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BALANCING BERKELEY: A CASE STUDY EXPLORATION OF BLACK STUDENT EXPERIENCES AT ELITE UNIVERSITIES

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Counselor Education

San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Sha Quasha Morgan

December 2022

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The Designated Thesis Committee Approves the Thesis Titled

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by

Sha Quasha Morgan

APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF COUNSELOR EDUCATION

SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY

December 2022

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ABSTRACT

BALANCING BERKELEY: A CASE STUDY EXPLORATION OF BLACK STUDENT EXPERIENCES AT ELITE UNIVERSITIES

by Sha Quasha Morgan

A qualitative study examining the individual and personal definitions of college success from the perspective of Black students at predominantly White and elite institutions. Using students from the University of California, Berkeley as a snapshot of the larger institutional context, this thesis centers the experiences of Black undergraduate students to discuss equity and student success. The university's written texts, reports and survey results were examined regarding diversity and interpreted to reveal patterns in subtext and narrative about commitments to success and compared to that of the students' experiences. Emergent themes included: isolation and sense of belonging, race relations including intra group differences, and community support. Findings offer insight into how Black students at Berkeley understand college success and the influence of race in navigating an elite university context. Implications are presented for higher education and student affairs professionals and recommendations for the field are discussed.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to me—to all the versions of myself. Especially to the little girl who was afraid to speak, you've found your voice. This is dedicated to my growth and healing.

And, to Black students, wherever you are reading this right now: you are enough.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank my thesis committee; to Dr. Laker, my faculty advisor, always true to himself, big personality and even bigger heart, thank you for your invaluable support and encouragement throughout my graduate program and during this project. You have believed in me since day one, and you continue to push and challenge me. I would not have gotten here without your constant compassion and words of kindness. Thank you for reminding me to embrace vulnerability and to trust myself.

To Dr. Birts and Dr. Watson, what an honor it has been to work with such powerful and inspiring Black women. This moment is so important to me; to have women who look like me offering their mentorship and showing me in real life that what I want is possible. Thank you both for your feedback, encouragement, support and simply being present.

I want to thank my family and friends who have supported me throughout this journey; letting me borrow books, being thought partners and listening to me ramble on about analysis (sorry Mom!). I truly appreciate everyone who has told me to keep going when I wanted to give up.

And last, but certainly not least, I want to extend a huge thank you to my participants. Thank you for trusting me to tell your stories.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

As I currently engage in writing this thesis, I have had many moments pop up where I questioned if I am good enough. In community writing sessions, I listened to others talk about their research and I wondered if mine could measure up. I am afraid to fail because if I do, what does that mean? For me, for my family? It has been a challenge to loosen up even with my faculty advisor even as we have built a very strong, collaborative, and supportive relationship over the past two and a half years. I find I am sort of still performing to be a smart student. To be real, to be raw, I have to let that go. I feel the pressure and the responsibility to positively represent the Black community. I feel the consuming sense of pride and culture in being a Black woman and sharing in community with others who understand me. I want to show that we, Black people, can do and are more–in spite of the little that is given to us– and the unnecessary additional barriers we face, we prevail. This is not a new story. But I open with this because this is the story of why I am here, writing this project. I am a survivor, and I came to push back. I know my existence and presence in spaces is a challenge to harmful dominant practice and historical thinking. That is why this work is important to me, and that is why I cannot give up. I am here to challenge and to uplift the voices of the silenced, talked over, and misunderstood.

In preparation for this thesis, I started an exploration journey of potential topics. Along this journey I found myself wondering about the Black college student experience. I decided to speak with a few college friends to talk about our time at Berkeley. In casual conversation with these fellow Black Berkeley, recurring themes around their Black racial identity came up in reflecting on their college experience. We talked about hanging out in the African

American Student Development office; missing class just to attend Black Wednesdays. We also discussed the isolation of being the 'only' in a large lecture and the disappointment in how frequently this happened. Through these conversations, it was apparent that being #BlackatCAL was such a visceral part of our everyday lives. I began reflecting on my own experiences and I found myself wanting to investigate more the ways in which navigating Berkeley in our Black skin had shown up for us. Now that I have graduated and have had time to consider my own experiences and friends' experiences, I have the language to go back and call out some of the things we encountered. It occurred to me that other Black students currently at Berkeley may very well be grappling with similar things. And this could be something that Black students at elite universities across the nation are facing. This search and reflection process prompted my interest in further exploring the social dynamics that occur for racialized bodies in academic environments (Nasir, 2012; Tatum, 2017). Thus, the decision to examine the socialization of elite universities and Black students materialized. Centering Berkeley as a snapshot, this thesis makes an inquiry about the process of cultivating and advancing racialized and academic identities (Nasir, 2012) in an elite university environment for Black students.

Background

Historically elite or 'leading' universities have been renowned worldwide, noting the international prominence and impact of such institutions in the United States, United Kingdom, China and South Africa, to name a few. Typically, there was a direct link between the economic status of students and the elite universities, namely, that the students came from upper- and middle-class backgrounds (Kingston & Lewis, 1990). This created a social class

divide, and elite institutions gained the reputation of being for the wealthy. With changes to education, some elite universities implemented a massified approach where students who were part of affluent families were able to attend. However, some did not make this change, and thus remained the elite status of institutions that was primarily tied to the financial status of its students and their families (Palfreyman & Tapper, 2009). The history of American education and the formation of elite universities will be discussed further in the literature review.

These highly selective universities enroll high-performing students as they take on the journey of higher education. Top universities are defined by their production of a very narrow range or small scope of academic and research-intensive activity (e.g., MIT's focus on science) (Palfreyman & Tapper, 2009). Thus, students are predisposed to certain success standards when they consider applying to an elite university. The bond with elite universities can happen at any point along a student's educational journey; but from the very beginning of that relationship, students are socialized into a narrow set of expectations around academic and social success. With the expectation of a quality education and the best opportunities, these types of institutions position themselves as separate *and* better than other institutions.

Elite universities attract the most academically talented students across the nation. Students are admitted, proving their worth by withstanding the highly selective admissions process. The byproduct of making it through the admissions process is a predictor of high academic achievement once on campus. The long-standing competitiveness of these universities, holding place through generations and social change, upheld the belief that where one went to college was important (Kingston & Lewis, 1990). Elite institutions have a

predetermined set of expectations as outlined in their admission requirements, and reciprocally, its students have a set of expected outcomes for attending the university. Students are attracted to the prestige, reputation and the advantage tied to these institutions. Some researchers highlight the accumulation of capital that occurs resulting from attending prestigious institutions. These findings convey the elite student status and its influence on postgraduate plans, attainment and job opportunities, particularly, in efforts to understand the connection between campus networks and pathways to professional careers (Martin, 2009). Writers for the Harvard Business Review presented a quantitative study exploring the relationship between work performance and the type of institution attended. They found that graduates from the top ranked universities tend to outperform those from lower ranked schools (Taras et al., 2020). Implications for employers heavily pointed to hiring practices that favored graduates from elite universities. Hence, students attend these schools with certain ideas about the benefits. After all, they have developed and nurtured a relationship with these institutions well before the time they first set foot on campus. Because of this, the socialization process of elite universities begins early on. Students begin learning to understand how they should perform and what is acceptable before they can consider applying.

In the case of Black students, disparity already exists relating to access to higher education institutions post high school, and retention and graduation rates once in a college setting (W. R. Allen et al., 1991; Harper et al., 2009; Harper & Wood, 2016). Add on the layer of the elite university context, the distinct experience becomes one of increased interest and examination. The disparity for Black students stretches beyond academic achievement

(i.e., “underperforming”). The Postsecondary National Policy Institute (PNPI) published a fact sheet in 2021 for the National Center of Education Statistics about some general disparities between African American students and White students in higher education. It reported that college enrollment for Black students was consistently around 62% from 2000-2018 (PNPI, 2021). Additionally, of the 16 million undergraduate students enrolled in higher education institutions in 2018, Black students only made up 13% of the total enrollment. Moreover, Black students were not equally represented across institution type. For 4-year public universities Black students were 12% of the population. At private nonprofit institutions, Black students comprised 13% of the enrollment, and 29% of those were enrolled in private four-year universities. Additionally, only 15% of Black students attended highly selective institutions, and at elite research universities they represent merely eight percent of the student body. In 2019, only 29% of Black students had obtained a degree compared to 45% of White students (PNPI, 2021). And Black students tend to receive more Pell grants and typically take out more federal loans than White students. Although there has been some increase in Black student enrollment and degree attainment, it has been a statistically slow progression. As such, these statistics pointed to further exploration of Black student experiences at elite universities.

The University of California (UC) system attracts degree-seeking students from all over the world with its California appeal and public designation. Among the top performing universities is UC Berkeley. As the number one ranked public university, UC Berkeley sets the ultimate standard for success and the promise of producing excellence. Like its private institutional counterparts, Berkeley’s admission requirements attract a specific kind of

student. Concerning Black students, Berkeley's applications, admission and enrollment has been stagnant since 2012. Approximately 5% of all incoming applications were from Black students; admission rates for Black students hovered around 3.5% until last year being 4.7% and lastly the total enrollment of Black students has remained under 4%. The fall of 2012, the number of Black freshman students was 142 (3.41%) (UC, 2021). I was one of them. We know the disparities exist. We are aware of the complicated campus climate issues on many elite campuses (Campbell et al., 2019; Jenkins et al., 2021); this continues to be a prominent issue within education. This project presents an opportunity to reveal the lesser-known nuances of Black students' experiences on a more personal level. Using Berkeley students as a case study allows us to take a focused look at a larger population of students and the distinct experience of being Black at an elite institution. There is something to be explored about why this continues to persist at Berkeley and institutions like Berkeley. Moreover, we can explore the processes, experiences, choices, interactions etc. that Black elite university students face.

Problem Statement

Research shows there are inequities in overall student success and outcomes for Black students for most higher education institutions. In elite universities, there are a set of social conditions, contexts and influences that are especially unique that inform the ways Black students experience their college journey and path to success. The combination of an elite university context and racialized experiences make for an interesting study in looking at student success and equity. The balancing of both racial and academic identities for Black

students at elite universities can heavily influence their relation to success which can cause friction in pursuit of traditional success outcomes.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this research is to further understand the lived experiences of Black students at elite universities and provide a conceptual roadmap for understanding the intertwined and multidimensional relationship between identity, success, and campus socialization. I strive to understand how an elite college context affects Black students' acclimation to college and pursuit of conventional methods of academic and social success. The intention is to provide commentary concerning the commitments of elite institutions to the holistic development of Black students. Additionally, this project intends to investigate if Black students at elite universities have shared experiences consistent with being in a certain environment, barring other identity differences. And lastly, this project intends to add to the important conversations around Black students, educational equity, and student success.

Research Questions

The following questions helped shape the direction of this research and inform the methodology for data collection:

1. How do students engage in acculturation around their racial identity at elite universities?
2. What are the factors that contributed to Black students' success at elite universities?
3. How do Black students' racial identity impact their defintion(s) of success at a Historically White and elite institution?

4. How does the context of an elite university influence the ways Black students attain success?

Definition of Terms

To assist exploration of the research, this paper uses the following definitions and terms:

African American/ Black. Refers to a United States born person of African descent or heritage. The author will use both terms interchangeably throughout the paper to signify the same racial and ethnic identity. Also, in terms of cultural significance, this term refers to a Black American.

Critical Race Theory (CRT). Framework used to "analyze the role of race and racism in perpetuating social disparities between dominant and marginalized racial groups" (Hiraldo, 2010, p. 54).

Elite Institution/University. Used to describe universities and colleges that are nationally ranked above others based on certain criteria and characteristics

Historically White Institutions/Universities (HWI). Describes a history in which these universities were created for the betterment of White students while explicitly excluding other racial groups (Givens, 2016, p. 56).

Predominantly White Institutions (PWI). This is defined as a campus where most of the student enrollment population is White compared to other racial groups.

Traditional Student Success. Encompasses outcomes such as graduation rates, retention rates, time to degree and post graduate salary, earnings.

Scope of the Study

This study is limited to Black junior and senior students who self-identify as cisgender male or female at UC Berkeley. These students will have spent at least one semester in-person at Berkeley either before or after COVID-19 restrictions. Thus, the core of this research relies on the existence of a physical presence on campus, sitting in classrooms and interacting with peers, staff, and faculty in person.

Limitations and Delimitations

The following limitations were beyond control of the research design:

1. Participants may not fully disclose their experiences due to unfamiliarity with interviewer and sensitivity of the topic
2. Interview questions are subject to the interpretation of the participants

It is an important acknowledgement that Black students have variant relationships with their racial identity; it is not assumed that all Black students have the same experiences. The intent here, however, is to investigate the context of an elite institution and the experiences for Black students across gender identities, sexual orientations, first to college status etc.

Additional parameters on the research include:

1. Intentionally focused on undergraduate students versus graduate students or alumni. It is important to capture the reflections of students who are currently experiencing the phenomenon of being a Black student at Berkeley. The experiences of Black graduate students and alumni are also important and can provide valuable insights, but they offer a separate and different set of experiences that I am not attempting to unpack in this project.

2. While the issue of student success and perspectives from Black students exists in other areas such as community colleges and Historically Black Colleges and Universities that should be explored, this paper attempts to provide a focused snapshot into the experiences of Black students and their success specifically at predominantly White elite institutions.

Statement of Significance

In this particular moment in time, looking at strategies and redefining success is appropriate for the trends in education and addressing equity. The relevance of this project comes at no better time in the history of education where Black student success is in the spotlight. Campuses across the world are faced with making decisions around campus climate issues in efforts to demonstrate commitment to educational equity.

This thesis will unfold in a series of chapters; Chapter One is the introduction, providing background information on elite universities, setting the context of UC Berkeley as a case study, identifying the scope of the study, an outline of research questions, definition of terms, statement of significance and relevance for the project. Chapter 2 will examine a review of the literature on elite institutions and Black students in higher education. The reader will be presented with a brief history of elite universities and the nuances of the case study campus. Further, the reader will be made aware of the overarching categories of research as it relates to elite universities and Black students. And finally, a discussion around disparity for Black students at Berkeley as it represents the elite university context. The justification of this project should be supported by a review of the literature. Following, Chapter 3 will be an overview of the methodology, outlining the theoretical framework of Critical Race Theory

(CRT) and autoethnography. Additionally, there will be comments on the use of narrative interviewing and thematic content analysis (TCA) to construct a semi-structured interview process for data collection. Chapters 4 and 5, respectively, will provide an explanation on the process for analysis, a review of the findings from the interviews including emergent themes and lastly, discussion around supporting Black students at elite universities and implications for student affairs professionals.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

History of American Higher Education and Elite Institutions

It is important to orient ourselves to the history of American education and the development of elite universities. The emergence of the American colonial college system in the 18th century arose out of the image of Western Europe and English practices. The newly developed Harvard and Yale universities borrowed many of its standards directly from English schools such as the four- year college class system, degree formula, curriculum, student discipline and administration regulations (Brubacher & Rudy, 2017; Soares, 2007). Although not explicitly preventing access to certain types of students, attending college was a hierarchical practice. Higher education, or higher learning, functioned as a tool to preserve the established society, consequently establishing a precedent on who could attend. The early goal of these institutions was to educate professional men under teaching and scholarship (Perkin, 2007). Thus, there was a high number of men in the clergy, ministry and other professions attending. As these schools became more popular an increased number of men desired a chance at higher education. Preparation for admission usually included private tutoring or instruction by a minister. Additionally, secondary school teachers focused more on Latin and Greek teachings, recognizing that familiarity with the languages as an admission requirement. Other entrance requirements included essays written in Latin (Harvard), sufficient evidence of proof of good moral character and a bond paid by the father to cover "quarterly bills" (Yale) (Brubacher & Rudy, 2017). The curriculum went through various iterations and adaptations covering various intellectual revolutions and students were expected to be well versed in all the teachings. Over the years a more comprehensive

curriculum emerged that included science, arithmetic and modern teachings relating to culture and arts (Brubacher & Rudy, 2017; Perkin, 2007). By the late 18th and early 19th century, college tuition saw an increase, widening the social class divide. The poorer students worked through college or received what we would today call scholarships. To offset this, denominational hilltop colleges emerged that claimed to be for the "poor but deserving" students who still wanted to pursue higher education (Brubacher & Rudy, 2017). This ignited the creation of elite colleges. In early eras, there was a direct correlation between the student body of elite institutions and economic status. Only those from affluent backgrounds were privileged enough to attend these high-profile institutions (Kingston & Lewis, 1990). Thus, elite institutions consisted of a White and male student body. As social demographics changed, some universities adopted more democratic practices, such as allowing men not from traditional professions like ministers to attend their universities as a revision to their admission requirements. But some continued in the early practice of being selective. The association with upper class and affluent society contributed to the maintenance of the prestige of institutions. For schools like Harvard, Princeton, and Yale, commonly known as the Big Three, their continued label as an elite institution was tied to the financial support from affluent families (Kingston & Lewis, 1990). I offer this brief history to set the stage for the following discussion about elite institutions and the socialization process of its students and relation to Black students who attend these universities.

Characteristics of Elite Institutions

We all know about elite institutions such as Harvard, Yale, and Princeton. We know the reputations associated with them, and their history. Above all, we know that elite universities

and institutions are praised for their world class knowledge and association with groundbreaking discoveries (Palfreyman & Tapper, 2009). In earlier definitions, elite institutions were almost invariably known for the level of research they produced. The elite institutions we recognize today still hold the early ideals of their historical beginnings. The fundamental practices of admission requirements, curricula, and reputations as spaces for advanced higher learning are prominent. The characteristics of elite institutions are based on qualities that set them apart from their other educational counterparts. These include consistent top rankings in national reports, having highly competitive admission requirements, a selective admission process, rigorous curricula, and desirable success outcomes. Elite universities require applicants to have high GPAs and test scores; they only admit a small number of applicants, increasing their desirability and making them even more attractive to prospective students. Although some changes have happened with admission policies (e.g., test scores no longer required) elite institutions remain competitive.

Berkeley as Elite

The first institution to be established within the UC system in 1868, UC Berkeley entered the higher education scene as a pioneer. UC Berkeley, also known as Berkeley or affectionately as simply, Cal, mirrors the typical characteristics of an elite university. The most prestigious of the UC system, Berkeley as a public institution has a significantly lower tuition cost compared to Ivy league schools. This allows students to receive an expensive, quality education for a fraction of the cost (Freeman, 2004), increasing the school's desirability.

Berkeley holds its place among the top elite universities. In 2021, Berkeley topped the Forbes list as the number one school in America, beating out Harvard. Adding on to the achievement, Berkeley made history as the first public school to receive this distinction (Whitford & Howard, 2021). For the second year in a row, it was ranked the number one public university in the United States and fourth overall according to the 2021 QS world rankings list (Souza, 2021). The U.S. News & World Reports' 2014 Guide to America's Best Colleges labeled it the "#1 public university in the world," marking the 16th year of this national ranking (Office of Planning and Analysis, 2013). Additionally, Berkeley holds the Carnegie classifications of "very high research activity" and "more selective" identical to its private Ivy league counterparts (Yale, Princeton, and Harvard) (Carnegie Classifications, 2021). Berkeley's consistent ranking in the top tier of colleges and universities both nationally and globally has contributed to the creation of an elite university culture.

Requirements and Selection Process

Noted on their admissions website, Berkeley says the goal of their admission process is to:

> Identify applicants who are most likely to contribute to Berkeley's intellectual and cultural community and, ultimately, to the State of California, the nation, and the world. (Office of Undergraduate Admissions, 2021a)

In its traditional fashion of pioneering trends, Berkeley recently implemented a holistic review process of applications, which most fellow UC's have adopted as well. The intent of a holistic review is to allow for a more diverse undergraduate class by not weighing one criterion more heavily than another. Both personal and academic preparation are considered (Office of Undergraduate Admissions, 2021a). This practice looks at criteria beyond

minimum GPA (which is 3.0), like patterns of grades over multiple school grades, participation in academic preparation programs and the "intellectual rigor" of said program. Despite this "holistic view," Berkeley's requirements and selection process remains competitive. Following suit of the elite characteristics, Berkeley is a selective institution with a very low acceptance rate. According to their 2020 admissions student profile, the campus admitted only 17.6% of its total 88,000 applicants into its new freshman class, with 2.8% being Black students (Office of Undergraduate Admissions, 2021b).

The Nuances

While the argument here is about the socialization of elite institutions, it is also important to note the nuances about Berkeley that make it an interesting case for discussion. The versatility in using a case study creates opportunity for openness in research design and ability to apply varied data sources in exploration of a phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Meyer, 2001). The campus is used here as a case study to offer insight into the socialization and the impact it specifically has on Black students in terms of a notable experience. The distinction in using Berkeley comes particularly from its history and reputation as an activist institution; a label not usually associated with other elite institutions in its league. This is a unique aspect of Berkeley as an institution, while also holding the traditional characteristics of an elite university.

As the admissions website mentions, it seeks applicants who can contribute to Berkeley's specific cultural community. Berkeley itself *is* a culture. Being the site of some of the most profound social movements, this campus carries with it a storied legacy that lives on through its students. The desire to speak out against societal issues has been a typical part of the

student experience. The campus and its students have been major contributors to some of the most widespread progressive political and social activist movements in the country (Freeman, 2004; Rhoads, 2016). 1964 ignited a string of student-led protests across the Berkeley campus. Under the leadership of graduate student Mario Savio, over 800 Berkeley students united to fight for the right of freedom of speech and the right to engage in political protest on campus (Freeman, 2004). Its legacy is forever commemorated by the "Free Speech Cafe" and Free Speech Cafe Mural housed on Berkeley's campus. In 2016, UC Berkeley Admissions published an article giving prospective students advice on how to develop leadership skills in preparation for their application to the university. Their admissions page directly highlights the campus's involvement in the Free Speech Movement. The website reads:

> Leadership is an important aspect to the UC Berkeley culture. It's in our DNA; after all, this is the home of the Free Speech Movement. (UC Berkeley Admissions, 2016)

This quote is one example of the expectations imposed on students and socialization by this institution. It demonstrates to students that not only leadership is important, but this *type* of social activism is so ingrained in the fabric of the university. Although a historically White campus, Berkeley has been the site of many social movements led and supported by people of color, including its Black community. With its proximity to the birthplace of the Black Panther party, UC Berkeley's campus became the center of promoting Anti-Black racism and Black Power (Rhoads, 2016; Taylor, 2010).

In 1966, Berkeley conducted its first racial and ethnic survey, reporting that only one point zero two percent (1.02%) of its student population was Black. These students organized into the Afro-American Student Union (AASU), being the first Black political student

organization on campus. Following, a newly developed Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) started with only 13 student participants (Taylor, 2010). The program offered academic and financial support to low income and minority students. By the end of the 1960's, this program saw a dramatic increase to over 100 students. As advocates of Black Power, the AASU journeyed beyond the Free Speech movement. With growing numbers of Black students participating in EOP, the necessity for educating Black students about their history sprouted, thus, the fight for a "Black Studies" program ensued (Taylor, 2010). This is the origin of the African American Studies Department we recognize today at Berkeley. The legacy of Berkeley and remnants of social activism is one aspect that continues to attract students to the school along with its elite status.

Overview of Student Success

Student success initiatives have become the hot topic amongst higher education language and practice. With pressure from the federal government, educational institutions are under the spotlight more than ever. Their response usually being a hastily put together initiative to prove their commitment to students (Mullin, 2012). Student success definitions have expanded to include graduation or completion beyond the institution of entry. Although the scope of definition has broadened, traditional measures of success still encompass some common indicators across institutions (Jones-White et al., 2010). The challenge with student success is the varied data points that institutions include. Yet, the common indicators of success seen across research include graduation rates, time to degree with most schools measuring six-year graduation for first year students and four year for transfer students, retention rates and salary or earnings captured via post graduate surveys (Baldwin et al.,

2011; Mullin, 2012; Talbert, 2012). There is a particular area of research that focuses on retention as a strategy to increase success. Researcher and author Vincent Tinto (1999) specifically discusses creating conditions of success, and names six areas: commitment, expectations, support, feedback, involvement, and learning. He suggested that implementing institutional policies to promote these conditions was needed to promote success, especially for first year students (Tinto, 1999).

Another strand of student success research examined improvement measures as an indicator of institutional effectiveness (Baldwin et al., 2011). This literature suggested that increased or improved rates of factors such as graduation and retention rates provide evidence of the campus itself being successful. Additionally, student success indicators are often measured at the institutional level versus an individual level and used primarily in a generalized way. So, most elite universities have the privilege to boast high graduation rates of their students. This is one of the characteristics that generate the elite reputation. After all, students attend college with the overall goal to graduate (Small & Winship, 2007). Lastly, Mullin (2012) discussed the implications in defining student success. He stated that more consideration in policy should be around student learning and success beyond graduation.

Elite University Success

The general research of elite universities returns literature around a small range of topics. These typically include retention strategies, admission practices and preferences and success outcomes.

Retention. Much of the literature we see discussing student success for elite institutions focuses on retention as a success strategy. A study on a business school examined the

formation of customer loyalty as it relates to retention of students. Surveying 395 students, Nguyen and LeBlanc (2001) found that institutional image and reputation were important indicators for developing loyalty. Thus, students were more likely to be retained where their perceptions of the school's image and reputation were positive. Additional literature examined the relationship between institutional policy practices such as funding and its impact on student retention, specifically, how this impacts minority students (L. Thomas, 2002). Among the retention strategies outlined, some researchers cited faculty engagement as a valuable resource for retention at elite research universities (Vogt, 2008). For engineering and computer science students, this study found that student-professor relationships were an important part of developing self-efficacy and academic integration. Implications around educational reform to encourage more faculty to be involved in student development was offered as a potential solution (Vogt, 2008). Although the aforementioned areas of research are presented, it still proved difficult to find literature that specifically discussed elite universities and success. Even with the individual terms of "retention" and "elite," the scholarship was limited. Most of the research available focused on "college student success" or "higher education retention" in general terms, not particularly with a focus on elite institutions.

Admission Practices and Economic Exclusion. When looking at the research of elite university admission practices, there is a large amount dedicated to admission practices or preferences. Author Daniel Golden critiques and exposes elite university admission practices claiming that it favors the wealthy and powerful. In his book he interviews various stakeholders: administrators, students, faculty, students etc. to gain a better understanding on

how these practices create social class stratification (Chiang & Grillo, 2009). He noted that elite universities were generally unwilling to increase their enrollment because the nature of inaccessibility is what contributed to its prestige. And an increase in affirmative action slots almost invariably reduced opportunities for students who do not qualify for any preferences (Chiang & Grillo, 2009). He goes on to criticize that affirmative action demonstrated a false commitment that poor students were a priority although the reality proved that rich students were favored. This caused a "lock out" for middle class students. Again, contributing to an economic divide. He argued that admission became more or less a "fundraising tool"; and campuses were not willing to jeopardize their flow of income from donors. Ending preferential admission practices would allow more incoming students to be admitted based on merit, which Golden notes is not the only important factor but should be highly considered (Chiang & Grillo, 2009). In doing so, elite schools would have increased socioeconomic diversity. The conversation regarding admission practices, affirmative action and Black students at elite universities will be discussed more in a later section.

Black Students in Higher Education

It is no secret that the relationship between the Black community and education has been more than a dysfunctional and strained relationship (Husband, 2016). From the creation of higher education institutions, Black people were blatantly denied access and admittance; then, segregation policies created exclusion. Following, Brown v Board of Education (1954), more barriers were created to cause a racial divide between Black and White people which increased difficulty in accessing education for Black people (Husband, 2016). Prominent Black scholars and researchers such as Claude Steele (1997), Shaun Harper (2009) Beverly

Tatum (2017) and many others have given invaluable insight for the consideration of race in education pertaining to Black students. Their scholarship includes discussions of the importance of Black identity development and the complexities of race. Implications for educational professionals focus on centering race in education to better understand the experiences and outcomes of Black students regarding academic achievement. To say the least, the struggle for educational opportunities for Black students has always been an especially trying battle (Quinney, 2021). Throughout this struggle, we observe a tremendous gap for representations of Black college student life in popular culture and media. The examples we have to date are *A Different World* which takes place at a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) in the 1980s, Spike Lee's 1980 film *School Daze*, *grown-ish* (2017-present) set at the fictional state school of Cal-U and finally, *Dear White People* (2017-2020), set at a fictional Ivy League campus (Lubiano, 1991; Quinney, 2021). A brief commentary on *Dear White People* will be offered later in the essay, as it pertains specifically to Black students at an elite university. The point here is that representation matters; and the lack of Black college student life in popular culture speaks directly to the inequity issues that we continue to observe in higher education presently. With large scale social movements like Black Lives Matter and activism gaining more media attention around Anti-Blackness and police brutality since the early 2010s, the practice of critiquing spaces and systems for racial inequity has become the trend (Hailu & Sarrubi, 2019; K. Thomas & Ashburn-Nardo, 2020). Consequently, the research about the place of race and culture in education has grown. There is a vast amount of research about the experiences of racialized and minoritized students at predominantly White institutions (PWI) (L. Jones et al., 2002;

Palmer et al., 2011). Similarly, there is even more growing research focused particularly on Black students at PWI's (Holmes et al., 2019; Husband, 2016; J. D. Jones & William, 2006; Payne & Suddler, 2014).

As previously mentioned, there is a pattern of disparity across success measures for Black students. Numerous scholars have written about academic achievement in higher education for African American Students (Borman et al., 2016; Harper et al., 2009; Harper & Wood, 2016). The National Center for Education Statistics study reviewed six-year graduation rates across both private and public institutions for racial minorities. Across both, Black students were at less than 50%. It was also found that for full time working adults, among ethnic and racial minorities (Hispanic and Black), the median annual incomes were less than both their White and Asian counterparts (de Brey et al., 2019). Further, we typically see the research discuss academic disparities between Black and White students. For example, Black students consistently tend to graduate at lower rates than White students (Howard, 2010; Payne & Suddler, 2014). We also have witnessed increased trends discussing campus environment, cultural capital, and sense of belonging as it relates to Black students. Among this research it was noted that HBCUs have more culturally attractive settings for Black students which can increase their likelihood of being retained. However, Black students' satisfaction is more linked to the supportiveness and inclusivity of the campus despite being an HBCU or a PWI (Sherman & Slate, 2020). The authors presented implications for policy reform focused on creating atmospheres for Black students to fully engage in both inside and outside the classroom. This recommendation centers on the development of supportive social systems.

Elite Universities and Black Students

The literature available on Black students and elite institutions tends to follow the areas outlined in the general discussion of elite universities and success. For example, the research highlighted areas such as success outcomes, socioeconomic status, and admission practices. This research also follows the same areas outlined in the more general research about Black students in higher education. For example, the research presented topics such as stereotype threat for Black women, especially in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math programs, and campus climate issues for Black students and other race specific issues (Fischer, 2010). These are among the traditional barriers identified that constrain Black students access and achievement in higher education.

During the 1970s, shifts in campus environments transpired as waves of Black students who might have otherwise attended HBCUs chose instead to enroll at elite and White colleges. Some scholars refer to this demographic shift as the "brain drain" (W. R. Allen et al., 1991). Although access has expanded since the 1970s, the likelihood of enrollment for Black and Latino students at elite universities has declined (Posselt et al., 2012). Again, this can be observed in the media. The series adaptation of the critically acclaimed film by the same name, *Dear White People*, offers some insight into the complex world of Black students navigating the fictional Ivy League, Winchester University. While the show utilizes a comedic approach, it still explores the very real topics of racism, politics, activism, cultural bias etc. that many Black elite university students encounter (T. M. Harris et al., 2020). I include this because media can be used as a pedagogical practice to engage in social commentary about the subject of Black elite university students. It is through the

consumption process that the audience interacts and forms interpretations and meaning of what is represented (T. M. Harris et al., 2020).

Success Outcomes. The research around Black student success at Historically White Institutions (HWI) and elite universities focuses on race-based differences and traditional success outcomes (Holmes et al., 2019; Martin, 2009). A strand of this research examines Black students and elite universities, graduation rates and institutional characteristics. In previous literature, which focused on primary and secondary schools, there tended to be contradictory information about whether institutional characteristics had an impact on academic success (Small & Winship, 2007). Due to the lack of adequate data sets in the 90's that included institutions with large samples of Black students, the research relating to this issue in higher education saw a decline. Small and Winship (2007) responded to previous literature by applying the concept of institutional hypothesis to look at the influence of characteristics of elite institutions and the probability of Black students' graduation rates. The study examined institutional characteristics and between institution differences for the 1989 cohorts across 27 elite institutions. The authors began by providing a definition for institutional hypothesis. The perspective stated that:

> specific characteristics of a college or university present constraints or opportunities affecting students' chances of graduating, independent of the students' other traits. (Small & Winship, 2007, p. 1259)

They go on to present the four tenets identified to have raised the most attention: (a) academic difficulty; (b) institutional resource; (c) social mismatch; and (d) group conflict. These models were used to inform their study. They looked at eight indicators which included SAT scores, linked to selectivity, academic difficulty, grading leniency etc. to

assess these tenets. The results showed that almost none of the common institutional characteristics had a statistical significance, and therefore did not impact the probability of graduation (Small & Winship, 2007). They explained the findings implying that a few variables could have changed the data. It was mentioned that pre-college factors may be more important than the institutional hypothesis gives credit for; and that the preparation of the student before attending college serves as more of a predictor of graduation (Small & Winship, 2007).

Additionally, most of the characteristics examined did not have a direct impact on graduation, although they can lead to stress, anxiety or other challenges that may affect the journey to graduation. Still, Small and Winship (2007) claimed that students who had pre-college preparation were more likely to persist despite these other factors. Thus, high graduation rates should be interpreted in collaboration with other variables such as GPA, which could affect post-graduate outcomes. Nonetheless, they did find that one characteristic did show some significance. The results showed that selectivity improved the probability of Black students' graduation (a 100-point increase in selectivity led to a 6% increase). At this time in history, this study emphasized the correlation between selectivity and the benefits of affirmative action, observing that increased selectivity benefitted both Black and White students (Small & Winship, 2007). They also suggested that selectivity could lessen the Black-White achievement gap and the high expectations of a selective school contributed to combating stereotype threat (Small & Winship, 2007). Further, Small and Winship found that, essentially, schools where Black students were more likely to graduate, so were White students. They claimed that low Black graduation rates at elite universities had more to do

with low graduation in general, suggesting a policy issue (Small & Winship, 2007). Potential solutions included implementing programs to increase Black student graduation rates that focused on areas of concern for all students. Implications from this study suggested further research on institutional characteristics and individual variables for elite universities.

Alon (2007) examined the impact of financial aid packages on graduation outcomes. They found that while aid eligibility did not have an impact, for Black and Hispanic students financial aid award amounts did have a significant and positive relationship on their likelihood of graduating. Specifically, grants and scholarships showed the most positive effect on graduation. Alon noted that for minority students, graduation outcomes are more sensitive to the influences of their financial aid package than it was for White students. He also suggested that award amounts for financial aid can help mitigate the ethnic and racial disparity observed in graduation rates.

Social Class and Socioeconomic Status. A later study considered the impact of social class. For Black students at elite universities, the literature weighed heavily on the topic of cultural capital as it is related to economic status. Researcher Kimberly Torres tested this and conducted a qualitative study done with Black students at Northern College, a small private liberal arts school. She specifically examined cultural styles, namely the ways that students talked, dressed, the music they listened to and other aspects of their social lives, in relation to the social life of the Northern environment, which was traditionally linked to affluent and upper-class style (Torres, 2009). In interviews with over 30 Black students, she concluded that the marginalization Black students experienced was connected to class difference which led to exclusion. Torres highlighted the persistent theme of culture shock of coming to

Northern and being a clear minority on the campus. In follow up interviews, it was revealed that by "culture shock" the respondents meant that they felt a general discomfort with being part of such a small number of students on a White campus and learning to adjust (Torres, 2009). In further exploration of cultural styles, Torres' findings showed that Black students' stylistic choice of clothing reflected more of an urban or city look even if they were not technically from an urban area. In contrast, the White students dressed in more "high end" clothing and name brands. Many of the students also discussed leading separate social lives from the university because of feelings of unwelcomeness and discomfort. When they were in social spaces Black students still experienced overt racism, like at other PWIs (i.e., 'being looked at funny') (Torres, 2009). Additionally, students talked about generally not being interested in a lot of the activities that White students were. One student noted that more White students were involved in alcohol use then Black students on the campus. They did not have Black Greek life; and the sororities and fraternities that were available were expensive to join and socialized mainly around drinking. Because of this, Black students did not have many opportunities when it came to social interaction.

Torres (2009) investigated the reasons that these students decided to attend Northern. Over half of the participants mentioned large financial packages in their decision-making process, supporting the earlier claim that financial awards were important to Black students. She also recognized the use of coded words such as "urban" "inner city" and "poor" that signified their racial differences. She suggested that the common and frequent use of these words indicated that "economic status was equated with skin color" (Torres, 2009, p. 895). In general, the Black students described themselves as being less affluent than White students

overall. The results also included the experiences of two students who did not necessarily feel a "culture shock" like the other participants. However, Torres implied this variable was due to their familiarity with upper class and affluent lifestyles. Further, the experiences of these students confirmed her claim that a class component is present (Torres, 2009). She concluded that Black students who are confronted with a predominantly White environment would have this discomfort whereas Black students who grew up in these areas had less of a difficult time adjusting. Torres ends with the claim that elite schools have a specific cultural style that favors the upper class. She invites more research to include social class to better understand economic inequity and Black students in college.

Admission Practices. Other researchers have focused on admission requirements and preferential treatment in the selection process. Similar to the literature on admission practices for elite universities in general, this research assessed if preferences had an influence on displacement on other prospective students. A large amount of research in this area discussed the implementation of Affirmative Action and other diversity initiatives (Fischer & Massey, 2007; L. Thomas, 2002). This study concluded that elite universities had preferences for many different types of students, however, the preferences tied to affirmative action were the most controversial (Fischer & Massey, 2007). It was also believed that students who attend elite universities were already on the path to higher education. This research suggests that simply admitting students from racially diverse and economically diverse backgrounds does not necessarily solve the issue of retention and completion (Rainford, 2017). It is not an issue of access or recruitment; the role of elite universities does not reduce inequalities, but instead reproduces them.

There has been one piece of literature that specifically discusses the influence of racism and racist interactions and Black students at Ivy League universities. In interviews with 14 Black students across five Ivy League institutions, Johnson et al. (2022) found that the ways Black students navigate the university and interact with other students, including other Black students, is influenced by racist interactions and impacts their sense of belonging. Recommendations included encouraging staff and faculty to recognize and challenge their implicit and explicit biases, setting up specific processes for students to report racist incidents, and creating a culturally engaging campus environment.

#BlackatCAL: Disparity at Berkeley

Since we are holding the claim that Berkeley follows the form of traditional elite universities, it is important to surface some of the disparities present. Today, its enrollment is regarded as "more diverse" on average in comparison to other institutions. Though an accomplishment for the campus, this is misleading. With the shift in campus and world demographics, Berkeley is not technically classified as a predominantly White campus, as the Asian student population has been the highest percentage. But, over the past 5 years, White student enrollment has consistently been the second highest percentage of students, while Black student enrollment has not exceeded four percent (4%) (Office of Planning and Analysis, 2016; 2017; 2018; 2020a; 2020b). However, institutional practice operates under the same systems, principles and ideologies that privileged a mostly White campus. So, for the purposes of this paper, I will refer to Berkeley as an HWI based on its historical context, an elite university and a PWI based on its practices, to reveal the contextual reality of the Black students who attend there.

Numerous news articles praise Berkeley for being one of the most ethnically diverse schools, with numbers past the national average (College Factual, 2021). The 2013 Diversity snapshot applauds Berkeley for serving diverse communities by providing access to higher education and social mobility, noting that 28% of students were first generation and 32% Pell-grant recipients (Office of the Vice Chancellor for Equity and Inclusion, 2013). However, these numbers fail to capture the context behind the data. In contradiction to the popular belief, Berkeley actually has a less than satisfactory relationship with diversity especially in regard to enrollment of Black students. The 2013 Diversity Dashboard showed low percentages of ethnic minorities at Berkeley compared to the California population, with Black students at only three percent (Office of the Vice Chancellor for Equity and Inclusion, 2013). On the other hand, it also reported that the campus numbers in diversity were still less diverse than the state of California acknowledging the campus had work to do in this area (Office of the Vice Chancellor for Equity and Inclusion, 2013). The report cited Proposition 209 as one of the contributing factors to the low enrollment of racial minorities, claiming that numbers for these groups saw a drastic decline. Although the numbers had some small increase, there remained a gap for some ethnic groups compared to White students. Additionally, the report showed that despite minority graduation rates having increased over time on trend with general graduation rates, disparities persisted between particular ethnic groups when compared to the general campus. The report suggested recommendations for research connecting diversity issues and campus climate. Around this, we see the use of campus climate surveys to better understand how students feel about the racial demographics

and campus efforts toward diversity. Later that year, a study was conducted, but results were not available until 2014. The findings will be discussed next.

Six years following the appointment of the inaugural Vice Chancellor for Equity & Inclusion position in the UC system, and Berkeley's own 2009 Strategic Plan for Equity, Inclusion and Diversity, the University of California Office of the President (UCOP) conducted a series of climate studies across the UC campuses. The 2014 reports for each campus were published on the UCOP website. The key findings in the report stated that 76% of all participants, and 69% of undergraduate students were "comfortable" or very comfortable with the climate at Berkeley. But, when you look at the demographics of respondents along racial lines, only White students had a separate category and made up 44% of the survey pool. Racial minorities were lumped together and labeled as "underrepresented minority" and made up only 15 % of the sample population. So, while the initial percentages may appear high in reference to feeling "comfort" on the campus, this report fails to capture the segregated data from each population. Still, the underrepresented minority group reported feeling less comfortable with the climate overall. In the opportunities section of the report, 26% of participants felt they had experienced some form of exclusionary conduct. Though a number was not provided, there was a high percentage of participants who described this exclusionary conduct as specifically relating to their racial identity. In the same year, Berkeley published its own campus climate survey. This campus climate study was conducted about perspectives on the campus environment specifically for African American students. The results showed that a large portion of Asian American and White students felt that Berkeley was a "very respectful or respectful" place for African American students

(89%). While 73% of Latinx and 47% of African American students themselves agreed with that statement. This report demonstrated that there is a disconnect between what the campus believes to be the experiences of their Black students versus the reality of those experiences (Givens, 2016).

Prompted by the misleading numbers in the 2014 campus climate study, former Berkeley PhD student Jarvis Givens' (2016) dissertation titled "*The Invisible Tax"* explored the relationship between Black student's campus engagement with respect to their racialized experiences on the campus. He discussed the existing issue of Black students being required to exert a "tax" to survive on campus- mentally, physically, and emotionally- that could otherwise be allocated elsewhere helping students thrive and promote success in the campus environment. Givens offered that student engagement functions similarly as a tax; an agreed entity to be nurtured by both the student and the institution. However, he critiques the mechanisms that Black students are required to be involved in for campus engagement. He noted that Black students must pay an invisible tax. He conceptualizes the "invisible tax" as the ways Black students:

> Create alternative spaces of support for themselves within, yet separate from, a university they find to be racially hostile… labor required to create and sustain counter spaces. (Givens, 2016, p. 60)

He goes on to state that for Black students, their student involvement requires additional levels of sacrifice than the traditional student engagement tax. He explains:

> The notion of invisibility denotes how Black students' engagement at HWIs results from their isolation from the dominant university culture and what they perceive to be a lack of institutional support for their needs (Givens, 2016, p. 71).

Black students at Berkeley are required to spend a disproportionate amount of their time mitigating anti-Blackness through what Givens (2016) calls "oppositional campus involvement." Because of this, he claims that Black students at HWIs and especially at Berkeley pay an invisible tax that they cannot divest from. As part of the research, Givens presented some of his own experiences in his ten years of being both an undergraduate and graduate student at Berkeley. He reflected on his choices to stand in solidarity with Black undergraduates in social and political movements. He mentioned the Black Senior Weekend, where incoming Black students learned about the "small, but close-knit" Black community and past protests. Givens (2016) recalls feeling that he was being "primed for responsibility." Using autoethnography here gives exclusive insight into the Black Berkeley student experience. Givens' work called into action higher educational professionals and HWIs to consider Black students' challenges on campus and beyond. He criticized the common response to promote integration into the campus climate, which Black students generally experience as racially hostile (Givens, 2016). He also suggested that campuses needed "healthy" strategies and structures to provide institutional support, particularly as Black student enrollment and admissions declined for these schools.

Limitations and Gaps in Literature

In the literature regarding race and college experience, we typically see a focus primarily on Black students' experience as a whole. We often see studies on topics like policy, achievement gaps and diversity. The conversation usually identifies disparity in graduation and retention rates in general for Black and White students and sense of belonging and hostile campus climate as a primary issue for Black students (Campbell et al., 2019; Jenkins

et al., 2021). And, in response, common implications for research are presented, such as, implementing campus wide initiatives to help "close the achievement gap" (Borman et al., 2016) and strategies for improving overall campus climate. Typically, the research offers valid critiques of these areas, calling into action educational professionals. While the literature does a good job at providing evidence and support of Black student experiences at PWI's, the literature on elite universities and Black student success is slightly limited. Besides the additional topics of affirmative action and economic status, it is seemingly the same line of research we see for Black students in higher education in general, without discussion around the elite university context. The current literature points to concerns around social class differences, admission practices and traditional Black-White disparities, retention strategies and success outcomes such as graduation rates. There still seems to be a lack of research around the conditions of elite institutions beyond their history and student body characteristics. I agree with scholarship around the social environment of elite universities being a place of racial tension and challenge for Black students (Small & Winship, 2007; Torres, 2009). It is valid to consider things such as culture shock, lack of outlets for social interaction and graduation rates. However, the research still shows that the social environment of elite institutions does not accurately reflect the increased "diversity" of socioeconomic backgrounds they typically claim. Most of the literature discusses the changing demographics of the student population (W. R. Allen et al., 1991). Though this is important in the historical context, there is much still to be explored about the current conditions of elite universities and its effects particularly on its Black student populations. Further, what is lesser known are the personal experiences of Black students at elite

universities. There are few studies that interview Black students at these types of institutions. I aim to explore how one's identity is directly related to the cultivation and maintenance of their place in an academic space and pursuit of success. What we have not seen much of is conversation with the students who are currently going through these journeys.

One discipline barely scratches the surface of educational equity. Within each discipline, of course, that lens is the priority. That being, the research falls subject to constraints and limitations of that field. Not necessarily a detriment, but with the addition of other disciplines, the complexity of topics such as educational equity requires more extensive and robust research from different areas. As such, interdisciplinary research is needed to further efforts in understanding the complexity and uniqueness of this phenomenon. As a transdisciplinary piece, my work provides historical perspective, connects to sociological context, and presents support for conversation within the educational profession. What I offer through this project is a space where Black students at elite universities can candidly and authentically share their experience, feelings, and challenges. As my work takes an individualized approach to success, it also engages in dialogue that challenges and speaks to previous literature. It offers a multidimensional space for new pedagogical practices that invites discussion around Black student success. This essay broadens the scope of existing literature by investigating Black students' experiences at an elite university. Overall, the goal is to provide awareness and insight into student needs in effort to create accurate systems of support.

Chapter 3: Methodology Overview

Phenomenological and Social Justice Methods

The following sections will provide an overview and discuss the relevance of the theories and methods used to explore this subject. Early studies on Black student academic achievement suggested that Black students needed to be assessed in qualitative and quantitative measures to further understand factors related to their academic achievement (Fisher, 2005). Although this research was conducted on a small sample of students in K-12 (ns 26), the implications of using mixed methods to gain a better understanding of Black student achievement is still relevant. This paper employs both qualitative and quantitative methods.

Qualitative methods center around recognizing the subjective world in relation to sociohistorical context and aids in uncovering patterns and themes in real world settings (Patton, 2005; Thorne, 2000). As the lived experiences are the phenomena in question, qualitative methods are the practical choice in efforts to understand the meaning making process for Black students at elite universities. Furthermore, utilizing social justice frameworks and methods, a mixed methodology presents an opportunity to engage in a nonlinear process of research, data and analysis. It allows for a greater variation in data, involves multiple perspectives and increases the chances of covering any "gaps" that might occur if using only one type of method (Almalki, 2016; Bulsara, 2015; Strunk & Locke, 2019). Multi-methodology covers the breadth and depth of an issue with a greater scope to investigate educational issues (Almalki, 2016). Typically, phenomenological methodology looks at a particular phenom with cultural and/or social context. With social justice

methodology the researcher has an inherent connection to the phenom or issue of interest which aids in the process of data collection and analysis.

In racial justice methodology it is inherent that the researcher is equipped with multicultural competency skills to engage with racially marginalized communities. This requires intentional learning and training in how to support populations whose experiences are informed by particular sociocultural contexts. These are considerations that are especially important when engaging with the Black community. As a researcher, the intent in applying a social justice focus is to have conversations about equity and access that disrupt dominant discourse and ideologies that arise from the data collection and analysis (Strunk & Locke, 2019). The purpose is to offer critique; and contribute to conversation around people and societies (Strunk & Locke, 2019). As such, in the development of the methodology, the protocol was inspired by the anecdotal stories from myself and other Black UC Berkeley alumni. To further investigate how Black students at elite universities perceive their relation to the campus environment, their sense of self (e.g., racial and academic identity), and define college success this study will use a phenomenological approach. In its essence, phenomenology looks at perceptions and worldview. A phenomenology study allows for the experience of the phenomenon to be examined through the lens of the participants (Green, 2015). The results give insight on how people experience the world (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Phenomenological methods allow for a richer understanding of the research and its implications.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory

There has been an upward trend in using CRT in educational reform and research since its introduction in 1995 by scholars William Tate and Gloria Landson-Billings (Jenkins et al., 2021). Most research utilizes CRT to investigate the role of race and racism to examine how educational, institutional, and structural policies perpetuate social inequalities (Hiraldo, 2010). A brief history of CRT is necessary to understand its evolution into its present centrality in educational research. The conception of CRT came from lawyer and activist Derrick Bell in the 1970's post-civil war era. In its early development, CRT claimed its space in legal studies. In its 1970's iteration, CRT criticized the United States legal system asserting that law and legal institutions were innately racist and supported White supremacy and White privilege at the expense of people of color (Delgado, 2001; Tate, 1997). The main premise of CRT is the notion that racism is so ingrained in our society that most of the institutional racism experienced is characterized as normal. In avoiding topics of racism and power dynamics, inequality and disparity would inevitably continue to increase (Gillborn, 2006). It is important to note that while CRT is a theory, it is being used here as a *guiding framework* on how to think about and engage with the topics of race and racism in particular spaces. As such, CRT also functions as a methodology. Throughout this paper, we will be engaging in a process of analysis of student perspective, equity and success through this critical race lens and framework. As CRT scholars consistently emphasize, race matters in education. There is a need to consider its implications within investigation policy, practice, and discourse (Harper et al., 2009; J. C. Harris & Poon, 2019; Howard, 2010). Scholars must

consider the connection between students' subjective experiences and the effects of racism that operate and influence their individual development process (J. C. Harris & Poon, 2019). This notion significantly informs the analytical lens of this project. Need a transition sentence that ties back to CRT.

There are five foundational components of CRT which scholars use to guide their work. CRT includes five tenets: counter storytelling, Whiteness as property, permanence of racism, interest conversion, and critique of liberalism (Hiraldo, 2010). It will be interesting to see how these tenets may or may not show up. Hiraldo (2010) offers a brief description of *counter stories* as a framework that "legitimizes" the narratives of people of color. These stories function as a critique of dominant ideology while also offering insight into the experiences of marginalized groups. Other researchers support this notion of critical race methodology that challenges oppressive systems and uses counterstories, grounded in lived experience as pedagogical practice to advance social justice (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). CRT is especially relevant in the field of higher education when assessing PWIs and their efforts around increasing diversity and inclusivity. This leads to the next tenet. The *permanence of racism* suggests that racism is an integral part of American society and flows through all aspects of life (social, political, economic). CRT believes that racism controls all these areas, which includes education, and privileges White people (Hiraldo, 2010). Within the higher education context, CRT is used to analyze the structural impact of institutional policy. For example, if institutional racism goes unacknowledged the implementation of diversity initiatives falls short of their goal and inadvertently reinforces systemic racism instead (Hiraldo, 2010). Thus, applying CRT is relevant to the research here. This project

aims to explore the connection between the experiences of Black students and the context of elite institutions and invites us to consider the function of race on the influence of Black students' perspectives on success as it relates to the larger institutional context.

Data Collection

Narrative Inquiry

In narrative interviewing, there is an increased likelihood of transparency that may not happen with a different method (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). The informal nature of interviews usually lends itself to more forthcoming participants (Akinsanya & Bach, 2014). Thus, this study will rely on semi-structured interviews conducted with six to ten Black students attending UC Berkeley. The participants will be mixed in gender identity but identify with cisgender expression. Students will be in their junior or senior year; and it is important to capture the experiences of students who spent time physically on campus as students in a remote environment will change the trajectory of the research. The pilot of interviews is intended to substantiate my own experiences while also providing insight to the question about being Black and in an elite institution.

My Journey to Autoethnography

In addition to the student interviews, I will also be a subject, whose personal experience with UC Berkeley will be examined to further inform the data. Earlier researchers highlighted the importance of autoethnography as a method (Alexander, 1999). Decades later, its relevance has been noted especially as a valuable tool in critical cultural research (Belbase et al., 2008). Utilizing autoethnography as a method can lead to transformative education that allows the researcher to incorporate flexible modes of inquiry in data

gathering (Belbase et al., 2008). My journey to this autoethnography has been both unexpected and challenging. I arrived at this unwillingly. In early planning, I was adamant about not wanting to put my vulnerability on the page. But as I pursued this topic, it became clearer that I had to tell my story. The disappointing trends in Black education and my experience as a Black undergraduate at Berkeley and my knowledge as an alumna compelled me to write this thesis.

As an ethnographic study it is important to note my own reflexivity and positionality – namely, considering how my knowledge and experiences influence the data-gathering process and analysis. I am a soon-to-be twice graduated first-generation college student on both sides of my family, I am the only child of two teenage parents, and I come from a two-parent household. I am from a low socioeconomic class but have acquired a vocabulary that is representative of the middle class. I grew up seeing mothers, aunts and grandmothers being the matriarchs of the families, leading with strength. I am a proud Black woman. I am someone who values education as a platform to instill change. I hold these identities in all the work that I do. Given these understandings, my background and my perspective, my choice in methodology (interviews) the way that I tell the story of the students' experiences, and analyze the data were all shaped by these aspects. I am approaching this from a perspective of transparent communication, care, nurture, and curiosity. Therefore, it is important to engage in methodological practice that reflects this. In choosing CRT and conducting narrative interviews, I am connecting with the heart of the experiences which are the students' stories. As such, it is critical that I began the data collection by reflecting on my personal educational journey and my experiences at an elite university, particularly UC

Berkeley. With insider knowledge, my story then becomes a critical component and introduction to the topic of this research project. It sits at the core of the *why*. Thus, I will be interweaving my personal narrative throughout the analysis section. This is a bridging and exploration of social phenomena with lived experiences (Boylorn & Orbe, 2016). There is freedom in confronting your vulnerability and I cannot investigate this phenomenon and remain neutral; my story is an important contribution to the research and thus an integral part of the interpretation and analysis.

Case Study Conceptualization

Researchers choose case studies because they are interesting; they can represent both a peculiarity and a commonality (Stake, 1995). Commonly used as a qualitative method within education and social sciences, case studies give insight into people, services, and programs (Stake, 1995). In selecting a case, the primary goal is to maximize what we can learn. Using case studies, with an emphasis on interpretation, is helpful in refining understanding. Choosing a single case for this project (UC Berkeley Black students), unearths the unique complexities of that case and its context while also providing awareness into broader generalizations representative of the typical cases it illustrates (i.e., Black students at elite universities) (Stake, 1995).

As briefly mentioned in the literature review section, case studies offer flexibility in research design. Both case study theorists Robert Stake and Robert Yin follow the constructivist paradigm that centers subjectivity and creation of meaning (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Thus, case study philosophy holds the claim that truth is relative and bound by perspective (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Case study methodology is useful when trying to answer

"how" and "why" questions and to understand contextual factors of a phenomenon. This approach facilitates in-depth exploration, with the goal of revealing multiple facets of the complex phenomenon. As a valuable methodological practice, case studies allow the researcher to develop theory, conduct evaluation and develop interventions due to its flexibility and varied resources of data (Baxter & Jack, 2008). It also calls for a collaborative approach between researcher and participants; an advantage that encourages participant stories and helps the researcher gain a better understanding of the participants' social realities and behaviors.

Applying this framework, I will be using a set of experiences from current Black undergraduates at Berkeley as the case study. I am intending to better understand their lived experiences and the environment of the campus. Further, the findings from these student experiences at Berkeley will be used as an example of elite university socialization and Black student development in a broader context.

Procedure for Data Analysis

The analysis approach will happen in two parts: a narrative analysis of the participant interviews, a TCA of the codes and a review of the written communications from UC Berkeley. Incorporating these types of analysis will hopefully allow for a more comprehensive assessment of Black student experiences.

Constant Comparative Narrative and Thematic Content Analysis

In reference to the participant interviews, the responses will be transcribed into written text. The transcripts will be annotated into codes and then the codes will be developed into larger categories. This process of narrative analysis helps organize large amounts of

qualitative data into codes from various sources in a systematic way (Hewitt-Taylor, 2001). Using Engineering students for a case study, researchers confirmed the validity of narrative analysis. This study demonstrated that comparing a set of data with a particular phenomenon has advantages in research (Akinsanya & Bach, 2014). They encourage the use of narratives especially for researching social phenomena. Other literature has supported the use of narrative analysis particularly for qualitative research acknowledging that the quality of lived experience cannot be reduced to a statistical data point (Hewitt-Taylor, 2001). Further, narrative analysis uncovers untapped insights into how to solve issues. Following, a TCA will be conducted to look for emergent themes among the responses. Particular attention will be paid to answers around sense of belonging, racial identity, and success similar to the themes found in earlier literature about Black students in higher education. With a constant comparative approach, the data is constantly revisited after initial coding until no new themes emerge (Hewitt-Taylor, 2001).

Alongside interview codes, for the purposes of a content analysis, this project will review various reports published on undergraduate experience to structure questions for a preliminary survey. The reports used will be the UC (2022) Undergraduate Experience Survey, and other reports from Berkeley's Office of Institutional Analysis and Planning. The reports will cover years both pre COVID pandemic, again, to capture the influence of the physical environmental context. The preliminary survey will serve as both a qualitative piece in assessing the content and as a quantitative piece of research by providing data on student responses. These reports will be part of my methodology in assessing how Berkeley talks about, promotes, and supports Black students. A constant comparative analysis between the

participants' responses and the published content will be conducted to investigate the data (Hewitt-Taylor, 2001).

As a phenomenological qualitative research piece, this paper uses methods that honors the complexity of lived experience. To establish validity of the data I will use peer debriefing with my faculty advisor to ensure that the participant responses remain true to their experience. The next chapter will provide an interpretation of the data produced by the above theory and methods to look at strands of commonality in the experiences of Black students at UC Berkeley.

Chapter 4: #BlackatCal, The Real Story

> They tell you fill the spaces, but don't tell you when you get to the space what to do or how to succeed.
>
> -Sky

Analytic Approach

To organize the data, I used a series of methods including interview transcription, coding, peer debriefing and TCA. I used a manual coding process that involved personally transcribing the interview recordings. For a qualitative study, coding is helpful in the goal of attaining the 'quality and richness of response' describing a social phenomenon (Basit, 2003). After concluding the first interview, I met with my faculty advisor to debrief what content had arisen so far, talk through initial analysis and reorient around the research questions for the interviews to follow.

As I continued through each interview, I recognized the same words or phrases coming up frequently across the participant responses. I reread the transcripts, looking more intently into meaningful passages especially around these responses and the context. Upon reviewing these patterns, I used TCA, the process of describing qualitative data by grouping and labeling texts (R. Anderson, 2007). I implemented a color-coding schema to represent each collection of words and phrases that were grouped together (e.g., yellow= isolation/sense of belonging, green= community, orange= race/identity etc.). Following, I organized the subgroups of (e.g., exclusion, campus environment etc.) into labels, or codes, based on what they referenced. The codes can be referenced in the appendix. In subsequent reviews of the transcripts and interviews, I noted when participants demonstrated particular body language, facial expressions and emotions such as laughter and eye rolling. Between the third and

fourth interviews, we debriefed again, this time discussing some of the similarities and differences between the participant responses. Finally, I consolidated the codes, and revised to eventually reach the larger themes of isolation and sense of belonging, race relations, and community. The themes will be discussed further below.

In conducting narrative interviews, it was important to utilize an analytic approach such as narrative analysis to examine how participants talk about a topic and its relationship to the context of the story (Ziebland, 2013). Since narrative interviewing was used for part of the data collection, it makes sense to also use narrative analysis to interpret the responses of the participants. With this approach the analyst can examine themes across multiple participant interviews (Ziebland, 2013). And the use of narrative inquiry allows for freedom in participant responses (C. Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016). Therefore, my decision to use narrative analysis was to capture the realness, the transparency, and the rawness of the participant responses. Considering the subject is Black student experiences, it is necessary to implement a culturally appropriate lens. This influenced the choice to use terms like "rawness" and "realness" in describing the process of interpreting the participant responses. Drawing from the fields of Black cultural studies, including art, social sciences, and psychology, I want to take a moment to briefly explain the importance and relevance of using such terms as realness and rawness.

Hopwood et al. (2021) explored realness as a form of authenticity, describing it as the relatively stable tendency to act on the outside the way one feels on the inside, without regard for proximal personal or social consequences. They also identified the concept of realness as a core concept of observable individual difference construct in authentic social behavior

(Hopwood et al., 2021). For this study, I use the term 'realness' in the sense that the participants are telling the 'real' story of their Black experience, recognizing that this process is part of being authentic. Similarly, I use the term 'real' to establish my trustworthiness as a researcher and to establish my trustworthiness as part of the cultural group as a Black woman interviewing Black students. In a study about the Black Arts movement, rawness was referred to as the expression of Black truths (Brooks, 2010). For this study, I choose to adopt this definition, in that this project is producing rawness and the expression of Black truths through participant storytelling. My commitment to honoring the rawness of the participant responses and accurately representing their lived experiences included asking them clarifying questions during the interview and a constant comparative approach where I re-watched the interviews and revisited transcripts multiple times.

A Note About the Participant Pool

Despite multiple outreach efforts (i.e., various follow ups, posts on social media and a post in the Black at Cal GroupMe), I had difficulty with securing additional participants who met the initial eligibility criteria after the first couple of months. Some of these challenges are attributed to still being in a mostly virtual environment due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which led me to use digital marketing strategies such as email and social media. I also implemented the snowball recruitment method, asking each participant at the end of their own interview if they would be willing to share the flyer to other students (Tenzek, 2017). While each participant agreed to pass on the information, this still did not produce additional candidates. Following a debrief with my advisor about recruitment, I decided to try a targeted recruitment, specifically seeking Black men, contacting student clubs and organizations such

as the Collegiate 100 (Black Men of America), with no success. One of the participants also briefly mentioned their own recruitment challenges for their student club in finding Black students to talk about their experiences even with them physically being on campus. So, it seems the difficulties in recruiting were not an uncommon complication for this research study. At the end of the recruitment and analysis process, I had a total of six participants.

I initially estimated there would be between six and 10 participants in my study, which Morse (2000) argues is sufficient to achieve data saturation. Glaser and Strauss (1967) define saturation as "the criterion for judging when to stop sampling the different groups pertinent to a category's theoretical saturation…As [the researcher] sees similar instances over and over again, [they] become empirically confident that a category is saturated" (p. 61). Considering the scope of the study is limited to Black students at Berkeley, a comparatively small subset of the student population (1212 undergraduates and 636 graduate students among Berkeley's 45,057 students in Fall 2021), it was not difficult for the data collected in six interviews in this study to achieve theoretical saturation.

Five of the six participants were transfer students; there were four that transferred from community colleges and one from another UC campus. Identifying as a transfer student was not part of the initial eligibility criteria to participate in the study. Although unintentional, this unique demographic provides more insight into the Black transfer experience at Berkeley which is similar/reminiscent of the general Black transfer student experience at PWI's. For example, the literature shows that Black transfer students are typically searching for support from peers as a coping mechanism due to lack of resources that are specifically geared towards them (McCall & Castles, 2020). While transfer students arguably offer a distinct

perspective compared to direct entry peers, the participants in this study offered thematically consistent perspectives regardless of which of the two they were. To protect confidentiality, the participants were given pseudonyms and will be referred to as their respective pseudonym throughout the analysis. The participant profiles and full descriptions can be referenced in Table 1.

Table 1
Participant Profiles

Name	Class Level	Gender Expression	Description
Sonya	Senior	Female	Transfer student from a community college in southern California. Identifies as Black and non-biracial, having two Black parents
Yasmine	Senior	Female	Transfer student from Berkeley City College; identifies as Black and non-biracial having two Black parents
Brittany	Senior	Female	Direct entry student; identifies as Black and biracial, mixed with Black and Mexican
Greg	Senior	Male	Transfer student from UC Riverside, born in the Bay Area. Identifies as Black and biracial mixed with White
Sky	Junior	Female	Transfer student from a community college in Sacramento; Identifies as Black and non-biracial having two Black parents
Michelle	Junior	Female	Transfer student from Bay Area community college, born in the Bay Area; identifies as Black and non-biracial having two Black parents

Participant Motivation

It is important to situate the reader within the motivations of the participants. Therefore, I offer a brief overview of each participant's *why*. The first question asked to the participants was 'Why did you volunteer for this research study?' Following is a collection of their responses:

> Michelle: I think…this is my first semester at Berkeley in person and I feel like I want to share my experience and what I've noticed so far. I feel like I haven't exactly had the space to do so and also think that it's good as well to really contribute to the conversation around Black students at elite universities cuz there, there isn't much

conversation about it and what it exactly means to be Black at an elite university, that upholds and moves as like prestigious and what not so I think it's just really important to do so

Sky: So I received the email from my advisor and so I usually just like typically go through her emails just to see if there's like any like new things that I can participate in or anything like that and so when she had forwarded it to us, your email, I kind of read through it and I don't know like I guess in a way [laughs] like it, my soul called me to it because it was like oh my God like this is exactly what I'm going through now, like so of course I want to like have my voice like heard and so that's kind of what brought me to do it

Greg: … And I've always wanted to participate in a research study just to see how it would be to be interviewed as a sociologist I mean that's the core of your work, so I wanted to be a part of it for 1 and 2 I think that the Black experience at a traditionally prestigious university kind of goes, the story goes unnoticed. I haven't seen many people ask about it especially me being a person who I'm not really surrounded by other Black or African American students, you know I don't really get a perspective other than my own so, I thought that maybe being a part of this would grant me a little more insight into the, what that's like. I have been joining Black student clubs here on campus to 1) connect with people in general and 2) just to find people who come from similar situations that I've come from. And that's what inspired me to join this

Brittany: So I saw the study in an email we got from the Black community listserv and then I was reading through like what the study was about and saw that it was just learning about Black people's experience at Cal and decided to do it because I feel like, um, I feel like not a lot of people know about the Black experience here at Berkeley, the Black community is so small and people don't really understand that it's not the same experience that other students might have. And especially in terms of like saying POC students, it's kinda like um, all grouped together and POC often includes things like Asian even though the Asian community at Berkeley is huge, its actually the majority um and I feel like our experiences kinda get grouped in when people say 'POC, diversity' so I kinda just wanted to talk about my experience and um just let people know that it's not the same. And also I'm a part of HUBBA on campus, I think it [HUBBA] was around in 2016 and yeah we're working on a lot of diversity stuff right now and tryna get people, were actually doing a petition, but tryna get people to talk about their experiences and get people to understand why this petition is so important to us. So that's what led me to want to do something like this just because us having trouble getting people to talk about their experience made me realize that not enough people talk so I just wanted to talk about my experience

> Yasmine: To be honest I chose to volunteer, partially because your research study looked interesting but also because I felt like if I was in your position and I needed people to volunteer I would want someone to do that for me so might as well and [small laugh] I am a Black student at Cal, so like this is something I can actually speak on so might at as well and help a sista out
>
> Sonya: Cuz we need this to happen you know there's no studies that are shown within this realm of study and it's like, it's super important that we get this out there and that could be being statistical data, I don't know what you're going to put into the study but, but just showing that this a problem and it needs to be fixed and for White people to know like they are hurting us, they're not, like essentially this is their institution, institutions, so to have this study done I'm hoping that it changes the way institutions are treating, treating us as a whole and whole meaning, us Black people, because in these prestigious schools, for example Berkeley has in their entire, the entire school is not even a point of 1% not even a whole 1% Black students I think so and Hispanics are like 14% I believe so that's a problem.

The participants represent a diverse set of majors, and uniquely, they all mentioned the fact that Black student's experiences are not considered and having a study that specifically focuses on Black students was needed and important. These statements underscored their *why* and also further supports the relevance of the study.

Connecting the Black Dots

I'm Black, Oh Shit!: Racial Consciousness Development

This section opens with a brief story about coming to terms with my own Black identity and meaning making process. Throughout middle school and high school, I refused to use my full name [Sha Quasha], feeling tons of shame and worried about how people would perceive me. I spent so much of my life trying to prove that the appearance of my name did not equate to my level of intelligence. So, when I first began at UC Berkeley, I was not really sure how I felt about my Blackness. I was not really a big proponent of advocating for my Blackness and my Black self. It was not something that I typically thought about. My first year, I decided not to live on the African American theme floor because that was not where I felt

most connected; that was not where I saw my identity. So, I opted to stay in one of the traditional dorms and my first roommate was an Asian woman. During my first year, my friend group was a multicultural mix of Asian, White and Filipino students. Later in the year, I became friends with what seemed like the only other Black girl in the building. I was not aware of the pressures and all the other things that were going on for me during my time at Cal and why in my second year I found myself immersing myself in the Black community. I decided to live in the dorms, but only with other Black women, I went to Black events, Black parties, and sat with my Black friends in the dining hall. My freshman year self transformed into this new Sha Quasha who fully embraced her Black name and who had found community.

In his compelling and provocative text, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon (1967) draws our attention to conversations related to race and Black identity development. His contribution is particularly important regarding the process of meaning making, for the Black body with its preexisting meaning and objectivity as a Black person is learned and understood through the perspective of others (Fanon, 1967). The puzzling question stands: why is Fanon's work about the objectivity of the Black body still relevant over 40 years later? Stuart Hall defines race as a functional language and is relational depending on the context (White, 2011). Others have written about the body as the primary site that engages in economic, social, political, and cultural systems, making meaning within each space (White, 2011). Over the years there has been numerous literatures written about theories surrounding the importance of understanding Black/African-American identity development (Herring et al., 1999; Jackson, 1976; Payne & Suddler, 2014). Popularized by William Cross Jr. in the

early 90's, the original iteration of Cross's Nigrescence theory (NT-E) discusses the process of Black identity development and racial consciousness as a response to and result of various forms of oppression (Cross et al., 1991). Cross describes Nigrescence as a "resocializing" and transformation of the preexisting identity from non Africentrism, to an Africentric and multiculturalistic awareness in the development of racial identities (Harper & Harris, 2006). Similarly, Herring et al. (1999) found that group cohesion and social identity is strongly associated with that individual's sense of 'common fate" with the group. Throughout the years, with theoretical advances and social and political influences, the concept of Black identity development evolved and expanded (Cross, 2012; Ritchey, 2014). Some criticize NT-E for not being inclusive as it relates to the cultural connection for people of the African Diaspora and their experiences in the United States (De Walt, 2013). However, as my research focuses specifically on cultural and social experiences of Black students who are U.S. born, I also adopt the earlier framework of NT-E whose conceptualization of Blackness holds the foundational tenet of the historical discourse of Black struggle (De Walt, 2013). In collaboration, to situate the context for the level of understanding, awareness and development experienced by the participants, I also adopt a more recent framework of Black identity development that specifically considers a higher education context and provides implications for student affairs professionals (Ritchey, 2014). Implementing this specific understanding of racial identity development is useful in analyzing and interpreting my own experiences navigating UC Berkeley, as well as the participants' experiences navigating the same space.

Consistent with observations from a CRT perspective, most of these Black students experienced the elite university setting as a racialized space first and an academic space second. This was evident in the stories of how their racial identity developed and the ways it influenced their perspectives. Most of the participants reported that their race was not a salient factor of their identity or their interactions in the world pre-Berkeley. They may have experienced some negative or curious interactions prior to attending college but had not recognized the racial component at the time. Especially interesting is that the families of the participants did not discuss race during their childhood; there was a lack of conversation about Blackness or what it meant to be Black. Whether they were from a two Black parent household or a mixed-race household, their parents did not make any purposive efforts to discuss race and Blackness with their children. It was also interesting that the participants grew up in neighborhoods that were not predominantly Black, so it might be assumed that they would be more aware of their racial difference having been a minority in their immediate home environments. Yet, before coming to Berkeley their racial identity was not at the forefront. This was largely because—whereas their home community had few Black people—their high schools and other colleges were more diverse, or at least enrolled a larger Black student population. The participants explain how they came to terms with their racial identity:

> Yasmine: So, in terms of the label, I guess I always knew. Both of my parents are Black or identify as Black you could say um and I don't wanna say surprisingly, but I grew up in a really White neighborhood and so well [laughs] you can say, I guess a little surprisingly, I didn't get a lot of racist comments like there were little instances but not- it was never like a big thing. Partially its cause where I'm from there was like subtle racism like that, you know, 'I have Black friends' racism, so nothing was ever overt. So, for me it was like my parents are Black so I'm Black.

> Sonya: So, I actually didn't know I was Black when I was growing up my mom didn't really talk about race, she's really light skinned, she's not dark like me like I'm really really dark compared to her but in the household we never really talked about race, I didn't know I was Black until I was maybe 18, 19…And now that I've gotten older, I realize that like I am Black I mean I'm not saying, oh my God I'm Black I didn't know, I'm color blind, it was, it was more so it was never talked about at school, wasn't really talked about at home so I just ignored it. I thought I was a regular human being. We bleed the same so we are all literally all the same so this [points to hand] was not a factor I guess; therefore, I didn't pay attention to it is what I should say.
>
> Sky: I didn't notice race, like race wasn't something that occurred to me because most of my friends were Asian and once I got to sophomore year [in high school] I started to join orgs, clubs so I started doing like National Honor Society, legal studies like a pre-trial type thing and then I would always start to notice like what the heck like okay well there is no other Black kids in the class like there's no other Black kids, there's barely any other like other people of color, so I think I started to notice it then but I wasn't aware of all you know like the isms and all these things and so I just chalked it up to like okay well they're just not in these classes cuz they're not taking these opportunities

For both biracial students, their non-Black parent is their mother. And their maternal side is the side of the family they are closer to and therefore identified more closely with racially as an adolescent. They also mention that they and their siblings look different from the rest of this maternal side of the family.

> Greg: I grew up in a very predominantly White area. Alameda its a very, very wealthy old kind of town in the Bay Area so a lot of people are also like biracial like me and if not Black another ethnic group. So, growing up I never really thought about race. It never really crossed my mind particularly cuz of my mom, who is my White parent, was very good at … making sure, like, there wasn't a division between us and her cause we obviously look so much different than her, she's a blue-eyed blond hair White lady and she has 4 kids who look like me and growing up people would always say we were adopted things like that because we look nothing like our mom
>
> Brittany: So, I guess I pretty much realized like you know I came to sense with who I am, my identity, probably in elementary school before I would say probably like second grade. I didn't really see a difference in anyone I thought we were all the same and then I noticed people would always make comments about my hair and always want to touch my hair and I didn't know how to do my own hair so my mom would braid it but of course she was busy so my braids would get kind of messed up and the

> people are like your hair is messy, so that's kind of how I started to realize okay I'm kind of different I don't have hair like everyone else that's essentially like me understanding that I was different. And then coming to terms with being, understanding that I was biracial was kind of like a thing that I just always knew. My dad is Black, my mom is Mexican and my dad's side of the family is kind of small, I only have like three cousins but then on Mom's side of the family I have like probably like 20 cousins so we, every time we went to like family gatherings, I would see all of my Mexican family. And me and my siblings and then two other cousins are the only ones that are Black, everyone else is full Mexican so that's kind of when I realized I am also different, but I have two, have these two sides biracial

As a second part of this response, the participants also reveal critical moments in their lives, during early adulthood (ages 18-25) in which their racial identity was questioned, put on display, or reduced, forcing their racial consciousness to spring forward. The participants described moments when they had a realization about their race and what that meant for how they understood themselves in the world:

> Yasmine: When it comes to kind of what being Black means, I think it took me a while because I grew up in a really White and Mexican neighborhood, its Chula Vista, its right next to the border, so growing up all my friends were White and Mexican and I was one of the few Black students, and like yeah people didn't talk about race for a [chuckles] multitude of reasons so like I was just who I was and it wasn't until I kind of went out into the world that I realized I'm not what people consider a [air quotes] "a stereotypical Black woman" to be like and so for me like I was the, I was the [air quotes] "nice" Black girl that they felt comfortable like the [changes tone of voice] "oh my gosh can I touch your hair" or the nice Black girl, or I'm thinking about getting dreads, you know, they would just say silly shit…sorry silly stuff that I kinda had to I guess take in, and for the longest time I didn't realize they were putting me into this token Black girl box. And when I did [realize] it felt weird to me like how you deal with how other people are viewing you and then as well like how that was affecting myself

> Sonya: I think I was 18 or 19, I was working at Nordstrom, and I got a cup of coffee from Starbucks and something was wrong with the coffee and my manager he goes, cuz I was expressing my frustration about how my coffee wasn't right, and he goes back then you would have never even owned a cup of coffee so I don't understand why you're complaining and I think that's when I knew I was Black. I was like, I didn't know the color of my skin meant this much and later on down the road one of my co-workers called me a Nigger, then I'm like for sure I'm Black oh shit… And there would be like a lot of homeless people that will come in [to the store] and they

> would call me Niggers and stuff like that and then I started getting treated differently than my White friends or my professors would make, like little comments and I didn't know that race was so huge, and I get treated so unfairly… But as I got older I paid attention to it a lot more and it really affects me and I actually break down a lot when it comes to the color of my skin cuz I've gotten so many things happen to me and I'm not, I'm not mad, I'm hurt and I'm disappointed that White people and every other race, Asians and Mexicans, it hurts to the core that they treat me or say things that like cut, cuz words hurt
>
> Sky: It wasn't until I got to CRC [community college] and I was directed towards a counselor and she was telling me that she was over this African American studies program where basically like the class has an African American emphasis and so instead of learning or writing essays about the environment I'll be writing essays about people that look like me and so I was like okay and um I signed up and I think that was the moment where everything changed, like after like one semester it was like okay no like I prefer not to be called African-American like please call me Black don't call me African American, and I think that's when it started that's when I knew I was Black. That's when I started to make connections with, you know, with all the isms like okay this is why I was the only person in this class and this is why I didn't see people that look like me in the honors classes and things like that so I think that was the moment… I think once I got the CRC and started immersing myself in like Black culture it was like oh my God like there's so many things that clicked like this is why you do this and this is why your Asian friends never understood that and for the first time I had like a large group of like Black friends since seventh-grade… so it just felt good like I could say what I wanted to say, I didn't feel like anybody was cutting me sideways or making a little underhanded comments, they just understood me

Specifically for the biracial participants, the critical moments occurred in college, where their initial hope of being accepted as a biracial and mixed person was threatened and they were confronted with a choice of how to identify themselves:

> Greg: Yeah, race didn't really become an issue, not a huge issue, but actually became a part of my identity until college, cause then I feel there's that divide. Not necessarily like a divide, but there's more emphasis on the way you look and expectations that come along with your racial identity. And also, in highly academic spaces you see how Black people are traditionally underrepresented in higher education and then you're kinda looked at like an exception to the rule so that's when I started to notice that, you know, I am Black and people see me in this specific way, people see me in these academic spaces, and they're surprised. But I always felt like my identity was much more than just being a Black student. So, I always really strongly identified with my mom's side of the family…so, I always identified more with the [air quotes]

> "White side", you know, rather than the Black side. So, I guess there's kinda a coming into these academic spaces there was almost like a clash of my identity almost. Cuz, especially going into Riverside and then being in community college after that it felt almost as if my racial identity was kinda erased and dumbed down to me only being Black and African American rather than a whole unique individual person, with like a variety of ethnic backgrounds. So, then going from there it kinda upset me a little bit that, you know, that you're kinda just shoehorned into this thing, and that people that don't even know you are pushing you into this category. I came to accept that, really during the BLM movements during Covid in May 2020 when people were protesting, I became much more in tune with the Black side of my identity and fighting for us, learning how Black people are underrepresented in society and things like that. So, it's definitely very recently come into my mind that I can bring those very two different identities into one and be me without being worried or upset how other people think about me
>
> Brittany: Then in college is when I started, well I'm more Mexican than Black, but to the outside world I started to realize that I'm Black. They don't see me as Mexican they see me as Black regardless of what I am because that's kinda what my features show, I have thick curly hair, um that's kinda what people see when they see my siblings, they also have the same kind of hair, Black features so that's kinda like what my experience was like in the world. That's why I identified a little bit more with that side just because that's kind of the image that was given to me essentially

The exception in the overall group was Michelle, who grew up in Oakland, attended public schools in the Bay Area and did not leave the area even for community college. She reflects on the first time she became aware of her race:

> Michelle: I definitely think my family is like very interesting in terms of racial identity. A lot of my family is like light skinneded [sic] like some of them could be White passing and so I am like the only like visibly like darker person within the family. I do think I was lucky enough to have a family that let me know like you're Black, specifically African American and so I think that that's how I really grew to understand my racial identity in terms of that
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> Sha Quasha: And do you know about what age this was?
>
> Michelle: It was definitely when I was younger, I would like to think what made me learn what I was and what I wasn't, is when I was going to school with my mom and my mom likes to wear wigs and so people really couldn't see her natural like hair texture and she could pass as something else. And I go to school with her and people would be like 'that's not your mom' and I'm like 'yes that's my mom' and they're like 'no either you're adopted or something's wrong' and so I would go home and ask and

> my mom is very sarcastic and she would say no I found you someplace but we would like have these conversations on it [race] and then I think that was like elementary school age so I think 6 was around the time that I'd like definitely knew my identity. And it wasn't just because of like my mom and how she looked but the classroom in Oakland schools, at this time, were notorious for like policing Black and Brown children on how they like they spoke. So when they would tell like the Spanish-speaking students like leave the Spanish at home they would also turn to us [Black students] and tell us leave your home language at home and I would be like, oh like obviously we are quite different in terms of like our identities like we are being told that we speak up like a whole another language with which it is, but at the time like it was very like covert…but I also remember in the classroom as well Black and Brown students specifically Latino and Black students were put at the back of the class because we were thought to act up more while the White and the Asian students were put at the front and the teacher would literally only like call on them, teach them and then like we'd be left in the back of the class like hoping to like get some understanding of what's going on
>
> Sha Quasha: And how do you relate to your racial identity now?
>
> Michelle: I definitely identify as Black and African American yeah. I don't wanna say I'd be foolish to think I could like identify as anything else but yeah, I can't pass for anything else or like lay claim to anything else so definitely Black and African American.

Although Michelle's critical incident happened a lot earlier than the other participants, she still experienced a similar hyper awareness of her race and what it meant to be a Black student once on Berkeley's campus.

Demonstrated above, there are many types of Black identity and the way that Black people understand themselves is demonstrated differently in the ways they make meaning about their social identities. All these stories reflect coming to terms with their racial identity in some way and owning who they are. The level of acculturation around their Black identity paired with their critical moment directly influenced their thoughts, behaviors, perception of the environment, and understanding of what their Blackness means in the higher education

setting. We will continue to explore this in the emergent themes and participant responses in the sections that follow.

Isolation and Sense of Belonging

Attending one of the most prestigious public universities in the world does something to a person. It tells you who you should be, who you are, and how you should perform. Anything outside of the expectations of this university and you begin to feel small. For me, this was mainly in the sense of academic achievement. Then, those pressures of attending this rigorous university, coupled with having to navigate through the unknown territory of being a small Black face in a large White crowd. That was my everyday life. And that's the thing about this campus. Yes, we are all among some of the top students, evident by our acceptance, but as Black students we must navigate the "both/and" dichotomy. We have to be both high performing students *and* Black students at an institution that makes us feel we are only allowed to be one or the other, which heavily influences our perceptions of campus and impacts our sense of belonging and community on campus.

There has been a lot of research over the years about the African American/Black experience at PWIs that identify difficulties and challenges that Black students deal with at these campuses (Feagin et al., 1996; Rodgers & Summers, 2008; Walls & Hall, 2018). Throughout this literature, it was commonly found that Black students struggled in adjusting to the campus, felt a lack of belonging on the campus, dealt with microaggressions, and were generally harder to retain (Walls & Hall, 2008). The UC system conducts an undergraduate experience survey that evaluates student experiences, including categories of overall satisfaction, academic engagement, major evaluation and so on (UC, 2022). For the purposes

of this study, the results in the campus climate section at UC Berkeley were reviewed. Over 20% of Black students who completed the survey reported feeling uncomfortable with the climate in their majors, with 19% selecting “agree” and 10% selecting “strongly agree.” Interestingly, almost the same percentage of survey respondents (20%) strongly disagreed with feeling the campus climate was not comfortable while 19% selected “somewhat disagree”, 22% selected “somewhat agree” and 19% chose “agree.” Regarding feeling if members of their ethnicity or race was respected on campus, 23% reported “somewhat agree” with a close 21% reporting “strongly disagree.” Although it may seem positive that more students are agreeing than not, this is still a point of concern considering the small size of Berkeley’s Black student population. In 2019, Berkeley conducted an internal campus survey as a follow up to a 2013 climate report. The findings were released in February 2021. The headline on the Berkeley news website read: “Campus climate overall is positive but marginalized still feel excluded” (Public Affairs, 2021). Under the belonging category, it was noted that marginalized groups had a higher rate of disagreement that diversity, equity, and inclusion were promoted at Berkeley’s campus. And even more, particularly high disagreement for Black students. Additionally Black students reported feeling their group was not respected and had the highest percentage among marginalized groups for having experienced regular exclusionary practices, a significant increase from 2013 (68%: 53%) (Office of the Chancellor, 2019). Participants in this study confirm this literature and also reaffirm the results of the previously mentioned climate survey describing their experiences related to isolation and belonging.

Repeated phrases or mentions of being the "only" person of color, Black person, or Black woman came up in the participant responses, causing a rift in feelings toward engaging and interacting on campus. They reported instances of feeling unwelcome, looked over, ignored, and isolated in the same spaces on campus and especially in the classroom. This hyper awareness of being the only Black person in these spaces occurs before students are even officially admitted. Sonya shares what her orientation experience was as a prospective student:

> Sonya: So first of all, did you go to GBO? (Golden Bear Orientation)
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> Sha Quasha: I'm not sure about that. I don't think I've heard of that.
>
> Sonya: Basically, its orientation for everyone that got accepted…it's like where you can walk around the campus and stuff, but it's a huge group so there's like smaller groups and there's like thousands of students and I was the only Black person, not Black woman, not man but only Black person in my group

Yasmine, too, reflects on her expectations before arriving to Cal:

> Yasmine: It was partially because when people talk about Berkeley, they talk about how it's so progressive, so diverse, diverse thought and diverse people, it has a history of activism and so when I got accepted and decided I was going there I assumed I would find a lot of people who were like minded, and as well I thought it would be, I think more diverse than it is now. At my community college, I felt very secure in my spot there so when I was going to Berkeley, I was more confident that I would be able to fit in than it turned out. But to summarize I thought it would be very diverse, really like social justice emphasis and activism and I thought I would be able to make my own stamp there

She adds, describing her typical classroom experience:

> Yasmine: I am often one of the only Black people in a classroom, um and with my major being Sociology and the classes that I take being around sociology, philosophy and psychology race does come up, and when it does, I do very much feel that people turn and expect me to speak for all Black people

Brittany reflects on Black students dealing with microaggressions:

> Brittany: Yeah, campus is different I don't know what it was like when you were there, but you know Black people we definitely still feel like the microaggressions we definitely have like those hard experiences…and it's just like those microaggressions are still here, it's still something that like we have to navigate

She adds that she has considered transferring to an HBCU multiple times due to how isolated she's felt at times:

> Brittany: …freshman year or sophomore year I didn't feel like I belonged, like I really wanted to like just, I knew I wasn't going to transfer but the thought ran through my head multiple times that I don't belong here I should have went to a different school like, I have a couple friends that go to HBCU's and I'm like I should have been there with them, not here

Michelle has had an estranged relationship with education throughout her academic journey. Beginning in elementary school and throughout high school and community college, she struggled with academia, mentioning it was hard for her to enjoy school; in middle school her GPA was consistently around a 3.0 but once she entered high school, her grades began to fall drastically. At one point her high school her GPA was a 0.86. She attributes her low grades mostly to being in environments where she felt ostracized, making it difficult to concentrate on academics. She describes what Berkeley's environment has been like for her:

> Michelle: In a lot of ways like just an isolating experience with like hurdles and bumps and I didn't anticipate it for it to be this rough and to be battling against like that much rampant anti-blackness and whatnot on campus like, the eye-opening thing for me is like they're upping like police on campus in the wrong ways, they are not wanting to fund like the resource centers that are targeted for Black students like they are making it– like a lot of things that would help Black students like they're making it a lot harder during a pandemic and it really doesn't need to be and the intention to push—like lock us out of these things are very clear and I think that, that's what I'm really bothered about because a lot of spaces on campus just are not welcoming to me and it sucks and so that's been the most frustrating part for me this whole time

Three of the transfer students had similar experiences where they came from community colleges where the student body was more diverse. In those spaces, identifying as Black was

not such a salient identity. Coming to Berkeley was a difficult transition for them due to the lack of racially diverse student population. Yasmine expands on what her transition has been like:

> Yasmine: Yeah I had a tough time, like I said, you know, I thought I was gonna be able to make, you know, my place like at my community college, I can do the same thing at Berkeley but I had a really tough time transitioning like you know my community college I was like one of what may be like 20,000, I don't know the numbers but compared to Berkeley I very much felt like a fish out of water here…I haven't had any like racist interactions on campus, nah actually that's a lie, I haven't had any overtly racist interactions, but I do very much feel people have given me the cold shoulder or overlooked me because of my race and on top of that because I'm a Black woman. So yeah on campus [laughs], you know, the percentages of Black students has gone down in recent years, so even more so now I feel very much like being a Black student is very isolating and also it's just a difficult thing to reconcile with people telling you to your face Berkeley is the most progressive school in California, we have this amazing history and yet your experiences sometimes tell you like nah
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> Sky: It's been rough [sighs, smiles and shakes head] like it's been rough. I go to therapy and so I kind of always share with my therapist and I even shared with my friends, I think that if I would have went to Berkeley straight out of high school it would be perfectly fine cuz that was all I knew, all I knew was hanging out with Asian and White kids I had that experience, and so I had kind of like already become adjusted to that. So, me going to CRC [community college] after high school and joining that Black program was kind of almost as if I was at my own like mini HBCU. And so going from like culture shock back to my people and then back into another culture shock is really rough… I think that if I wasn't so headstrong and if I didn't like have my granny to like call and be like Grandma like I am going crazy like why did this lady say this in class today, this is not normal like if I didn't have that I don't, I really don't know like it's very defeated and it could be very scary and fearful kind of like to go into my classes and be like oh I'm the only drop a color like that's all you see
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> Sonya: So, some context when I was 18, I went to Los Angeles and attended college there. I didn't know what I was doing I had just graduated high school I did not know what the fuck I was doing. I don't know what it was, but I was a fish that couldn't swim and quickly I started to swim, so many things started, everything was perfect, I would have friends it was very very easy. When I came here it was hard, I broke down I had so many psychological shit happened to me, I was stressed, I was sad, I never felt this way cuz being on campus was really hard

Author and researcher Joy Degruy's theory, Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS) (DeGruy, 2005) is a theoretical framework that outlines the consequence of multigenerational trauma due to chattel slavery that Black people continue to experience through structural racism (Scott-Jones & Kamara, 2020). Early work described this concept as the repression of trauma in the collective unconscious of Black people (Fanon, 1967). Dr. Degruy's theory has been used in educational settings to comment on the well-being of African American students, in collaboration with other forms of therapy to treat African American youth in the fields of mental health and healthcare. Due to the forced self-preservation during slavery, Black people were conditioned into a persistent survival mode (Scott-Jones & Kamara, 2020). Connected, this can be used to explore how Black students engage in survival behaviors in other predominantly White spaces such as elite universities, with the distinction that their survival is not contingent on threatening, competing or putting any other groups at risk. The focus on healing multigenerational trauma and racist microaggressions helps provide insight into the behaviors and responses from the Black students at Berkeley. The adaptable survival behaviors associated with trauma that DeGruy (Scott-Jones & Kamara, 2020) describes are evident in the responses that Black students at elite universities have. Across the participants, four key patterns and behaviors reflective of PTSS emerged. These include:

- Vacant esteem: "the insufficient development of self-esteem, accompanied by feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness that can lead to depression and a destructive outlook" (Scott-Jones & Kamara, 2020, p. 81).
- Propensity toward anger

- Racist socialization, and
- Politics of respectability

All students referred to the low percentage of Black students on campus and how this manifested as a physical awareness of loneliness, isolation, and exclusion. As individual as the experiences were, there still existed among them the common feeling of isolation and exclusion from the campus (both perceived and actual) that necessitated seeking out community and a heightened awareness of relation to and understanding of their Black identity. Their experiences further confirm the research mentioned about Black students' challenges at PWIs and lack of sense of belonging (Walls & Hall, 2018) that can lead to exclusion and isolation, and especially intentional isolation manifesting in disconnection and navigating the university through the lens of anger, disengagement, and distrust. As Michelle describes, she tries to spend as little time on campus as possible due to fear and heightened anxiety around her Blackness:

> Michelle: I'm scared about the anti-Blackness like I don't, I don't have the mental capacity to put up with it cuz I don't know how I'm going to respond. I typically don't stay on campus for long. I like come home and that's it, like I can't even fathom trying to like walk around campus and do all of that just because I'm like I don't know how I'm going to be received here at any point in time from students faculty or anything of the sorts

Talking about advice, warnings or encouragement given, Michelle speaks on her intentional seeking of Black people on campus for guidance, but not witnessing any real institutional efforts toward changing the Black student experience:

> Michelle: I meet with a graduate student that's in my major department like monthly—I have to have monthly meetings with people to like literally keep myself sane on campus but like I was talking to her and it's always like, I'll tell her something and the advice is always like 'I'll advocate for you' like 'if you need it I'm always here to advocate for you' so like having that, that's like really nice. I don't—I don't

> think a lot of some other [Black] students have that. It's just also been like when you do say stuff it's like ‘yeah that's Berkeley’ or ‘that’s what being Black at Berkeley is like’ and we don't really have any answers to it, like it just happens, and you have to figure out how to navigate it because they aren't ever going to address it correctly. And so, it's just like the only thing we can do is give you like a space to speak on it because like there's not going to be any change higher up in creating like a more Black friendly campus and environment at all

She goes on to make an interesting commentary about the advice she has been given regarding her belonging on campus:

> Michelle: So, it's just been that ‘You belong at Berkeley’ thing like a thousand times and sometimes I feel like okay that like yeah I might belong here but that doesn't like solve the case of me not having my basic needs met

Brittany’s also reflected on receiving advice from her peers:

> Brittany: And then in terms of students I've gotten so much advice in like I think freshman year when I came onto campus I met [an older student] and she kind of just said like to be yourself, just like take up those spaces don't feel afraid to be you because yes, you know you're probably going to be the only Black person in a lot of your classes but that's okay like you know you want to show off this is who Black people are this is what we are this is what we do that kind of thing. Someone else had some advice like no just sit in the front of the classroom and make sure your voice is heard because our voices aren't really heard especially on this campus when our community is so small

She specifically mentions seeking some advice regarding her hair for an internship, feeling paranoid and nervous that braids would be seen as inappropriate and unprofessional:

> Brittany: Some other advice I got was because I was going into an internship and I was really nervous because I wanted braids but I was like I don't know if I'm going to feel weird with braids like, you know, a company where it's mostly White people and not a lot of Black people so I'm like are the braids not professional and she told me you know do whatever you want to do like, you shouldn't have to change yourself to try to fit in with like what you think the typical culture is like, you know be yourself— is the advice I've gotten, don't be afraid to speak your mind and show who you are

Sky also received encouragement from a Cal alum whose advice was similar to what the other participants received:

> Sky: She's my law school mentor, and so I had recently contacted her just about you know what I need to do to get to where I want to get and she gave me some advice and she told me like she understands like being a Black woman on campus is not easy and that, you know, she don't want to be the bearer of bad news but basically kind of like I have to suck it up and I got to do what I have to do to get where I want to get and you know it doesn't matter if they like me, you know none of that matters as long as I'm showing up every day and I'm being the best that I can for myself and for my community

In contrast, when asked about receiving advice from other Black students, faculty, or staff about how to navigate the university, Greg had a very different experience than the other participants. He did not have any examples of advice given specifically around his racial identity. He instead, mentioned simply reassuring himself as a means of encouragement, and points to his club as a space that encourages belonging, although not explicitly giving advice to Black students:

> Greg: So being here at Cal so far I mean sometimes it can be a really isolating experience based on the sheer volume of students that are here so it's hard to interact with professors in a more intimate manner like that, so usually when I would go to office hours or anything where you would get encouragement usually it wasn't necessarily anything about my racial identity um it was kinda more a self-reassurance that you know I do belong here, I got in on my own merit, worked hard to get to where I am today and that my identity or anything else can't invalidate the fact that I deserve to be here. So it's mostly self-reassurance but recently joining clubs, you know the BSA I would say it's a positive group and that it enforces feelings of belonging, so to answer that question the Black Sociological Alliance really do push that everybody belongs and regardless how you identify this is a space a very open and safe space for you to be who are and that you deserve to be here

He goes on to discuss not receiving advice from non-Black people as well and the discomfort in talking about his racial identity and race in general:

> Greg: I feel [laughs] like people here are very cautious about talking about racial identities that don't belong to them. Not necessarily, well kinda in for fear of being insensitive um so like a lot of the time people won't comment on my identity unless I bring it up first and it's usually not something I like to bring up because I don't wanna be seen as just a Black student. I just wanna be seen as a student like everybody else and I don't know in my day-to-day conversations I don't want to turn the conversation

> away that would isolate myself potentially and make other people uncomfortable. So, it's never really been brought up before

In chapter 2, I briefly mentioned the lack of media representation of Black student experiences in the media by way of movies and TV shows. One example that was provided is grown-ish (Barris, 2018-present), which has a primarily Black cast set at a fictional PWI. In a recent episode (Allain-Marcus, 2022), the plot centers on one of the characters, Aaron Jackson, who has been known for his participation in initiating social movements on campus particularly around critiquing racism (e.g., police brutality, divesting tuition money from prison systems). In this episode, Aaron is asked to represent the university in an event to talk about the success of his self-titled class, the Afro-Saloon, which is intended as a space for Black students to talk about their experiences. After hearing a draft of his speech entitled "A Guidebook on how to Survive being Black at a PWI", the administration urges Aaron to represent the university in a "positive light". Aaron grappled with appeasing the administration or going against them, which would possibly put his job in jeopardy. In the end, he refuses to rewrite the speech, feeling it would be an incomplete and inaccurate representation of the Black student experience. To omit the negative experiences that students had would simply be wrong. Instead, he has one of his students read the original speech. As the student mentions, talking about the grievances of Black students and their experiences with racism on campus is the honest and accurate portrayal of *the* Black experience. This episode confirms the experiences of the participants in this study, highlighting that Black students in PWIs are required to learn how to survive the space and do so in community with each other.

Racial representations in popular culture can perpetuate belief systems and social policies based on racist and prejudice ideologies (White, 2011). It can be argued, too, that is why it is so important to have Black writers developing media about the Black experience as a challenge to dominant media and reclaim the Black body and the Black story. With writers like Kenya Barris (black-ish, grown-ish) and Justin Simien (Dear White People), and programs particularly focused on university settings, it is important to have the representation from Black writers that can affirm the Black student experience.

Race Relations: Intragroup Differences

During my sophomore year, came the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement in response to the 2014 shooting of unarmed 18-year-old Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. Black Berkeley students, along with many across the nation, organized in solidarity. I put on my all Black and marched around the campus yelling "Black Lives Matter" with my fellow peers. As time went on and more protests occurred, I found myself thinking about activism more. I began thinking about what it meant for me to sit on the sidelines instead of out on the frontlines. I remember thinking, 'that's not the Black I want to be, I'm not a revolutionary'. As a younger student, I thought it was necessary to always be on the frontlines, to be seen for Black causes. I thought I had to be at every protest. But I realized, there are many ways to be Black, to be pro-Black without always being in a protest. This was my introduction into understanding about the tensions and conflicts that existed within the Black community.

All the participants felt a heightened sense of awareness of their Black identity and their race came to the forefront in navigating a predominantly White practicing academic space and being faced with the expectations and assumptions imposed on them by other people,

being labeled Black. The level of acculturation and how closely they identified with their Blackness also influenced the way they experienced the presence or absence of resources, the awareness of the number of Black students, comments on interactions with professors or other staff and opinions about the campus more generally. In the post segregation era, education was deemed as a "White thing" and educated Black people were seen as the enemy, a concept that hooks (2004) refers to as anti-intellectualism. In the Black community this anti-intellectualism operated as a marked signifier for class difference (hooks, 2004). For most of the students there was recognition of difference in skin tone, whether biracial or not and within their own families. There were also mentions of experiences where people pointed out that they "talked White" compared to "talking Black." This points to the literature on Black students' choices in using "Standard English" or "Ebonics" in both White and Black dominated spaces which is already a point of contention in Black identity and community politics (Myers, 2020; White, 2011).

In the earlier conversations about how they came to understand their Black identity, Sonya, Yasmine, and Brittany all talked about how their speech was used to determine their Blackness in comparison to their skin color:

> Sonya: …Keep in mind like I had White cousins right, they look White, but obviously they were mixed but they could pass as being White, no one would ever know that they were Black. The only thing they made fun of me was like the way that I spoke cuz I was like [changes voice] oh my God, you know, but I never knew about[race], it was never talked about
>
> Yasmine: …like I would get, you talk like a White girl, you know like people are telling me I'm not Black enough basically, so like being kinda light brown skin, yeah, I don't know it's a whole like thing I'm still processing

> Brittany: … I grew up in the suburbs, my parents had nice jobs so when I would go to school people would say you're not really Black why do you talk like that you talk White. The amount of time that people have told me you're not really Black…

Notably enough, both biracial participants talked about wanting to embrace both sides of their race, but the world only perceived them as Black. While Greg decided to diversify his choice of student clubs and activities, Brittany intentionally sought out the Black community as a means of embracing this imposed worldview. But, only after attempting to seek out the Hispanic community first, which was the side she identified with the more. She reflects on trying to become part of the Hispanic community:

> Brittany: …and then I tried like in college to like connect a little bit with my Mexican side. I went to a lot of events, and in the Hispanic Community if you don't really look Hispanic it's kind of like you're not really accepted, like I have a friend who is also Hispanic but she kind of looks a little bit Whiter and you know she has that same experience where in the Hispanic Community especially the Mexican Community if you don't look Mexican it's hard to be accepted, and I just didn't want to force myself, I didn't want to force trying to be accepted but I was easily accepted by the Black community which is why I, you know, I joined Black organizations and you know just made that my community instead of trying to make something else that wasn't really as accepting of me

Greg specifically highlights the multiculturalism of the activities he's involved in. He makes a point that even though the club he is part of is named, Black Sociological Alliance, again, its purpose is to provide a safe space for marginalized groups:

> Greg: So, I've joined the Black Sociological Alliance, which we meet once every 2 to 3 weeks and we just talk about various things like our experiences on campus, prominent Black thinkers in the field of Sociology. It's just like a place for you to go to be safe cuz it's not exclusive to Black students, there's people of other ethnicities, Black people, mixed people, Asian Americans in this group as well, so it's just really nice to have community to come together to talk about various issues.

He also mentions his involvement in a sport organization:

> Greg: I also joined a club soccer team recently and there's actually surprisingly, well I was surprised because growing up when you play soccer you usually play with a lot

> of Latinx people but there's actually a lot of Black people, Black men on my team and within club soccer in general, so it's been nice to have that as well people who look like you playing the same sport as you do sending you love

As the outlier, being both the only male participant and the one other biracial participant, Greg provided some interesting insights. It seemed he strongly wanted to take away the focus from his racial identity and be recognized purely for his academic achievement. It was interesting that Greg noted surprise in seeing so many Black men on the club soccer team, but quickly corrected to say that he also appreciated their presence and relating to them specifically through race and assumed similar background experience. Greg's comments continue to display some of the earlier notions of DeGruy's adaptive survival behavior specifically around racist socialization (Scott-Jones & Kamara, 2020).

The non-biracial participants did not have any experience with trying to seek out a community other than the Black community. Though, they still could not avoid intragroup conflict as many of the participants referred to the variety of thinking, responses and interactions between members of the Black community. For example, intragroup relations showed up in questioning the term 'Black' itself. I asked participants, how did they come to recognize and understand that they were Black. Yasmine, who identifies as Black and non-biracial, reflects on her identity and its influence her perspective:

> Yasmine: So, when you say coming to know I was Black do you mean just like in terms of the label or what being Black means?
>
> Sha Quasha: However you'd like to interpret it.
>
> Yasmine: "…Like I feel comfortable in how I identify, like I don't think I can identify as anything else but it's more my viewpoint of myself and my race is sometimes affected by the way others perceive me or the box that others put me in

Yasmine's need to clarify the term brings up a valid topic and points again to the complexity and variety of reactions, responses and understandings of the Black racial identity. Further, there was even notable references to intergroup tensions regarding how they preferred to be identified, who counted as "full Black" and who was included in the Black community based on nationality and which faculty and staff were "for" the Black community. Sky clarifies what is meant when asked if she's advice from any Black students, staff or faculty:

> Sky: Well okay for the last question when you say Black folk are you including like just like pure Black people or like mixed black people because now I'm like [side eye and laughs]
>
> Sha Quasha: [laughs] Yeah, people who self-identify as Black

Additionally, Sonya describes her feelings on the recent appointment of Berkeley's new Dean of Admissions:

> Sonya: Yes, and um we have an, well, he's African, not African American but we just got a new Dean of Admissions last year and the numbers [Black students] are still low so that's a problem too. And that's what frustrates me, we don't belong on those campuses but at the end of the day we built that campus— this world was built on our backs

Both comments reflect an attempt to understand who can be counted as Black, further demonstrating Black students' need to identify people they can trust for advice and support. This will be explored further in a later section.

As a direct entry student, Brittany sought Black community after being rejected by Hispanic community as a freshman. As she progressed, she learned to thrive by also finding a subgroup within the Black community in the student organization, Haas Undergraduate Black Business Association (HUBBA). Her initial expectation that the existence of a small population of Black students would cause them to come together was reflected in her

experience. However, this was not the reality for some of the other students. They agreed that finding or building community around their Black identity was important, but they experienced more difficulty with achieving the connection to other Black students unlike Brittany. For Sonya and Michelle, the exclusion and isolation led them to be filled with more anger than anything else:

> Michelle: I haven't been able to find or go to any of the like Black Center events on campus and that really sucks so I think also as well like it's a huge thing of me lacking community and I think that's what I wanted when I came to Berkeley. Like coming from a community college where like there weren't many Black students there as well, I was like for sure when I go to Berkeley I'm making, I'm like it's going to be nothing but pro- Blackness like I'm going to have Black friends but it hasn't been that

Sonya specifically talks about how she wanted the Black community to come together more and witnessing the lack of unity is one of her many sources of frustration with the institution:

> Sonya: It's frustrating not to see my Black people come together. We are smart and our passion for things is big. I can't stand the ignorance of other Black people and women— cause this is what they see and put on all of us. I'd rather be alone than to deal with that shit

Greg was interested in community but in the sense of building networks but not with a specific group. His interest in the Black community stemmed from a sociological and political curiosity. But he could not ignore the lack of Black students on campus nor was he excluded from being identified by others as a Black student.

We can look at the intersection of race and performance in exploring the relationship with Blackness and hip hop; the mannerisms, characteristics, gestures, and linguistic elements that all indicate hip hop and its intertwinement with Blackness and masculinity (White, 2011). Similarly, we can take this idea of race as performance in the elite university context especially around authenticity and agency and the type of Black students choose when

expressing their Blackness (White, 2011). Those with limited interactions with Black people may find it difficult to grasp that there are a multitude of ways to be Black and how that is expressed (White, 2011). Consequently, Black students are met with the challenge of a campus environment that stifles Black identity expression and must consider the unspoken rules and regulations that dictate the Black community (Cox, 2020). This creates tensions specifically around authenticity. Michelle gives insight into some of these tensions:

> Michelle: I think on campus as well there's always like, within the Black students there's this thing of like understanding or like a push of when we shouldn't be like visibly Black and like upset and like not rocking the boat and on campus there's a lot of back and forth about that like you shouldn't say things about like White people or like you shouldn't be protesting and disrupting the environment like it doesn't look good on us. You have the other opposite opinion of like yeah if you're going to have us here and mistreat us then we like deserve to disturb the peace because clearly like nothing else like talkin or any other means has like gotten you to care…there are some people within the like, the Black community on campus that want a lot of Black students to like adhere to respectability politics to not scare White— scare non-Black people but respectability politics honestly has not gotten a lot of folks on campus anywhere

These group politics are existent in most spaces, but the contextual environment that is Berkeley (e.g., elite institution) in combination with the small Black population exacerbates these types of situations for Black students. More will be discussed about how the constraints of the environment impact Black students' sense of community.

Gender Differences

As mentioned in the introduction, the selected participants were aligned with cisgender identity expression. Throughout the responses, there were some differences in feelings toward racial identity, perception of the university, how to properly navigate the campus and overall experience with respect to the participant's gender identity.

Black Men in College

Early masculinity ideologies developed in the era of slavery in what bell hooks (2004) refers to as plantation patriarchy. The concept of patriarchal masculinity in its core tenets had foundations from the gendered practices of slavery and white supremacist domination. This ideology taught enslaved Black men that masculinity was synonymous with power and control (hooks, 2004). Additionally, this masculinity framework was used as a measurement of Black men's progress in achieving manhood, by proximity or closeness to whiteness (Fanon, 1967; hooks, 2004). As Black boys transcend from adolescence into adulthood, Black men undergo this gendered socialization (Moody & Lewis, 2019) that subjects them to violent physical and emotional abuse and receiving patriarchal messages that tells them not to express their emotions or perform emotional caretaking (hooks, 2004). Throughout adulthood, they are further conditioned by societal images of the hypermasculine man (hooks, 2004). For Black men, there is the addition of racialized images of Blackness that creates the racial and gendered stereotypes we are familiar with (i.e., assertive, aggressive, criminal, hypersexual) (hooks, 2004; White, 2011).

Much of the research relating to Black men and college reference the low enrollment rates, disparity in retention and persistence to degree, specifically discussing low achievement and performance expectations, while the response to address these issues are related to access (Kim, 2014; Strayhorn, 2016; D. V. Tolliver & Miller, 2018). And on a smaller scale, there is an area of research pertaining to the seemingly rare high achieving Black male student at a PWI, almost exclusively written by educator and researcher Shaun Harper (Harper, 2005; 2008; 2015). There is also some research on high achieving Black

males at HBCU's (Bonner, 2001; Johnson & McGowan, 2017). However, the overall literature about Black male success in college is scarce. In more recent literature, there is an increased spotlight on the environment of PWIs and how Black males are impacted. For example, Q. Allen's (2020) research argues that PWI's are sites of racialization and socialization that reinforce negative and racist ideologies of Black males (i.e., stereotypes of hypermasculinity). Others support Q. Allen's (2020) research suggesting that the ways Black men assign or interpret meaning of certain stereotypes and go through the critical process of aligning or distancing themselves to demonstrate their Blackness and masculinity, is particularly important at PWI's, whose demographic context creates these conditions (W. A. Smith et al., 2007). In the research about Black male achievement and existence at PWI's there is a large focus on the literal policing of Black male bodies and interactions with campus police, the assumptions of Black male students and athletics or even declaring certain majors (Jenkins et al., 2021; Messer, 2006; Singer, 2002). Within the subset of literature, the focus on Black male athletes we see this literature discuss Black male athletes at PWI's and Division I schools, particularly around specific stereotypes (i.e., low income, on a scholarship, football or basketball as the sport, majoring in some sort of physical education) (Messer, 2006). Additionally, African American men have the highest rate of college dropouts among college athletes and their graduation rates are lower compared to White males (48% vs. 62%) (Messer, 2006). Though Greg did not talk explicitly about his gender identity, there is plenty of existing research that discusses the challenges of Black men and Black male students in college (Q. Allen, 2020; Cuyjet, 2006; Harper & Harris, 2006; Messer, 2006). Curiously, these issues did not emerge through Greg's responses. It cannot be

assumed that he does not consider his gender to be an important part of his identity, however, it is still noteworthy to comment on his experience with masculinity and a Black racial identity in conversation and comparison to the female participants. During his time at UC Riverside Greg mentioned that he was more focused on sports and athletics, this was the only reference Greg made to adhering to traditional masculine expectations (Messer, 2006). Upon arriving at Cal, he made the intentional decision to focus more on academics, where sports were no longer an important part of his college experience.

> Greg: … my priorities in life have definitely changed where I was very athletically oriented and I didn't necessarily not care about my academics, but I didn't focus entirely on academics as I did now and also the social aspect and the connecting aspect that college grants especially at a huge university like Berkeley with all the opportunities they have available and all the people you can meet has definitely changed so I kinda oriented myself away from athletics and even more from focusing solely on academics and trying to take advantage of all the opportunities we have here on campus…

As we see above, Greg does mention his initial involvement in sports and in an earlier section we know that his sport of choice is soccer, which is also not the stereotypical sport for Black men in college (Messer, 2006). We do not know if Greg encountered any of the Black athlete discrimination at UC Riverside, but his decision to focus more on academics when transferring to Berkeley, a school that is known for its challenging academics, is interesting. It is possible that this choice was simply not wanting to divide time between sports and academics in order to have the best chance at succeeding academically, and it is also possible that this choice could have to do with wanting to avoid falling into the Black student athlete trope and the assumptions that come with that label. His lack of conversation regarding his manhood supports the literature that asserts Black men have difficulty in challenging the patriarchal thinking they were socialized into (hooks, 2004). So, it makes

sense that Greg may not recognize any exclusionary practices against his gender and if he is aware, masculine thinking prevents him from bringing these issues up or wanting to express his feelings about it. Considering Greg is of lighter skin tone and biracial, it is possible that his experience as a Black male is not the typical experience of other Black men at Berkeley who have a darker skin tone and have two Black parents. He does, however, provide us with some of the nuance and challenges that Black students face in developing a multiracial identity (Rockquemore et al., 2009; Snyder, 2016; Stites et al., 2021). There is more research that needs to be done specifically on Black men at Berkeley.

Black Women in College

Numerous studies over the decades have looked at African American women in higher education (Moses, 1989; Walkington, 2017). Among this research, it is consistent that Black women are dealing with hardships in the college setting; for example, they do not see themselves included in the mission and goals of the university, and they meet difficulty in fully integrating into campus culture and life due to the double obstacles of their race and gender, particularly at PWIs (Moses, 1989; Walkington, 2017). Nonetheless, Black women have continued to be present and excel in academia. Since the 80's and 90's, Black women enrollment in college and degree completion has been higher than that of Black men (Walkington, 2017). Black women also tend to hold more than one degree type. In 2016, the National Center for Education Statistics reported, regarding race and gender, more female students enrolled than male across all ethnic groups, but the gender gap was the largest between Black students (62 vs. 38%) (de Brey et al., 2019). There are plenty of news articles that highlight Black women being the most educated group in the United States, just as of

two years ago (Katz, 2020). Yet, Black women also deal with a multitude of stressors that impact their college going experience based on their racial and gender identity.

A psychology study investigated the relation between gendered racial microaggressions and traumatic stress symptoms among Black women (Moody & Lewis, 2019). They looked at instances of subtle gendered racism such as being treated according to stereotypes (hypersexual, angry Black woman), being silenced in school, the workplace or other professional settings and receiving negative comments about hair or skin tone. Moody and Lewis' (2019) study supported early empirical studies that there is a significant relationship between gendered racism and negative health outcomes for Black women, specifically a correlation with greater psychological distress. In an earlier study, Lewis et al. (2012) explored coping strategies for gendered racial microaggressions for Black women in college. They highlighted the differences in gendered socialization for Black boys and Black girls. For Black boys, parents were more concerned about their son's physical safety– this was following the shooting of unarmed Black teen, Trayvon Martin–whereas the messages given to daughters focused on racial pride and achievement (Lewis et al., 2012). This study concluded that Black women college students implement a variety and combination of coping mechanisms (e.g., Using One's Voice as Power, Resisting Eurocentric Standards of Beauty, Leaning on One's Support Network, Becoming a Black Superwoman, Becoming Desensitized and Escaping) dependent on the context of a situation and utilizes the process of 'picking and choosing battles' in dealing with subtle gendered racism. These findings were consistent with the ways that the participants in this study discussed how they navigated the university, although not explicitly using the term coping strategies. For example, self-

protective strategies like desensitization and escaping were utilized by Michelle in intentionally isolating herself as means to reduce her interaction with the stressful campus environment (refer to section "Isolation and Sense of Belonging"). Additionally, the findings from these studies points to further research about the socialization of Black undergraduate women at PWIs.

The meaning making process for Black women is tied to both their race and gender simultaneously and include factors like community, relationships, and self-awareness (Porter et al., 2019). Black women's experience of racism, sexism, and classism are inseparable. Their needs and worldviews are distinct from those of Black men and White women and the struggle against racism, sexism, and all other isms must occur simultaneously (Green, 2015). Research on Black women in collegiate spaces has claimed that Black women are typically discounted in terms of intelligence, but hypervisible when "looked at" as a token (Green, 2015). Further research explored the socialization of Black undergraduate women. Porter et al. (2019) and Lewis et al. (2016) found that Black women in college are often socialized into bearing more family responsibility and representing uplift for their family, taught to be more aware of both race and gender and have a sense of cultural pride. All but one participant were women, and they frequently mentioned the Black and female experience in relation to each other. Contrary to Greg's account, the intersectionality of race and gender for the female participants was an important component in their reflection about their experiences. More often, there was a racial spotlight on the Black women in the classrooms. These few accounts relate to the existing literature about the hypervisibility of Black women on PWI campuses.

The women talked about tokenization particularly in the classroom. Sonya expressed feeling self-conscious in her intellect, highlighting another of DeGruy's adaptive survival behaviors (vacant self-esteem):

> Sonya: I wasn't accepted throughout my classmates. I never wanted to raise my hand cuz I was scared, I felt like I was shit, my education was shit, felt like I was stupid as fuck, I would take Adderall, I would be in the library for like 17 hours and run back home take a shower and come back to campus, but I still didn't feel like I was learning shit. There were a lot of readings, and I didn't want to read it, it was rough, it was really really rough, there was a lot of mental breakdowns

Brittany reflects on her experiences in group projects:

> Brittany: … often times I'm like the only woman in a group and then on top of that I'm the only person who color, so I'm the only person of color like in a project currently right now and the people in the group are all men and five out of the six men are White so it's like dealing with things like that definitely still happens anf I definitely have to like force my voice to be heard cuz I've been talked over multiple times, it happens a lot

On why she chose Berkeley, Yasmine mentions specifically leveraging Berkeley to create more opportunities for herself, particularly as a Black woman:

> Yasmine: Like people will see Berkeley and that will open a lot of doors for me. And as a Black woman, I was thinking I need that; I need that extra door to be opened for me

The female participants also seemed to identify more heavily with their Blackness shown by how much they had to say about the resources, faculty and staff interactions, criticism of diversity efforts and the campus as a whole. They expressed anger, hurt, frustration, and exhaustion when reflecting on their experiences as a Black student on campus. Greg did not seem to come from a place of hurt or feel very intensely about what was happening on campus as the female participants did in their interviews. He did not reference any interaction that he personally had on campus that was tied to his racial identity other than the Black

Lives Matter movement, which prompted him to look further into the historical mistreatment of Black people. Greg did not mention these issues specifically or make any criticism of the university. Greg seemed oblivious to the challenges that he might encounter as a Black student on a predominantly White practicing campus. This could be due to his background and upbringing in a predominantly White area. His experiences align with the literature regarding intra racial diversity and closeness, wherein Black biracial students and those who came from a predominantly White background experience more distance from the Black community due to a lack of racial awareness (S. S. Smith & Moore, 2000). He is aware of his lighter skin but does not interpret its meaning in the ways that the other biracial student did or as the non-biracial Black women who grew up in non-Black neighborhoods. For Brittany, she felt that she had light skin privilege:

> Brittany: The town I was from in Wisconsin there weren't a lot of Mexicans so I couldn't really find a community there. All my friends were Black when I was in Wisconsin and so there was kind of like some identity issues there too, because being light skin, I know I have privilege and all of that but I also had to fight for my Blackness… I've had people say oh you're not this you're not that because you do this, or you don't do that you're light skinned you look White but that kind of played into the identity issues as well in high school. Then coming to Berkeley, I met all kinds of different Black people and everyone's super accepting so

For the non-biracial Black women who grew up in non-Black neighborhoods, this did not manifest in a lack of racial awareness that Greg seemed to display. Their background in predominantly White neighborhoods did not prevent them from experiencing racist comments, behaviors or microaggressions:

> Sky: ... so even just walking on campus like people give you dirty looks like people look at you like okay like why is she here and it's been hard like, I'm a very extracurricular type girl and I haven't even found myself doing that just because I'm like oh my God like I don't want to be the only Black girl in these clubs or even like walking down Sproul like you can kind of notice like that people who are passing out

> flyers right, they'll pass it out to the Asian or the White kid but when you come, when I would come it would be like okay let me turn the other way and see who else is coming. And so, I pick up on stuff. I'm very observant so I'm like okay that's like rude. I think like the way that people look at you kind of makes you feel a certain type of way… then going into classes, like even my first day on campus like ever going to class like a professor gave me like this really strange like mug in the hallway and I'm like what the hell, I'm sorry, like what the heck like why is this professor looking at me like that so it's just uncomfortable cuz you never know like if your professor is for you

The socialization of Black undergraduate women shows up again, and this too, can be internalized causing them to take on the savior persona. They are considered to be the racial uplift for their families and even the larger Black community (Porter et al., 2019). Sky talks about why it is so important for her to be present in the classroom:

> Sky: ...It kind of is putting pressure on me like, I don't feel like I'm getting my education just for me, like, I feel like I have to show up every day because I have to represent that Black people are capable, Black people, you know, do deserve these opportunities

The university operates within a patriarchal and masculine ideology. As a man, Greg is in a position of authority (hooks, 2004). So, in comparison to the women it is easier for him to navigate the institution without feeling the burden of care for the entire Black community and not have to think about the extra disadvantages related to his gender.

Faculty and Staff Engagement

In chapter two, the literature on elite university success specifically discussed retention strategies. One of the strategies mentioned was student-professor relationships and cited faculty engagement as a valuable resource for retention (Vogt, 2008). Therefore, it is also necessary to explore the student-professor relationship relating to Black students. There is research that provides evidence that there is a lack of Black/African American professors at the collegiate level, especially at predominantly White and prestigious universities (Edwards

& Ross, 2017). Edwards and Ross (2017) specifically look at underrepresentation and lack of success of Black faculty at PWI's. Some research claims that Black faculty do not negotiate their identities by way of communicating differently than they normally would. A study on Black professors gave insight into the challenges such as identity negotiation, student perceptions of credibility and scrutiny by fellow colleagues. It was noted that Black professors are strategic and intentional in communicating in ways that represent them as professional, credible, and accessible to students and other staff while also dealing with microaggressions themselves (W. R. Allen et al., 1991; Louis et al., 2016). In PWI's, Black female faculty and staff are expected to take on the modern mammy role, which defers to the White male as knowledgeable, allows being questioned about professional competence and faces sabotage by White administrators; they are only allowed to advance or be assertive when it benefits others, but not able to push their own agendas (Walkington, 2017). Additionally, the 2007 National Center for Education Statistics results reported that Black women rarely hold authority positions (Walkington, 2017). This nuance causes extremely difficult conditions for Black faculty and can lead to complex interactions with students.

Wright and McCreary (1997) discuss the importance for Black students to have positive relationships with faculty and staff, especially at PWI's. For Black students, they look for support and guidance in faculty and staff, especially from Black faculty and staff (Wright & McCreary, 1997). But the typical mentoring model that encourages autonomy and independence for students tends to cause tension for their interactions with Black students (Wright & McCreary, 1997). As an intragroup interaction, the perceived rejection, lack of availability or lack of adequate help is often interpreted as a personal rejection to the student

and causes a distancing from their race (Wright & McCreary, 1997). This type of interaction occurred for some of the participants in this study. Sonya describes her experience with a Black female professor, who is perceived to be ignoring the four Black students when they raise their hand in class:

> Sonya: I had a Black professor and it's almost as if they care more about their White students than their Black students. I'll give an example, I'm currently in this class and there's actually four Black, I'm the only Black girl but there's three Black men and I'm so happy and the professors Black and I might just be in my head but for example, these Black students talk, like I don't talk that much in this class but these other Black students they talk and raise their hand and I love it and the professor would see them raise their hands, cause we sit in the front, well three of us sit in the front, and one in the back , but we're right in front of her [gestures to show location]. So, we would raise our hands and of course White students would raise their hands and she will pick on White students and forget that we raised our hands. And it's happened a few times and I would raise my hand and say you know you forgot [says names], and she's like, I guess you're gonna have to keep check throughout this entire semester of people raising their hands. And I'm like [looks annoyed] first of all, you better be happy that I'm saying this, cuz I don't know, it just pissed me off. We still get shunned and to make that comment in front of White students made me mad so that was like wow, like instead of saying like thank you or like I don't know. Cuz, Sha Quasha, I always make sure my Black people are heard; I make sure that we're never ignored cuz we been ignored our entire life you know. But isn't that shocking for like them to be sitting in front of you and for you to [air quotes] forget, that's crazy

Similarly, Michelle talks about her experience with a specialist from the Disabled Students Program (DSP) trying to seek accommodations for class. She describes her shock in this interaction primarily due to the fact this staffer—a Black man—did not help her:

> Michelle: And I think what's also made it worse, is that departments on campus that are supposed to be your first point of contact that are supposed to like make marginalized students feel safe heard and advocated for and accommodate weren't doing that. So DSP definitely a huge issue and I think I went through a bunch of specialists but I get to one specialist and I think what hurt and bothered me was that he was Black and I go in and I tell him like they never gave me the accommodations I asked for, where I had a rough semester mentally and it messed me up and I had thought I had to seek support and help and so I was like I want to be accommodated for this because this is what's going to help me thrive on campus and like if I don't have that I can't thrive here and he goes, like you don't need that and he also says in

> the process that it doesn't look good your first year at Berkeley to be asking professors for extensions on assignments and papers. Then I'm like what do you mean by that, like are you are you getting at the fact that as a Black student it doesn't look good. Like I think like that moment for me it was like, wow, like I can't even get the basic things I need here to thrive when it's already in an environment that's uncomfortable. I'm taking a huge risk putting myself through like hell with endless torture and the one place I thought that would help me out, they were like no way, no it—it just doesn't look good

The African American Studies Department at Berkeley is comprised primarily of Black professors. Yet, participants still had difficulty engaging with them.

> Brittany: I haven't had any Black professors, but just two Black [Graduate Student Instructors], but I didn't get no advice. But that's a separate experience of not having any Black professors. I even took an African American studies class, but it was taught by a White woman

This was interesting especially with the juxtaposition of Sonya's comments around her experience with a Black professor. Brittany intentionally sought out Black professors by trying to take classes in the African American studies department, while Sonya—who did not intentionally seek out Black professors—had an interaction that she perceived as unpleasant. Sonya and Brittany's experiences (or lack thereof) with Black professors resonate with the literature around the presence or absence of Black professors at elite, prestigious and predominantly White universities (Edwards & Ross, 2017). Michelle's experience is illustrative of the literature about Black students feeling personally rejected when support is withheld by a Black staff member. This reminds me of my own experience as a first-year student enrolled in an African American studies course in which I was excited to learn about Black history from a Black professor. I walked into this 8 am class and to my surprise there was a White man at the front of the classroom. Given the topic, my immediate thought was that I was in the wrong classroom because I did not see a Black professor.

Yasmine expresses frustration with the lack of Black faculty and staff who she can go to:

> Yasmine: Like if I'm going through something why can't I talk to a Black staff member who I can relate to. Student numbers are important but like what about Black staff

She also mentions that the only interaction she did have with a Black person on campus was someone who was not even a staff person but a woman who owned a restaurant:

> Yasmine: So no encouragement from any Black staff, I don't think none of my [begins counting on hand] professors, none of my GSI's, none of the counselors, not like DSP, not— there was no, actually the one Black person who gave me some encouragement was, I don't know if Pinky's was there when you went to school, it's like a chicken place inside Sproul [Hall].
>
> Sha Quasha: No, definitely not
>
> Yasmine: Okay, so a Black lady owned it and I went there to eat one time and she said 'look at you, look at what you're doin' and I think that was it. The fact that she wasn't even associated with the university and that's the only encouragement I got. Like I don't I don't think there's any other staff I interacted with that were Black
>
> Sha Quasha: That's interesting

Although this section opens with a discussion around Black faculty and staff, it is equally as important to include the student experiences that highlight relations between White professors and Black students. This is another area in the literature regarding Blacks students at PWI's that discusses the interactions between students and professors. At the end of the interview, I asked participants if there is anything else they would like to add or that should be considered. Sky had additional comments:

> Sky: Like interactions that like individuals have with like with professors because I think those like really [stretches out the word really] matter. I think since I've been at Berkeley, I've had some really negative interactions with professors, and I think that kind of has shaped me too because it's like gosh if the students don't like me and I can't even go to my professor then I really feel left out

I ask Sky to give an example of one of these negative interactions she has had with one of her professors:

> Sky: Yeah of course. So, I had one where I had really loved the professor, my Philosophy Professor...he kind of had that value where he spoke on the truths and he didn't deny anything. We always have really good interactions. He was like the first professor that I actually went to like office hours… I think he taught me that just because someone lectures and they seem like they're for the cause all the time, you know, it's just a part of their job description…and one time he had kind of made like a little [chuckles] he had alluded to a maintenance man or landscaper outside being like an illegal immigrant and I was kind of like okay, but you don't know that man so how do you know he's an illegal immigrant. So, I'm like, okay, well if you think that about that brown person, what do you think about other brown people. And so that was kind of a situation where he was like, he didn't directly do anything negative towards me, but it was kind of like well that's a little awkward even though he and I had always had good interactions

She provides an additional example of a negative interaction with her legal studies professor. In this example, she sets the scene of initially being ignored by another professor who was having a conversation with her professor but clearly seen her, and how her professor goes on not to physically acknowledge her and her seeking help:

> Sky: … so he was just like "ugh I'm sorry I just haven't had enough time I'll, I'll email you later." And I'm like, so, I was expressing that I was having difficulties and trying to grasp the concept of what I need to do to go to law school and you know that I needed guidance and you chose to not respond… And then the way that you did respond in front of the class and students, was kind of to belittle me like I wasn't—like don't try to make me feel like I wasn't speaking clearly or like I didn't deserve time, like I was just a bother. And so, he did email me that evening, but I didn't respond because at that point it was like well you've made me feel uncomfortable, I don't feel comfortable sitting down one-on-one with you either. And when he was talking to me, he wasn't even looking at me in my face, like he was looking somewhere else. So, I'm like okay well that's just bad interaction for me. Yes, I think that, that was the one that kind of like did it for me [laughs]

Yasmine discusses her feelings about dealing with non-Black professors and the way it impacts trying to speak up in the classroom:

> Yasmine: You know like you have professors sometimes, White professors, well not even White professors just non-Black, speaking on Black topics and just the way they come at it is so wrong and you feel like okay you're my professor how do I like say something but yeah feeling like you can't. So yeah, [small laugh] it's tough being a Black student at a PWI

Both Greg and Michelle were born and raised in the Bay area and had a more intimate connection and personal tie to the area. However, the ways that they navigated Berkeley were completely opposite. With her previous negative associations with education and troubling academic journey, Michelle did extra preparation to even consider applying to Berkeley. She took summer classes and participated in prep programs to make herself eligible for admission. Michelle sought help to have a chance at thriving on campus. As a student with a learning difference, in her story above, Michelle also brings awareness to the lack of support from departments like the DSP, particularly for Black students. Greg on the other hand did not believe he needed support with his academics or acclimating to the university:

> Greg: I really welcome the challenge, I wanted it. And that's why I chose Cal over all of the other schools that I got into, but definitely I was expecting academic rigor but also a great social life and great interactions with esteemed professors and stuff like that… I know that the Student Learning center, the SLC which I know it's for everybody but they do send out a lot of emails towards Black students or underrepresented students, although I haven't really had time to use those resources 1) because for the most part I don't feel like I really need them. The way that I work and operate in academic spaces I have a very set way that of doing things and I kind of just get my work done on my own time and so far it's worked for me very well

Although Greg's did not mention any negative interactions with staff or faculty in this regard, it cannot be assumed that he did not have any adverse experiences in attempting to seek support or if he sought support at all. Overall, the perceived lack of support from faculty and staff, especially Black faculty and staff, contributed to the isolation and detachment from the university that the students were already feeling. The participants' experiences further

support the research suggesting faculty and staff engagement is an important part of fostering belonging for Black students.

Pride and Community

This project is being completed in an interesting and especially culturally relevant time. It is currently February 2022, Black History Month. The world is being flooded with reminders about the legacy of Black historical figures and the contributions of Black people to America. We are reminded in emails, special sections in our favorite stores, spotlighted tv shows and movies on streaming services and of course, the media. A show I am watching cuts for commercial break, and I am not paying attention until I hear this specific State Farm commercial. I pause and listen. It is a 30 second clip about Black people being silenced in America and the power of uniting voices and coming together to make a change; it emphasizes the importance of supporting each other. The commercial ends with this tagline: "When we use our voices together, it's impossible not to listen." Again, we are reminded of how far we have come, but still how far we have yet to go. In theory, this message is great, and it highlights the community aspect. I also recognize this as an edited, commodified, and packaged piece of propaganda used by State Farm in collaboration with the Social Change Fund to promote their performative commitments to social justice. Nevertheless, as was mentioned earlier, it is still important to consider how the impact of media discourse and popular culture, particularly around staging Blackness (White, 2011) in this manner can influence the ways that Black students understand their relation to the Black community, including the one they are part of in college. I use this example to introduce this next section

on pride and community; two prominent themes that showed up throughout the participant responses.

Participants used phrases such as building community, making friends, social relationships to identify the importance of connecting to other students on campus. To provide clarity, the participants used the term community specifically referring to the Black community and the larger Cal community. I use this term in adherence to the participant's understanding of the social context and representative space for Black students, that is the Black community, which lives *within* the larger institutional context as well as the larger environmental community of practice that is UC Berkeley. I offer this to situate the reader's understanding of the participant's use of community.

Research has argued that integration is the key to successful student persistence in general (Messer, 2006). Wright and McCreary (1997) and Kim (2014) found evidence that increased retention and graduation was associated with overcoming barriers, finding motivation, and building support systems. It was also emphasized that there was a need for group support systems that focused on social support (Wright & McCreary, 1997). Additional research has found that same race & same gender groups (e.g., black sororities/ fraternities, clubs etc.) facilitate social integration and positively impact educational outcomes, particularly for Black students more than any other racial minority (Toliver, 2022; Wright & McCreary, 1997) This suggests a focus on allocation of resources to these areas for Black students that promote support systems (Wright & McCreary, 1997). The participants' responses confirmed this research, demonstrating the importance of support and community.

Toliver's (2022) study looks at how Black girls form community around the nerd identity, using a womanist perspective. The study concludes that Black girls, with their varied ways of being, need a space to fully be themselves. Toliver's research directly relates to the topic being explored, especially surrounding Black students and Black women striving for community in an academic space. This desire for community shows up in the responses and experiences of the participants. The small number of Black students, faculty and staff created scarcity and therefore a constraint for Black students that is not worth the risk of 'rocking the boat' as Michelle puts it. In this pressurized setting, to be part of the small community is better than to be separated from it, to have the chance for any amount of support. Yasmine discusses more intergroup tensions and the difficulty in trying to find support with such a small population of Black students:

> Yasmine: So, for zoom it was like nada, like there was no interaction with anyone and in 2019 I don't think I interacted much with any Black person, I had no Black professors, no Black classmates. I had joined the Black Student Union but it was at the same time as one of my classes so I couldn't go. So, I don't think I was able to build any community with any Black folk my first year and then when I would've tried, COVID happened and now that I've been back, I've been trying again, but it's like you said, like it's difficult when its [laughs] 1% of Black students… And it's like what if I go to a [BSU] meeting and there's like 10 people there, what if I hate 6 of the people, you know? You don't like everyone just cuz, you know, you're the same race so it's like at least give me options, give me options of friends to make. The point is it's, it's much tougher to be at a PWI when social media and the internet has made it easier for people to spread hatred and it can feel antagonizing

In an unstructured conversation following the formal interview, she provides additional commentary reflecting on social media's influence on the college environment and again the small Black student population:

> Sha Quasha: Is there anything else you would like to add?

> Yasmine: Social media and fake news have made like, made people more divided— I feel like there's even more on-campus students who are very much Trump supporters and very much conservative thinkers who you know even though they're at Cal with its history, like their way of thinking is so divisive and so when you are not able to have a community on campus to support you it's very easy to feel lost and also very easy to feel kind of attacked like damn, like I'm trying to have a good college experience but there's people out here like really racist, there's people out here who are prejudice, there's people out here who like, whose way of thinking is like so damaging to me and I just have no exit for that like I have no way to—you know, have reprieve from that because there's a 1% population and like no there's no way to really make a strong community

Sky adds to this narrative of having challenges in building community with her experience walking on campus and in an African American studies class:

> I've tried to get out or like smile if I don't have my mask like outside, but I don't know most Black girls or Black boys would, they kind of just like look at you like [looks to side] or they'll be with their Asian and White friends. In class in the beginning like the first week I had my African American studies class and that was like the most Black people ever I seen in a class since I've been at Berkeley. I tried to talk [to other Black students] but even then, it was kinda like they just didn't vibe with me I guess, so it was just like all right yeah

And yet, despite some of these intra group tensions, the low numbers of Black students and the typical feeling of isolation, being able to have community is powerful and influences the access, retention, and success for Black students. Research has been done particularly around Black undergraduate women at PWI's and similarly found that support across various levels (i.e., campus, faculty, and a support group) was an important part of their integration into campus life (Porter & Dean, 2015). The key takeaway is that the participants in that study articulated how they felt supported in their identity as a Black woman by being socially, culturally, and academically involved in the institution. Particularly notable was the power in having an African American women support group (Porter & Dean, 2015). And more, later studies have confirmed that having a safe haven in spaces where they have people

who look like them at a PWI was necessary for Black women's survival (Booker, 2016). In the earlier study mentioned about Black women's coping strategies, leaning on one's support systems was identified as a protective mechanism (Lewis et al., 2012). The findings gave insight into the use of support systems and for Black women it was important to have other Black women in their networks for validation and normalization of their experiences (Lewis et al., 2012). Collective coping (Lewis et al., 2012) showed up for Sonya, who talked about the support of her Black female friend, who were the only two Black people in a 300-person lecture and found each other:

> Sonya: Thank God I had my friend cuz we're going through the same shit, without her I think I probably would have been like I'm going to give up…We would always say don't worry you got this oh, we're in this together, we're not in this alone. We would take classes together, there might have been one class or so that we didn't take together but we would take our classes together and would encourage each other and it was just me and her it was almost as if it was always just me and her

This was present for some of the participants too like Brittany, who found a subset of community in her Black business organization:

> Brittany: I guess other advice is just, I got is to just find your community like the importance of finding your community with, like within Berkeley or within the Black community there's so many separate smaller communities so just find my community there and I think I did that

When the Black women used the term "community" they were specifically referring to the Black student community on Berkeley's campus. Greg used the term more generally describing the process of connecting with other people and really emphasized forming social relationships and networks. His definition of community did not include the Black identity or specifically connecting to the Black community. Though Greg did not mention explicitly seeking community in Black men or the Black community, he did talk about having

community in his club, BSA, and the fact that there were a lot of Black men in his intramural soccer club was nice (refer to section “Race Relations”). He also mentions being exposed to different people:

> Greg: … to meet people, put myself outside of my comfort zone to go do things I normally wouldn’t do and to meet people who I would never meet otherwise unless I put myself in these situations. I find it really important to just kinda put yourself in these social situations, so you know what you do and don't like in life

There is also literature that argues the need for community support is true for Black men too (Harper & Harris, 2006). Harper and Harris (2006) investigated the role of fraternities for Black men and found that Black men in Black Greek letter organizations tended to embrace a stronger sense of self, developed positive self-esteem and racial identity. Among their findings it was also revealed that they had increased chances in leadership development, mentorship opportunities and were able to build meaningful relationships (Harper & Harris, 2006).

I can attest to this experience of what it is like to have support from people who look like you. During the recruitment process for the new Counselor Education faculty, I attended the research presentations of the last two of four candidates. The first presentation was from a Black woman whose research centered on Black mental health. The representation of that moment was so important for both of us, being able to see another Black face, a Black female face. In the short time we spent together in this very public space, we talked and laughed, and she even offered to help me with articles related to my research. In this brief interaction, there was so much affirmation and encouragement for one another. And that is the power of community, for us two complete strangers to want to stay connected and support one another.

Moments like this and the emphasis on needing to *find* community when referencing the lack of Black students, signifies the conventions that occur which seem inconsequential (i.e., being friends with the only other Black person in a class) but are illustrative of the shared cultural knowledge among Black people in White spaces. The creation of the Black community as a subgroup challenges the culture of the dominant community but also highlights the coercive factor to create a space within a larger social context that they feel excluded from (Toliver, 2022). Not simply just community but what they receive from that community in the form of nurture, support, and relational bonds. All of this is necessary in terms of their identity and feeling a sense of belonging. Again, demonstrating the necessity for Black students to create support systems with each other and the importance for a safe space for Black students in an educational space (S. S. Smith & Moore, 2000; Toliver, 2022). With the small numbers of Black students on campus, it is this pride in themselves and their community that becomes the key to keeping these students determined and engaged with a campus that has repeatedly excluded them. Sonya talks about the feeling of being in community with just two other Black students walking on campus and what that meant for her:

> Sonya: Its funny cause I was with my Black friends, my Black guy friends yesterday and when we walked on campus, I almost felt like we were kings and queens because you don't see that, we don't see that, and I was like can we please take a picture and I asked this White girl can you take a picture of us. I felt so good I felt so empowered [shows picture]
>
> Sha Quasha: Oh nice!
>
> Sonya: It made me feel so good and so having that makes me feel like everything is okay, and don't you worry everything is going to be okay

And other participants talk about how they came to be proud of themselves and their race. Sky discusses feeling more pride in her Blackness specifically in the way she likes to be identified:

> Sky: My sister she calls me like ‘overly woke’ now because like we’ll be sitting there and I'll be like ooh uh see you know they did that because I'm Black and listen let me tell you why this is why this is happening [laughs] so she calls me overly woke, so I think I resonated with—like resonate with my Blackness like strongly, like in the past like if I would say you know the whole colorism thing like people would ask like “oh are you full Black” and I’d be like I’m Black but I got some Native American in me [laughs] like I would shy away from Black but now like today if people say like are you Black or are you African-American, I say no I'm not African American I'm Black like I'm Black AF like don't call me anything else
>
> Sha Quasha: That's great. I love that. I have a follow-up question, you said that in the past you would have shied away and maybe like you know say you’re Native American or whatever right. Like I feel like a lot of Black people say that like ‘I got a little Indian in me’ right [laughs] and now you say you're just like no like I'm this like you are proud of that right, so can you like walk me through like how you got there? So, like when you used to kind of shy away what does that look like and why did you feel like you needed to like shy away?
>
> Sky: I think it was just because it was like at that time like so what like 2015, 2014ish, it wasn't like cool to be Black like I didn't, I didn't hear like all this like ‘oh she natural yes Queen yes sis, it was kind of like ‘no bro’

This reminds me of my own decision not to associate with the Black community during my freshman year. I was obviously visibly Black, but I did not want to be associated with the struggle, assumptions and limitations placed on Black folk. So, like Sky, I distanced myself from the Black community, not to the extent of watering down my Blackness by saying I was mixed, but I made a conscious decision not to seek out other Black students. Research has shown that for Black students, stereotypes are one of the largest barriers to their academic success (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013). Now, having the language to recognize this behavior, I can name that we were dealing with stereotype threat, in that identifying so closely with the

Black identity would negatively impact us. But, also like Sky I found myself having a change of opinion and saw the importance of having the Black community in my corner. Other participants reflect on the journey of learning themselves and coming to terms with their racial identity in a positive way:

> Yasmine: But for me it took me a while to realize just by virtue of being who I am, I am enough. I am a Black woman, and that is enough

Sonya adds, describing how she feels about her Blackness now:

> Sonya: But I've learned to love the color of my skin I learned to say Sonya, you're unique God made you unique, everyone in this world is unique and, and be happy that you're unique be happy that you're tall, be happy that you're Black. I'm just coming to terms that like I'm proud that I'm Black, I never understood the 'Say it loud, I'm Black and I'm proud' until now

The participants' experiences in seeking community either on campus in general or specifically within the Black community demonstrates the necessity for peer support systems centered on social integration. It also provides evidence in the distinct experience that is the Black student experience. Having support in the form of community is an act of survival for Black students on these elite university campuses.

Defining College Success

Student success definitions encompass a variety of institutional actions, student actions and outcomes. From the student perspective, it is the expected benefits and rewards from receiving a postsecondary education (Kinzie & Kuh, 2017). Common measures of student success, or hard outcomes, include retention and graduation rates (usually within four years) and post-graduation employment (salary) (Baldwin et al., 2011; Zepke & Leach, 2010). Zepke and Leach (2010) introduce the concept of 'soft outcomes' that relate to aspects of interpersonal skills (social and coping skills), organizational skills (time management,

planning) and personal skills (motivation, confidence, reliability). Minority student success also measures retention and graduation rates but looks at factors such as campus culture, practices and programs that may influence attainment for students of color (Museus, 2011). In this study we explored definitions of success from the student's perspective.

All of the participants' definitions of a successful college experience changed in some way during their time attending Berkeley. Their definitions were influenced by what they tried in the past and what they were able to achieve at various stages along their college journey. Old definitions included good academics, passing grades and even popularity (i.e., being well known). Their new definitions included aspects like making connections, accessibility, networks, resources specifically for Black students and mentorship. For Greg he identifies success as interacting with as many different people as possible:

> Greg: Definitely taking advantage of social situations more, is my idea of a successful college career. Just while you're here on campus especially you know like after COVID you pretty much lost a year of your academics doing online school and you lose so much that way. So, this year I really wanted to change that and take advantage of like really being able to connect with people and meet face to face, be able to be invited to events and hang out with people. While your academics are important, I think that the relationships that you make in college matter a lot more in the long run and have a more drastic impact on your life. So, definitely the social aspect is important

Sky's definition focused on gaining knowledge, campus environment, and having professors who are committed to being honest and truthful:

> Sky: Uh yeah, I think that successful college experience is one in which the amount of knowledge that I'm gaining is just so much that my head hurts [laughs], like I'm trying to make sure that I come out as informed and aware as possible. I think also an experience that is comforting where– and where the professors are not denying the truths and the reality. That they're just as outspoken and blatant in the truth as possible, there's nothing that is being covered up. I think, I think those are just kind of like my, my main 3, somewhere where I'm getting a lot of knowledge. Oh, and an

> experience where I know that even when I have to leave there it's going to kind of like follow me and shape me

Brittany reflects on her earlier definition of college success and how it has changed:

> Brittany: Yeah that definitely changed cuz I guess I just didn't really know what a successful college experience was going to be, like going into college I was kind of more open with it like I didn't set too many expectations… my first couple of semesters on campus I started to think like okay college experience you know everyone's at frat parties I should go to frat parties and that's what makes it successful if I'm popular, and that's definitely changed now. I realize that's [popularity] not really important once you graduate no one really cares about that

In her new definition, she brings up feeling prepared for the 'real world, having a network, having fun and feeling that she belongs:

> Brittany: I think a successful college experience is being able to come out of college feeling prepared and feeling prepared to– that's like one) having a network and I think I've definitely been able to build the network throughout different student organizations and just meeting people in class and that kind of thing. Another thing in terms of feeling prepared is feeling like I'm ready to go into the world like on my own which I definitely feel like I'm able to do and Berkeley has been able to teach me that. Because, you know when you go out into the world especially like I'm going into like the corporate world after I graduate, and Berkeley just taught me to understand that like it's not always going to be what you think it is, you know, it's not easy for Black people in college, it's not going to be easy after college like it's kind of like an ongoing thing that you have to deal with microaggressions, and you know that kind of thing and I've definitely had to deal with some of those here at Berkeley which I think is just preparing me for what life is going to be like in the real world on. And then on top of that overall, just having fun is like what makes a college experience like successful you know not being too stressed out about everything, being able to find your community being able to eventually feel like you belong, and I definitely feel like now I belong…

She adds about making a difference, building community and giving back to the Black community in the form of mentorship:

> Brittany: …now it's more in terms of like your network who can I get connected with what kind of like community did you build that kind of thing and then and then also like what mark did you leave. I think it's in part of like having a successful college experience is just being able to say that like you made a difference like whether it's like a big difference like a huge, like you know I don't know you help me get the

> name of a building changed or like a small difference where you help them improve something. If you're able to give them [Black students] some good advice that they took with them so yeah. I think that's like probably an important part that I should mention earlier just like make that difference especially for the Black community just you know, being able to serve as like a resource and a mentor for you know the freshmen and sophomores

In her definition, it's interesting that Brittany notes that Berkeley has given her insight into how the world operates for Black people outside of Berkeley, and she feels it a part of college success is having that awareness.

For Michelle, her definition centered on larger institutional practice and recognition that the institution of higher education is systematically broken, especially in its mistreatment of Black students and in its responses to such issues. She specifically talks about wanting the Black identity and experience to be valued and respected:

> Michelle: Another college experience that is positive that I would want and that I thought would occur was just that literally my experience, experiences and my background and my identity were considered valid within the environment and like not always told that like it needs to be backed up with research. I think a lot of the times like anything concerning my identity in a lot of the things that other marginalized people specifically, Black people experience there's a lot of like, well where's the citation where's the research behind it, like you are definitely silenced…I really wish in these environments that the experiences that a lot of Black people have had were like up there with what you consider like the validation that research has but that's not the case. And I think it's very unfortunate that in particular Black people on campus are always asked to provide the proof regarding their experiences with stuff…I just I hope in the future like Berkeley is just a lot more honest about how they treat Black students on campus like I'm, I'm pretty much over the like the whole little thing they add at the end with emails of their dedication to like learning about the plight that Black folks and what Black students go through because like that's not the case

She also brings up the issue of accessibility and how the universities standards set unrealistic expectations that are a hindrance to students that affect them mentally and emotionally:

> Michelle: I think for me a successful college experience is accessibility, it has to be accessible, it has to be affordable, it has to be welcoming and it's supposed to shift

> your mind on academia, higher ed academia for the better. It's not supposed to like send you into depressive episodes and it's, it's really supposed to just be like a positive experience that you can say like I, like I grew personally emotionally physically from this experience. Like I know it's not always going to be positive, but I would say like it has– the hurdles that I've experienced this semester not to even have happened for me to say like yeah I learned and grew. Like fighting with the whole department on getting accommodations like I don't, like I don't want that to be considered like a powerful or like positive like college experience because that's not like some of the adversity shouldn't be normalized or like romanticized or glamorized whatsoever. But also during my time at Berkeley like I don't know, like I knew Berkeley would be tough, but I didn't know it would be this tough, I didn't know it would be this rigorous like an idea like yeah it was going to be hard but I didn't think they'd make stuff extra for no reason they put you through a lot for no reason…like it's, it's not it's not what it's cut out to be and I will say that it shifted my perspective on it being accessible and for everyone, I'm like stuck on my own to do these assignments and navigate these spaces and like have all these like expectations that are not humanly possible. So I think another thing as well that I'm learning is that I'm being held to standards and expectations that I know nothing of and it's made it difficult for me to understand how to grow as a person who does like academia and academics in some way when I've had negative experiences with it so I think that sucks as well

Yasmine's definition included community, connecting with faculty and a small focus on grades:

> Yasmine: I think growing up, I definitely thought a successful college experience was just getting, getting good grades and graduating. Now, I do find it really sad that I haven't been able to have the same experience I had in my community college like being able to find a community, make friends and uh kind of get good grades as well but also make connections with you know faculty or take advantage of all the experiences afforded to you like that's what makes a good college experience

And lastly, Sonya's definition of college success centered solely on supporting Black students with resources and being a part of a celebrated Black community:

> Sonya: I wish we had Black sororities, fraternities I wish we were loud on that campus, I wish that there was a lot of Black resources where it's almost as if like we were the golden ticket on that campus. I wish there were more Black professors, Black faculty, I wish there was more like resource centers in the front of the campus and not next to the police station and not in the back…I want Black therapists in our resource center so if we're feeling down or imposter syndrome, we can talk to them have like group therapy sessions. Also like weekly meetings with the Vice Chancellor

> where we could talk about our frustrations and make space for that so the Vice Chancellor can understand what the fuck we go through, just be loud, you know, like almost make this campus an HBCU…I want it to be more inclusive, I just want more Black students on the campus, I want us to come together…. I wish there was a fund like a specific one fund, over 20million dollars that only went to Black students, I wish there was grants for only Black students, not Asian, not Mexican, just Black. I want there to be a resource that if we can't pay our rent, we can go to that fund, and they can help us. And each college I want there to be like a study room for Black students, like there's the East Asian Library, where is the Black Library so that's what I want

The participants mention connection in some way and feeling that they have gained something from their experience they can carry on beyond the campus. A large portion of the participants also mentioned aspects that directly related to their racial identity and how the campus does not support the Black student community. The campus claims they are committed to diversity and demonstrate this with showcases like the "African American Initiative" but when you talk to these very students that this initiative is for, the interviews show that what the campus says is not rooted in the lived experience of these Black students. This interview question was asked: Berkeley has a variety of programs, initiatives etc. to address diversity issues. Are you aware of any of these, participated in any etc.? If so, what are your thoughts? Following are their responses:

> Yasmine: Uh, no. [pauses] Like besides like you know clubs that are geared for Black students like the BSU, Cal BSU, I can look at my email. Actually, I get emails from different organizations like the Black staff and faculty organization, African American student apartment, Cal black community from those groups. I think once I signed up for one list or, actually what probably happened is I put down 'I'm Black' on their questionnaire and they just put me in a list, on the email list cuz like I said don't think I signed up for anything, I just started getting emails. So besides what I get emails for, I think that's it. I think it would have just been whoever I get emails from like I don't hear about anything else. And if I had declined, well I don't know if you can decline to state your ethnicity but if I had I wouldn't know, I wouldn't know and I have not taken part in much, no.

Sonya: Um I don't even know what you mean like I don't know if you're talking about Fannie Lou [resource center], I don't know what we're talkin' about. I'm not sure I'm not sure, actually, I mean there's AASD, actually I don't know. Well, I got a Black scholarship from them but sorry I can't answer that question cuz I don't know. Hold on let me think, diversity programs [pauses for a few seconds] I, um…I dont know, sorry. But there are though?

Sha Quasha: yes, there's the African American initiative that was started in I think 2015

Sonya: What? Where do I find this information, because I want to know before I graduate

Sha Quasha: If you look on the diversity website, probably there.

Sonya: There's a diversity website? Shut up. [pulls up website] [surprised] what? I did not know that…wow.

Sky: [shakes head] uhn uhn, no

Sha Quasha: [laughs] Okay, they do exist just so you know. But that's fine you don't have to know

Michelle: I haven't heard any of it to be honest like I've heard like Black students say sometimes in like the recruiting events say 'oh like Berkeley wants more Black students or like Black students need to be at Berkeley more but personally I don't see any follow through even if it said some place I don't see follow-through like they still haven't made any concrete attempts of letting it be known and having it be seen like I feel like I don't see any of it to be honest

In Brittany's response she criticizes the efforts of her department, claiming that their diversity efforts puts the burden on the two minority clubs and their Black student outreach is lacking:

Brittany: I don't really know about what Berkeley's doing in terms of diversity. All I know what, since I'm a part of HUBBA [club] I know what Haas specifically is doing and I don't support their efforts like at all. I don't think it works, I don't think it makes sense like one of the things that they do is they mandate or they like they have a rule that in order to be a sponsored organization you have to have at least one diversity Center event and what usually ends up happening is all of the other organizations come and reach out to HUBBA to try to have some kind of diversity and inclusion event with us just because we're like one of them and kind of just puts a lot of burden on us because everyone's coming to us to try having the events but they wouldn't have

> reached out otherwise if this rule wasn't in place. They wouldn't really care, it's just kind of like not good in my opinion. They also have a program called RISE to help Black students get into Haas and it's a good program but it's not really reaching the Black community at all so I guess in terms of those efforts it's like it could be better, like outreach could be better. I was part of RISE and I think, I think it would have been better just like being more personalized like, the Black community is so small so it's really easy to like reach out one on one to talk to Black students, host like office hours so students can sign up like that kind of thing, it's super easy

She also talks about the successful diversity efforts on campus in general that she recognizes are mostly initiated and sustained by students:

> Brittany: In terms of diversity on like, the general like Berkeley campus, I don't know like, I don't know what the campus is doing. I know what other organizations are doing and there's a lot of organizations like dedicated, like student organizations dedicated to diversity and that kind of thing, which is also super helpful to just like, have those communities within like smaller spaces. And yeah, as far as the general campus maybe they're doing something, and I just don't know, but it feels like to me most of anything that happens in terms of diversity is through the students. And I guess one thing, two things I could think about is like BRRC [Black Recruitment and Retention Center], which I guess is like a campus department but it's, you know, its run by students, and that's actually, I think that's probably like the most helpful thing in terms of like increasing like diversity on campus, because they're actually going out to talk to high school students about Berkeley and, you know, serve as a mentor to them and that's really good

As participant accounts reveal, most thought the Black spaces like the African American Student Development Office or Fannie Lou Resource Center or the Black Student Union (BSU) counted as diversity programs, not recognizing that official resource centers or student organizations were not what was being referenced. Only one student in this study was aware of any programs or initiatives that existed at Berkeley, and especially any that were focused specifically on Black students. One of these programs is the NavCal course (Navigating the University of California, Berkeley) established by the Public Service Center associated with the Haas School of Business. This course was created by a Berkeley alum who comes from a non-traditional background and wanted a way to give back to the community. The purpose of

this course is to help non-traditional, marginalized students access and acquire resources on navigating the Cal campus. In direct opposition to the individualistic and competition model, this course emphasizes togetherness, community, and gaining resources through peer mentorship and shared knowledge. The only student who was aware of this course, Greg, was enrolled in it. The following is the exchange with Greg in response to the question:

> Greg: Um, so I'm definitely aware of that education opportunity program that helps first year and underrepresented students at Cal kinda adjust to campus life…Also, there's one more thing, what was it, it's something new with the sociology department on campus [pauses] but well one thing I do remember is the Berkeley connect program which is kinda for students who are new to academic spaces and there's a lot of um Latinx, BIPOC people and in those classes in general…those classes are really nice, it's just a welcoming warm environment for people to settle in and just to like to meet new people and learn about resources and take advantage of those resources at the same time
>
> Sha Quasha: Are you aware there is an African American initiative on campus?
>
> Greg: [smiles] Oh I am yes; I received a lot of emails from them
>
> Sha Quasha: Wow! You are literally the first person, you're the only person so far who is aware of that [laughs]
>
> Greg: Really?
>
> Sha Quasha: Yes
>
> Greg: I'm surprised because at Sproul Plaza, or Sproul Hall they have a lot of the information up like just on banners in front of this thing and I also get emails from them a lot too. Cause I signed up to get emails from them but uh, that's surprising to me
>
> Sha Quasha: That's probably why, yeah, from the Diversity office right?
>
> Greg: yeah.
>
> Sha Quasha: Yeah. That's really interesting, you're the only person that I've interviewed so far who actually is aware of more initiatives and stuff and programs. Everyone else is like" "What"

Black students are not even aware of the initiatives that theoretically exist to support them. And this lack of awareness, and lack of enforcement is evident in the continued negative climate issues experienced specifically by Black students. For students who have been there for at least two years, they are still unaware that these "commitments" exist and more importantly the outcomes of such initiatives are not reflected in these student experiences. The fact that this is the first time that most of these students heard about this initiative is extremely telling about the effort in effective implementation. As Brittany mentioned above, the successful campus diversity efforts that she is aware of are student led. This creates a situation where careful consideration must be given to how the university promotes and advances such initiatives. Whether a student who is 'Black AF' or one that wants to be seen as 'just a student, and not a Black student' the reality is, their Black identity is something that does dictate the ways that they navigate the elite university environment and define college success.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications of Research

Discussion

When I began this project, it was to tell the story about how the traditional markers of collegiate success (i.e., graduation and retention rates, employment, salary) were misaligned with the definitions of success for Black students. As the project ensued, it does still highlight some of those differences *and* it also offers additional insight into the Black student experience. The story of Black students' survival. Again, this is not a new story, and yet, this project provides even more context into the reality of Black student experiences through the lens of the Black students themselves, an aspect that has been severely lacking. This project set out to explore Black student's experiences at traditionally elite and PWIs. Participants were asked about their understanding of their racial identity, what their experience has been on campus with that racial identity and how they define a successful college experience. I used qualitative methods such as narrative interviewing and narrative analysis, case study conceptualization and peer debriefing. I openly coded the interviews, developing a color-coding system to develop categories and eventually the emergent themes. Holding a critical race lens, from this collection of Black students' conversations at Berkeley, major themes and patterns of experience were revealed around isolation and sense of belonging, race relations between Black students, including gender differences, interactions with faculty and staff, community, support and finally, definitions of college success.

The participants spoke a lot about feeling isolated, exclusion and a lack of belonging on Berkeley's campus in some way due to their racial identity. They mentioned feeling uncomfortable, unsafe, being stared at, blatantly ignored by students and professors, and

generally unwelcomed on campus. Most of the participants, except for one, talked about how stressful their experiences have been, leading to multiple mental health issues. There were intergroup conflicts and tensions between Black students that influenced how Black students felt about their belonging on campus. Particularly with a small Black population like at Berkeley, Black students were hyper aware of how they were perceived and interacted with other Black students. There were tensions around how Black students should behave on campus (e.g., to be loud or more conservative), tensions on who "counted" as Black (i.e., African and biracial people being labeled as Black) and assumptions on how Black faculty and staff should support Black students. Gender differences between Black men and Black women also showed up; from the female participants, their experiences uniquely included the intersection of their race and gender. There was a stronger tie to their Black identity and their womanhood, and they had more criticism about the institution and what needed to be different. They also had more of an emotional response regarding their experiences and used phrases such as "hurt", "anger" and "frustrated." On the other hand, the male participant did not seem to have a strong tie to his Black identity. In fact, he mentioned wanting to be perceived as simply a student instead of a "Black student." The male participant gave insight into how the patriarchal dominant culture of an institution can influence the way one does or does not have to think about navigating the campus. Another aspect that came up was the interactions between faculty, staff and students. Most of the negative interactions that these students experienced were again presumed to be influenced by their race. The participants mentioned not feeling respected by professors, feeling belittled and not able to receive appropriate accommodations to succeed academically. I have also found that for Black

students, their definitions of success were strongly tied to their development of social relationships (i.e., friendships, clubs), professional relationships (i.e., mentors, faculty, staff) and personal well- being (i.e., not feeling depressed or stressed) and if they felt they belonged on the campus. These findings demonstrate that elite universities and Black students have differing definitions of success and this mismatch can affect the overall college going experience. Overall, the participants felt that Berkeley was not doing well in supporting Black students and major changes needed to take place for course of action.

These findings are consistent with existent research regarding Black student experiences at PWIs which emphasize that Black students have a harder time than most marginalized groups adjusting to college (Feagin et al., 1996; Rodgers & Summers, 2008; Walls & Hall, 2018). The student experiences from this project can be studied to give insight into the Black student experience at other elite universities. The findings in this study do not represent the full picture; nevertheless, it invites more research specifically around a few subpopulations within the Black student population such as direct entry students, neurodivergent students, non-biracial Black males, differing gender identities and sexual orientations. It can be assumed that these layers would add even more variety to the range of experiences and insight into the Black student experience at elite universities. Moreover, research needs to be done regarding Black students at other elite universities, specifically outside of California, and in the private sector. These are additional contexts that may influence the experiences of Black students.

Implications of Research

There are four primary implications and recommendations that emerged from this study:

1. Systemic/institutional change
2. Leveraging Peer Support
3. Modeling Care
4. Faculty and Staff Re-engagement

These areas will be discussed further in the following sections.

Systemic Change

While I understand that long instilled policies will likely not change in the near future, it is still worth having the discussion and putting forth some recommendations. We know that, historically, institutions of higher education were not built with Black students in mind. Therefore, the very policies that dictate the campus environment are inherently exclusionary to Black students. Based on the interviews, it is apparent that one of the most important ways to address some of the issues is systemic and institutional change. Black students would have less difficulty adjusting to a campus if campus policies and practices did not persistently exclude and mistreat Black students.

I want to be clear that I am aware that other marginalized groups face barriers and difficulties and some that even overlap with Black students. At the same time, there is a distinct set of circumstances and histories that are particular to the Black student which is not experienced by other groups. For example, the historical remnants of the transatlantic slave trade, the current overt racist attacks, the increased instances of killing unarmed Black people by the police; these are not contexts that other groups experience in collaboration with the discrimination faced in higher education. In the university setting Black students are the only marginalized group that does not have grants, funds, or high-level resources to support them.

Black students bear the burden of being scrutinized for simply existing on campus. One might think with its proximity to areas with large Black populations like Oakland and its history of progressive social movements Berkeley might be better equipped to handle and address issues of diversity. Unfortunately, that is not the case. For example, one of the participants told a story about a viral video of an Asian student saying the 'N-word' in the dorms. Following that event, there was a campus wide email response from the Chancellor regarding the incident. The response included phrases like "we do not condone this behavior" but no mention of the consequences for the student or reference to the incident ever again. Instances like this demonstrate the lack of attention and care that campuses have toward holding people accountable for their actions especially in response to anti-Blackness and in support of Black students.

Another aspect of systemic change relates to the measures of success. The inclusion of traditional measures of success are still important and relevant to the conversation of racialized educational disparities. There is much to be said and researched from an institutional and policy perspective regarding consistent inequities between Black and White students. As traditional measures consider quantitative data points, these measures do not do a good job of representing or explaining how students are experiencing the campus on a social level. Undergraduate experience and campus climate surveys are conducted, and reports are available to review, however, this information is not used to determine success. So, it is equally important to also consider the sociocultural influences present that may contribute to these inequities, not as isolated instances. The patterned outcome of inequity between Black and White students says more about what the students are experiencing

instead of a reflection on their academic or success capabilities. Inspired by the research done in minority healthcare, the concept of cultural safety can be applied here. This research states that health organizations and healthcare professionals must work toward cultural safety and critical consciousness to progress toward health equity (Curtis et al., 2019). The same concept can inform higher education practice. Higher education institutions need to implement a culturally safe practice, one that challenges its own perspectives and cultural systems. Strategies need to be made with consideration from the perspective of the students and not from the perspective of the university. A practice that centers Black students and their experiences and is measured by factors of success defined by them. My research proposes that success measures, especially at elite universities should include indicators related to identity and belonging, such as did students feel they were able to build positive relationships, did they find community, did they feel supported in all their complexities and identities, and lastly, did they find support and encouragement from faculty and staff. These are examples of experiences that *all* students encounter in one way or another, and so the revision of success measures to include these indicators is beneficial for all groups of students.

Strength of Community, Care and Support

Mentioned in the literature review, it was highlighted that Black students' positive relation to a campus environment was influenced by the support they felt on that campus, no matter the institution type (HBCU or PWI) (Sherman & Slate, 2020). Thus, there needs to be an evaluation of existing resources and creation of new resources that promotes and nurtures community thinking, and that recognizes the importance of support. This strategy is

beneficial for all communities but especially for marginalized communities, and specifically for Black students. The call to action is to look at the Black student community from a strengths-based care perspective and consider how we can amplify their strengths.

Leveraging Student Support Systems and Community. In chapter four, there was research that centered on the importance of peer support systems that helped students integrate into campus life, noting that social integration was a key component of college success (Harper & Harris, 2006; Toliver, 2022; Wright & McCreary, 1997). There is also research that confirmed the success of peer groups, particularly for the acclimation and social integration for Black students, and not only how this is encouraged but a critical component in helping Black students persist (Kim, 2014; Toliver, 2022; Wright & McCreary, 1997). The participants in this project reaffirmed that student support systems are important for Black students and essential to their retention in the elite university context. This should inform the practices of the institution especially in leveraging peer to peer support systems. In every student's story, there was at least one person or group (club or organization) where students felt belonging and that contributed to their well-being, which ultimately encouraged them to continue at Berkeley despite some of the negative experiences they faced. Further, recent research released in 2022 related to the Black student experience at Ivy League institutions, confirms the experiences of the participants in this project, in that for Black students in elite university spaces, seeking Black community for support is an important part of their college journey. The authors suggest that institutions should encourage active participation in affinity-based groups on campus to facilitate community building for Black students (Johnson et al., 2022). I agree that there needs to be an allocation of dedicated resources that

promote community building among students and dedicated resources that support Black student groups. Leveraging student support systems and promoting community building for Black students presents the opportunity to center race and community in their college experience in a positive way.

Modeling Care. How do we model care? I want to offer an answer to this question by telling a brief story. While I was writing up the data analysis for chapter four, something interesting occurred. I received an email with the subject line: "Please Read! Recruitment for Undergraduate Research Study." This email came from a Black undergraduate student at Berkeley. My initial response was to read through the eligibility criteria to see if I could qualify to be a participant because I wanted to support this other Black student doing research. I began reading through the email and started to notice some similar parts to the outreach email I sent for my own participant recruitment. By the end of the email and after reviewing their flyer, it seemed that this student modeled their recruitment materials after mine. Upon this realization I had many questions about the course of action to take. Do I report the student? Do I reach out to them? I immediately thought, this is another Black student, what would it mean for them if this was escalated; they could possibly be kicked out versus a White student who might get a slap on the wrist for the same thing. I spent an hour considering what to do and ultimately decided to do nothing. My choice not to take action was primarily because they were a Black student and I felt justified that I was doing less harm to this student by not reporting this incident. I did not want to scare them (as somewhat of an authority as a grad student) and cause anxiety and fear especially if they may already be

having a difficult time. I was concerned with how their future might be affected. Although a minor event, it is yet another example of the challenges that exist for Black students.

This incident has less to do with the student modeling their recruitment materials after mine; the issue is that this event is indicative of the larger institutional issues in that Black students are severely lacking in understanding how to navigate university politics such as these. Now, I do not know anything about this student; I do not know if they asked for help or if they have proper support in pursuing research. However, with the historical (and current) mistreatment of Black students within education, it would make sense that in navigating this process on their own, the safer option would be to model their work after someone who looks like them instead of seeking guidance within the institution. If I did connect with this student, I would imagine that my questions to them would be concerning what support they have in understanding how to conduct research, from other students, staff or faculty. This is grounded in care. And this is the kind of practice student affairs professionals should be implementing. We need to decriminalize Black students and give them the same grace, patience and guidance that is afforded to other students. This is an example of liberatory practice that is needed. The advice for Black students has almost exclusively been focused on how to survive on campus. College should not be about survival. There needs to be a focus on nurturing students.

Faculty and Staff Re-Engagement. Research has shown that relationships with faculty play an important role in facilitating student engagement and success because of the many opportunities that faculty interactions can provide (i.e., research experience, mentorship) (Johnson et al., 2022; Wright & McCreary, 1997). As was highlighted in this study, the

nature of an interaction with faculty or staff can have a lasting effect on a student's perception of who they can trust and identify as support. With professors and administrators that are not familiar with the Black experience and unwilling to connect to Black students, this consistently creates an academic environment that is unwelcoming. For Black students it is even more necessary to have positive relationships with faculty and staff to enhance their sense of belonging on campus. Particularly at elite universities where the campus is predominantly White, the existence of Black faculty and staff is important, in terms of representation (e.g., seeing someone who looks like them). However, the bottom line is being able to interact with staff and faculty who have the cultural sensitivity, understanding and knowledge of interacting with students using a multicultural lens. Again, grounded in a framework of community of care, faculty and staff need more training on how their interactions influence student engagement in campus life and ultimately their college experience, especially for Black students.

Conclusion

The question remains: are elite universities for Black students or is there a cultural mismatch? I can confidently say, no, they are not for Black students. Historically, these institutions were not built for Black students, and they continue to function in this exclusionary way. Berkeley is a bubble; created by the traditions and histories of the institution and again its role in social justice movements. The latter being particular to the Berkeley campus and a nuance that exists for its Black students. And this concept of the bubble also exists for historically White and elite universities. These campuses too come with their own traditions, lore and histories that create their own contextual bubble. What these

campuses share with Berkeley is this restrictive social context that is tied to the elite institution's continued and unchanging ideologies and practices that Black students are forced to navigate for academic and social survival. The elite university context creates a particular set of conditions for Black students which causes them to share a common experience. Black people are socialized to be strong and resilient in the face of adversity but what if they do not want to be strong and resilient? And, more importantly, we should not have to be. Our educational journey is overrun by trying to get our basic needs met and appropriate treatment as people. That is an issue.

While Berkeley is not illustrative of all Black students at all elite universities, it adds to an emerging conversation around the experiences and lives of Black students in this type of pressurized setting. A setting with high standards and expectations, the ability for Black students to thrive academically and socially is constantly threatened by institutional inaction and neglect. This neglect manifests into the practices of faculty, staff, and even other students, creating a campus environment that is unwelcoming, exclusionary and not enjoyable for Black students. The socioemotional aspect of peer support groups with students that look like them is one part of the equation for Black student success; the other, is proper policies that have multicultural sensitivity embedded in its practice. Maybe the problem is not about Black students at all; maybe the problem is that elite universities should have more responsibility and accountability in fostering belonging, regardless of race, considering their selectivity and competitiveness. For elite universities their historically exclusionary practices transcend and continue to be part of their practice and ideology, even for schools like Berkeley who, although is a public institution and typically characterized as more liberal, still

contribute to creating an isolating environment due to their lack of efforts in understanding the complexities of "othered" students. My research asks us to think critically about Black students' experiences at elite universities and how that context influences Black students' perceptions of achievement and college success. Black students are dealing with hurdles that are not related to academics, but that can very well negatively impact their academic achievement. How do we mitigate these issues? How can we resolve the issue of Black students existing on a campus without people having a visceral reaction to their presence? The aforementioned suggestions and strategies, although aimed at improving the Black student experience, are beneficial for all students. All students need peer support, all students need positive relationships and engagement with faculty and staff, and all students need to feel cared for by their institution. These are the drivers of success.

A lot of this project has discussed the transgressions against Black students. I want to use this platform to change the mindset that Black students are lacking. Instead, we should be considering all of their strengths. Speaking on the strengths, the talents, the complexities, and the multifaceted nature of the Black student identity that emerges more profoundly in a historically White, White practicing and elitist space. I agree that a historical understanding of Black people in America is important, and relevant to consider *and* there also needs to be a commitment to being proactive and a continued learning about what Black students need to thrive and cultivate resources around those needs. I chose the option to undertake a thesis, with the understanding that it would be published. This is a challenge to the continued problematic institutional practice; this is meant to be an intentional disruption to the system.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Emails

Email Template to Staff

Subject: Recruitment for Graduate Study Research

Dear (Staff Name),

My name is Sha Quasha Morgan, and I am a graduate student in the Counselor Education department at San Jose State. I am also an alum of Cal; I graduated in 2016 with a degree in American Studies.

I am contacting you because I am looking for participants for my Master's thesis that involves research which focuses on the lived experiences of Black students at elite universities and uses UC Berkeley as a case study.

The study asks for participants to be available for a 1 hour Zoom interview. I've attached the flyer with some of the eligibility requirements and the QR code for students to access the survey link. I am asking if you could please circulate to appropriate student networks, share via social media and or newsletters. If there are other people/ departments I should contact, I'd appreciate it if you could direct me to them as well.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study you can reach me at shaquasha.morgan@sjsu.edu or my faculty advisor, Jason Lakerat jason.laker@sjsu.edu.

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Sha Quasha Morgan

Email Template to Faculty

Subject: Recruitment for Graduate Study Research

Dear (Faculty Name),

My name is Sha Quasha Morgan, and I am a graduate student in the Counselor Education department at San Jose State. I am also an alum of Cal; I graduated in 2016 with a degree in American Studies.

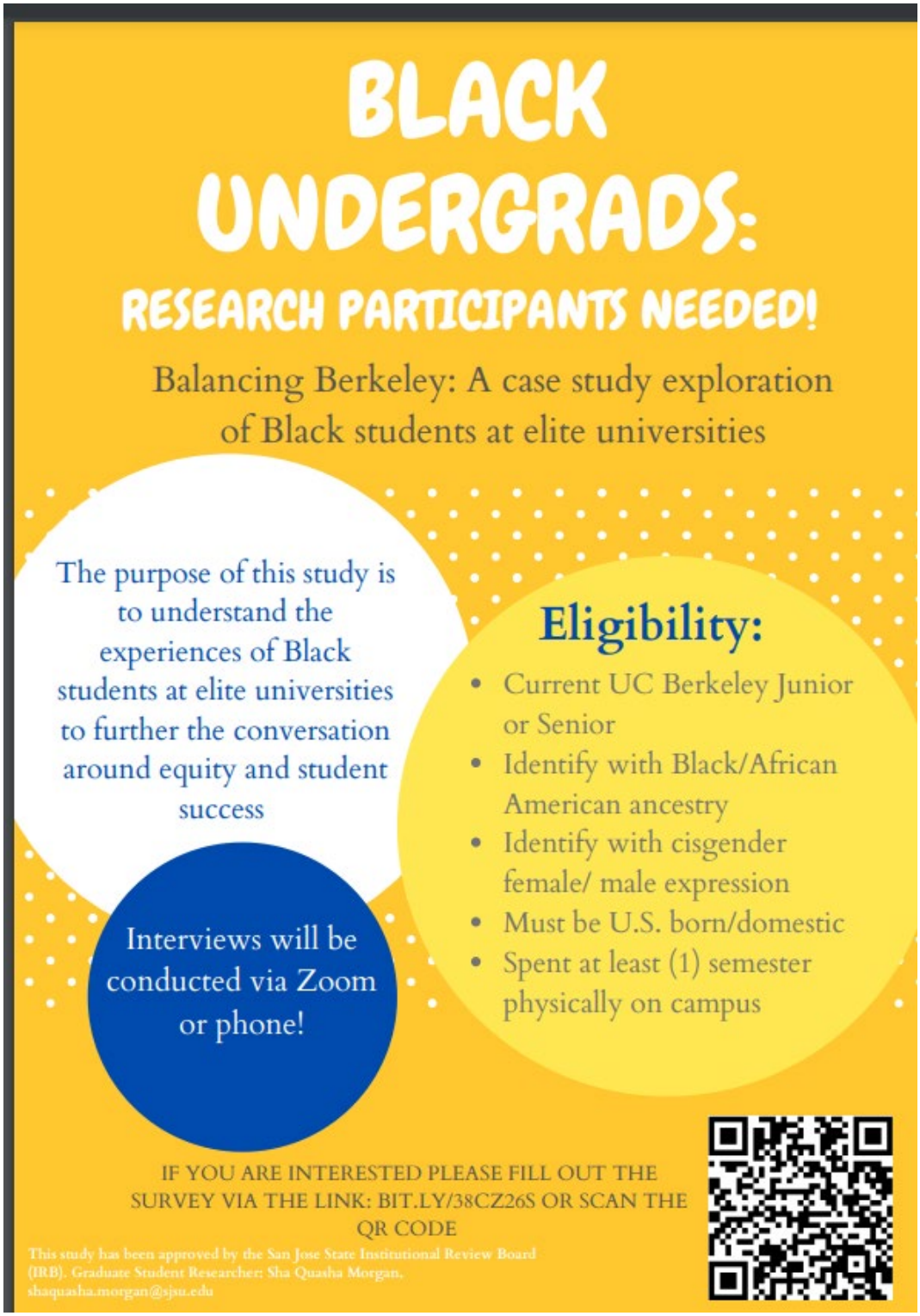
I am contacting you because I am looking for participants for my Master's thesis that involves research which focuses on the lived experiences of Black students at elite universities and uses UC Berkeley as a case study.

The study asks for participants to be available for a 1 hour Zoom interview. I've attached the flyer with some of the eligibility requirements and the QR code for students to access the survey link. Please circulate to your classes or individual students who you think may be a good fit. Alternatively, I can do a brief virtual presentation to your classes if preferred. If there are other people or departments I should contact, I'd appreciate it if you could direct me to them as well.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study you can reach me at shaquasha.morgan@sjsu.edu or my faculty advisor, Jason Lakerat jason.laker@sjsu.edu.

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Sha Quasha Morgan

Appendix B: Recruitment Flyer



Appendix C: Consent Form

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

TITLE OF THE STUDY

Balancing Berkeley: a case study exploration of Black student experiences at elite universities

NAME OF THE RESEARCHER

Sha Quasha Morgan, San Jose State University graduate student
Thesis Committee Chair: Jason Laker Ph.D., Department of Counselor Education

PURPOSE

The purpose of this research is to further understand the realities of Black students at elite universities. Using case study conceptualization, the intention is to provide commentary concerning the various experiences imposed on Black students in this particular setting. Interviews will be conducted to better understand the intertwined relationship between identity, success, and campus socialization. This project intends to add to the important conversations around Black students, educational equity, and student success by offering a snapshot into the experiences of Black students at elite universities.

PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to engage in a 1 hour Zoom or phone interview on an agreed date and time. Audio from the interviews will be recorded and transcribed by the graduate student researcher.

POTENTIAL RISKS

The potential risks for participating in this study are minimal. There may be emotional discomfort due to the sensitive nature of the topics.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

There are no direct benefits from participating in the study. However, indirect benefits may include personal insight about experiences and contribution to the literature and scholarship involving the core topics in the study.

COMPENSATION

No compensation

CONFIDENTIALITY

The findings from this study will be published for academic purposes. No identifying information such as names, numbers or emails will be included. As a case study, only UC

Berkeley will be named. Reference to participants will include pseudonyms or grouped as part of larger thematic observations. Since I am a mandated reporter, I must report any information disclosed about harm to self, harm to others and child and/or elder abuse.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can refuse to participate in the entire study or any part of the study without any negative effect on your relations with University of California, Berkeley. You also have the right to skip any question you do not wish to answer. This consent form is not a contract. It is a written explanation of what will happen during the study if you decide to participate. You will not waive any rights if you choose not to participate, and there is no penalty for withdrawing or stopping your participation in the study.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.

- For further information about the study, please contact graduate student researcher, Sha Quasha Morgan, shaquasha.morgan@sjsu.edu or the Faculty Advisor, Dr. Jason Laker, jason.laker@sjsu.edu.
- Complaints about the research may be directed to the Counselor Education Department Chair Dr. Dolores Mena, dolores.mena@sjsu.edu.
- For questions about participants' rights or if you feel you have been harmed in any way by your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Mohamed Abousalem, Vice President for Research & Innovation, San Jose State University, at 408-924-2479 or irb@sjsu.edu
- **SIGNATURES**

  Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to be a part of the study, that the details of the study have been explained to you, that you have been given time to read this document, and that your questions have been answered. You will receive a copy of this consent form for your records.

  Participant Signature

_____ _____

Participant's Name (printed) Participant's Signature Date

Researcher Statement

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to learn about the study and ask questions. It is my opinion that the participant understands his/her rights and the purpose, risks, benefits, and procedures of the research and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

_____

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent Date

Appendix D: Demographic Pre-Interview Survey

SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY

Thank you for your interest in participating in the case study, Balancing Berkeley: a case study exploration of Black student experiences at elite universities. Please complete the following survey which will determine your eligibility.

First and Last Name (preferred name, if applicable)

Please provide an email address where you can be reached

Please provide the best phone number to reach you, if needed

Please provide the best phone number to reach you, if needed

What is the best time to contact you by phone if needed?

- ◯ Morning (8-11am)
- ◯ Afternoon (11-4pm)
- ◯ Evening(4-8pm)

What is your age?

- ◯ 19 - 21
- ◯ 22-25
- ◯ 25+

What best describes your nationality?

- ◯ American (U.S. born)
- ◯ Non U.S. country
- ◯ Dual citizenship
- ◯ Decline to answer
- ◯ Other

Do you identify as Black or African American?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Do you identify as biracial or multiracial? If so, please list the races/ ethnicities?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No, I do not identify as biracial/ multiracial

If you must choose, what best describes your gender identity?

- ◯ Cisgender Male
- ◯ Cisgender Female
- ◯ Non-binary
- ◯ Transgender
- ◯ Decline to answer
- ◯ Other

What is your current class level?

- ◯ Junior
- ◯ Senior
- ◯ 5th year

Have you spent at least one(1) semester physically on campus pre COVID-19?

- ◯ No
- ◯ Yes

SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY

Thank you for completing the survey! If selected for the study you will be contacted via the email listed with next steps including the consent form to be signed.

Appendix E: Interview Protocol

Pre interview:
Once eligibility is verified, participants are contacted via email to review and sign the consent form. After consent has been received, a date and time will be set to conduct the interview.

Introduction:
Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this study. Your experiences are a very important part of the larger story that I am exploring. I wanted to give a little background about why I chose this topic. There is a strained and tainted relationship between Black people and education. Presently, we continue to see history repeat itself in many aspects of our everyday lives. As a Black undergrad at Cal, I questioned my belonging there, my worth and my potential. I chose this topic because I wanted to dig deeper into the world of elite universities, and I wanted to understand how Black students navigate these spaces and how they foster racial and academic identities. I am not here to make any assumptions, just to listen and learn. This time together is meant to be a discussion; I hope through this research project we can shed some light on the complex and nuanced academic and social experiences of Black students, particularly in the context of elite/ prestigious institutions.

The interview will consist of roughly 50 minutes, which is approximately 6-7 minutes to answer each question. As a reminder, I will be recording the interview. As mentioned in the consent form, none of your personal information will be included in the study. Are there any questions before we begin?

Questions:
1. Why did you choose to volunteer for this research study?
2. Why did you choose to attend Berkeley?
3. As you thought about your acceptance to Berkeley, what were your expectations about what your experience would be?
4. You self -identified as (refer to survey responses for racial identity); How did you come to know that? How do you currently relate to your racial identity?
    0. What has your experience on campus been with this racial identity? (expansion on Q4)
5. What kinds of advice, warnings and/or encouragements did you receive from other Black staff, faculty or students on campus, if any?
    0. What about from people of other races?
6. Berkeley has a variety of programs, initiatives etc. to address diversity issues. Are you aware of any of these, participated in any etc.? If so, what are your thoughts?
7. What is a successful college experience for you? What is included? Has it changed from what you originally thought?

Closing:
Thank you again for your help. It's been a pleasure to chat with you about your experience. If you know someone who may be interested in participating, please share my contact information with them. If you have any follow up questions, feel free to email me.

Appendix F: Color-coding Legend

Feeling of not belonging
Community/ Support
Motivation/ expectations
Racial/Identity
    Intergroup differences
    Gender differences
Interesting quotes- not sure what to code yet
Racial consciousness development

Word or Phrase	Codes	Theme
Scared, fearful, voice not heard, hurt, angry, frustrated, bothered, lost, imposter syndrome, ignored	Exclusion	Belonging
Unwelcoming, uncomfortable, glare, stares, limiting, dirty looks, shocked	Environment	Belonging
Small population of Black students, population is so small, there's only a few of us, the only one, speck of color, lack of community	Black student population	Isolation
Rigor, standards, expectations, large challenge, #1 public university, tough, world-renowned, esteemed professors, stressful, top student, prestige, stupid	Academic difficulty, pressure to prove	College Success
Their institution, I don't belong here, those campuses	Exclusion	Belonging
Vibe, support, community, feel good	Connection with other Black students	Support
I belong here, I am enough, self-reassurance, empowered, beautiful, gorgeous, proud	Pride	Community/Support
Both sides, just a student, rejected	Racial Identity difference	Intergroup Difference
Black woman, athletically oriented	Gender Difference	Intergroup Difference