher education institutions to to provide safer and more accessible career resources for Black women students.

For Faculty and Staff Members in PWIs and Other Higher Education Institutions

The findings from this study identified mentorship as the most important factor in advancing Black women students' career readiness and development. For participants, mentors provided access to career-related resources and opportunities, guidance and support. However, participants noted various challenges to finding a mentor and many of these challenges were connected to the gendered-racial discrimination they faced daily. Further, participants' stories highlighted the importance of finding a mentor they share an identity with. However, there are factors that limit opportunities for homophily in mentor-student relationships including lack of faculty representation for marginalized

student populations. Therefore, when recruiting new faculty members, student affairs, and academic and administrative departments should acknowledge the importance of increasing diversity and should also assess their hiring practices to reduce any hidden biases that may create barriers for candidates from marginalized populations.

Further, while increasing faculty and staff diversity is vital, it is also important to note that mentorship roles should not be subjected to women faculty or faculty of color. Rather, faculty and staff members from all backgrounds should participate in mentorship programs (if such programs are available) and other career events to make connections with students and commit to being allies and advocating for students. As research findings showed that advocacy and trust were salient features of mentorship and could advance participants' career planning, faculty and staff members may benefit from implementing an advocate-mentor model in their mentorship. In their article on mentoring in higher education, Harris and Lee (2019) identified five characteristics of an advocate mentor which include (1) actively working to address the needs of marginalized students, (2) expressing a deep commitment to seeking social justice on behalf of marginalized students, (3) use their privilege to foster inclusiveness and educate students on important resources and opportunities, and (4) to commit to creating an safe and supportive environment for marginalized students. In addition, when working with Black women students, it may benefit for faculty and staff members to ask career-related questions such, "what are your career aspirations?" (Culver 2018).

Another recommendation is for academic departments to collaborate with campus career services to develop programs that focus on career fields related to that academic

program. These programs may reduce the likelihood of career fairs and programs from solely focusing on STEM and other majority white and male academic fields. These programs could include mini career-fairs and specific resume and career options workshops tailored to each academic program or college. An additional recommendation is for faculty and staff members to work toward increasing their cultural competency by engaging in diversity, equity and inclusion trainings and workshops. Topics that faculty and staff members should continue to expand their knowledge of include bias recognition, allyship and advocacy, and intersectional practice. It would also be beneficial for faculty members is to work toward creating safer and more inclusive classroom environments by ensuring that Black women students and other marginalized students are reflected in course curriculums. Creating safer and more inclusive classroom environments play important roles in Black women students' academic performance which can inform their career paths.

The above recommendations point to the importance of increasing faculty and staff diversity and commitment to allyship and mentoring. It is also important to note that many faculty and staff members may not yet recognize the value of embedding anti-racism and diversity, equity and inclusion in their roles. One explanation for this could be lack of awareness or understanding of systemic racism and oppression. Critical Race Theory asserts that U.S. society is built on the ideology white supremacy and whiteness is viewed as the status quo (Delgado and Stefancic 2017; Howard and Navarro 2015; Savas 2014). Because it is normalized and viewed as the status quo, it is difficult to address (Delgado and Stefancic 2017; Howard and Navarro 2015).

Therefore, one final recommendation is for faculty and staff members to engage in a collaborative process of unlearning and for these conversations to be encouraged and perhaps even expected by academic and other departments (Ash et al. 2020; Kishimoto 2018). An example of this is to incorporate racism and other forms of oppression in conversations and talking points including faculty and staff meetings. Engaging in these conversations may be difficult and uncomfortable but is essential in helping faculty and staff members see the value of being allies and advocating for marginalized students (Ash et al. 2020; Kishimoto 2018). An important aspect of the process of unlearning is focusing on identity exploration. In an article presenting a model for change in higher education, Ash et al. (2020) emphasized that self-examination and exploration, especially among white faculty and staff members, is crucial to understanding systemic racism and the importance of anti-racist work. Normalizing conversations about systemic oppression among faculty and staff may lead to increasing commitment to anti-racist work and allyship such as creating safer and more inclusive classroom environments and mentoring Black women and other marginalized student populations which would help to advance students' academic and career development.

For Future Research

The current research has two notable implications for future research. First, the research illustrated the values of utilizing an intersectional approach to understanding and making meaning out of the unique lived experiences of Black women students. Utilizing an intersectional approach, this study identified the intersections of socio-economic status, race and gender and its impacts on Black women's academic and career

development. In addition to the understanding that student who report lower socio-economic status are disproportionately members of a racial minority (Castellanos 2018; Titus 2006), participants' stories in the current study highlighted that socio-economic factors guide their academic and career decisions from selecting an academic program to post-college employment options. Some participants also discussed the impacts of their status as Black, first-generation women students on their college experiences and career planning.

Some participants noted additional struggles with navigating college and barriers to accessing crucial resources as first-generation students because they had no guidance or knowledge of what it means to be a college student prior to enrolling and had to learn on their own. Future research exploring Black women students' career planning in PWIs should continue to utilize an intersectional approach in order to gain a whole understanding of Black women's experiences and what makes their experiences unique (Delgado and Stefancic 2017; Solorzano and Yosso 2000; Savas 2014). Moreover, as CRT in education scholars have emphasized, an intersectional analysis is crucial to developing tools to create social change and fight for social justice (Delgado and Stefancic 2017; Savas 2014). In addition, since students who report lower socio-economic status and first generation status are disproportionately racial minorities, future research should further explore the intersections of race, gender, socio-economic status, and first-generation status to further identify the barriers that Black women students face in higher education institutions.

In addition to identifying factors that influence Black women's career development in PWIs, the current research explored how these factors continued to impact Black women's post-college career development. This study found unique ways that these factors and participants' experiences continue to shape their career development. For example, participants' experiences with daily gendered-racial microaggressions provided them with a distinctive form career-readiness where participants felt more prepared to enter predominantly white workplaces and gained expertise in recognizing "fake diversity." In addition, the resilience that participants gained in addition to their experiences at SEC allowed participants to strive toward bettering diversity, equity, and inclusion in their professional roles. Further, their experiences at SEC continue to define their career paths and shape their career aspirations and passions. Factors such as career resources, mentorship and academic experiences continued to influence participants' post-college career development but not in the ways these factors were designed to be. Yet, these unique skills that participants gained from various factors and their lived experiences at SEC play important roles in their current career development and should be explored further in future research.

CONCLUSION

The overall implications for the research findings include providing a new direction to exploring continuing or long-term impacts of Black women's experiences in PWIs on their career development and identifying unique factors to Black women's career planning. Future research should consider widening the sample to test generalizability of these findings. Future studies exploring long-term impacts of Black

women's experiences in PWIs should consider utilizing longitudinal data to gain a deeper understanding of the ways that these experiences impact Black women alumni in different stages of their career development.

The findings from this study can also be used by higher education institutions to better understand the ways that racialized and gendered campus climates create challenges, barriers and unique experiences for Black women's career planning. The research findings can be utilized by higher education administration to create safer and more inclusive spaces for Black women students. Further, PWIs and higher education institutions can utilize this study to create social change and increase diversity, equity and inclusion practices on their campuses. In addition, faculty and staff members can utilize findings from this study to learn about ways to support Black women students in the classroom and through mentorship.

This research also has implications for public sociology, and CRT and intersectionality scholars by illustrating the importance of having Black women and other marginalized voices as knowledge producers. By placing the experiences of Black women at the center of inquiry, this provided a deeper understanding of the complex realities that Black women face in PWIs and how these realities are shaped by intersecting systems of power. Further, this study also supports the argument that to achieve meaningful social change in education institutions and in U.S. society, it is important to listen to marginalized voices.

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Introductory Questions

1. How old are you?
2. When was your graduation date?
3. What is your current occupation?
   a. How long have you been working there?
   b. What are some of the things that you do as a [insert occupation]?

PWI questions
1. Tell me a little bit about your college.
   a. If participants ask for clarification, ask for the size of the college, was it a co-ed university, what the campus looks like, what was student life like (were there a lot of organizations? Was there Greek life?), etc.
2. Why did you choose to attend this college?
3. Was there a culture shift from your hometown?
   a. If yes, can you tell me more about the culture shift? how did you adjust?
   b. If no, what are some of the biggest similarities between your school and your hometown?
4. Do you think your college was diverse?
   a. If yes, what made it diverse?
   b. If no, why do you think that it wasn't diverse? What was missing?
5. Tell me about your experiences of being a Black woman at your college.
   a. Can you describe one experience that really show what it is like to be a Black woman at your college?

PWI Academic Experiences
1. What was your major? Why did you choose this major? When did you choose this major? What influenced your decision? What did you find attractive about that field?
2. Of all the classes you took in college, which was your favorite class? Why was this your favorite class? Which was your least favorite class? Why did you not like this class? What could have been changed in this class so that you would like it more?
3. Have you ever been the only Black woman in your classes? What was that experience like? can you give me one or two examples of your own experiences?
4. In your classes, did you feel supported by your professors?
   a. If yes, can you tell me more about the support that you felt from your professors? Can you tell me more about these professors and what your relationship was with them?
   b. If no, why did you not feel supported by your professors? Can you give me one example of this lack of support?

5. Do you think being a Black woman shaped your classroom experiences? Why or Why not? Can you give me some examples?

Experiences Beyond the Classroom
1. When you were in college, did you live on campus or off campus?
    a. If on campus, can you describe your residence halls? Were you the only Black woman in your residence hall?
        i. If yes, what was that experience like?
    b. If on campus, did you feel "at home" in your residence halls? Why? Why not?
    c. If on campus, can you describe your relationship with your roommate? Hall mates? RA? Do you think that being a Black woman shaped these relationships? Why? Why not?
    d. If no, what shaped your decision to live off-campus?
2. Were you involved in any campus organizations? Which ones? What was attractive about these organizations? How often were you involved in these organizations (i.e. did you attend regular meetings and events?)

Support, Mentorship and Other Relationships
1. Did you feel supported in college? Who made you feel supported? Do you think the type of college you attended has made a difference in how you were supported?
2. Did you have a mentor in college? What were they like? Can you describe this relationship? How did they become your mentor?
3. How did being a Black woman student play a role in your college experiences? Do you think that you faced unique challenges because you were a Black woman student? If so, how did you cope with these challenges?
    a. did you share these challenges with your friends? Mentors? Professors? College staff? How did they respond? If not, why didn't you share these challenges?

Career Development
1. When you were in college, what were your post-college plans? What influenced you to choose this path? When did you begin to make post-college plans?
2. When you were in college, what was your career goal? What influenced you to choose this goal?
    a. Has this goal changed since you graduated? If so, what influenced this change? If not, have the things that influenced you to choose that career goal continue to influence you today? How so?
3. When you were looking for jobs after college, what were some elements that you were looking for in a workplace? Why were these elements important to you? Are these elements still important to you today? why or why not?
4. Did you go to any career centers on your campus to help you with your career development? Why? Why not? Can you describe your experiences at these career centers?
5. Did you attend campus events or workshops to help you prepare for your career path?

      a. If so, can you describe these events? What made you decide to attend these events? How did you find out about these events?

      b. If not, what kept you from attending these events?

6. Were there any individuals on your campus who influenced your career development?

      a. If yes, without giving me their name, who were they in relation to you? (i.e. academic advisor, roommate, professor, mentor, etc.)

7. Do you think your college experiences shaped your career development?

      a. If yes, how? Can you tell me about one or two specific experiences?

8. If answered "no" to questions 6 and/or 7, what influenced your career development? Can you tell me more about the way you established your career development?

9. Do you think your experiences as a Black woman in a PWI shaped your career development when you were in college? why? Why not? Can you give me some examples?

10. Did the people or experiences that influenced your career development still influence the decisions you make today? Why? Why not? If yes, can you give me some examples?

11. How have your experiences with being a Black woman in a PWI shaped other aspects of your life besides your career development? Can you give me some specific examples?

12. Is there anything that you want to add that we did not cover?

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