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From Their Eyes: Using Funds of Identity to Explore the Experiences of Black Women in a California Community College

Author
Cobb, Rebecca

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From Their Eyes:
Using Funds of Identity to Explore the Experiences of Black Women in a California Community College

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

by

Rebecca Lorine Cobb

2020

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

From Their Eyes:

Using Funds of Identity to Explore the Experiences of Black Women

in a California Community College

by

Rebecca Lorine Cobb

Doctor of Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2020

Professor Cecilia Rios-Aguilar, Chair

There is scant research about Black female students in community colleges. A review of statewide data on Black women in California Community Colleges reflects similar challenges faced by their Black male counterparts. However, there is little attention paid to the experiences of Black women in community colleges. This study examined the experiences of Black female students on a nationally recognized California community college campus, Rose City Community College (RCCC). Specifically, the study centered their lived experiences through a funds of identity ((Esteban-Guitart, 2016; Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014) lens and from a Black Feminist frame. The study included secondary data analysis of research and data about Black

female students at the selected college. The study was a phenomenological qualitative study centered on in-depth interviews of 11 Black women who were enrolled at RCCC at the time of the study. Findings from the study revealed that the college had little data available regarding Black women specifically. The interviews illuminated the following findings: Black women use their funds of identity to navigate/survive various forms of personal, educational and societal abuse; conflicting messages and stereotyping effect the experiences of Black women in the classroom and on campus; Black women experience invisibility, hypervisibility, and microaggressions in the classroom and on campus; and the experiences of Black women are not monolithic. This study fills the research gap that exists related to Black female community college students, particularly from the lens of a Black female scholar-practitioner. The study also provides a critical analysis of the efforts made to understand the experiences of Black women by an institution recognized as a leader in equity.

The dissertation of Rebecca L. Cobb. is approved.

Christina Christie

Robert Cooper

Kimberley Gomez

Cecilia Rios-Aguilar, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2020

DEDICATION PAGE

This dissertation is dedicated first and foremost to my parents, Erika and Talmage Cobb Sr. for their many sacrifices, unwavering love, and support throughout my life. They helped me raise my sons and made it possible for me to pursue my educational and professional goals and let me cry and scream when I needed to. Though you are not with us now Daddy, you have been with me the whole way. Talmage, my brother, and my lifelong best friend, this is for believing in my intelligence and ability, even when I didn't see it in myself. Trying to outdo you, paid off!

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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VITA

EDUCATION

California State University, Long Beach — **Long Beach, CA**
Master of Science, Counseling
Student Development in Higher Ed

University of California, San Diego — **La Jolla, CA**
Bachelor of Arts, Political Science

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Dean of Student Life, Rose City Community College

Director of Student Development, El Camino College

Student Affairs Advisor, Rose City Community College

Student Activities Coordinator, University of California San Diego

Alumni Relations Coordinator, Southwestern University School of Law

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Counseling 12-Personal Development & Leadership
Rose City Community College

Counseling 30-Leadership Development
Rose City Community College

Graduate Teaching Assistant
Student Development Theory in Higher Education
Master of Counseling Program
California State University, Long Beach

PRESENTATIONS

- African American Women in Politics: A Snapshot of Resilience (Democratic Women's PAC)
- Utilizing Restorative Justice in Student Conduct: California Community College Chief Student Services Annual Conference
- Developing Effective and Responsive Title IX Policies & Procedures-California Community College Student Affairs Administrators and Chief Student Services Annual Conference
- Effective Partnerships for Behavioral Intervention Teams on Community College Campuses (FBI TARGET Regional Training on Higher Education Campus Safety)

- Holistic Wellness for African American College Students: Young African American Women's Conference
- First Amendment Issues on College Campuses: Time, Place & Manner (Community College Leadership Forum)
- New Laws in Student Conduct Procedures: California Community College Student Affairs Association

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Association of Student Conduct Administrators
ATIXA- Title IX
NABITA-Behavioral Intervention
American College Personnel Administrators
Association of California Community College Administrators
National Association of Student Personnel Administrators
California Community College Student Affairs Administrators

LEADERSHIP AND INVOLVEMENT

- President Appointee to USC Race & Equity Center Equity Leadership Alliance
- SanFACC Mentor
- Management Association, Vice President and Coordinator, Rose City Community College
- Former Foster Youth Advisory Committee, Rose City Community College
- Disabled Students Advisory Committee, Rose City Community College
- President, Vice-President, and Parliamentarian at the Association of Black Employees, Rose City Community College
- Member, President's African American Advisory Committee, Rose City Community College
- Founding member of the Assessment, Intervention, and Management for Safety Team, El Camino College
- Vice-President and Southern Region Representative, California Community College Student Affairs Association
- NAACP, Pasadena Branch
- YWCA, Pasadena Branch

AWARDS & RECOGNITION

- Educational Leadership Program Dissertation Scholarship, UCLA
- California Community College Student Affairs Association Professional Scholarship recipient
- Classified Senate Scholarship recipient
- Risser Award for Outstanding Support for Education

Chapter 1: Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the unique and complex experiences of Black female community college students. The study focused on how Black women[1] develop their core identities and how they integrate those identities with their roles as students, and in response to their experiences on campus (Esteban-Guitart, 2016; Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014).[2]The study included secondary analysis of available data from Rose City Community College (RCCC) about Black women. I also explored issues of systemic and structural inequities that may negatively impact the educational success of Black women (Lewis et al., 2013; Patton & Croom, 2017; Winkle-Wagner, 2015).

Studies of Black female students in higher education tend to focus on the experiences of Black women who attend predominantly white universities and Historically Black Colleges and Universities. However, more than half of all African American students enrolled in post-secondary education are enrolled in community colleges. In California, Black students account for 5.6% of the overall community college enrollment, and African American women make up just 5.6% of women enrolled in California Community colleges (CCCCO, 2019). This data from the California Community College Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) indicates little difference in the completion rates between African American men and women in community colleges, yet there are great efforts being made to understand the identities and experiences of Black male students. There is little comparable attention directed toward Black women. This chapter will discuss assumptions made about Black women in higher education that may preclude the community college system and institutions from addressing the needs of Black female students.

[1] This study will use the terms Black and African American interchangeably to encompass all women who identify as Black. Some of the literature cited use the term African American exclusively.

[2] Funds of identity is defined as resources, skills and knowledge constructed and appropriated by individuals to form their identity. (Esteban-Guitart, 2012)

Chapter 2 will set the context of California Community Colleges and efforts toward diversity, inclusion, and equity, and the impact that has had on progress for Black students, women in particular. I delve further into the research and literature related to the identity and experiences of Black women at post-secondary institutions. I will also delve into three theoretical frames of Black Feminist Theory (Collins, 2000; Collins & Bilge, 2016; Evans-Winters & Love, 2015; Evans-Winters, 2019), Intersectionality (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1989, 1990; Patton & Harris, 2019) and Funds of Identity (Esteban-Guitart, 2016; Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014) as a means of using a relevant, affirming and asset lens to understand the lived experiences of Black female students attending RCCC.

Background

In 2018, the Chancellor of the California Community College system delivered an edict to all districts and colleges in his Vision for Success to eliminate equity gaps for all students in 10 years (CCCCO, 2018). Throughout the state, equity efforts have focused on Black and Latinx students because they experience the greatest equity gaps throughout the system. Initial programs and efforts have emerged to support Latinx students, who are the largest ethnic group, yet have very low success rates. There has been a focus on men of color, particularly Black male students, as data reflects that they have the highest gaps in all categories, across access, persistence, and completion. However, no such attention is paid to Black women. Their success rates are reflected primarily in the aggregate data for all Black students. Examining statewide data shows that Black women persist and complete at rates only slightly higher than Black men (CCCCO, 2019). But because the plight of Black men is perceived as more abysmal and prolific, there is scant attention paid to what is happening with Black women. This is a problem because for community colleges to end equity gaps and improve success rates for Black students, the

experiences, challenges, and voices of Black women must be heard and included in the strategy to create system-wide change.

The data for African American women, regarding access and enrollment in higher education, has been touted as a tremendous accomplishment, particularly in comparison to their Black male counterparts. For a period, it was even proportionally greater than the advances of other minoritized racial and ethnic groups (Strayhorn & Johnson, 2014). Data retrieved from the American Council on Education's Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education Status Report (2019) showed that Black women constitute 62.2% of the overall Black undergraduate student population compared to 37.8 % for Black men. This is the greatest gap of gender disparity among all racial/ethnic groups. The same data set revealed the variance among higher education sectors. In the 4-year public institutions, Black women were 27.7% of Black students enrolled compared to Black men at 26.8 %. At 4-year private institutions, Black men were enrolled at slightly higher percentages, with 13.7% in comparison to Black women's 12.5%. At 2-year public institutions, Black men were enrolled at a higher rate than Black women, 46.8% to 42.39% (Espinosa et al., 2019). Black women enjoyed an overall increase in enrollment in post-secondary educational institutions from the late 1990s to 2011, a growth attributed to the increase in access to for-profit institutions. For-profit institutions enrolled the second largest percentage of Black women in post-secondary institutions. There was a drop in enrollment for Black women in 2011 due to tighter regulations being imposed on for-profit institutions (Commodore et al., 2015; Iloh & Toldson, 2013). Community colleges enroll the largest number of women in higher education, 54%, and more than half of all African American undergraduates (American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), 2017; Walpole et al., 2014). The picture that is often painted is that Black women are out-enrolling and out-performing their

Black male counterparts in higher education. (Fisher, 2016; Strayhorn & Johnson, 2014). However, a review of statewide data for California community colleges indicates this representation is more complex, depending on enrollment status. Black women who transfer from another college or are returning students do indeed enroll in higher numbers than African American men. Black women who enroll in California community colleges for the first time do so at a slightly lower rate, approximately 1% less than Black men. California Community College Chancellor's Office 2018 shows enrollment for first time African American female community college students was 5.6% of the overall female population, compared to women in other racial and ethnic groups: Asian 10.05%, Hispanic 51.72%, and White 20.8%. Reviewing the enrollment data over time reveals a decline in for Black women from 7.2% in 2012 to 5.68% in 2017 (CCCCO, 2018). The same data also confirms that persistence and completion rates for Black women are similar to that of Black men, between 35% and 41%. (CCCCO, 2018). This contradicts the generalization that Black women are accomplishing their educational goals at significantly high levels, leading to the perception that institutions are not compelled to address the needs of Black women.

Statement of the Problem

Black women may enter post-secondary education in higher numbers than their counterparts and some may continue to completion, but they do so with little systematic support that specifically addresses the barriers they may encounter (Banks, 2009; Commodore et al., 2015; McDaniel et al., 2011; Patton & Croom, 2017). Black women's success is under-examined because of the practice of looking at Black students in aggregate. The insights gained from the research are therefore lacking concerning how their experiences may be racialized or gendered (Strayhorn 2012; Winkle-Wagner, 2015). Research on Black women has been obscured in recent

years by efforts to respond to the "crisis" for Black men in community colleges (Banks, 2009; Patton & Croom, 2017; Strayhorn & Johnson 2014). While there may be some commonalities between Black men and women in higher education, just as the experiences of the two groups are not monolithic, the solutions for supporting their achievement and well-being may not be the same. The lack of focus on Black women may hinder any strides institutions attempt in reducing equity gaps, increasing completion rates, and enhancing the college experience for Black women students (Strayhorn & Johnson, 2014; Winkle-Wagner, 2015). As California moves to a student-centered funding formula that ties college coffers to completion and post-completion outcomes, institutions will need to make concerted efforts to ensure the success of all student populations (CCCCO, 2017).

There is scant research on Black community college female students and their experiences. The literature on Black women in college focuses primarily on students who attend predominantly white universities. More research in this area is particularly relevant for community colleges at a time when the California Community Colleges are focused on eliminating opportunity and equity gaps for specific groups and simultaneously creating guided pathways to improve completion. At this very pivotal time, we as a system, must not overlook sexist or racist cultures and practices that may negatively affect Black women students. It is not acceptable to mask the microscopic statistical achievements of Black women by comparing them to the abysmal conditions for Black men (Lewis et al., 2013, 2016; Patton & Croom, 2017). With little research on Black women students in community colleges, it is difficult to know or understand what the contributing factors are to the inequitable educational success rates reflected in the data.

The majority of existing research on Black women in community colleges focuses on

faculty and administrators. There is little research that examines the experiences of Black female students in community colleges. Additionally, the current research is often portrayed through a deficit lens, in other words, trying to identify what is wrong with Black women, rather than affirming what they bring to college spaces and looking into how institutions may be failing them. With little research on Black women students in community colleges, it is difficult to know who they are or understand how they experience their campus spaces. I examined Black women from a holistic perspective that included their cultural, personal, and social contexts. I connected these contexts with the intersections of their identities and explored how their identities were impacted by interactions with faculty, staff, and their peers, as well as the socio-structural campus environment. The women in the study were encouraged to discuss whether their experiences affected progress toward their educational goals.

Research Questions

To gain an in-depth understanding of who these women are and the context in which they attempt to maneuver within the RCCC community college. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How are Black women's funds of identity integrated into their role as students?
2. What are the experiences of Black female students on a community college campus?
    a. What are they experiencing in the classroom?
    b. What are their interactions with staff and other students?

Conceptual Framework

The approach to this study drew from three primary theoretical frameworks: Black Feminist Theory (Collins, 2000; Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1989; Evans-Winters & Love, 2015; Patton, 2017), Intersectionality (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1989, 1990;

Patton & Harris, 2019), and Funds of Identity (Esteban-Guitart, 2016; Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014). These concepts allowed me to use my lens as a Black woman to center and understand the intersectional identities and lived experiences of Black female students and how they used their funds of identity to navigate RCCC.

The Black Feminist framework is important as it was developed and defined by Black women. It asserts that the position of Black women has been controlled to keep them in a subjugated status, it rejects the stereotypical definitions applied to Black women by others, and it also affirms that not all Black women are oppressed in the same manner, but as a group experience oppression based the intersection of their race and gender. Black feminist theory incorporates the concept of intersectionality (Collins, 2000, Crenshaw, 1990) as it examines the experiences of Black women from a holistic perspective, not exclusively as members of the Black race nor solely through the lens of being female, but from the lens that Black women exist within dually oppressed identities.

The Funds of Identity concept (Esteban-Guitart, 2016) emerged from the funds of knowledge literature (Rios-Agular et al., 2011) asserting that there are competence and knowledge embedded in the culture, family, and lived experiences of students of color. Funds of Identity (Esteban-Guitart, 2016; Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014) explores how cultural and familial funds of knowledge extend to the individual identity of students through their own life experiences and development of resources they use to define themselves.

These concepts allowed me to explore the experiences of Black female students from the lens of a Black woman, to understand how the participants incorporated their lived experiences into their current identities, enabled them to respond to negative incidents, but also challenging the often racist and sexist campus environment. These concepts framed the critical lens I used to

analyze the available data about Black women at RCCC.

Overview of Research Design

I conducted a qualitative study utilizing in a short demographic survey, in-depth interviews, and secondary data analysis, through an inductive process building thematic patterns (Creswell, 2018). I employed a phenomenological qualitative research approach to capture the lived experiences of Black female community college students in their own words. According to Merriam and Tisdale (2016), phenomenology allows us to study and bring to consciousness people's daily experiences. This type of qualitative research was appropriate for the human experiences raised by this study, such as oppressions experienced by Black women based on their intersectional identity, discussion of experiences related to family and community, and identifying forms of affirmation and support they may or may not experience within their campus community.

Site Selection and Sampling

My site selection was a California community college, Rose City Community College (RCCC), located just northeast of Los Angeles. The college is known for its equity work and is a highly ranked transfer institution that has won several awards for innovative programs and student success. It makes up a single college district, with three satellite campuses, two within Rose City and one in a neighboring city within the district. RCCC is identified as a Hispanic Serving Institution and has a majority non-white student population. Rose City Community College has an African American/Black student population that is 3.6% of the total student population of 26,600. Black women represent 573 of the 1079 African American/Black students. I selected the site because, for a campus that boasts such accolades, their student success data for Black students do not reflect such achievements. Black women at RCCC have a success rate of

65%, the lowest of all women in all racial and ethnic groups, except for Native Americans. I was curious to find out why that is and what Black women may be experiencing at the college.

The sample for this study were Black female students currently enrolled at RCCC at the time of the study, Fall 2019 and Spring 2020. I recruited a diverse sample of women who identify as Black. The women's backgrounds represented a broad spectrum in terms of socio-economic status, family of origin, gender identity, sexual orientation, academic status, family composition, to name a few statuses. Eleven women participated in the study. I used many approaches to recruit participants via flyers and direct e-mails through programs that support Black students, as well as students and staff using the snowball approach.

Data Collection

Demography Questionnaire

I created a brief socio-demographic survey using Survey Monkey to gather information about participants of this study, including racial/ethnic identity, sexual orientation, gender identity, socio-economic status, usage of RCCC programs and services, educational goals, and co-curricular involvement.

Interviews

The primary form of data collection was through in-depth, semi-structured individual interviews. I interviewed 11 Black women students for two months conducting in-depth interviews that lasted from 60 minutes to three hours, some occurring over the course of multiple days. I employed a Black feminist lens in both the interview process and throughout the analysis to center the experiences of Black women from an "outsider within" positionality (Collins, 1989).

I incorporated a self-reflection identity drawing exercise after the initial introduction part

of the interview protocol. Each participant was asked to draw who she was at that point in her life. The women were encouraged to add other people, things, places that are important or meaningful to them (Esteban-Guitart, 2012).

Secondary Data Analysis

I conducted secondary data analysis to examine RCCC data related to Black women students. This included responses from campus climate surveys, equity data, student engagement and/or satisfaction surveys, documents such as brochures, event flyers, program handbooks and websites that are directed toward Black students, women in particular, as well as statewide and local success and completion data for Black women. This information came from five sources: HEDS Diversity and Equity Campus Climate Survey 2018 (IEO), RCCC Observations Report (2018-2019), Community College Equity Assessment Lab's Community College Success Measure (2019), RCCC Equity Dashboard, and the 2019-2022 Equity Plan Summary, as well as the RCCC website.

Data Analysis Methods

Demographic Survey

I reviewed the demographic responses from the questionnaire to gather information about participants' identities, educational goals, socio-economic status, resource utilization, usage of academic and student support services, and co-curricular involvement.

Interviews

Recordings of each interview were uploaded to a laptop computer, placed in an electronic folder, and given a specific identifying file name. The digital audio files were sent to an external company to be transcribed. Once transcribed, the transcriptions were placed in the electronic files, with each audio file, labeled with a unique participant identifier. I listened to the audio

recordings and reviewed the transcripts for accuracy, making corrections for any inconsistencies. I then sent each proofed transcript to the corresponding participant to allow her to review it for accuracy and meaning.

I manually coded for broad themes that emerged from the transcripts, color coding overarching themes, and sub-themes. I used Dedoose, a qualitative analysis software, to analyze the transcripts, further narrow themes into codes, and identify excerpts from the transcripts to support those codes and the research questions.

Secondary Data Analysis

I analyzed data from sources provided to me by the RCCC Institutional Effectiveness Office and the California Community College's Chancellor's Office Datamart. The data were reviewed for patterns, trends, and any qualitative responses. I approached each set of data by identifying the purpose of the research or survey. I then reviewed each data source for any data related to Black students in general and specifically if the data source included disaggregated data that included responses from Black women and provided insight into the experiences of Black women.

Significance of Research

The goal of this research was to illuminate for campus leaders and faculty the negative impact gendered racism may have on Black women in community colleges, how we can identify and expound on their funds of identity to create meaningful learning experiences for Black women students, and how colleges can use this information to positively impact their educational success. This study fills a gap in the research on Black women students in community college by expanding the discussion of the intersection of race and gender beyond universities and predominantly white institutions to include open-access public community colleges. The data

from this research also enabled me to identify structural barriers such as exclusionary curriculum, hostile environments, deficit-minded teaching practices, and service delivery and failure to hold individuals accountable for microaggressions toward Black women. The study illuminated the lack of data, programs, or any institutional discussion about Black women, thus making them an invisible cohort of students who need the support of the college. I will make recommendations on how to affirm the identities of Black women on community college campuses, support their needs as students, and determine ways to mitigate gendered or racist behaviors toward Black women and their effect on Black female students.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

In California, community college completion rates for African American women is 37%, compared to a 50% completion rate for women overall (CCCCO, 2018). This is an equity gap of 13% for Black women. This data is similar to that for Black males in community colleges. However, while there is an increased focus on Black men in community colleges, the same attention is not being given to Black women. Studies of Black female students in higher education tend to focus on the experiences of Black women who attend predominantly white universities and Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Of the research that exists regarding Black women in community colleges, the focus is on the faculty and administrators. There is little research that examines the experiences of Black female students in community colleges. As a state, as institutions, and as educators, we mustn't have only more quantitative data for Black women, but a deeper understanding of who they are as students, what they experience, and how they need to be supported. The lack of qualitative studies giving attention to Black women prevents any true efforts to overcome equity gaps for Black students and perpetuates the continued marginalization of this population (American Council on Education, 2019; Center for Race & Ethnicity, 2017).

This study sought to examine the experiences Black women students have on community college campuses related to their race and gender, as well as how they have come to interpret their identities as Black women and integrate that identity into their role as community college students.

Nationally, Black women enter post-secondary education in higher numbers than their counterparts and some continue to completion, but they do so with little systematic support that

specifically addresses the barriers they encounter (Banks, 2009; Commodore et al., 2015; McDaniel et al., 2011; Patton & Croom, 2017). Some perceive that Black women are achieving and advancing in higher education beyond not only Black men but other peer groups as well (Strayhorn & Johnson, 2014; Winkle-Wagner, 2015). The narrative is emphasized by the fact that the data for Black women students is often used in contrast to, or in aggregate with, the data for Black men (Person, et al., 2014; Strayhorn, 2014). The California Community College Chancellor's Office data confirms that persistence and completion rates for Black women are 37% compared to 55.8% for white females (CCCCO, 2018). Additional research is needed to identify what Black female community college students are experiencing, as well as a greater understanding of what these women bring to their roles as students through their funds of identity and how institutions can do more to recognize and affirm their assets.

This chapter begins with an overview of the California Community College system including pertinent demographic information. This section will include key initiatives and legislation that have and may impact the lives of Black female students. To add a holistic context, I will provide a brief overview of research on the pre-college educational experiences of Black girls. To gain an understanding of the socio-cultural-political context, I will provide a historical snapshot of Black women in higher education. I will then explore literature and research that examined the experiences of Black women in higher education from the lens of Black feminist theory and the intersectionality of gender and race. The concept of funds of identity will be introduced. Next, I will explore how this approach can provide educators with a greater understanding of what socio-cultural tools Black women bring to community colleges that are embedded within their identity. Finally, I identify the gaps in the literature and research on Black women students in community colleges that lends itself to the necessity of this study.

Overview of California Community Colleges

In 2019, the California Community Colleges boasted the largest system in the nation with 72 districts and 115 colleges. The system currently educates 2.3 million students at a time (CCCCO, 2018). California adopted the initial trend of the creation of junior colleges started by the University of Chicago in 1901 (Robles, 1998; Wattenbarger & Witt, 1995). These campuses were created to provide an additional two years of education to high school students in preparation for university work. They were considered six-year high schools or "junior colleges." California's first such extended high school institution opened in Fresno, in 1910. By 1919, the state had 21 junior colleges, far surpassing the rate of growth in other areas of the nation.

California then developed a formal process that allowed local communities to establish junior colleges. This was usually done by a consortium of parents, local politicians, high school administrators, and businesspeople. The state began providing direct aid to the colleges in 1921 via the Ballard Act (Wattenbarger & Witt, 1995). It was not until 1961 that the state officially recognized junior colleges as a part of the public higher education system.

In 1960, the legislature passed the Donahoe Higher Education Act, which established the function and relationship of each component of the public higher education system. This included the University of California, California State University, and the Community College systems. The primary differentiating feature of the community colleges was the inclusive nature of its purpose. The California Master Plan parameters were established to outline which students would be accepted into the UC and CSU systems, with UCs accepting the top 12.5% of the graduating high school seniors, CSUs accepting the top third, and the "Community Colleges were to admit anyone capable of benefitting from instruction" (UCOP, 2007). The universities had feared that a formal establishment of the community college system would impact their

access to state resources. They were willing to support expansion because they wished to maintain their exclusivity and did not want to accept students who were not top-tier students (Larnell et al. 2017; Robles, 1998; Wattenbarger & Witt, 1995).

The original purposes of community colleges in California were to provide academic preparation for students who were planning to transfer to universities, vocational training, and community service (Larnell et al., 2017; Robles, 1998). They were founded on equity and access, though that did not initially include larger numbers of "minorities" until after World War II. The number of students from minority backgrounds increased significantly during the 1960s, as community colleges outpaced their university counterparts in desegregating and creating support systems for students of color (Cohen, 1980; Guichard, 2000; Larnell et al., 2017; Robles, 1998). During this time and through the 1970s, community colleges offered vocational programs to an older and more diverse student population, with vocational programs accounting for 40% of the overall curriculum (Larnell et al., 2017; Robles, 1998).

A shift came in the 1980s with a call for a greater focus on academic performance and economic efficiency in the community colleges, causing the system to question its purpose and whether or not it could continue supporting an open-access mission. This also coincided with national challenges to affirmative action and the increasing prevalence of impaction on community college campuses (Guichard, 2000). Access and equity have given rise to periodic calls for "quality," "efficiency," and performance accountability, soften used to mask pushing marginalized students out of the system (Harbour & Jaquette, 2007).

Laws and Policies Impacting Black Students

In 1992, the California Community College Board of Governors adopted a policy on student equity. This policy required districts to create a plan to achieve equity on each campus.

These plans needed to include: 1. campus-based research and campus climate study to determine if historically under-represented groups had negative experiences and to identify barriers to educational access or success for these same populations; 2. Goals to address the negative impact on any of these groups in access, success, and transfer; 3. Strategies for attaining goals; 4. Resources designated for implementation of the plan; 5. Process and a schedule for evaluation of the plan. The implementation of the required plan found that few colleges had complete plans or had even begun to conduct the necessary research by 1996. Proposition 209 had somewhat of a chilling impact on the effort to compel colleges to implement a student equity plan. The result was that the Board of Governors expanded the equity beyond historically underrepresented groups to all students, and established criteria for determining whether existing disparities existed were significant enough to correct (CCCCO, 2018; Guichard, 2000).

In 1996, voters in California passed Proposition 209, which banned public institutions of higher education from considering race and ethnicity in admissions decisions. The year before the passage of Proposition 209, UC admissions rates of Black students were 74% admittance of those who applied, but this rate has been in a steady decline since then, with only 47% of Black students being admitted in 2016. Currently, only 9% of all Black undergraduates are enrolled in CSUs and 3% in the UCs (Campaign for College Opportunity, 2019). Following the implementation of this law, there was an increase in students of color attending community colleges as a means of entering higher education (Guichard, 2000). Two years later, the Board of Governors established the California Community College Commitment in support of diversity and equity programs. The two notable changes from the 1996 model were to increase opportunities to hire, promote more diverse staff and faculty, and implement an awareness campaign extolling the value of diversity. They further authorized funding for what was called

the Partnership for Excellence (PFE) program, which many campuses used to address equity issues. While attempts were made to establish parameters and measurements that would trigger corrective action for inequity, local colleges and districts failed to conduct adequate research to assess these needs (Guichard, 2000). Unfortunately, in 2004, PFE funding was eliminated. Though Title V mandated that districts have equity plans in 2005, this became an unfunded and unmonitored directive from 2008 through 2013 (Guichard, 2000).

In 2013, the Chancellor's Office established a Student Success Scorecard which enabled campuses to view and track student performance indicators such as persistence, retention, completion data over time. The Scorecard tracks completion and success measures for a variety of student demographics groups, including Black students. The Equity Policy was attached to the Student Success and Support Programs in 2014, when Governor Jerry Brown provided funding to provide efforts that reduce achievement and equity gaps, by race/ethnicity, on community college campuses, specifically identifying Black/African Americans as one of the primary groups, along with Latinx students to target for equity intervention support and correction (CCCCO, 2018; FACCC, 2015; Felix & Fernandez Castro, 2018). Felix and Fernando Castro (2018) found that of 178 equity activities, only 28 explicitly targeted Black and Latinx students with "culturally relevant, data-driven, evidence-based strategies" (p. 2). Most campuses have operated from a "cast a wide net and all boats will rise" approach (Felix & Fernando Castro, 2018), as well as from a deficit-minded approach, which places the onus for change and improvement on the students, thereby blaming them for the challenges they face in the institutions (Bensimon, 2016; Harper, 2012). Upon review of nine promising equity plans from California Community Colleges accounting for 178 activities implemented to address equity gaps, Felix and Fernando Castro (2018) found that for Black students the activities focused on

addressing basic skills and campus-wide improvement efforts, these were primarily professional development workshops to directed toward Black men. Areas related to access and degree completion received the least amount of attention and funding.

A current change in the landscape of the California Community College system is the recent passage of AB 705, which mandates that community colleges maximize the likelihood that students will enter and complete college-level English and math courses within their first year. Data shows that 89% of Black students at community colleges are placed in remedial courses (Campaign for College Opportunity, 2019; CCCCO, 2017). The data for California Community Colleges indicates that only 47% of all community college students will complete their academic goals in six years, but for African American students, the outlook is even more dismal, with only 36.2% achieving their academic goals in six years (CCCCO, 2017). A primary cause of this is the time students spend in developmental courses that do not count toward their degrees or educational goals. AB 705 is a sweeping, structural change that requires campuses to eliminate arbitrary placement exams, to use multiple measures, such as self-reported high school grades as indicators for course placement, and to place the majority of students directly into college-level math and English courses, creating either supplemental or embedded support interventions for students. By design, AB 705 is intended to reduce equity gaps primarily for Black and Latinx students through research-based interventions once fully implemented (California Legislative Information, 2018).

As mentioned previously, the Chancellor of the California Community College system established the system-wide goals for student success through the Vision for Success. In June 2020, with protests and demands to dismantle systemic and structural racism at the forefront of the national landscape, Chancellor Eloy Oakley issued a “call to action” for the entire

community college system to “actively strategize and take action against structural racism” (CCCCO, 2020). This call to action directed colleges and districts to do the following:

1. Conduct a system-wide review of law enforcement officers and first responder training and curriculum.
2. Campus leaders must host open dialogue and address campus climate.
3. Campuses must audit classroom climate and create an action plan to create inclusive classrooms and an anti-racism curriculum.
4. District Boards must review, and update Equity plans with urgency.
5. Shorten the time for the full implementation of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Integration Plan.
6. Join and engage in the Vision Resource Center “Community Colleges for Change.”

The Chancellor further stated that this “call to action” is a beginning to dismantling the structures of racism that exist in the community college system (CCCCO, 2020).

This overview of legislation and policies identified by the State and the Chancellor’s Office sheds light on the policy-making that can positively and negatively impact the status and success of Black students in higher education overall, and community colleges specifically. There have been many initiatives but very little has changed regarding how Black students experience community colleges.

Black Women in Higher Education

Preface

According to Crenshaw et al. (2016), only 48 peer-reviewed articles were published between 1991 and 2012 dealing with the experiences of Black women in college. This compares

to 62 written about Black men. This is not to negate the necessity of addressing the experiences of Black men; however, this disparity has the effect of placing less emphasis on the lived experiences of Black women. Research on Black women in higher education receives less attention because national data indicate that Black women are achieving at rates higher than Black males, as well as other demographic groups. This gives a false impression that Black women are thriving and do not have pressing needs or face challenges that deter them from their success (Allen & Crenshaw, 2014; Banks et al., 2009; Patton & Croom, 2017; Strayhorn & Johnson, 2014). The drive for Black student success should not be contextualized as exclusive by gender but rather one that recognizes and supports both Black men and Black women (Allen & Crenshaw, 2014; Patton et al., 2016; Strayhorn and Johnson, 2014).

History of Black Women in Higher Education

Oberlin College was one of the first institutions of higher education to admit Black students. Oberlin began accepting Black men in 1835 and women in 1837. Sarah Barnett was the first Black woman to enroll in 1842 (Bush et al., 2009; Commodore et al., 2018; Patton & Croom, 2017). Mary Jane Patterson was then the first Black woman to receive a bachelor's degree in 1862 (Bush et al., 2009; Commodore, Baker and Arroyo, 2018; Patton & Croom, 2017; Thomas & Jackson, 2007). By 1880, 54 Black women had graduated from 10 universities and colleges. During this period, women only made up 10% of African American college graduates, and most attended predominantly white institutions.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) began to be supported by the government in 1890 by the second Morrill Act to provide separate institutions of higher education for African Americans, primarily intended as agricultural and mechanical institutions, what we now know as A & M colleges. The men were to learn trades and the women were

limited to courses in domestic science. These courses for women were designed to teach them how to serve in white homes and businesses (Bush et al., 2009; Thomas & Jackson, 2001). At the time, only 22 of the 156 Black graduates from HBCUs were women and 10 years later, graduation rates remained about 17% of the overall Black graduates (Bush et al., 2009; Patton & Croom, 2017).

Black women who attended predominantly white institutions, as well as HBCUs, had to work to pay for their education and living expenses. The majority of them worked as domestics. The social and educational lives of these women were controlled by the campus administrators, who were often members of religious organizations seeking to maintain the piety of the women by limiting their access to information, socializing beyond campus, and coursework that they believed would be detrimental to their station in life as Black women (Bush et al., 2009, Patton & Croom, 2017). Over time, HBCUs began to encourage women to take courses in education and then directed them to the field of teaching as an option for service work. Very few women in this era went on to professional or graduate studies upon completion of their baccalaureate degree (Bush et al., 2009, Commodore et al., 2018; Patton & Croom, 2017; Thomas & Jackson, 2007).

During the founding of HBCUs, women's colleges specifically for Black women also opened. The first of these was Scotia Seminary, founded in 1867 (Baker et al., 2009; Thomas & Jackson, 2007). Ultimately, most of these colleges merged and became co-educational or dissolved completely. Bennett College and Spelman College are the only two of these early established colleges for Black women that remain (Bush et al., 2009; Commodore et al., 2018; Patton & Croom, 2017; Thomas & Jackson, 2007). By the 1940s, the majority of African American women in college attended HBCUs and began to earn more bachelor's degrees than

their male counterparts (Bush et al., 2009).

The post-civil rights era led to an overall increase in enrollment of Black students in institutions of higher education at all levels. This was driven by shifts in national legislation related to non-discrimination and access, such as Brown v. Board of Education (1954), Title VII of the Civil Rights Act (1964), Title IX of the Educational Amendments (1972), and affirmative action (1965). By the 1950s, Black women received 66.4% of all of the degrees awarded by HBCUs (Bush et al., 2009; Commodore et al., 2018; Jackson & Howard, 2007). Black women's participation in higher education continued to climb, increasing 12.4% from 1976 to 1980, 15.6% between 1980 and 1990, and a 28% increase from 1990 to 2000 in undergraduate enrollment. This rate began to slow between 2000 and 2005 to 23.5% but then held steady (Bush et al., 2009; Commodore et al., 2018). In 2000, 17% of Black women aged 25-29 years old had a bachelor's degree or higher. This increased by 2015 to 25%. This growth seems to coincide with an increase in enrollment in for-profit institutions (Commodore et al., 2018; Iloh & Toldson, 2013). The Obama administration began imposing more stringent regulations on for-profit institutions in 2014, which may have reduced the number of Black women who attend. As of 2018, the majority of Black female undergraduates in California were enrolled in the California Community College System.

Black Women in Community Colleges

National data of associate degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions shows that in 2015-2016, the percentage of degrees conferred to Black women was 14.7% compared to 56.2% for white women, 20.1% for Hispanic women (NCES, 2017). Overall statewide completion rates for Black females in California Community Colleges are 37.1%, compared to white women, 55.8%, Hispanic women, 43.7%, Asian 68.8%, and other than Pacific Islanders, have the lowest

completion rate when compared to other groups of female students. Black men have a similar completion rate of 37.0% (CCCCO Scorecard, 2018).

This data indicates that Black women in community colleges are facing barriers to completion and degree attainment. While there is NCES (2018) data and California Statewide system data that indicates this (CCCCO, 2018), key sources of data that would allow for us to have a better understanding of what Black women are experiencing are missing. Black women's success is under-examined because of the practice of looking at Black students in the aggregate. After conducting a brief document review of eight community colleges in Los Angeles County, I found that none of them disaggregate their local data by gender and race, nor do they have disaggregated data by gender for Black students in their equity plans. Even the notable organization Campaign for College Opportunity did not disaggregate their data related to gender in their recently released report on the State of Higher Education for Black Californians (2019). Additionally, the Statewide Umoja Community, which exists to enhance the cultural and educational experiences of African American students on community college campuses, in their recent report with the Institute for Social Research on the Evaluation of Umoja Programs, did not delineate the survey responses and interview responses by men and women (Umoja Community Foundation, 2019).

My search for research about Black female students in community colleges produced very few peer-reviewed articles or studies. The significant study by Strayhorn and Johnson (2014) conducted a secondary analysis of data from the 2004-2005 Community College Student Experiences Questionnaire and applied a regression analysis to identify the predictors for Black women's satisfaction with their community college. They reviewed data for 315 African American or Black women who were enrolled in a two-year, accredited associate's degree-

granting institution at the time of the study. The study only included students who were seeking an associate's degree. Strayhorn and Johnson (2014) found that: 1. there was a relationship between Black women's background traits, expectations, engagement, performance, and satisfaction; 2. Age is the strongest predictor of Black women's satisfaction with community colleges, the older students expressed more satisfaction with their college; 3. Social engagement with community college faculty was positively associated with satisfaction with college, in that Black women who engaged with faculty often and in meaningful ways were more satisfied than those who did not. They found this to be the second greatest influence on college satisfaction for Black women; 4. Black women who had a great deal of family responsibilities that impacted their ability to study or fully participate in school were less satisfied than those who did not; 5. Grades and positive academic performance created a greater sense of satisfaction for Black women in community colleges. The implications of this study support other research that has found that Black students who are engaged meaningfully with faculty perform well and can make school a priority tend to be more satisfied with their experiences (Bush & Bush, 2004; Bush et al., 2009).

A study by Walpole et al. (2014) explored the educational paths taken by African American women who began their study at a community college and compared that to African American men and all women. The researchers conducted this study utilizing longitudinal data from the 1996/2001 Beginning Postsecondary (BPS) and the 1193/2003 Baccalaureate and Beyond (B&B) data sets provided by the National Center for Education Studies. The study results were as follows: 56% of students enrolled in a community college in 1996 were Black women, surpassing Black men and other women by a minimum of six percentage points. However, 68% of Black women had not attained a degree or certificate or were enrolled in 2001.

This compares to 48% of other women who had not similarly completed. Additionally, the study found that only 3% of African American women went on to achieve a bachelor's degree (Walpole et al., 2014). The study did not go into greater depth about the actual experiences of African American women attending a community college.

I have included a study by Dimpal Jain (2010) who examined the experiences of 11 women of color student leaders. While the research was not exclusively about Black women, it was a qualitative study that utilized a critical race theory lens to address the gendered and raced experiences of women of color in a community college and how that related to transfer. The participants were African American, Chicana, Dominican, El Salvadoran American, Native American, and Pilipina. Jain (2010) interviewed each participant twice for a year at key transfer readiness periods. The themes that emerged were race and transfer, gender and transfer, race and leadership, gender and leadership, within those appeared sub-themes of attitudes and appearance, interactions with men, and motherhood. These themes are similar to those found in research and literature about Black women and their experiences on predominantly white campuses (Lewis et al., 2013; Patton & Croom, 2017; Winkle-Wagner, 2015). Jain (2010) stated: "Issues of race, racism, and sexism often become muted in community college discourse simply because the majority of students are of color and are women…it is assumed that gender and race must not be salient and do not have to be examined with a critical lens (p. 79). Her statement is emblematic of the need for research about Black women on community college campuses.

The exploration of the literature on Black women yielded articles, empirical studies, and relevant books on women in higher education. These sources focused on psycho-social experiences of Black women, intersectionality, gendered racism, microaggressions, persistence, and mental health concerns in colleges (Banks, 2009; Bush et al., 2009; Commodore et al., 2018;

Evans-Winters & Love, 2015; Lewis & Neville, 2015; Marina & Ross, 2016; Mendenhall et al., 2016; Patton & Croom, 2017; Shorter-Gooden, 2004; Szymanksi & Lewis, 2016). Within these contexts were discussions of external factors that may impede the academic progress of Black women such as family responsibilities, work, and lack of financial and material resources (Booker, 2016; Brown et al., 2016; Henry et al., 2011; Howard-Vital, 1989; Lewis & Neville, 2015; Shorter- Gooden, 2004; Szmansky & Lewis, 2016; Walpole et al., 2014; Williams & Nichols, 2012; Winkle-Wagner, 2015). There was scant research that examined the structural institutional barriers that exist for Black women, beyond experiences with microaggressions, particularly those in community college, as they are not considered predominantly white institutions.

In addition to the lack of data focusing specifically on Black women, there is limited research on the experiences of Black women in community colleges. The majority of the work examines Black women in the context of predominantly white institutions and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (Banks, 2009; Bush et al., 2009; Commodore et al., 2018; Evans-Winters & Love, 2015; Marina & Ross, 2016; Patton & Croom, 2017; Rosales & Person, 2014; Strayhorn & Johnson, 2014; Walpole et al., 2014; Winkle-Wagner, 2015) and women of color in community colleges (Jain, 2009; Rose et al., 2014) as well as research comparing the experiences of Black men and women (Baker, 2015; Gipson & McLean, 2017; Strayhorn and Saddler, 2008).

Though Winkle-Wagner (2015) primarily addressed the limited research on Black women in higher education overall, the study summarized the problem with this limited approach to examining the lives of Black women in community colleges by stating “this lack of focus on the experiences of Black women could hinder the efficacy of institutional policies geared toward

maximizing academic performance, reducing attrition and enhancing college experiences for these students" (p.172).

Conceptual Framework

The approach to this study drew from three primary theoretical frameworks, Black Feminist Theory (Collins, 2000; Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1995; Evans-White & Love, 2015; Lewis, 2014; Patton, 2017), Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989,1990; Collins & Bilge, 2016; Patton & Harris, 2019), and Funds of Identity (Esteban-Guitart, 2016; Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014). These concepts allowed me to use my frame as a Black woman to center and understand the intersectional identities and lived experiences of Black female students and how this enabled them to develop and use their funds of identity.

Black Feminist Theory

The most salient theoretical concept that applied to this study was Black Feminist Theory (Collins, 2000; Patton, 2017) as it centralizes the lived experiences of Black women. The Black Feminist framework was crucial to the study as it was shaped and defined by Black women; the theory asserts that the position of Black women has been an oppressed status, rejects the stereotypical ideas about Black women, and affirms that not all Black women are subjugated in the same manner but, as a group, experience unique oppression based the intersection of their race and gender. Black feminist theory incorporates the concept of intersectionality (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1995; Lewis, 2014) as it examines the experiences of Black women from a holistic perspective, not exclusively as members of the Black race nor solely through the lens of being female, but from the lens that Black women exist within dually oppressed identities. The negative experiences of Black women based on this intersectionality are expressed in some literature by the term "gendered racism" (Banks, 2009; Bush et al., 2009; Commodore et al.,

2018; Evans-Winters & Love, 2015; Marina & Ross, 2016; Patton & Croom, 2017) and beyond the sector of education in society as a whole (Lewis & Neville, 2015; Mendenhall et al., 2016; Shorter-Gooden, 2004; Szymanksi & Lewis, 2016).

According to Lewis et al. (2013), gendered racism captures the oppression experienced by Black women based on racist perceptions of gender roles. Black women experience the intersection of racism and sexism within the classroom as well as throughout campus. Two measurements have been developed specifically to assess the phenomena of gendered racism experienced by Black women. Lewis and Neville (2015) piloted the Gendered Racial Microaggressions Scale for Black Women. The scale examines Black women's experience with three core types of gendered racial microaggressions: 1. projected stereotypes, 2. silenced and marginalized, and 3. assumptions about style and beauty. The scale is a quantitative multidimensional scale that measures the frequency and stress appraisal of the intersection of racial and gender microaggressions experienced by Black women (Lewis & Neville, 2015).

Brown et al. (2016) developed the Gendered-Racial Socialization Scale for African American College Women. The researchers define gendered racial socialization as a form of dual socialization imparted by families or communities designed to address the realities of the African American female experience and to teach them how to cope with the gendered racism they may encounter. The scale is quantitative and includes items that reflect the intersectional racial and gender messages young African American women receive. Their study used a sample of 174 college females who identified as Black or African American. The initial validation of the measurement examined how Black women's socialization experiences impacted the following domains: education and career success, sexuality and sexual practices internalized gendered racial oppression, religion, discrimination and oppression challenges, family responsibilities,

independence and strength, gendered racial pride, gendered racial history, and heritage (Brown et al., 2016). The development of these quantitative measurement scales is indicative of the need for more quantitative tools that can appropriately capture the intersectional experiences of Black women. Whether the term gendered racism is used explicitly, or variations of the phenomenon are expressed through encounters with microaggressions, stereotyping, exclusion, or overt events that target Black women, the impact is the same. Research has established that Black women can experience stereotype threat, mental and physical health challenges, as well as social-emotional issues as effects of racist and sexist encounters and environments (Booker, 2016; Brown, et al., 2016; Henry et al., 2011; Howard-Vital, 1989; Lewis & Neville, 2015; Shorter-Gooden, 2004; Szmansky & Lewis, 2016; Walpole et al., 2014; Williams & Nichols, 2012; Winkle-Wagner, 2015). In the past, research on Black women in college failed to take into account that they contend with a dual minoritized status inside and outside of the classroom, including through subtle stereotyping, microaggressions, and even overt forms of racism and sexism combined. This behavior is perpetrated not only by other students but by faculty and staff as well (Lewis et al., 2013; Winkle-Wagner, 2015). The literature is couched in data-driven numerical achievement measurements and narrow definitions of success that provide little or no contextualization or meaning to the experiences of Black women in higher education. This study thus explored whether Black women in community colleges experience gendered racism within our institutions, how they experience it, and how this may impact the attainment of their educational goals.

Many factors influence why, when, and how Black women succeed. These factors include family relationships, external responsibilities, financial reasons, academic preparedness, and school satisfaction (Booker, 2016; Brown et al., 2015; Henry et al., 2011; Howard-Vital,

1989; Lewis & Neville, 2015; Shorter-Gooden, 2004; Szmansky & Lewis, 2016; Walpole et al., 2014; White-Johnson, 2016; Williams & Nichols, 2012; Winkle-Wagner, 2015). The literature provides evidence that Black women are encountering this phenomenon of gendered racism in universities at all levels, including among faculty and administrators in community colleges (Banks, 2009; Bush et al., 2009; Commodore et al., 2018; Evans-Winters & Love, 2015; Patton & Croom, 2017; Marina & Ross, 2016) and, beyond the sector of education, in society as a whole (Lewis & Neville, 2015; Mendenhall et al., 2016; Shorter-Gooden, 2004; Szymanksi & Lewis, 2016). Such key studies, in conjunction with qualitative research, help create a greater understanding of how Black women navigate society and their environments (Brown et al, 2016; Lewis and Neville, 2015).

Intersectionality

In her seminal work, Crenshaw (1989) challenges the feminist movement as one that has historically advanced the privilege of white women by denigrating the womanhood of Black women. Similarly, anti-racist movements have focused on the struggles of Black men in exclusion of the unique experiences of Black women that often include violence and subjugation based on gender. Crenshaw (1991) expounded on this dynamic by identifying three realms for exploring intersectionality: structural, political, and representational. This study incorporated these three concepts of intersectionality within the context of Black women in community colleges. Utilizing intersectionality as a frame provided a broad contextualization for which to study the lives of Black female students, while the use of funds of identity allowed for an intimate expression of the identities and lived experiences of these women.

Collins (2016) discusses intersectionality in education by affirming Crenshaw (1989, 1999) and asserting that intersectionality is not simply about discussing the essentialism of

identity but also requires addressing the cultural and structural systems that repress and oppress the multiple identities of students. She states that "using intersectionality as an analytical tool may provide a more expansive lens for addressing the complexities of educational equity…intersectionality's emphasis on intersecting power relations…refocuses attention on the structural organization of schooling" (pp. 188-189).

More recently, Harris and Patton (2019) conducted a summative content analysis of seven peer-reviewed higher education journals, identifying articles within those journals that used the term "intersectionality." The researchers found 97 articles and developed a 13-question rubric that generated four themes: 1. Intersectionality as a Buzzword; 2. Intersectionality as Framework; 3. The (Mis)Definition and (Mis) Application of Intersectionality, and 4. the Herstory of Intersectionality. Harris and Patton (2019) found that 56 articles used the term as a buzzword, including little explanation or connection to women of color or systems of oppression. Thirty-eight papers used intersectionality as a framework for their research. Of these 38 manuscripts, 29 used intersectionality to examine race and its intersections with other social identities in higher education. The majority of those focused on race and gender, half of which was on the experiences of women of color in higher education.

Researchers determined that the majority of the articles focused on the intersections of social identities while ignoring the connection between these identity-related experiences to structures of oppression. Concerning the misapplication of intersectionality, they found that most of the articles remained at the micro-level, of identity and individual lived experiences, without expanding their analysis to a macro-level of how "women of color's individual experiences pare positioned within mutually constitutive sociohistorical systems and structures of inequality" (Harris & Patton, 2019, p. 363). Of the 97 articles analyzed, the majority failed to cite the women

of color who were foundational in identifying intersectionality as a concept. Of those that did, Crenshaw (1989, 1991) and Collins (1990) were cited. The authors concluded that scholars must examine both the micro-and macro-level structures of intersectionality, honor the foundation of the concept by attributing it to women of color and that it must be done in a manner that advances social justice.

Funds of Identity

Funds of Identity (Esteban-Guitart, 2016) emerged from the Funds of Knowledge literature (Rios-Agular et al., 2011) that asserts that there are competence and knowledge embedded in the culture, family, and lived experiences of students of color. The theory further incorporates the Vygotskian (Esteban-Guitart, 2016; Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014) concepts of identity. Positing that learning goes beyond cognitive and social experiences directs researchers and practitioners to recognize and affirm how students experience themselves within different contexts. Funds of Identity (Esteban-Guitart, 2016; Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014) explores how cultural and familial funds of knowledge extend to the individual identity of students through their own life experiences and development of resources that help define themselves. This theory recognizes that individuals develop a set of tools such as artifacts, geographic locations, structures, social relationships, and interests that enable them to create meaningful learning experiences across contexts and spaces.

Esteban-Guitart (2016) identifies funds of identity as a complement to funds of knowledge that enables educators to create learning experiences that connect with out of school experiences of students. Though Esteban-Guitart's (2016) research was primarily focused on elementary and secondary school children, the approach has application in the higher education realm. The theory is an approach to connect home, school, and community in a meaningful way

for students (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014). The application of this framework is appropriate for Black women in community colleges as they typically come from the immediate community around the college (CCCCO, 2019; Office of Institutional Effectiveness, 2019). Funds of identity extend funds of knowledge beyond an individual's accumulation of knowledge; it states that those sources of knowledge contribute to the individual identity of a person that enables them to incorporate those "tools" into different situations, contexts, and spaces (Esteban-Guitart, 2012, 2016, Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014).

Funds of knowledge theory emerged as a counter-narrative to challenge the deficit-based perspectives on Latinx students and families. The concept asserts that working-class families and communities of color utilize strategic knowledge and skills that enable them to navigate and thrive in society. Contextualizing and integrating these funds throughout the educational structure creates a more inclusive and meaningful learning environment for students from these communities (Esteban-Guitart, 2016; Rios-Aguilar, 2011, 2012).

Funds of identity define identity from a Vygotskian perspective (Esteban-Guitart, 2016; Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014) that it is sociocultural phenomena that shape individual identity formation (Esteban-Guitart, 2016). Funds of identity expound on this through the assertion that people "actively internalize family and community resources to make meaning and describe themselves" (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014, p. 35).

Esteban-Guitart & Moll (2014) use four components to define identity:

1. Identities consist of people, places, skills, knowledge, practices, and resources that people have acquired and now use in various activities and diverse social interactions.
2. Artifacts are internalized and externalized. They can have meaning for an

individual as well as a group of individuals.

3. People form their identities through these resources by engaging in social activities such as work and school.
4. Identity is essentially social in origin. People appropriate narratives, models, or discourses of identity.

These four factors together build funds of identity, which are "historically accumulated, culturally developed and socially distributed resources that are essential for people's self-definition, self-expression, and self-understanding" (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014, p.37). Esteban-Guitart and Moll (2014) further describe funds of identity by dividing them into five major types:

Table 1

Types of Funds of Identity

Type	*Description*	*Examples*
Social Funds of Identity	People (significant others) who are of sufficient importance in one's lived experience to affect positively or negatively one's emotions, behavior, and sense of self	Friends, partners, family members, mentors,
Institutional Funds of Identity	Structures and mechanisms of social order that manage one's behavior within a given community or group	Marriage, religion, laws, education
Geographical Funds of Identity	Lands, regions, and landscapes of peopled environments	Country, landscape, river, campus spaces
Cultural Funds of Identity	Artifacts (symbols, tools, social categories) that characterize, define, and mediate human experience	Smartphones, religious symbols, gender, affinity groups
Practical Funds of Identity	Significant activities, interests	Sports, music, work, art,

Note. Each group of funds represents resources that are held simultaneously.

These categories can be used to explore the sociocultural ways by which students choose to identify themselves and incorporate tools and artifacts related to these into new contexts.

Esteban-Guitart (2012) offers methods that can be utilized by researchers to reveal the funds of the identity of a student. Notably, the use of the self-portrait and significant circle activities allow the student to capture who they are, as well as who and what is important or meaningful in their lives in a creative way.

Esteban-Guitart and Moll (2014) recognize the limitations of funds of identity in that what a student reports as significant funds are those that they have subjectively known, or that are visible. However, there are socio-cultural factors that impact all members of a society that may not be known or acknowledged by an individual or those that are invisible. These factors nevertheless contribute to shaping a person's identity just as those that are known.

Summary

As cited in the literature, more research is needed to understand the unique experiences of Black female students on community college campuses through a lens that recognizes their multiple identities, as well as the oppressions that are attributed to those identities. Additionally, research is necessary to discover and understand how best to foster campus environments that affirm Black women, recognizing that they have ability and capacity through their funds of identity. This study sought to contribute to the research on Black female students in community colleges by exploring these dimensions from the perspectives of the Black women students to identify the supports and acknowledge the assets they bring to their experiences as students.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This study examined the experiences of Black women students on California community college campuses that may be barriers to their educational goals. Specifically, I centered their lived experiences with funds of identity lens and within a Black feminist context. I was able to gain an understanding of their intersectional identities of gender, race, gender identity, sexual orientation, and age (Lewis et al., 2013; Walpole et al, 2014). This approach was used to explore the experiences of these Black women in the classroom and on campus overall and to find out how they have integrated their funds of identity in their roles as students. This study answered the following questions:

1. How are Black women's funds of identity integrated into their role as students?
2. What are the experiences of Black female students on community college campuses?
    a. What are they experiencing within the classroom?
    b. What are their interactions with staff and other students?

Research Design and Rationale

I conducted a qualitative study utilizing in a short demographic survey, in-depth interviews, and secondary data analysis, through an inductive process building thematic patterns (Creswell, 2018). I employed a phenomenological qualitative research approach to capture the lived experiences of Black female community college students in their own words. According to Merriam and Tisdale (2016), phenomenology allows us to study and bring to consciousness people's daily experiences. This type of qualitative research is appropriate for human experiences such as oppressions experienced by Black women based on their intersectional identity, discussion of experiences related to family and community, and identifying forms of

affirmation and support they may or may not experience within their campus community

The study could have used a quantitative method; however, that method would not be sufficient to capture the depth or richness of the students' experiences.

Site Selection

My site selection was a California community college, Rose City Community College (RCCC), located just northeast of Los Angeles. The college is known for its equity work and is a highly ranked transfer institution. RCCC has won several awards for innovative programs and student success in its single college district, and the school has three satellite campuses, two within Rose City and one in a neighboring city within the district. RCCC is identified as a Hispanic Serving Institution and has a majority non-white population student population. Rose City Community College has an African American/Black student population that is 3.6% of the total student population, with 1,079 of 26,600 total students, with Black women represent 573 of the 1,079. I selected the site because for a campus that boasts such accolades as their student success, data for Black students does not reflect such achievements. Black women have a success rate of 65%, the lowest of all women in all racial and ethnic groups, except for Native Americans. It was important to explore this gap and investigate what Black women may be experiencing at college.

Access to Site and Participants

I was employed full-time as a dean at the site during the time of the study. I worked with the Institutional Effectiveness Office on campus to secure permission to conduct the study and to get access to qualitative and quantitative data including Black women. I reached out to and provided recruiting material to multiple student service areas, the Dean of Kinesiology & Athletics, the Athletic Director, academic counselors, advisors to Black student organizations,

coordinators, and staff who work at the Black Student Success Center, and faculty. I created flyers and posted them on campus to solicit participation in the study and handed them out during the first week of the spring 2020 semester.

Recruitment and Participant Selection

Participants were selected based on their self-identification as Black or/African American female students enrolled in credit classes at the institution. I established an email address specifically for the study and women who were interested in participating emailed me or came to my office on campus. I spoke to all women who were interested to explain the study and the process. During the initial contact, I collected each participant's name, email address, and phone number. Women who decided to participate were sent an informed consent form and a link to a brief demographic survey. Upon completion of those items, I set meeting dates and times with those students. I initially had 22 students contact me to participate in the study. However, only 15 made interview appointments. My goal was to include between 12-15 students in the study. The COVID-19 pandemic hit during this time and the RCCC campus closed, leading to ultimately 11 women participated in the study. The participant group was diverse in terms of socio-economic status, family of origin, gender identity, sexual orientation, academic status, educational goals, age, and family composition. Each participant received a Black Woman Empowerment swag bag and a $12 food gift card, as well as a list of local resources for Black women (See Appendix G).

Data Collection

Interviews

The primary form of data collection was through in-depth, semi-structured individual interviews. I conducted a pilot interview with two Black women who were alumnae of RCCC

before the start of the study. I made revisions to the interview protocol based on their feedback (See Appendix A). I met with the students for two months conducting in-depth interviews that lasted from 60 minutes to three hours, some occurring over the course of multiple days. I employed a Black feminist lens in both the interview process and throughout the analysis to center the experiences of Black women from an "outsider within" positionality (Collins, 1989). This perspective simultaneously recognized their strengths, accomplishments, and resilience while attending to their experiences with multiple forms of oppression and marginalization within the institution and society. As expressed by Evans-Winters (2019), "symmetry is in our telling of oppression and resistance is fundamental" (p.18) as a Black feminist researcher.

Ten of the interviews took place on campus and one via Zoom. I conducted semi-structured interviews that allowed for flexibility while ensuring that a common set of questions were pursued with each participant and also allow for the worldview of the respondent to emerge (Merriam and Tisdale, 2016). The interviews dove deeper into the identity and experiences of the Black women on campuses.

Each interview consisted of two key parts: an interview and a self-portrait reflection activity. Some of the women had not completed the online demographic survey, so they completed it at the beginning of the interview. Each participant selected her pseudonym for the study. The interview itself involved open-ended and probing questions, as needed, to deepen the conversation. The questions encouraged the women to explore what it means to be a Black woman and to begin to connect that identity to their role as students. The second part of the interview process incorporated a self-portrait activity completed by each student (Esteban-Guitart, 2012). Each interview was recorded by a digital tape recorder and labeled with an identifier unique to that participant and date. The in-person interviews were conducted in a

private location with a closed and locked door to maintain confidentiality. The Zoom interview was recorded through Zoom, as well as with a digital recorder. I received a transcript from the Zoom recording.

I incorporated an identity drawing exercise after the initial introductory part of the interview protocol. Each participant was asked to draw who she was at that point in her life. The women were encouraged to add other people, things, places that are important or meaningful to them. The participants then shared their drawings with me and what it meant to them. The activity allowed each participant to express her identity in a less formal, directed manner. To capture funds of identity, Esteban-Guitart (2012) recommends utilizing such multi-methodological approaches that allow the researcher to "capture the dynamic details of the identity of individuals" (p.178).

I had initially planned to conduct a walking interview with each participant; however, I was only able to complete one. The participants expressed and demonstrated discomfort and reluctance about the walking interview, and therefore I did not pursue it as an additional tool. I did utilize a campus map to allow the participants to describe areas where they felt comfortable, spent their time on campus, as well as places where they did not feel welcome. However, there was no meaningful insight gathered from that activity and thus I did not use it as a data source.

Secondary Data Analysis

I conducted secondary data analysis to examine college data related to Black women students. This information came from five sources: HEDS Diversity and Equity Campus Climate Survey 2018 (IEO), RCCC Observations Report (2018-2019), Community College Equity Assessment Lab's Community College Success Measure (2019), RCCC Equity Dashboard, 2019-2022 RCCC Student Equity Plan Summary (2019) and the CCCCO Datamart. Information

gleaned from these sources was compared to the narratives from the student interviews.

Data Analysis Methods

Interviews

Recordings of each interview were uploaded to a laptop computer, placed in an electronic folder, and given a specific identifying file name. The digital audio files were sent to an external company to be transcribed. Once transcribed, the transcriptions were placed in the electronic files, with each audio file labeled with a unique participant identifier. I listened to the audio recordings and reviewed the transcripts for accuracy, making corrections for any inconsistencies. I also compared the transcriptions to the handwritten notes I had taken during each interview to ensure reliability. I then sent the proofed transcripts to each participant to allow her to review for accuracy and meaning. I also printed each transcript to keep a paper copy in the file for each respective student. I conducted an initial analysis of the paper transcripts highlighting broad themes that emerged, then manually identified sub-themes within the broader categories. I then color-coded and labeled each theme. I read all the transcripts again, capturing additional themes that emerged, and further labeled and color-coded each of these. I was able to narrow the themes by assessing the relevancy to my research questions. I then uploaded the transcripts to Dedoose, a qualitative analysis software, and applied the broad themes as codes I had discovered through manual analysis to the excerpts, entered my research questions, and further narrowed the broad themes into more succinct codes and findings. The first set of codes were based on my research questions: Funds of Identity with sub-codes, intelligence and resourcefulness, family and societal messages about being a Black woman, and use of funds to navigate society and systems. Secondly, Black women's experiences on campus used another set of sub-codes- experience in the classroom, including hypervisibility and invisibility, microaggressions, interactions with

peers, and positive experiences in the classroom. The third theme under experiences on campus were experiences outside the classroom, interactions with staff and peers. A final code that emerged from this analysis process was that Black women were not homogenous, and further sub-codes used were age, parenting status, and gender identity.

Secondary Data Analysis

I analyzed data from sources provided to me by the RCCC Institutional Effectiveness Office and the California Community College's Chancellor's Office Datamart. The data were reviewed for patterns, trends, and any qualitative responses. I approached each set of data by identifying the purpose of the research or survey. I then reviewed each data source for any data related to Black students in general and specifically if the data source included disaggregated data that included responses from Black women. I was particularly interested in front-facing data that indicated that its purpose was to reflect equity or campus climate. I dove deeper to determine if there was comparative data for different ethnic groups or between genders. If comparative data existed, I assessed if the survey or research included responses from Black women. If it did not, I contacted researchers in the Office of Institutional Effectiveness at RCCC to ask if the data existed and had not been reported or if the responses for Black students, women specifically, did not exist and why. I compared the data I retrieved to the responses and findings I had gathered from the participants in the study to see if their identity or experiences were reflected in the reports I had analyzed. I reflected on what story was being told about Black women through the research and report data that I collectively analyzed.

In the analysis of both the secondary data and the interviews I regularly re-engaged with my theoretical framework to cross-check how I was applying my analytical lens with the data, I was reviewing. Regarding the funds of identity, I confirmed what I was reading and how I was

interpreting what the women shared reflected their funds of identity. For example, I critiqued the data to ascertain whether an excerpt integrated absorption of knowledge, messages, experiences, and resources from their families, communities, and experiences, exemplified if it was a key aspect of the student's identity and how that was translated into who they were as Black women and further transcended into their roles as students. I often referred to the funds of identity table (Esteban-Guitart & Moll,2014)

I regularly evaluated whether I was centering the lived experiences of the Black women as Black women, as well as my lens of understanding and interpretation as a Black woman researcher in line with a Black Feminist theory focus.

Positionality Statement

I am a biracial woman, but I identify as a Black woman. I have worked in community colleges for almost 30 years. As a Black female undergraduate, I had negative experiences related to my gender and race, which at times resulted in my succumbing to stereotype threat and imposter syndrome. These beliefs about myself negatively impacted my academic success and educational trajectory. I was motivated to conduct this study due to the anecdotal stories that have been shared with me by Black female students. A number of these stories were shared in the context of my role as the Dean of Student Life and the primary student conduct administrator, in which students were referred to me for student conduct violations. These stories brought to my attention that Black women experience gendered racism, as well as heterosexist comments and micro-and macro aggressions on campus. My discussions with these Black women led me to believe that there is an implicit, and possibly systemic, bias toward Black female students on community college campuses that have rendered them invisible. These phenomena may be contributing to the lack of educational success they are experiencing as

students. I believe my identity was an asset in establishing trust with participants; however, I was particularly aware of my identity in the interviewing process, as well as the data analysis. I took my role as a researcher seriously and made every effort to mitigate any bias.

My experience as a researcher was with an insider-outside lens. I centered myself as an objective observer into the students' lives and experiences. However, what I experienced was a shared pathology that comes from having been in their shoes as an undergrad and in graduate school. It was when I released myself from being a monotone, an objective gatherer of data and allowed myself to be a Black woman, sharing space and time with another Black woman, that their rich identities emerged. I relaxed, stopped watching the clock, and stopped trying to control their narratives to fit the protocol and my prescribed flow, instead of allowing them to navigate the interview. I was able to gather the responses to the prompts without always having to ask a specific question and participants simply shared their stories in naturalistic ways.

I let go of strict Euro-centric models dictating how this should be done to ensure validity and eliminate researcher bias. But there is bias, even when research is purported to be objective, all researchers bring their worldviews, lived experiences, stereotypes, and bias into research. Additionally, I recognized that to approach this study from a Black feminist ideology I needed to center my Black womanhood to be able to hear and affirm the nuances within the women's expressions, emotions, and attitudes that came forth as they shared their stories and experiences. I authentically embraced Black feminist theory as a researcher. It was through this perspective that I was able to understand simultaneous expressions of self-doubt, resistance to harm caused to them, the pain of trauma, and the conviction to live in their own identities and fight injustices against them in their way.

It was upon my rejection of artificially imposed, Euro-centric standards of data

collection, and analysis that I was able to hear and see the depth of data present in each interview. I was also able to evaluate the secondary data from a critical perspective beyond the numeric representation of data points that I found did not often tell the story of Black female students. I reevaluated my funds of identity as an intelligent, critical researcher and a scholar-practitioner who is an expert on what it means to be a Black woman.

Credibility/Trustworthiness

One threat to the credibility of this study was the lack of access to a broad range of Black female students. This indicates that the findings are not wholly generalizable to Black female students on other community college campuses; however, the findings were similar to research done with Black women at public college and university campuses at historically white institutions.

Conducting research in my own work environment could raise issues of trustworthiness. However, my role on my campus did benefit the study by instilling a greater, more immediate sense of trust among the participants, as I was not considered an outsider. I ensured that participants knew the study was voluntary, and that their data would be kept private. I also sent the transcripts to the participants for review and member check to ensure that I was accurately capturing what was shared by the students.

Ethical Issues

There were not any ethical issues related to this study except for the issue of my role as Dean of Students on my own campus. Confidentiality continued to be maintained with each participant. Campus and individual pseudonyms were used. Given the personal nature of the interviews, I provided a list of campus and local resources for students who participated in the interview should any painful or traumatic issues arise.

Limitations

The study was limited because participants may not be representative of Black women in all types of community colleges, as I selected students from a single large urban campus. Black women at smaller or more rural institutions may have different experiences. However, I believe the themes that emerged from the depth of the study are similar to those of prior studies of Black women in predominantly white institutions. Additionally, as one of the few studies on Black female community college students, the themes that emerge from this study can serve as a starting point for future, broader research of this population. Finally, the timeframe and the pandemic that ensued limited my access to a larger number of Black women. The participant selection came primarily from referrals from individual staff and faculty, which could have excluded the voices of female students who are not as connected or involved on campus.

Summary

Because this study was focused on Black women's identity and experiences on campus, the length and depth of the interviews provided authentic and rich insight into the lived experiences and the assets they bring with them. The demographic survey provided information regarding services and programs utilized by the women who participated. The secondary data analysis the consistency of information shared by the students, as well as the gaps of data, particularly qualitative, that RCCC has about Black women. My positionality as research, as well as issues of credibility, trustworthiness, and ethical issues, were all named and considered in the planning and execution of this study.

Chapter 4: Findings: Secondary Data Analysis

Introduction

This study delved into the identities and experiences of 11 Black female students at Rose City Community College (RCCC). This study intended to gain an understanding of the experiences of Black women in community colleges and how the students experienced the campus overall, but specifically focused on their experiences within the classroom. Through intensive semi-structured interviews, the women shared how their identities were shaped by their pre-college educational experiences, family contexts, childhood trauma, and their self-image integrated into their role as students.

My study consisted of in-depth interviews, some lasting over three hours over multiple days, with 11 Black women at Rose City Community College during the Spring Semester of 2020. I met with 10 students on campus and one via Zoom after the pandemic shuttered the college. I was also able to capture how the women viewed themselves at that point in their lives through the use of self-portraits. In addition to the interviews and the self-portrait exercise

The following research questions guided the study:

1. How are Black women's funds of identity integrated into their role as students?
2. What are the experiences of Black female students on a community college campus?
    a. What are they experiencing within the classroom?
    b. What are their interactions with faculty and other students?

The two findings chapters are organized by first providing an overview of RCCC and its relationship with Black students and the local Black community, my findings from my secondary data analysis, introducing the study participants, and then a discussion of the themes and findings that arose from participant interviews. Each finding will include primary themes as

well as subthemes that emerged. The third section will examine the secondary data provided by RCCC and CCCCO to determine how that data relates to the interview data, by either supporting, contradicting, or being silent on reflecting the experiences of Black female students as provided by the interview narratives. Lastly, I will offer a summary of the findings synthesizing the outcomes of participant interviews and secondary data analysis.

Findings from the secondary data analysis showed there is only one piece of front-facing data or programs that reflect the experiences of Black women students, disaggregated data for Black students is not readily available, no qualitative data exist related to the experiences of Black women, and there is a conflict between stated equity goals, recognized academic and student support programs and lack of data on Black women, and it is unclear how data on Black students, women, in particular, are used for decision-making at RCCC.

The following main themes emerged from the interview portion of the study: Black women use their funds of identity to navigate/survive societal, institutional, and personal abuse; conflicting messages and stereotyping effect the experiences of Black women in the classroom and on campus; Black women experience either invisibility or hypervisibility and microaggressions in the classroom and on campus; and the experiences of Black women are not homogenous.

Rose City Community College Context

To provide context for the findings, as well as an understanding of the overall significance of the study, I offer a brief description of RCCC and its relationship with Black students and the Black community surrounding the college during the last five years. The enrollment for Black students at RCCC has remained at approximately 4% since 2014. The city of Roses has a Black population of 8.2% and the smaller adjacent foothill town that shares its

school district has 21.3% Black residents (City-Data, n.d.). The Black student population in Rose City Unified School District (RCUSD) is 16%. The relationship between RCCC and the Black community has ranged from non-existent to highly contentious. In 2015 the Journal, a local Black-owned newspaper, wrote an article describing the experiences of Black employees as "having to keep quiet…not voice complaints about fear of being fired." Other local media, including the student newspaper, have covered the negative experiences of Black students and employees over the last five years. There were multiple causes for the scrutiny, primarily the large numbers of faculty being hired with none or only one being Black/African American. Secondly, multiple Black employees were fired within a compacted period, disproportionately compared to their representative numbers. Others pointed to the lack of programs and resources for Black students and the stagnating enrollment of Black students. Another issue that continues to exist is the lack of recognition, promotion, hiring, or equitable compensation for Black women employees (Hopkins, 2015; Lipsey, 2017). A student interviewed explained that " she almost did not return…for the second year and that she didn't feel Black students had enough help" (Lipsey, 2017). A first-year student described that the "Black demographic has gone down, and I was not necessarily surprised…I feel like people go where they feel the most comfortable" (Lipsey, 2017). A statement by a former senior Black administrator sums up the context in which Black students and employees have experienced RCCC:

> The district has recognized that there is an equity gap and closing the achievement gap on paper, they said that that's a priority, but I never witnessed any actions of that to happen. I think sincerity in coming with a listening ear and communicating directly with those impacted. If you're not sincere and proclaim to do things, it's empty promises and people will transfer out and walk away.

As recently as spring 2020, the local chapter of the NAACP released a synopsis of what has occurred, particularly with Black women, at RCCC and launched an investigation of the RCCC's treatment of Black employees and Black students (Hopkins, 2020; Lipsey, 2017; Smith, 2020). And finally, as the murder of unarmed Black men and women were at the forefront of the news, the Black Students, faculty, and staff hosted a listening session to express how it felt to be Black at RCCC (YouTube, 2020). Shortly thereafter, the campus paper wrote yet another article title "[RCCC] has a problem with responding to anti-Blackness," which stated that "By failing to address their students' needs for racism prevention and resource support, [RCCC]'s vice presidents and superintendent/president…have let their students down…The students and staff deserve to know what actions [RCCC] is going to take to make things better for its Black students (Hernandez, 2020). Following the listening session, the college began to take steps to address the anti-Blackness and structural racism that had existed at RCCC for years.

Secondary Data Analysis Findings

I conducted secondary data analysis provided by the RCCC Institutional Effectiveness Office (IEO) and the California Community College Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) to identify data that may contribute to understanding the experiences of Black women on campus.

This information came from five sources: RCCC Observations Report 2018-2019, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) Report (2019), Higher Education Data Sharing (HEDS) Diversity and Equity Campus Climate Survey (RCCC OIE, 2018), RCCC Equity Dashboard, RCCC 2019-2020 Student Equity Plan, and Community College Equity Assessment Lab (CCEAL) Community College Success Measure Report (2019).

RCCC Observations 2018

RCCC's Institutional Effectiveness Office calls its Observations publication "a Compendium of Information for and about the students." This is a public-facing publication. I reviewed the report's data to determine patterns of enrollment and outcomes for Black students as compared to students of other racial and ethnic groups. What is seen is a steady decline in the number of Black students over five years. While this decline has fluctuated slightly from 2017-2019 (not shown) it continues to remain under the 1200+ students in 2013. This information does not include differentiation for gender within race and ethnicity.

Table 2

RCCC Enrollment by Ethnicity (of Credit Students)

	Fall 2013	Fall 2014	Fall 2015	Fall 2016	Fall 2017
Count					
African American	1211	1207	1108	1046	1022
Asian	6008	6292	6603	6516	6503
Hispanic	11841	13048	13914	13957	14092
Native American	26	28	31	27	31
Pacific Islander	39	33	28	27	28
White	3271	2481	4130	4021	4096
Two or more	1650	2566	901	889	948
Unknown	1368	1174	1072	1014	990
Total	25414	26829	27787	27497	27710
Percent					
African Amer.	5%	4%	4%	4%	4%
Asian	24%	23%	24%	24%	24%

Hispanic	47%	49%	50%	51%	51%
Native Amer.	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Pacific Islander	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
White	13%	9%	15%	15%	15%
Two or more	6%	10%	3%	3%	3%
Unknown	5%	4%	4%	4%	4%

Note. RCCC's ethnic demographics are seen changing from 2013 to 2017 (Observations, 2018).

First-Year Experience Pathway

I selected this data to include because the First Year Pathway Program at RCCC is considered the model program for first-year students. Students who participate in the First Year Pathways program experience greater rates of success and completion. The table shows a decrease in the participation of Black students from the first year to the most recent year depicted. Though the 3% participation rate is almost consistent with the current enrollment of Black students overall, it must be noted that the First-Year Pathways program incorporated the Umoja program as a Pathway program, which may have contributed to the participation levels. This data was not disaggregated by gender; therefore, it is unclear how Black women are represented in this overall number.

Table 3

First-Year Experience Pathway Participation by Ethnicity

Count	Fall 2013	Fall 2014	Fall 2015	Fall 2016	Fall 2017
African American	**61**	**27**	**48**	**50**	**57**
Asian	207	306	444	470	589
Hispanic	522	637	872	994	996
Native American	2			3	3
Pacific Islander		1	1		6
White	33	10	169	189	243

Two or more	105	137	40	51	65
Unknown	8	19		162	98
Total	938	1137	1574	1919	2057
Percent					
African Amer.	7%	2%	3%	3%	3%
Asian	22%	27%	28%	25%	29%
Hispanic	56%	56%	55%	52%	48%
Native Amer.	0%			0%	0%
Pacific Islander		0%	0%		0%
White	4%	1%	11%	10%	12%
Two or more	11%	12%	3%	3%	3%
Unknown	1%	2%	0%	8%	5%

Note. A decrease in Black students participating in RCCC's First Year Experience Pathway program is indicated here (Observations, 2018).

The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)

The IPEDS data for RCCC was compared to 11 similar community colleges in its region. The Data Feedback Report "is intended to provide institutions a context for examining the data they submitted to IPEDS. The purpose of this report is to provide institutional executives a useful resource and to help improve the quality and comparability of IPEDS data" (NCES, 2019). Data provided in the IPEDS comparison report for RCCC was not disaggregated for gender within race and ethnicity. Enrollment data indicates that RCCC enrollment for Black students overall is the same as the 11 comparison institutions (at 4%), and their graduation rates are similar, at 19%. This indicates Black students are not enrolled in high numbers, and in some cases, not at parity with the representation of African Americans in local high schools and communities. African American students represent 7.4% of the student population in Rose City high schools and 8.8% of the overall population in Rose City itself. The adjacent town that is also served by Rose City

School District, Foothill Community, within Rose City Community College District has a Black population of 21% (US Census Bureau, 2019).

The data selected for comparison was determined by the institution. RCCC did not choose to disaggregate data further by gender within race and ethnicity. Had they done so, it would have provided data about Black women.

The IEC at RCCC provided further data from IPEDS (See Table 4). The table reflects the completion rates for a cohort of full-time, first-time degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate students that started RCCC in the 2015-16 AY and completed within three years by 2018-19.

Table 4

Completion Rates for an RCCC Cohort

Race/Ethnicity	Men	Women
Hispanic/Latino	20%	29%
Asian	50%	62%
Black or African American	14%	23%
White	48%	48%

Note. The completion rates for Black or African American women were lower than the other women reported (RCCC Office of Institutional Effectiveness, 2020).

HEDS Diversity and Equity Campus Climate Survey 2018

The Higher Education Data Sharing (HEDS) Consortium Diversity and Equity Campus Climate Survey ask students, faculty, staff, and administrators about their perceptions of their institution's climate, perceptions of how their institution supports diversity and equity, and experiences with discrimination and harassment at their institution (Institutional Effectiveness,

2020). I created a table (See Table in Appendix 8) that reflects the survey outcomes and compared that to the information gathered from the women who participated in this study to provide context to the results of the survey. The table includes the narrative provided for each of the survey questions. I believe this be an important aspect for seeing how the college perceived the survey responses and the narratives they chose in representing that perception. I found that there were missing responses from Black students for some questions. Some of these questions would be pertinent to understanding the campus climate for Black students. I followed up with the RCCC IEC and was informed that not enough students might have responded to a particular question. I pressed the researchers to look to see if that was the case or to provide me with the raw data and they were not able to do either.

RCCC Equity Dashboard Data

The equity data on the RCCC website hosts data for various ethnic and racial groups. The data included encompasses enrollment numbers (section enrollment not headcount), retention, and success percentages. The public-facing dashboard does not disaggregate the data by gender within ethnic/racial groups. However, I was able to secure data disaggregated by ethnicity and gender, specifically for women. The tables comparing the overall Equity Dashboard Data with the data provided to me by the researchers in the Institutional Effectiveness office specifically for Black women show that Black women are not enrolled in as many courses as other student groups, the retention[3] rate for Black women is slightly better than the overall student retention rate, however, the success[4] rates for Black women there is a 6.8% as compared to the overall

[3] Retention rate is define as the rate at which students competed courses and did not drop or withdraw from the course.
[4] Success rate is defined as all credit enrollments from which a student received a grade of A,B.C or P for the course.

student success rate. This indicates that there is some challenge or barrier that exists for Black women toward successful course outcomes.

RCCC Equity Plan Summary for 2019-2022

While equity data for Black women did not exist on the public-facing Equity Dashboard but only upon request, I was able to find this data from the college's Equity Plan Summary for 2019-2020 through a search of the RCCC website. The introduction to the summary report includes the following statement:

As such, we are pursuing parity in educational outcomes with the purposeful understanding that (a) historical and contemporary policies, practices, and discourses have created structural barriers for Students of Color in particular; (b) race and ethnicity intersect with other defining identity markers such as gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, citizenship status, class, and others that have varying degrees of privilege and marginalization associated with them in higher education and beyond; and (c) even so, Students of Color, LGBTQ+[5] students, Students with Disabilities, Current and Former Foster Youth, and Veterans bring within their lived experiences and aspirations various assets to our college. (RCCC Student Equity Plan, 2019)

The report included data for Black female students for the following metrics:

1. Enrollment at the same college;
2. Retained from Fall to Spring at the same college;
3. Completed both transfer-level math and English within the District the first year;

[5] The LGBTQ+ group includes representation from all targeted student populations therefore they may be experiencing multiple barriers and oppressions related to these goals and they may also be included in other group data.

4. Attained the Vision Goal[6] Completion Definition
5. Transferred to a post-secondary institution.

The report shows the disproportionate impact experienced by each targeted group. Groups are identified to have equity gaps as compared to the overall metrics for the college and statewide system goals. In addition to providing the equity data for targeted groups, the report identifies the strategies that will be taken by the College to remedy the gaps.

The following is an analysis of the report as it relates to Black women:

1. Metric 1-Black women experience the highest negative impact of all targeted groups as it relates to this metric. This means fewer Black women maintain consistent enrollment at RCCC than other groups. The identified strategies for this metric do not identify any efforts to address this gap specifically for Black women. The strategies are generalized for all students.
2. Metric 2- There is a 4% equity gap for Black women related to retention from the Fall to Spring semester. The strategies stated to correct this gap for any of the female groups, however, it does identify the need for inquiry related to mean of color.
3. Metric 3-Black women experience an 8% equity gap as related to the completion of transfer-level math and English. This is equal to that of Black men. Strategies related to this metric identify academic support activities that create a sense of belonging generally for Black, Latina/o/x, and LGBTQ+ students. However, the sub-strategies do not identify activities specifically directed for Black women, they are generalized within Black students. It does mention the need for additional inquiry about these student groups, however, it does not differentiate between Black men and women as it does with the term

[6] Vision Completion Goals refer to the Vision for Success Completion goals of the California Community College Chancellor's Office https://www.cccco.edu/About-Us/Vision-for-Success

Latina/o/x which implies that inquiry will be done for each of the gender identifiers for the overall Latino group.

4. Metric 4- RCCC identified a 27.03% equity change needed to attain the completion goal for Black women. Comparatively, there needs to be a 138.8% change to achieve this goal for Black men at RCCC. The strategies provided call for directed interventions for Black and LGBTQ+ students but not specifically for Black women. The plan also calls for "additional qualitative and mixed methods students to better understand students' intersectional experiences and provide targeted interventions (RCCC Student Equity, 2019).
5. Metric 5-Black women have a .72 transfer rate which represents an 11.76% equity gap. There are no specific strategies provided to remedy this disproportionate impact on Black women. The approaches provided are generalized for all target groups and marginalized student populations.

The information presented in the Equity Plan Summary (2019) provides a conscientious philosophical foundation for eradicating the disparities and gaps that exist for Black women at Rose City Community College. The plan provides a disaggregated look at specific equity-related goals that indicate that while Black women may have lower equity gaps than Black men and some other groups in some areas, they still have gaps in every metric being measured. The plan itself does not identify any strategies designed to close or eliminate the disparities specifically for Black women. This is problematic as there is literature that shows the most successful means of creating equity among groups is to address the specific experiences and needs of each group. (Harper, 2012; Felix and Fernandez Castro (2018)

recommend that equity practices and resources be used in "intentional ways that target student groups who face barriers in explicit ways." (pg. 26)

CCEAL 2018 Study

The Community College Success Measure (CCSM) is a survey designed by the Community College Equity Assessment Lab (CCEAL) as a comprehensive assessment tool for evaluating student success in community colleges, with a focus on students who have been historically underserved in postsecondary education. The CCSM was developed to examine predictors of community college student success and administered at RCCC in 2016 and again in 2018. CCSM's items and scales are specifically designed to measure experiences and factors directly impacting the success of community college students of color.

These factors include:

Non-cognitive outcomes (e.g. locus of control, utility, academic self-efficacy);

Environmental factors (e.g. finances, family responsibilities);

Campus ethos (e.g. campus climate, perceptions of care);

Identity (e.g. gender and race/ethnicity).

The survey used levels that were determined and defined (See Table 7).

Table 5

CCSM Definitions

Acceptable	indicated that less than 20% of students from a particular ethnic group somewhat agreed or disagreed with the item, or marked 'never'
Needs Attention	indicated that between 20-30% of students somewhat agreed or disagreed with the item, or marked 'never'

Immediate Concern	indicated that over 30% of students somewhat agreed or disagreed with the item, or marked 'never'

Note. CCSM uses these indicators to categorize student data.

Campus Ethos Domain

The Campus Ethos Domain reflects the students' perceptions of the campus climate and culture in the institution (CCEAL, 2019). In 2018, under the Campus Ethos domain, the item *perception of faculty racial bias* excluded women. The exclusion of women was due to the intentional focus on the experiences of men of color, primarily Black and Latinx men. Questions asked about the perception of faculty racial bias were:

"Appreciates me compared to other racial groups"

"Interested in me compared to other racial groups"

"Pays attention to me compared to other racial groups."

Additionally, the survey included a section called Masculinity Factors that included Non-Cognitive Domains, such as *help-seeking, breadwinner orientation,* and *school as a gender-neutral domain*.

Results for Black Women

Sense of Belonging with Faculty. This factor improved from the 2016 study from needs attention to acceptable (CCEAL, 2019). This change is consistent with the positive experiences that students in this study have had with the faculty they consider to be good and engaging instructors.

Cares about my perspective in Class	Acceptable
Values interacting with me	Acceptable
Values my presence	Acceptable
Cares about my success	Acceptable

Personal Relationship with Faculty. The student responses for faculty's relationships with them were of immediate concern, the most urgent rating from this survey.

Knows my name	Acceptable
Knows about my academic goals	**Immediate Concern**
Knows about my career goals	**Immediate Concern**
Knows about my life aspirations	**Immediate Concern**
Knows important information about my life	**Immediate Concern**

Validation from Faculty. The validation from faculty was rated to be an acceptable level.

I can do the work	Acceptable
I can succeed in college	Acceptable
I belong to this institution	Acceptable

The study found that in comparing the 2016 and 2018 survey, Black women's responses for feeling welcome to engage with faculty on "academic matters" outside of the classroom improved from "needs attention" to "acceptable."

In terms of feeling welcome to talk about "non-academic matters" outside of the classroom, scores for Black women improved from "immediate concern" in 2016 to "needs attention" in 2018.

Validation from Staff	
I have the ability to do the work	**Immediate Concern**
I can succeed in college	**Immediate concern**
I belong at this institution	**Immediate Concern**
Welcomeness to Engage Inside Class	

Ask questions in class	Acceptable
Respond to questions during class	Acceptable
Participate in class discussions	Acceptable
Inquires about class progress	Acceptable
Talk before or after class	Acceptable
Welcomeness to Engage Outside of Class	
All Acceptable except Talk about non-academic matters	**Needs Attention**
Encouraged to ask for academic support	**Needs Attention**

Service Care. The findings from this survey reflect how Black women believed they were treated in other areas on campus outside the classroom. Some of the participants in this study indicated having negative experiences with staff in labs and student services spaces, particularly Financial Aid and Counseling. For Black women, scores for perceptions of care from career counseling, transfer services, and the campus library declined from acceptable to needs attention from 2016 to 2018.

Advising	Acceptable
Career Counseling	**Needs Attention**
Transfer Services	**Needs Attention**
School Library	**Needs Attention**
Computer Lab	**Needs Attention**
Tutoring	Acceptable
Service Access	
Easy to Access	Acceptable
Know where to go for help	Acceptable
Available when I need them	Acceptable

Service Efficacy	
Provide me with the help I need	Acceptable
Accurate Information	Acceptable
Critical to my success	Acceptable

Student Outcomes. Questions around student outcomes demonstrate students' levels of academic engagement, including faculty-student engagement, usage of student services, transfer readiness, and persistence (CCEAL, 2019). For Black women, scores for "academic advising" went from "needs attention" to an area of "immediate concern." In contrast, their scores for using the computer labs improved from an "immediate concern" to an area that "needs attention.

Service Use

Advising	**Immediate Concern**
Career Counseling	**Immediate Concern**
Transfer Services	**Immediate Concern**
School Library	**Needs Attention**
Computer Lab	**Needs Attention**
Tutoring	**Immediate Concern**

Faculty-Student Engagement

Talk about academic matters in class	**Needs attention**
Talk about academic matters outside of class	**Immediate concern**
Talk about non-academic matters outside of class	**Immediate Concern**
Talk about course grades	**Needs Attention**

Outcome Measures

Transfer Readiness	Acceptable
Anticipated Persistence	**Immediate Concern**

Environmental Domains. The environmental domain refers to factors external to the institution that have an impact on students' success in college. Primarily, this section presents data on insecurities, barriers, and challenges. With respect to food and housing insecurities, two important points should be noted. First, the CCSM focuses on the most acute form of food insecurities (as opposed to marginal levels). Second, the measure for housing insecurities is designed to encompass an array of challenges that students can experience, ranging from "couch surfing" to "homelessness." Thus, it is a more general measure of housing insecurity (CCEAL, 2019).

CCEAL examines the extent that students on campus (as a whole) experience food, housing, transportation, employment, and other types of insecurities. Women, more so than men, experienced higher levels of insecurity across all areas. Overall, regardless of race/ethnicity, women reported scores that "need attention" for several areas, including housing insecurity, legal challenges, and relational barriers. Five of the seven areas were identified as "needing attention" for Black women, including transportation concerns, legal challenges, relational challenges, employment barriers, and health concerns.

College Requested Items. RCCC requested several items that provided additional insight into the experiences of students at the college. Given this, the largest points of concern are for Black students. Specifically, both Black men and women reported scores of "immediate concern" in two areas: over-exposure to the criminal justice system and feelings of being

stereotyped at RCCC (CCEAL, 2019). The responses from Black women to the following items indicate they are disproportionately impacted by stereotypes and criminal justice.

Have you or someone in your immediate family been impacted by incarceration and/or the criminal justice system?

Black Women	Mean
24.4%	14.7%

Do you feel that you have been stereotyped at RCCC based on appearance?

Black Women	Mean
34.1%	22.7%

The CCEAL data provides a broad perspective of how Black female students are experiencing RCCC. It indicates that Black women are feeling supported by faculty within the classroom and about their abilities in the classroom, however that interest from faculty does not seem to extend beyond the classroom or course-specific realm. The areas that need to be addressed immediately are those that support Black women toward their educational goals and positive outcomes. There is cause for concern about the areas that indicate "needs attention" and "immediate concern" particularly those metrics that have not improved from the 2016 and 2018 study.

Summary

Findings from the secondary data analysis show that RCCC lacks information about Black female students. This is reflected in the fact there is little disaggregated dated for Black students. I was only able to find one data source that was publicly available that included data on Black women, that was the Student Equity Plan Summary Report for 2019-2022 (2019). However, even that document did not provide strategies or recommendations to increase inquiry

about Black women and their experiences or targeted approaches to eliminate the disparities for Black women. Consistent with prior research on Black women in higher education, men of color were specifically were identified for attention and intervention and any deliberate statements for resolving equity gaps for Black women were cloaked in the aggregate identity for Black students. The CCEAL data provided the most information about what Black women were experiencing at RCCC. However, there were key questions in the study regarding experiences with racism and stereotypes that excluded Black women and focused on the voices of men of color. Based on that particular study it is clear that Black women are having negative experiences, some related to their appearance, which could be rooted in gendered racial stereotypes, and areas that need immediate attention that has not been addressed by the institution from the 2016 study to the 2018 study. When analyzing those areas and comparing them to the outcomes reflected in the equity data for Black women, those components, such as academic and student services support areas, are key to educational success for students yet Black women are facing barriers from those institutional systems. Furthermore, the CCSM study shows that Black women are struggling with external life challenges at higher rates than other students, particularly in the area of housing, food, and transportation insecurities, yet there are no apparent institutional programs or structures established to respond to and support them, as there are for Black men and other men of color. My review of the RCCC website additionally illuminates this as I was able to find two programs specifically designed to support Black men and two others that include Black men as a target population. The other programs that exist for Black students have no components specifically addressing the needs of Black women. The College has data that signals that Black women are experiencing institutional barriers to their

educational success but has not taken action to address that reality. Rendering Black female students invisible.

Chapter 5: Findings: In-depth Interviews

Participants

Recruitment for the study solicited the participation of any currently enrolled RCCC student who was age 18 or over and identified as a Black woman. The method of recruitment included flyers being posted on campus, word of mouth, handing flyers to Black female students on campus, targeted recruitment was done through the Ujima and Blackademia programs, the EOP&S/CAFES (foster youth), Kinesiology, Health & Athletics Division, the Transfer Center, and the Association of Black Employees. Interested students could contact me in person or via an email address specifically created for this study. Initially, 26 students expressed interest in participating in the study, however, only 15 students scheduled interviews, and ultimately 11 of those 13 participated in the study. Each student who participated in the study completed a demographic survey before the interview and created a pseudonym to be used in the study. The following table provides the demographic information for the study participants.

Table 6

Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Racial Id	Age Range	Gender Identity	Sexual Orientation	Enrollment Status 1	Enrollment Status 2	Immediate Ed. Goal	Long Term Ed. Goal
Kimberly	Black/AA	55-64	Female	Hetero.	Returning	Part-time	AS[7]	AS
Amaya	Black/AA	18-24	Female	Question.	Contin.	Full-time	ADT[8]	Profess. Degree

[7] Associate Degree Only—not transferring
[8] Associate Degree for Transfer—student takes a course of study that will enable them to transfer (i.e., A-G requirements)

Sweets	Black/AA	18-24	Female	Hetero.	Contin.	Full-time	ADT	Bachelor's
D'artagnan	Black/AA	25-34	Female	Bi-sexual	Returning	Full-time	ADT	Profess. Degree
Wilma	Black/AA	35-44	Female	Hetero.	Returning	Full-time	ADT	Grad. Degree
Ness	Black/Latina	18-24	Female	Hetero.	New/FY	Part-time	ADT	Grad. Degree
Amanda	Black/AA	18-24	Female	Hetero.	New/FY	Full-time	ADT	Grad. Degree
Chi	Black/AA	55-64	Female	Hetero.	Contin.	Part-time	Certif.[9]	AS
KeKe	Black/AA	25-34	Trans.	Hetero.	Returning	Part-time	Certif.	Job/ Intern
Weaver	Black/AA	35-44	Female	Hetero.	Contin.	Full-time	ADT	Profess. Degree
June Baby	Afro. Carib.	25-34	Female	Hetero.	Cont.	Part-time	ADT	Profess. Degree

Note. The diversity of participants in the study is noted here.

As can be seen from Table 6, the group of participants was diverse in terms of age, sexual orientation, enrollment status, and educational goals. I will share a deeper introduction of each participant to provide context for the findings throughout the chapter.

Kimberly is an older returning/re-entry student who has taken classes at Rose City Community College for 30 years. She is a single parent with an adult daughter. She initially came to the college in 1978 but as she stated, "I decided I wanted to live the fast life…I didn't

[9] Certificate-student—pursuing a certificate in a career (professional or paraprofessional) or technical field (i.e., paralegal, auto tech, construction, certified nursing assistant)

know what I wanted at that time, so I didn't stay in school. I went into the workforce." It was when Kimberly became a parent that she decided to return to school and take classes again, so she could get a stable job and to set an example for her daughter. She explained: "I have not gone to school full-time since coming back because I have always had to be there for my daughter, family and work full-time, so I take one, maybe two classes at a time." Kimberly described herself as "an alone kind of person" who likes to help people but can be "kinda shy and I guess nerdy." Kimberly's church community is very important to her, and she currently works on campus as a bookkeeper as she works toward finishing her AA in Accounting.

Amaya is a "traditional age" continuing student. She describes herself as "energetic and outgoing and very unique and creative." Amaya attended a local high school and came to RCCC directly from high school in fall 2018 and has been enrolled since. According to Amaya, her family is supportive and nourishing. In response to completing the demographic survey, Amaya divulged that she would consider herself heterosexual "but currently I am in a relationship with a woman because that's who I like right now, but I'm not sure how that works, because I'm Christian and you know…so I'm Questioning." Amaya is the middle child of a family of five children. She considers her family to be her community and she loves being together with them at family reunions. Amaya is active in the Ujima club and works in the Transfer Center on campus.

Sweets is a continuing student, who is a student worker in the Black Student Success Center at RCCC. She comes from a large, artistic family. Both parents graduated from historically Black colleges and she and her siblings "are all pretty much entertainers. I sing, dance, model, act, and occasionally paint and draw." Sweets attended multiple schools as a child and ultimately graduated from a downtown Los Angeles high school for performing arts. Sweets

shared: “I have two learning disabilities, short-term memory loss, and dyslexia. So, for a long time, I thought I wouldn’t even make it to college.” Sweets have struggled with the stigma and misconceptions attached to learning disabilities, which have affected her educational journey.

D’artagnan is a 31-year-old returning student who has been actively involved on campus in clubs and student government for three years. D’artagnan considers herself middle class, from a family that instilled good values. Both her parents have retired law enforcement officers. Throughout her childhood and teenage years, she experienced her parents’ drug abuse, domestic violence, and homelessness. “My mom and dad were doing drugs…they told me don’t tell anybody, this is family business…they did that until I was 17.” D’artagnan described how they lost their house and began living in hotels “for maybe two or three years…Basically my whole middle school life.” D’artagnan attended multiple schools in the RCCC area and ultimately graduated with a high school diploma. She attended RCCC initially out of high school but left to get a job because she was not ready to be there. D’artagnan returned several years later and recently graduated and was accepted to start at a UC in the next semester.

Wilma is in the 35-44 age range and is married with three children. She had attended a community college directly out of high school but there was a financial burden because she was not eligible for financial aid. Wilma shared that an abusive relationship stopped her from returning to college: “he tried to kill me, so I ended up hurt really bad…I was not ready to go back to school in public after having so many surgeries. And I was not financially able, so I went to work.” Throughout her life, Wilma has attended trade schools for certificates in computer technology and repair, as well as cosmetology and culinary arts, to gain the necessary skills for employment. Wilma stated that she returned to school because of her husband, her children, and her interest in educational advocacy: “my husband was the catalyst of, I’m going back to

school…he has his master's degree and his life all planned out." Wilma currently works in the Welcome Center at RCCC.

Ness is a 19-year old first-year student who is part of the Ujima program. Ness recently graduated from a local high school, is the third of six children, and lives with members of her extended family. Ness described her family as close but said that her family has struggled financially all of her life: "I grew up in apartments. We only recently moved into a house a few years ago, because it was left to my grandfather. For me, it has felt weird to be stationary in a house and not have to move in and out of apartments." Though she attended several different schools growing up, Ness was in AP classes in high school. Ness initially planned on attending Cal State Dominguez Hills but realized she could not afford to have the full college experience, so she attended RCCC. She explained: "I decided not to go because we just couldn't afford it. It just, the dorms alone were expensive…so that kind of broke me a little." Ness attended full-time originally but had to start going part-time so she could work part-time as well: "I really want to come to school full-time and get more involved with Ujima because those will be connections that help lead me to the future I want."

Amanda is a 22-year-old first-year student. She is a single mother of an 18-month old son and described herself as "a first-generation college student, super-excited to take my educational journey." Amanda has experienced a great deal of trauma in her young life: "My mother committed suicide when I was a young girl. Our family, we suffer a lot from mental health disorders." Due to her family situation, Amanda attended many different schools, was a foster youth, and spent time, including much of her high school time, in juvenile halls. She ultimately dropped out of high school. Amanda described her community as going from one that had a lot of positive Black-owned businesses and neighbors who watched out for one another, to one in

which gangs became the families and there was an increase in human trafficking. Amanda became a victim of human trafficking at age 13: “But like many other young girls in my community, we turned to prostitution, because that’s what was normalized.” Amanda decided to attend RCCC after the birth of her son and to get away from the life she was living after speaking to her father, who “ said ‘go to school, get an education…that’s how you’re going to win.’” Amanda is currently part of the Ujima program, the EOP&S/CAFES program, and involved with the Harvard Leadership program.

Chi is the oldest of nine children. Her age is between 55-64. She has worked in a hospital and the medical field since 1978. She is a continuing student and began attending RCCC to get a degree in gerontology because she enjoys working with the elderly and wants to be an activity director for elderly patients in a hospital or long-term care center. She described this role as involving “case managing, getting to know their background, and how to guide them in a direction where they’ll be comfortable mentally and physically.” Chi has endured multiple forms of abuse, several serious injuries, as well as a heart attack on campus. Despite these hindrances, she remains optimistic and excited about her education.

Keke is a transgender woman in her early thirties. Keke holds a bachelor’s degree from a prior institution and attends RCCC specifically for its music program and other various opportunities: “Well, I’m an artist, so just very eclectic.” Keke’s educational history included public schools, both affluent and under-resourced, homeschooling, private schools, and a Christian private school that she considered to be “very cultish.” Throughout her younger years, Keke described multiple incidents of racism, sexual abuse, and transphobia. At a young age, she was hospitalized for mental health issues, “taken out of school and put in this hospital…it was like a mental hospital…but I was an outpatient.” She further depicted the sexual abuse that

started in elementary school and from others in her church which impacted her schooling. Keke's negative encounters related to her identity have continued, which led her to attend multiple campuses seeking the best environment. Throughout these experiences, Keke maintains her passion for music and said: "I want to know all there is to know about music and how I can perfect and share my perspective of music."

Weaver is a 37-year old returning student. She is an only child to her mother, but among seven siblings on her father's side, and is a single parent to an 11-year son. She describes her family, including extended family, as being close and supportive. She has a particularly strong bond with her mother who she calls "my soul source, her back-bone…she has always been here for me…helped me raise my son, as we both had to work, and now that I went back to school full-time." Weaver attended RCCC after high school but "was playing around, and didn't take it seriously, because there were so many people I went to high school with, we saw it as the 13th grade, I thought I am not ready to do this, I didn't know about asking for help or resources, so I went to work." Weaver attained an AA several years ago but returned to school for a degree in nursing, her professional goal. One of the commonalities she has noticed throughout her time at RCCC was the lack of Black people on campus: "I thought there weren't many when I came the first two times, but now there are even less, I'm just shocked."

June Baby is a single parent with a two-year-old son. She proudly stated she is half Trinidadian and half Guyanese. She was raised by her paternal grandparents most of her early life and said, "I am a coddled child, everything was kind of given to me." After middle school, June Baby attended multiple schools, but eventually dropped out, moved out of state, became a victim of sex trafficking, and ended up in jail. It was that experience that made her return to high school in California for her senior year: "My grandparents rewarded me with money or things for

getting good grades, so I began to have that motivation…I did participate in different things. Like they had a big BSU, we got to go on a lot of cultural trips. The teachers were encouraging." June Baby did not complete her senior year at the high school, instead of doing so through the community education center of RCCC. She completed her high school diploma with a 3.8, then enrolled in RCCC full-time. June Baby currently works in the Welcome Center on campus.

The similarities among the women in the study are that they come from complex family structures. Their complexities included being part of a blended family that they may or may not have been aware of until they were older. In describing her family structure, Wilma explained how she came to find out that her father had another family: "So, now you get the gist of the type of father I had…I found out that he had another child with a woman while he was married to my mother."

Nine of the 11 participants divulged that they came from families in which there was physical, sexual, and substance abuse. June Baby explains of her middle school years: "there was a lot going on in the household with my grandfather, as far as drugs and stuff like that, like pills…selling it, using it."

All of the women come from large families that include five or more siblings, as well as extended family members living in one home. Sweets, a continuing student, shared: "well, I come from a really big family. I have five sisters and one brother…for a long time we lived in a two-bedroom house with one bathroom, so all of us in there." Amanda's family was the largest, with 14 siblings who "are all over the states and a brother in Ocho Rios."

These descriptors provide a snapshot of the stories of these Black women who participated in the study. The next section will provide a deeper insight into how their background and lived experiences have contributed to the development of their funds of identity.

Table 7 indicates the type of experiences each woman has had in her life and educational journey, how they have used their funds of identity to overcome and excel, their self-portrait, and the type of funds of identity[10] each students' story and drawing reflected (Esteban-Guitart, 2016).

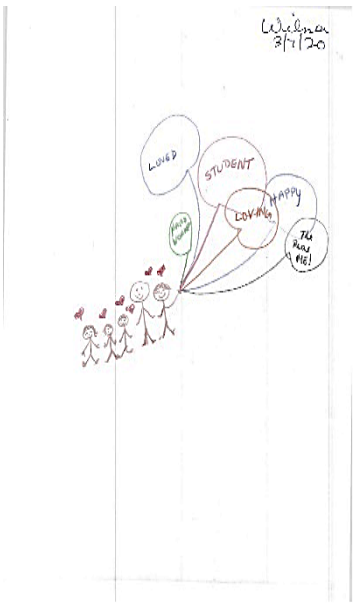
Table 7

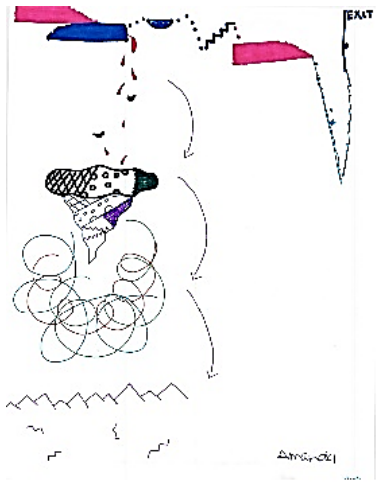
Self-Portraits

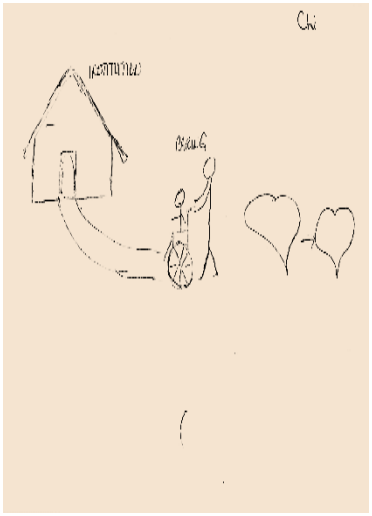
Name	Experience	Funds of Identity	Self-Portrait	Type of Funds of Identity
Kimberly	Single parent, part-time, returning, working student, has not felt encouraged in educational settings, feelings of isolation because of age and identity	**Caregiver/helper utilizes resources**, seeks connections, *is a conscientious* ***resource provider*** *in her job on campus,* supports **colleagues** and students.		Institutional and social funds of identity

[10] For explanation of types funds please see Chapter 2 or Appendix.

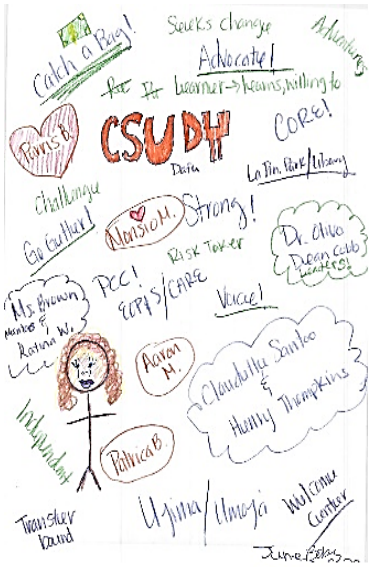
Name	Experience	Funds of Identity	Self-Portrait	Type of Funds of Identity
Amaya	Supportive family, involved in support programs for Black students, has dropped classes rather than be subjected to stereotypes and microaggressions	**Positive self-image** (Black Girl Magic and **scholar)**, high self-**advocacy**, confident in who she is, sees her contributions to the classroom in terms of **positivity** and perspective.		Social funds and cultural funds of identity
Sweets	Complex family structure, supportive, artistic family, learning disabilities, experienced microaggressions in class (stereo-type threat), experienced gendered harassment on campus, a student leader in program and club for Black students	**Positive self-image** as a Black woman uses her artistic skill to give **voice** to her experiences, **utilizes campus resources** to manage her learning, sees herself as an **intelligent** and a **leader**. Takes on leadership roles to **advocate** for Black students.		Social funds, cultural funds, and practical funds of identity

Name	Experience	Funds of Identity	Self-Portrait	Type of Funds of Identity
D'artagnan	Complex family structure, strong cultural upbringing, negative educational experiences, stopped out, family trauma, addiction, dropped out of school, negative college experiences with microaggressions and stereotyping with faculty, involved in campus life, leadership, dropped classes to avoid racist teachers	**Strong self-agency** took on **leadership** roles to **advocate** for students, challenges exclusion from curriculum, and microaggressions. Brings people together, resolves conflicts, **utilizes campus and community resources**. Takes risks on behalf of herself and others to create change. Strong **self-identity** and self-image. Flexes her **intelligence** and voice.		Social funds, institutional funds, geographical funds (RCCC), cultural funds, and practical funds
Wilma	Complex family of origin structure, though supportive family, abuse and trauma in various areas of life, including earlier education, returning student, parenting student, multiple career paths	**Advocate** for parents and children knows she is **intelligent**, takes advantage of education for **multiple skill sets** and to be employable, **utilizes campus resources**, **assists other students** to navigate college, strong **agency**, self-advocate, **loving**, involved parent.		Social funds, institutional funds, cultural funds, and practical funds

Name	Experience	Funds of Identity	Self-Portrait	Type of Funds of Identity
Nessa	Close and supportive family, financial instability, transient housing, part-time student, working student, has experienced microaggressions and stereotyping, has also experienced gendered harassment on campus. Part of college program for Black students	Asserts her **intelligence** through involvement and **leadership** roles related to her educational goals, works to **provide for her family**, **utilizes multiple campus resources**, **counters** stereotypes by calling it out with peers in co-curricular spaces, strong **self-identity,** and sense of **community**. She is committed to **education** and an advanced degree.		Social funds, cultural funds, institutional and practical funds of identity
Amanda	Unstable family structure, former foster youth, abuse, trauma, addiction, incarceration, negative early education experience, supportive parent, microaggressions and gendered harassment on campus, parenting student, involved in campus programs for former foster	Takes advantage of **leadership** and **involvement** opportunities on campus **utilizes campus resources**, **engages faculty and administrators** to be the best student she can, **uses her voice to advocate** for herself and other students like her, especially Black women, is a motivated and assertive **learner**,		Social funds, institutional funds, and cultural funds

Name	Experience	Funds of Identity	Self-Portrait	Type of Funds of Identity
	youth and Black students	demonstrates **agency** and aspires for **advanced degree**. Caring, **loving parent.**		
Chi	Part-time CTE student, working student, complex family structure, experienced domestic violence, experienced housing discrimination, health issues, member of multiple campus programs and services	**Clear occupational goals and how education relates** to those goals, **caregiver**, **resilient**, strong **self-advocate**, agency, **resourceful**, active **participant** in the classroom, **contributes her experience and perspective** to class, actively **engages with faculty and staff**.		Social funds, institutional funds, and practical funds of identity
Keke	Returning student, family, and church abuse, discrimination and microaggressions on campus related to Black trans identity, negative pre-college educational experiences, mental health challenges	**Self-advocate** in the classroom and on campus **utilizes campus resources**, **challenges discrimination and microaggressions** in the classroom and on campus, **uses her music and artistic talent** to give **voice** to her experiences and challenges facing students like her,		Institutional funds, cultural funds, and practical funds of identity

Name	Experience	Funds of Identity	Self-Portrait	Type of Funds of Identity
		confident in her **intelligence.**		
Weaver	Supportive family, returning student, stopped out, parenting student, working student, negative experiences in earlier education, some negative experiences with microaggressions, experienced isolation, in class and on campus, has dropped classes due to microaggressions.	**Utilizes campuses resources work on campus** to learn more about campus processes and navigating them, brings her son to campus to **instill an expectation of college education**, she **supports other students** and **helps them understand the resources** available to them, **motivated learner**, clear about **career goals and how to achieve that goal**.		Social funds, geographical funds, cultural funds, and practical funds of identity

Name	Experience	Funds of Identity	Self-Portrait	Type of Funds of Identity
June Baby	Parenting student, supportive family, complex family structure, negative secondary education experiences (stereotyping and bullying), dropped out, trauma, incarceration, working student, experienced microaggressions in college, involved in a program for parenting students and Black students	**Advocates** for herself and **other students, involved** in programs and groups on campus, **challenges microaggressions** and negative perspectives of parenting students, **volunteers,** brings son on campus to connect to education, **confident** in her **intelligence, utilizes campus resources, positive self-image, agency.**		Social funds, institutional funds, geographical funds, and cultural funds

Note. Each participant indicated a varied set of experiences that contributed to funds of identity.

I found the women in the study have internalized the following funds of identity from their lived experiences: They are resilient, motivated learners, intelligent, and resourceful. They use their agency, and positive self-image, using their funds in leadership, advocacy, and helping with love, compassion, and creativity.

Black Women's Funds of Identity

To answer the question of how Black women use their funds of identity in their roles as students I will begin with a refresher of the concept of funds of identity, how that concept was applied in this study and the findings that came from the interviews with the 11 Black women.

As I discussed earlier, the concept of funds of identity was presented by Esteban-Guitart and Moll (2014) as an extension of the funds of knowledge approach by connecting the cultural and social knowledge gained from home and community to the classroom experiences and learning (Gonzalez et al., 2005). Funds of identity are the lessons and resources individuals internalize from family, home, and community resources that help them make sense of the world. Also incorporated into a person's funds of identity is the influence of the social, economic, and political circumstances in which they occur and are used (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014).

I used the funds of identity approach in this study to shift the narrative of Black women in education from a deficit lens to one that is asset-based. The women not only shared their lived experiences but also how those experiences impacted their current context as students in community college.

Primary Findings

Finding 1: Black Women Use Their Funds of Identity to Navigate and Survive Educational, Societal, and Institutional Abuse

I asked each participant questions about her family structure as well as dynamics within their family. They were asked to describe their community and the role of that community in their lives. I also solicited information about participants' educational experiences prior to coming to RCCC and how that made them feel about themselves and their education. Finally, they were asked to uncover messages they may have received about what it means to be a Black woman and how they have interpreted those messages over time.

The women in the study shared their familial and life histories, and most of the women described various experiences of abuse, exploitation, and trauma, some of which occurred in

educational settings. One overarching theme emerged: that the women used their funds of identity to navigate or overcome the abuse, in their own way.

A common fund of identity that appeared from participants was being a part of a family. The concept was not exclusive to their family of origin but rather a more general sense of being a member of a family. The importance of family or belonging to family was exemplified in different forms. For many, family and community were synonymous terms.

Sweets, for example, comes from a large blended family. Her parents divorced and there was tension within the family after the separation, a time during which her mother and her siblings became homeless. Sweets' description of her family dynamics reflects the non-dichotomous perspective of family: "I have a pretty good relationship with my mom, for the most part…My dad and I's relationship got better over the years. I went to therapy and we ended up going to therapy together…Me and my dad are actually really good now." She further shared that she doesn't have a great deal of trust with her siblings because they used to bully her about her learning disabilities when she was younger. She explained: "they kind of took all their anger out on me because they couldn't take it out on my mom or dad. I know that's where it comes from and I don't hold a grudge about it at all. I still love them." She said that since becoming a college student she feels more supported in her educational goals by them.

Amanda's family system and childhood experiences were by far the most complicated and potentially traumatic, yet it was those very experiences that motivated her to pursue higher education, with the ultimate goal of becoming a psychologist:

My mother…she committed suicide when I was a young girl. Our family, we suffer a lot from mental health disorders, which is why I would like to move forward to getting my doctoral degree in order to become a psychologist, so, therefore, I can reach out to people who look like

me, people in my community…my dad was a single parent. He did what he could. My father couldn't read or write until he was 45 years old. He's now a business owner. He has always encouraged me and my younger sister to get an education.

Kimberly's family consists of her biological family, her co-workers, friends, and her church community. Family is represented for Kimberly by demonstrations of mutual support: "I can depend on my family if I ever need help…I have good friends, they're very supportive of me, they're there if I need them…Always there to assist me and I'm trying to serve them the best I can…I have very dear co-workers who are very supportive of me and I try to give that back."

D'artagnan's family experience has caused her emotional turmoil and conflict, yet she loves her family and gathers her strength as a student leader by expanding her positive sense of family beyond her family of origin:

> Because I feel like I'm the type of person that if we're on a team together, I'm going to rock with my team no matter what disagreements we have because we're a team, we're a family. And families don't always agree and that's okay, but at the end of the day this is who we got, and we got each other's back. Everyone in OSL has become my family now. They're just all really supportive of myself and all students.

D'Artagnan reflected her feelings about love and family in her self-portrait as she described her drawing, "So my picture is just a picture of myself and the things that I care about the most, which are students, my friends, and my family and a heart that says love always."

Figure 1

Sample Self-Portrait

Note. D'artagnan's self-portrait indicates important loved ones and self-descriptions.

The trauma that challenged the early identity formation for these women transcends their family and community lives into their early educational experiences as well. Nine of the 11 women interviewed shared experiences that occurred beginning in middle school that included bullying, microaggressions, questioning their intelligence, and being told they didn't belong.

Wilma discussed her early education which began a pattern of traumatic bullying not only by other children but by adults as well:

> I have a lot of bad memories. I had a teacher accuse me of throwing things…these are things you don't think you would remember as an adult…she accused me of throwing a pencil and hitting another student in the eye. I ended up in trouble. I was accused of that and I didn't do it. I'll never forget it was like, you're lying, and you're a child. And so, I feel like I started being bullied by adults at that age.

Wilma continued that it sticks with her today as an adult when she hears another adult tell a child that they are lying. She said she usually steps in to help in such situations, because as she says, "you should never put that stigma on a child." Wilma's current advocacy for children is a direct result of her experiences with education earlier in life.

D'artagnan's middle school experience made her beg her mother to move her to a different school. She teared up as she reflected on it, describing how she felt about having a middle school so closely adjacent to a high school, "that experience is…I would never do that. Never put your kid in the middle school/high school situation because men are perverts. They prey on little girls and it's gross because a lot of [male] seniors would try and talk to the eighth graders because they were young and didn't know they were gross." D'artagnan moved to ninth grade at that school but stopped attending class because she didn't feel comfortable on campus.

June Baby's pre-college educational journey was similar to that of D'artagnan's and some of the other participants, concerning attending multiple middle and secondary schools due to non-conforming behavior and lack of support from school personnel. D'artagnan, June Baby, and Keke were each kicked out by the teachers in the programs that they felt had kept them in school. For D'artagnan, this was the choir, for June Baby, it was the Health Academy, and for

Keke, it was the music program. They were often removed or suspended from school for such things as not wearing the appropriate uniform or questioning a teacher. June baby reflects on her experience:

> The only part that I did like was that I was part of the Health Academy because that was the career path that I thought I wanted to go into…Unfortunately there's a way that you kind of have to act in Health Academy…that you'll follow rules, you'll dress in dress code. And I wasn't. And so that was alarming the coordinator and she would ask, "Are you doing any drugs or anything like that?" I said what? Because I have jeans on? You're asking me if I'm doing drugs? I felt like I was being stereotyped because there were groups on campus who wore certain clothes and she assumed I was one of those people…I dressed different. I have my own style, which today I still do.

For four of the 11 participants, these events led them to drop out of high school for a period of time before returning to get their high school diplomas.

Interviews often indicated a conflict between the individual's belief in her intelligence and the concurrent underlying doubt that came from messages and treatment by external players, primarily primary and secondary education and societal stereotypes. This is the phenomenon of stereotype threat, a socio-psychological threat felt by an individual during a situation or activity for which a negative stereotype applies to a group they belong to (Neal-Jackson, 2020; Steele, 1997). Internal conflict arises when the beliefs Black women have of themselves do not match the stereotypical perspectives of instructors, staff, or peers. The response for many of these women is to drop a class or leave an activity, removing themselves from the situation that is not congruent with their self-identity and motivation. These experiences were expressed by eight of the 11 participants in the study.

Amanda felt this in her middle school classrooms: “I feel like I wanted to learn. I felt like I’ve always had a drive to get my education, but the resources weren’t necessarily there. I think the teachers were more focused on getting through the classes more than actually teaching anything.” I followed up by asking Amanda how she felt about that as a student who liked to learn. She responded: “ I felt very insecure because I didn’t think I had any power in any other areas besides in class…because now I’m spending majority of my days in school, where it wasn’t good to be Black, even in a Black community.” Amanda’s insecurity has carried into her role as a student at RCCC: “If I don’t understand something, I feel like it’s one of those things that’s generalized…But when another student, they’ll have a question, and then it will be more elaborated on. So, it makes me feel like, are my questions stupid? Should I not ask this question? Then it makes me not want to ask questions.”

Similarly, Weaver said her statistics instructor: “made me feel like I was not smart enough to be in his class…it wasn’t that he said anything outright negative to me, just he had a tone when I asked questions. So I just stopped asking questions…but then I noticed that I wasn’t getting picked for group work and I kinda felt like it was because of the tone he had with me, that made other students feel like I wasn’t smart enough to contribute. I just tried to keep being friendly, and I did all the work to the best of my ability, but I dropped that class, yeah eventually.” As she said this, her body slumped down and her eyes turned downward; when just moments prior she was discussing positive experiences, she had been very animated and engaged.

After years of messages that informed them that they are not smart, Sweets and Kimberly shared why they are hesitant to participate in class. Sweets stated: “ I don’t feel comfortable participating in class, out loud…I don’t want people to laugh at me if I get something

wrong…I've had people look at me weird if I've answered a question correctly." Responding to the question about whether she participates in class, Kimberly answered reflectively: "No, I am not that comfortable participating in class, I don't know why I don't know if it's going back to my childhood. Sometimes I hesitate, thinking I will get the wrong answer, and other people will think something about me. But I should just be more confident, if it's the wrong answer, it's not going to hurt me…I should just take a chance."

However, the women did not allow these feelings or occurrences to deter them from their belief in their abilities and intelligence. Amaya said proudly, I've always been a scholar…I was always very talkative, but that's because I was too smart…I think I was too smart for the grade levels I was in because after I learned the lesson, I did the homework and I had nothing to do." She described how throughout her early education teachers would call her parents "like it was a shock, I'm doing so good in class…that I tested so well like I'm not supposed to be doing good in class."

Nessa shared: "when I decided to be an English major, I was the only Black person in my classes, male or female, people were acting surprised, like oh you're an English major? I'm like yeah, because I'm Black, and you know, the stereotype is that we have to be a communications or sociology major. I have always been an A or B student. I also became the co-editor of the English department annual magazine. I blew up how they saw me."

At the same predominately White school where Wilma experienced bullying and was sent to the principal's office for behavior, she was removed from the school because as she said, "I was 'too smart' to be at that school…I was then bussed to a gifted learning school." For Wilma, being intelligent was a double-edged sword, constantly challenged by educators about

whether she belonged in gifted programs, but also not necessarily fitting in with other Black children. She elaborated:

> I almost didn't make it out of school, because I was not going to class because it was not fun or challenging, even though I was very smart and knew the answers. I would never participate because I didn't want my name to be called…I didn't want to experience the names I would be called.

Wilma's demeanor changed as she told me about leaving the gifted school and attending a magnet school with other Black students: "I found that smart Black kids were in L.A…. and I was like so was I really going to school with the smart kids before? I always wondered that, because I ran into more smart Black kids when I started going back to school in L.A."

Many of the women I interviewed come from families of origin that society would deem dysfunctional and broken. However, I discovered layers of complexity that exist in their families that belie such simplistic, negative monikers. My interviews with the students did uncover instances of abuse, instability, and turmoil from which they indeed experienced trauma. However, their families were not absent of love and support. These experiences and how the women have integrated them as tools into their funds of identity aligns with the concept of difficult funds of knowledge (Huerta & Rios-Aguilar, 2018; Zipin, 2009). This concept acknowledges that not all funds that students gain from families, community, culture, and society are positive. However, it affirms the knowledge, skills, and coping mechanisms that arise out of difficult and even traumatic experiences can transcend into assets for navigating educational and societal realms.

Finding 2: Black Women Assert a Counter Narrative to the Conflicting Messages and Stereotypes About Black Women

Being Defined as Strong is Limiting

In order to gain an understanding of how the participants saw themselves as Black women, I wanted to explore the messages they had received about what it means to be a Black woman. However, I sought more than just what they had heard, and wanted to understand how they have interpreted these messages, as well as how they may have impacted their identity. The first descriptor used by ALL the women was "strong." This reflects findings of other research on Black undergraduate women and identity, in which being a Black woman and being strong were synonymous. For some they were told this by other Black women or family members, or they observed behaviors such as overcoming barriers, attaining educational goals, advancing careers, surviving difficult life events, providing for family, or helping their communities. This was interpreted as strength and associated with what it means to be a Black woman (Patton & Croom, 2017).

Kimberly, an older returning student said: "To be honest with you, it was just being a Black woman was strong." Amanda agreed: "I think a lot of times other people have this idea that Black women are just so strong, and we can just do anything, and we're so confident." The sentiment was echoed by D'artagnan, "I feel like every message that I received was just like you're strong, you got it, no matter what, you could do whatever, you can do it." While the women embraced the "strong Black woman" identity, some including it in their self-portraits, they also expressed their belief that describing Black women as strong was simultaneously empowering and limiting to who they are. Kimberly appeared exasperated as she talked about how her nephews were always saying the women in their family were "some strong women":

> Why do we all have to be classified as strong Black women? Because we can do a lot? We take a lot on. We don't have to wait on anyone to help us. We're very opinionated or whatever? We speak our mind…it doesn't ring so much positive to me. Okay, I know I'm strong. I know I could take on things and do things without need a male to help me, but it's almost like [we] could take the world on, our back is stronger than other people's backs. You don't get offended as easily as someone else might get from another culture?

I probed to ask Kimberly what she would like to hear that would ring positive to her? She responded, "Some positive words from [her nephews]. You're a beautiful sister, you have a kind heart. You do a good job…thank you for being there for us, helping us. Not to be taken for granted." Amanda's perspective was that the perception was also insufficient: "I'm not always strong, even though people see me that way. That's not the case. I'm literally cracking inside every day." She elaborated that people see what makes them feel comfortable about Black women and they don't really want to know the truth about what Black women feel, "when I go into class, I don't know…they don't know what we're suppressing, what we're hiding…studies are not being done about Black women…we're missing so much of what is going on." Wilma shared how her earlier perspective of what it meant to be strong, meant you had to accept abuse from men or be alone:

> As a child, I always looked at a Black woman as strong, but then I learned that the vision that I had was always, we don't need nobody to take care of us. We can do it by ourselves. Then I learned, uh uh [shaking her head no], that's not true…in my church I would see the husbands and wives and they were together, but in my house it wasn't like that…even though that Black woman can still be strong, but she can still have somebody on her side.

For Wilma this perspective shaped her desire to be in a loving, supportive relationship: “And so it was like we always have to fight…and I’m okay with the fight, but sometimes I don’t want to fight. Could somebody please fight for me? And that’s what I wanted when I got married to my husband, now we fight together. I don’t have to be strong alone.”

Keke, a transgender woman, offered a unique perspective to the messaging around being a strong Black woman. She transitioned two years ago, though she has presented as female for several years, and therefore offered an outsider within point of view: “I was predominantly, most of my life, raised by Black women. So, on one hand it was, they are providers, people who take care of things and just put everything together. But then on the other hand, I saw great sadness, despair, anguish, misunderstanding and lack of compassion toward them.” When I asked her how what she observed has impacted her identity as a Black woman she thoughtfully replied, “I am constantly having to dissect, am I being too, much or are people just not hearing me, really hearing me…why do I have to keep everything down here and be so nice, when other people don’t have to…they tell me ‘oh I prefer when you act this way’, but that’s what’s more comfortable for them, not always how I want to be.”

On the whole, the women in this study expressed the desire to be seen as whole beings, capable of being soft, warm, kind, and vulnerable, just as equally as they are seen as strong and resilient.

Black Women Reject Stereotypes Related to Prescribed Behavior and Appearances

A term that came up with the younger women, Amaya, Sweets, Nessa, June Baby, and Amanda, was the term ratchet. According to Slangguide.com (2020), “Ratchet is used to describe someone (usually female) as coarse and inelegant, seen as belonging to a lower social class.”

Urban Dictionary defines ratchet as “A ghetto-dialect mispronunciation of the English term "wretched" and “A ghetto girl who is loud and obnoxious and constantly causing drama and usually trashy.” Amaya described a situation in a class in high school when her teacher, a white man, asked her and her friends why they referred to themselves as “ratchet”? “He was really just trying to tell us that it is a degrading word, but for him to be tell us Black girls at a young age, I’m always going to remember that, because he was so right. She said she realized that she couldn’t answer his question but now doesn’t use that term, or even sing it when it comes up in songs, “because I realized that that word and words like bitch and ho, go against how I see myself, I am Black girl magic and smart!” Amaya smiled broadly as she uses these positive words to describe herself.

Amanda teared up as she shared her experiences growing up, and even as a young woman, related to appearance and the value of Black girls and women who are dark-complexioned.

> For someone as dark as me, it was terrible. I got bullied for things I couldn’t change, like my skin color, or my hair was too nappy. So, it wasn’t good to be Black your own community. That felt awful. Then the music, it only uplifted the Black woman if she was overly sexual, women were referred to as ratchet. I was referred to as ratchet, especially when I was being sex trafficked. I was treated in more horrible ways because of how I looked, even than other Black women who were lighter and had curly hair. So, it was awful.

I followed up by asking Amanda how that message impacted her identity. She shared that seeing older women who were in the sex profession helped her decide she didn’t want to be in their position:

> I decided I'm going to try this school thing. [My son and I] are going to try it out, and we're going to make the best of it…I feel like my true educational journey is beginning right now…there's no way in the world I can say I cannot do it because I see it. It's happening. So, I know it's possible for me.

All of the participants shared stories of being judged based on their identity as Black women. Chi shared about a conflict she had with a neighbor who " would yell at me and call me a Black, nigger bitch, and I told my landlord, who then said I was the problem and he wasn't going to do anything. So, I packed up and moved myself right out of there…I do not tolerate that kind of negativity around me." Chi laughed and then added, "I sued him for allowing that discrimination, and I won $6000!"

Sweets discussed a period in her life when she had been hurt by a classmate who rejected her because of her hair. She stated she began to straighten her hair and try to put herself above other Black people because she had a light complexion. Sweets shared that thinking this way made her feel depressed. She explained:

> I don't really think there was any one thing that made me want to go back to accepting all of my Blackness…I don't think it was an actual event that happened that made me want to just drop that narrative that I had about myself before…I think it was kind of just over time, I was just like, "People should accept me for who I am regardless of how I look, how I wear my hair, anything"

The funds of identity I found in how these women have been that they are motivated to learn, they are leaders, and they keep moving forward toward goals even if they have to pivot in life. The participants respond to the messages they have received about not being smart, not being seen completely, and stay positive through complex and at times traumatic life experiences

by their resilience, agency, and by centering themselves around their authentic selves. These funds show up in their classroom experiences and how they navigate as students at RCCC.

Finding 3: Black Women Experience Either Invisibility or Hypervisibility in Classroom Settings

Invisibility

In studies about Black women attending predominantly white universities (Shahid et al., 2017), the participants express feelings of being alone in the classroom. Their stories are indicative of a term that is often applied to Black women: invisibility. Commodore et al. (2018) cited a number of studies that found that Black college women often reported feeling isolated or as the only one. Some of these feelings come from being the only or one of few Black students in a class or from behaviors directed toward them that they believe were based on the instructor or other students projecting stereotypes about them. Nessa's experience reflects her sense of isolation: "I specifically remember…I was the only Black woman, but there was a Black man in the class, but he treated me like it was a competition with me…he was kind of challenging me in front of the class…I then felt like I was the only Black student in the class." Sweets also provided an example of what it feels like for her in most of her classes:

> For me, in the classroom, it's like you're in the back of the choir all the time. It's just like you're constantly, you're just there, but no one really notices, you…you do a lot of the work, but you don't get recognized for it…I could leave the classroom and nobody would even notice or nobody would even care…so I feel like it's kind of like being invisible.

Amanda talked about her frustration trying to get help from her instructors but feeling ignored when she tries:

> I don't always feel like I get the help I need. I do office hours, even during those office hours I feel like I'm not getting the help I need…I don't know, maybe I'm too enthusiastic…but they don't seem interested… I just feel like they're more interested in other students, I don't know, doing better than me.

The students not only shared examples of feeling personally invisible in the classroom but also, not appropriately reflected in the curriculum. D'artagnan described her American history class:

> the material and the teacher just, blipped over any mention of Black people, even when talking about the Civil War, you know you usually get some mention because of slavery, but we didn't, they focused on LGBTQ rights and women's suffrage, but no mention of Black lives and movements that led to these other movements…I was upset, so I told the teacher, you need to fix this and change your curriculum.

Wilma said she has had very good instructors, but that she has been amazed by the lack of effort on the part of instructors to include Black people in the discussion or curriculum. She cited a particular interaction with her professor who insisted on using the term African American and would not use the term Black even after Wilma addressed it in class:

> Everybody's about gender equality…how people want to be addressed, their gender identity and then I still feel like, but yet you still have not taken the time out to respect or address my people's identity…I'm Black, I'm a Black woman and my thing is if you cannot accept that, you still want to force-feed me that I'm African American, that's a problem.

Sweets and June Baby brought up their experiences taking the women's history course at RCCC. Sweets dropped the course because it only covered "white women's history." June Baby

expounded on the course, explaining "we had a smidge piece of Rosa Parks…there was no history of African American women in the book, in the classroom…she only brought in white women as guest speakers…I asked the instructor about it and she said, 'I can't [bring in other speakers or material], I don't have the resources…it was an issue for me, I ended up dropping the class."

Hypervisibility

In what might be considered contrast to invisibility are the experiences students reported with feeling hypervisible. The sense of standing out because they are the only Black student in class or Black woman in the class was a common theme among participants. Their presence may draw undue criticism or punitive behavior toward them. Weaver shared such an experience she had with a white male speech teacher who "seemed to enjoy writing comments all over everything I wrote." She stated:

> Negative comments, never suggestions about how to do it better, just everything that was wrong with it. Then I noticed he didn't do the same thing to other students in the class. I felt singled out. He would ignore me too whenever I tried to participate in class.

June Baby shared that in more than one class when she came in a few minutes late or had to leave a few minutes early to pick up or drop off her son, "the teacher would say something rude to me in front of the whole class, then I would watch these non-Black students stroll in 15 or 20 minutes late and the teacher wouldn't say anything to them at all!" June Baby further shared that she would always inform her instructors about her responsibilities as a mother that may cause her to be occasionally late or have to leave early. In another class, she described an exchange with her instructor who had threatened to drop her for coming in late twice, "He tells me, 'Well if this is not going to work for you…then you're going to have to drop my class, or

I'm going to have to drop you…my class starts at a certain time and it's disrespectful for you to come in late.' I told him, I don't do this all the time, but he didn't care." She stated further that the same instructor had a negative reaction when she had to miss a class presentation due to her child being ill:

> He said this to me: "why don't you just leave your child in the car while you come to class and do your presentation?" My son was six months old! I ended up getting a D in the class because of that missed presentation. I spoke with the dean, but it was too late. Really? Other students have missed papers and don't participate, and he never said anything like that to them.

Several of the women shared moments in which they were ignored in classes until there was a unit about Black history or Black culture, as Sweets, D'artagnan, Nessa, and June Baby said, "then all eyes are on me!" D'artagnan goes further saying, "oh yeah, well you want to ignore me for an entire semester, then when one part comes up about Black people, they and all these other students, look at me to tell them what it means to be Black. That's not my job!"

Amaya's statement captured the dual sense the women had of feeling simultaneously hypervisible and invisible in the classroom. "Probably all eyes on me. Sometimes it feels like that…I'm so…I'm not an outcast, but I feel like I'm one in a sea full of nothing or no one that's like me…It's like when I walk in, I feel like if I walk in a second late, everybody's staring at me like, Dang, sometimes it's just overwhelming…I feel like it's just one wrong move would be like, 'of course it's you, the Black girl."

Microaggressions in the Classroom

According to Evans-Winters, (2019), the average teacher views Black students as "inherently deficient, lacking purpose and in need of mending…education systems perpetuate

racialized myths of inherited deficiency" (p. 47). This leads to a myriad of microaggressions that make classrooms exclusive spaces. The women described experiencing microaggressions within the classroom and in other service areas of campus. According to Sue (2007), microaggressions are "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative…slights or insults" (p. 271).

June Baby shared her struggles trying to be a kinesiology major, a process through which her impressions were, "like not caring, if I understand, just kind of…you're not doing it right. I asked my teacher if he could show me and he responded, well I've showed you twice already, so I kept trying to get it right…then he yelled at me, 'Negative, wrong, wrong, wrong, you're doing this wrong!' I just left the class that day."

Keke has dealt with multiple incidents because of her intersectionality being a Black Trans woman with a disability. She shares she attended RCCC pre-transition and "it was bad enough, being Black and Queer" but since her transition, "post-transition has not been…This campus has not been good to me. It's been very disappointing…but this is a new level of …attack on me, who I am." Keke discusses the lack of diversity in the Performing & Communication Arts Division and the struggle she has had when asserting her desire to see a curriculum that reflects the true origins of music:

> they're not all white, but the teachers act like they are…it's mostly white men who are the full-time instructors…you point something out that maybe you felt was disrespectful, or just didn't quite sit right with you, it turns into a personal attack…well, they just turn it around on you, like it couldn't have possibly been them…They just, gaslight you, a lot of gaslighting.

Amaya divulged an experience she had when she first began attending RCCC, "I had this Armenian teacher…it was my first math class and she told me I had a bad attitude. I hadn't ever really talked to her, so I didn't understand where that was coming from." As she spoke, Amaya's body language closed in and her energy shifted, remembering this experience. She continued:

> The teacher told me, "Maybe you'd be passing the class if you didn't have such a bad attitude"…she made it seem like I was a problem when I had never talked to that lady…I want to learn, I always try to sit in the front because I feel like I can focus better…I emailed her…I do my progress reports and I'm not getting any better. She just emailed me back, "it's your attitude."

Amaya went on to tell me that the instructor began accusing her of cheating as she improved in the class:

> When I did good on my tests, she said I was cheating so she would give me a zero…I told her if I'm cheating so much why haven't you reported me to the dean? I asked her "is there anything I can do to get my grade up?" She told me, "fix your ways"…I couldn't believe it, I participated in class and everything…I felt like dang I can't get anywhere, so I just dropped the class, because I felt she wanted me to fail.

In reflection, Amaya shook her head and said, "that's the first time I ever told anyone about that, that's where I messed up, I didn't know who would believe me."

Microaggressions from Peers

> Sweets expressed the reactions she gets from her peers when she participates in class:
> I like attention…but I don't like negative attention…if a professor asks a question and I raise my hand, another student raises their hand too, but the professor picks me. I answer the question and I get the question right. I feel as if people are so quick to think that I'll

> get the answer wrong that when I get it right, they look at you funny. I can't really describe the look, but it's a very weird look and it's very uncomfortable.

Kimberly shared what it was like for her as an older Black woman in her classes: "I don't get asked to join many groups. I don't know what they think about me, but maybe it's because I'm older, maybe because I'm an older Black woman. They don't see how I can contribute to a group or project."

Nessa shared an experience about when she was part of a research group and the group was deciding how they should present their research,

> I was the only Black person in the group and in the class, my group was mostly Asian students and one White girl…it was a political science class, we were supposed to talk about how governmental laws and policies impacted American culture, the Asian students kept telling me that I should dress like a slave and then break out in an outrageous outfit with "bling" to show how Blacks came from slavery to "success." I almost dropped the class…but the White girl actually stuck up for me and told them that shit was racist!

Nessa shared that she didn't want to do the project anymore and thought about taking an F on the assignment, but she was too far into the semester to make changes. Additionally, she said she had been the one who did most of the research in the class.

These are but a sample of the microaggressions experienced by the women in the study. For some, especially the two oldest women in the study, this was just the way it was and, as Chi expressed, "you can't let it bother you, you just have to tell yourself that they are ignorant and you are going to take the higher ground."

Through this study, I wanted to know and understand if and what negative experiences these Black women had, but I also wanted to know what their affirming and engaging classroom experiences had been as well.

Black Women Thrive in Classrooms That are Affirming and Engaging

As part of the interview, I asked each participant if they had any instructors who affirm or engage them, and if they had any classes that reflect their identity. Sweets shared about a speech class she had taken. Her entire body woke up as she spoke.

> My professor was very engaging with all of the students…he was so comfortable with us…it was a safe space to talk about anything… he let us pick any topic and didn't judge us and didn't let any other student judge us. I felt it made me a better student.

D'Artagnan talked about a photography course she took with two professors "who happened to be white males, were very appreciative of my Black, female voice. They made it a point to tell me they were appreciative of my voice in class." When I asked her what this looked like she responded, "whenever I raised my hand they would call on me, after class if I went to talk to them they would thank me for participating…thanked me for engaging in the material."

Chi explained that she researches her instructors on Rate My Professor site and also asks her EOP&S and DSPS counselors to recommend teachers, she even Googles them, "In classes, I love how the professors that I chose, how informative they are and how they care about you learning…that's what I need. I need somebody to not look at me as an object…give me the substance and help me to go about feeling the substance. I got to have that." I followed up by asking why she put so much effort into selecting classes and instructors and she responded: "I used to work 12 hour days, and now I come from Los Angeles, so I don't have time to mess

around with teachers who don't care about teaching and don't want to help me understand and succeed."

Wilma took a course with an instructor who teaches honors courses, whom she described as "awesome." "He made us feel like we were his honors class, and there were four of us Black folks in there…the class was so in tune with each other…he created that environment…we had an assignment about superheroes and he made sure to include superheroes that were Black, women, Latino and Asian…that was intentional and it made a difference."

All of the women stated that it was important to see themselves in the curriculum of their courses. Weaver explained that she had never taken a course about African American history. She said she expected to have course content that she had received throughout her education, even at RCCC. Weaver said when she took an African American history class at RCCC she was astonished about how much she didn't know.

> That has been my favorite class. Not just because it was focusing on Black people, my people, but because the professor, he was Black, was so engaging, he made us feel like we were living the history. He always made sure he talked about what Black women were experiencing during whatever time we were studying. Most of the time you only hear about the Black men. He connected our history to what we experience now. And that class wasn't easy, but I didn't mind doing the work because it was interesting.

Amaya revealed that she had a number of Black instructors at RCCC, which was not the experience of the other participants. "My Black teachers were really helpful, some more than others…but these two, they're really woke. They engaged with us…They made me feel like they're on my side. They're here for me…When I see them, I'm just so happy to see them, even outside of class."

The terms used most by the women in the study as they were describing their positive or affirming classes were engaging, relevant, positive, participatory, open, inclusive, responsive, supportive, interesting, intentional, and helpful. The students said of the instructors who taught these classes that they enjoyed teaching, they knew and loved the subject they were teaching, they wanted their students to enjoy learning, they wanted to know their students and their students' experiences, and that they adjusted their teaching method when they felt students were not engaged or struggling with content.

Black Women's Funds of Identity in the Classroom

In addition to the overall funds of identity exhibited by the women in the study, they were able to share with me how they see themselves in the classroom in response to a question about what they feel they bring to a class. Chi stated, "I bring originality and real opening up…I open up about what I think and feel and that encourages other students to open up. I'm a leader." Amanda, describing what she does when she goes to class, said, "You have to go into class with the most confidence you can muster. You have to. You have to sit in front, you have to demand…Or you have to command that they notice you, that they pay attention. I'm here. I have questions. I'm here to learn just like everyone else." She stated additionally, "I bring a lot of energy and positivity…I think by me participating it helps others…I can influence people to feel good and comfortable."

Bringing energy and positivity to a class was a common response to the question of what these students bring. "Energy, I bring a lot of energy and encouragement…being open to learning new things," echoed June Baby. Amaya also said she brought energy, "Energy. Yeah…Positivity, I like to pump people up…College is hard, and people have lives, they just need to hear good things…I want to make people feel like they can do it."

Weaver said she brings her "good attitude" to her classes, "I like to help out, sometimes if I feel like other students are not understanding and I am not understanding, I will ask a question so we can all understand…I also really enjoy contributing to group projects."

The two women who were most divergent from the more positive responses to the posed question were Kimberly and Keke. Kimberly initially stated, "I don't bring anything, to be honest. I just go to class nowadays." When I rephrased the question about what she thought she could bring to her classes, she very thoughtfully replied, "Maybe some experience to my classes. Some opinions, yes experience. Maybe some suggestions to the topic if it is something I know or have lived." Keke's response was pointed, "Conflict, that's what I bring to classes…I guess a seat at the table. Well, what I bring is a whistleblower. I'm going to call it out, you know."

The Black women in the study see themselves as contributors to the classroom, and as positive, inquisitive learners and encouraging leaders. This contrasts and complicates the stereotypical perspectives held about Black women and the gendered-racist behaviors enacted toward them.

Black Women Experience Racialized and Gendered Microaggressions Beyond the Classroom

All of the women identified negative incidents outside of the classroom that they believe occurred because they were Black women.

Wilma, who was a part of the First-Year Experience (FYE) program, shared how it felt to be part of this program: "I used the resources that were available to me, but what I didn't like about it …it was something about being in that space that did not feel inclusive at all…I never felt comfortable enough to sit there and study in that space…so I never really went there to do anything…it felt sterile."

Amanda, who is a parenting student, described her experience in the FYE center, recalling: "I was with my son in the…center…my son was, I guess was being fussy…and this older white male…he pushed my baby's stroller. He opened the door to push my baby's stroller out, and I'm like, don't touch my child, what are you doing? He's a baby, he's going to cry. I wasn't disrespectful to him…but I haven't been back there since. I wasn't only mad, he embarrassed me."

A few of the other women who are or were part of the FYE part shared similar perspectives. They either only went to the center for academic appointments or resources but did not feel the center was a place they belonged. Those women sought out other programs such as EOP&S, Umoja, or PASS that were more welcoming to them.

Kimberly, after stating that most of her experiences with staff outside of the classroom were generally positive, said,

> I think there's some staff members…that might be prejudiced because I have seen them be willing to help some, certain students but not others…I remember I sent this Black girl to the financial aid office and she came back to me and said they wouldn't help her so. She came back and told me. I got up and went there with her. The person that was supposed to be helping her started to tell me how she couldn't help us or even schedule an appointment with an advisor…this was after we watched her help two people who weren't Black right in front of us. I told her, oh yeah, I'm a student too, and I'm staff here…you CAN help this young lady or I will go right down that hall and tell the vice president…I don't usually speak up like that, but that was just wrong!

June Baby and Wilma had similar experiences with counselors who work in programs designed for first-generation and parenting students. June Baby's encounter left her feeling "judged" and

as if she was being told to limit her transfer aspirations because of the counselor's response to her transfer goals: "her response was 'oh that's out of state, can you really afford to go out of state?' I told her I had researched it and they have a good program, and I think I meet the qualifications, do you know what she told me? She said, 'Well, do you think you really need to do nursing?' I said, really? So, I went and told her supervisor."

Wilma's situation involved what she described as a counselor using "coded" language when she sought help with her resume.

> She's like, 'Yeah, you're writing the way that you talk…I think you just need to use more professional words'…I have never had anyone tell me that I do not speak or write professionally. I told her I have been in professional settings for 14 years! I feel like I will have to tell the department head about that little interaction. Because if that had been someone else, younger or without much experience, what message would they receive?

The other participants shared experiences in which they watched other non-Black students receive the attention that was not extended to them. Keke shared her experience as a Black trans woman on the college's shuttle van when she was asked for her student ID card when other students on the van were not. The encounter led to her being removed by the campus police, patted down by a mail cop, and handcuffed.

> Those transphobic assholes, they know they are not supposed to allow a male officer to pat a woman down! I told them to get a woman if they were going to do that. I initially refused to leave the van because clearly, I was being discriminated against. It happens to me all the time with the police and the shuttle drivers. I always get singled out to check my ID. I do not look like a vagrant. It is racist, transphobia.

Keke reported that incident to her DSP&S counselor, who reported it to an administrator.

The student services in which the majority of the women had the most negative—and what they believed were racialized and gendered experiences—were in Admissions & Records, Financial Aid, and the Counseling front counter. Sweets and Amaya both said that when they have to go to the Student Services building, they go with a coach or counselor from the Umoja program, so they do not get ignored or dismissed. Wilma and June Baby shared that it helps that they now work on campus because they know more staff people, but as Wilma said, "It shouldn't be like that for any student, I shouldn't have to say I work with so and so, to be treated with respect." Keke did not mince words when she said, "I give that whole building an F." Other areas on campus that students mentioned were uncomfortable for them as Black women were the Quad area, describing feeling isolated or alone as they moved through the Quad. A number of the women disclosed that they experienced harassment by men, either sexualized taunts or derogatory remarks about their looks, as they walked through the Quad. According to Amaya, "If I am not traveling through the Quad with my friends from Umoja, I put my head down and go from the Campus Center to class as quickly as possible. It is such a difference to go from the Black Student Success Center, where I feel safe, into the Quad and campus where I feel alone and unwanted." Nessa also shared that she tries not to walk by herself across campus, because of the comments made. "You know everybody knows the Black guys at the end of the Quad are going to say something to you, but if I know one or two of them, they will stop…but it is not just them, other men say nasty things to me, objectifying me too. I try to find my way around those areas."

Conversely, the programs and environments that made the students in the study feel most welcomed and validated were Umoja, EOP&S, the Foster Youth Program, Disabled Student Services (DSP&S), Black Student Success Center, the Transfer Center, the Office of Student

Life, and the overall Campus Center. While not all participants had positive experiences in these spaces, they appreciated the services that had been available to support them. Additionally, except for DSP&S, those areas are all led by Black women.

Finding 4: Black Women are not a Homogeneous Group

My analysis of interviews with these Black women students revealed that while they may have shared experiences and messaging based on their gender and racial identity, they are not a homogenous group. The differences were related to age, parenting status, and gender identity.

An excerpt from Kimberly illustrated this difference when she spoke of her feeling another layer of isolation because of her age. Wilma and D'artagnan also shared that though they both appreciated the existence of Umoja and the opportunity to be in community with other Black students and staff, neither felt that the program was for them. Wilma described her experiences with the Umoja program at RCCC, "I'm glad I did that, but I eventually, as the semester went on…I learned some things…I don't want to say it's not for me. I feel like it could be for me and other students like me, but the door's not really wide open for that…for returning students, especially if they are older." D'artagnan added that the program "is for Black students who are younger, just out of high school, who may need a mother figure or to be talked to in a certain way, but that's not me. I don't see older students there. I am grown, and I don't need parenting. But that's cool for new students who need that to transition into college. I do wish they would have had that when I was here right out of high school though."

Chi's attitude about being a non-traditional age student was positive. She described feeling like being in class with younger students gives her energy. Because she is older, she also considers it her responsibility to take the lead by participating in class, even when she is in a class where the instructor is not engaging. "I go ahead and raise my hand and say something just

so people can take heed…I'm kind of there to instruct the class too, a little, from a distance." She said she receives more respect from teachers because she is older. Additionally, she shared that she believes she is older than most of the instructors she has now: "Sometimes when they are younger than me, they seem a little uncomfortable because they are used to talking a certain way to students who are younger. I try to put them at ease and let them know I am here to learn too." The only negative for Chi is the lack of social interaction with her peers: "I have made friends with younger classmates, in their twenties, a real good one in one class, we exchange numbers, but we never do end up doing anything social together or calling one another."

Another barrier for the older, returning students is that their access to support programs and resources, such as financial aid and EOP&S, becomes limited because they have attended college previously and have too many units or have exhausted their financial aid over time.

Parenting status also affected the experience of some of the Black women in the study. For Kimberly, Weaver, Chi, and Wilma being a parent initially delayed their return to college. However, it was also their status as parents that motivated them to return to school. Kimberly described how she dropped out of school to raise her daughter and provide for her: "I put her through schooling and college. I was pushing her to go farther than her mother. Then I decided it was time for me to go back."

Wilma's spark to come back to college was the advocacy she found herself doing on behalf of her own children in school, as well as the other parents. She stated: "I was a very active mother…I take a lot of pride in being a mother…my kids are the reason I'm doing what I'm doing now too." Her husband was also a catalyst for her to return to school, he has two master's degrees. Similarly, Weaver shared, "I want to be a role model for my son. He sees me working

and going to school, becoming a nurse. He knows to expect to go to college too. We study together when we can."

The struggles depicted through prior excerpts from June Baby and Amanda are indicative of the experiences of other mothers in the study, dealing with the gendered-racist perspective of who should be a college student. These parents experienced challenges around whether they belong in the classroom because of responsibilities of parenting or not feeling welcome in other spaces on campus with their children. Wilma described feeling challenged to identify herself as a mother in her classes: "Recently, I feel like I need not share that I'm a mother anymore…but then if I am asked 'how do I describe myself'…that's part of who I am. I just feel like I am all of these things that most of the other students are not, I am an older Black woman who is a mother." Wilma did reveal that she recently had an instructor ask who in the class was a parent and to her surprise, there were five parenting students in the classroom. She said this made her feel better about identifying herself as a mother, and that the instructor did this to show the class that RCCC was diverse in many ways.

While all but one of the participants identified as cisgender women, Keke's experience as a transgender Black woman led to additional gendered-racialized experiences. As shared by the other women walking through the Quad area of campus could feel uncomfortable, but for Keke getting from the bus stop to class has at times caused her to be the victim of violence: "I have had things thrown at me, I have been stalked by the religious nuts in the Quad, I have had people spit on me and threaten to rape me. Sometimes I won't even go through or I come just before class." As described previously, her experiences with transphobia are not limited to her peers but also college employees as well. Even in the Queer community on campus, she does not feel particularly welcome, explaining, "I have tried to go to the LGBTQ club meeting, it was okay,

and I think there were other trans people there, but it still did not feel comfortable. I feel like some of the trans people are so concerned about being clocked that they will not associate themselves with me because I may not look femme enough and they want to pass."

These differences among the participants speak to the intersectional identities of Black women and these intersecting identities come with unique challenges for the students.

Summary

The overall findings from the interviews reveal that participants report that they have had mostly positive experiences at RCCC, most being attributable to their funds of identity and the connections they have made with each individual participant's programs and groups that are supportive of her. D'artagnan summarized this sentiment: "I would say my overall experience…has been positive. Yeah because the good for me outweighs the bad…especially when I have come in contact with other Black people that work here…those interactions are the ones that are most heartfelt…the ones I value the most." This study adds new information that explains the available data for Black women at RCCC, indicating oppressive structures and participants' proactive responses. By analyzing data from extensive interviews, including a self-portrait activity, as well as triangulating with secondary analysis of data, all findings are contextualized.

Chapter 6: Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusions

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to delve into the identities and lived experiences of Black female students in community colleges. Using Funds of Identity (Esteban-Guitart, 2016; Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2012) to probe these funds, Black female students contribute to the college environment from their families, communities, society, educational experiences, work-life, and their own self-image. The other theoretical concept embedded throughout the study and the research process was Black feminist theory (Collins, 2000; Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1995; Evans-White & Love, 2015; Lewis, 2014; Patton, 2017).

While the number of participants in this study was small, the richness and depth of what they shared provided substantial insight into who they are, what it means to be a Black woman with multiple identities and roles, what and who they value, and how they have been able to negotiate lives that were, at times, filled with pain, trauma, abuse, mental health issues, complex family structures, and negative educational experiences. Despite these complex social, emotional, and political obstacles, they all chose to go to college. For some, this marked a return to college to finish a degree after years. The 11 participants described RCCC as an environment where they see very few faces that look like theirs, where they are often isolated and ignored, and where their desire to learn and inquisitiveness is at times treated as negative or aggressive. Yet they persevere, and they shared their motivations, strategies, and hopes.

In this study, I did not include standardized indicators of success such as individual GPA, number of units, academic standing, or whether they had dropped out or paused their studies. Those indices lack context and are often one dimensional. I used broad student success data to shine the light on the fact that this data should be used as a signal to the educational system and

institutions that Black women are facing challenges in their pursuit of higher education, rather than couching their success in comparison to Black men. This type of data should only be used to alert an institution and educators that attention needs to be given to the experiences of Black women and to ascertain what we need to do to provide an environment in which they can achieve their own educational goals. My secondary data analysis brings attention to the lack of information that exists at RCCC about Black women.

In this chapter, I will provide a discussion of the findings related to the affirming, as well as difficult, funds of identity expressed by the students. This will include elaboration on how the women chose to assert their funds in their role as students and how that may contrast with gendered racists perspectives of Black female students. I will present how the women in the study navigated being treated as invisible or hypervisible and how they dealt with microaggressions, in ways that may not fit within the narrow definitions of educational success. I will also include comments about how they negotiate a campus where they experience microaggressions outside of the classroom. Lastly, I will discuss recommendations for practice, from the student perspective and the scholar-practitioner perspective.

Discussions of Key Findings

Funds of Identity

Funds of Identity is an anti-deficit approach to understanding students' classroom experiences. It is defined as ways of knowing students based on their social identities (Esteban-Guitart, 2016). The use of Funds of Identity incorporates any use of an "identity that remains unrecognized is an identity (i.e. knowledge, will, desire, need, passion) that remains unincorporated into the educational act" (Esteban-Guitart, 2016, p.108).

Affirming Funds

The Black women in this study indicated an attitude toward their lives that was sometimes complicated, stressful, and traumatic, yet they have positive self-images that belie some of their lived experiences. This is reflected in how they describe themselves. As previously shared, Amaya exemplified a positive self-image by describing herself as energetic and outgoing and very unique and creative: "I am Black Girl Magic…I think that comes from my upbringing because I have very nourishing parents."

Difficult Funds

Resilient is a term often used to describe Black women in general and in academia, it is used throughout the literature about Black women. The participants did not question whether they were strong or resilient but questioned why they were expected to be that way. I would say that stereotype of Black women is akin to the belief that Black people, especially women, can tolerate more pain than other people, and that therefore more pain is afflicted upon them. According to West et al. (2016), the idea of being a strong Black woman is often passed down through generations from mothers and grandmothers as a means of coping with multiple oppressions and trauma they may experience. Their work on the Strong Black Woman stereotype informs us that embodiment of this image of invincibility may cause mental and physical harm, particularly stress, coping, and depression. I saw this firsthand with the women I interviewed. They were conflicted as they spoke positively about being strong Black women, and they also understood that moniker was limiting to their authentic identities. Kimberly, by far the most subdued participant, teared up when she exclaimed, "Why do we always have to be strong. Maybe we could use some help. Ask us! It's not that we can't do it but…" She slumped down and quietly said, "it gets tiring." A number of the other women cried as they spoke of this

phenomenon Black women carry with them. D'artagnan said it succinctly, "We get to be soft. Needing to be cared for and supported and told you are beautiful should not just be something reserved for White women. I need to be vulnerable too."

Difficult funds of knowledge (Huerta & Rios-Aguilar, 2018; Zipin, 2009) can challenge the funds of identity of Black women. Throughout my meetings with these students, they divulged very personal, intimate stories of abuse, ostracization by family because of their sexual orientation, gender identity, physical appearance, or perceived family status. A number of the women cried uncontrollably when sharing their life histories and spoke of how freeing it was to say these things out loud. Wilma expressed it this way: "it has been so painful sometimes, I have experienced severe depression, even now I struggle with depression. But I have a loving, patient husband, and coming here, with the people I have met, you, doing this, making us important. I know I am in the right place and at the right time in my life. I can be an advocate for other women like me."

I realized that no matter the extent of pain that had been a part of their experiences, the women in this study looked for the good in life. They also had enough agency to get help when they needed it. All of the women had utilized personal counseling at one point or another, as well as utilizing the campus resources when they were struggling with basic needs issues. It was evident that the Black women in the study would be considered resilient, however, it is about their own sense of self and worthiness, as well as their commitment to their education that enabled them to keep showing up.

Transcendence into Student Role

The women who participated in the study shared a number of incidents encountering gendered racism through microaggressions, stereotypes, being ignored (or made invisible), as

well as their behaviors being policed and their intelligence or ability as students being challenged. As noted in the findings, they responded to these incidents in various ways. Some women dropped classes rather than be subjected to microaggressions and deficit perspectives assigned to them. Women like Keke, Nessa, Amanda, and June Baby reported mistreatment and exclusion to college administrators. Other women such as D'Artagnan, Wilma, and Weaver challenged staff and faculty directly for the behavior directed toward them and other Black women. They used their funds of identity as advocates and leaders to address issues of gendered racism, having learned to confront wrongs in their lives. Sweets, D'artagnan, Wilma, Amaya, and Chi directly equivocated their way of being as students to their lived experiences. This was reflected in Amaya's story about the instructor who told her she had a bad attitude and was cheating. She knew the problem was not with her and she refused to subject herself to the abuse. Sweets takes full advantage of the resources for students with learning disabilities at RCCC because as she said, "I'm not dumb, I'm smart, I need help managing my disabilities and there is help here, so why wouldn't I?" Amanda described seeking out opportunities to be connected to campus so she can get as much out of her experience as possible: "Other women were still working the streets…I just decided that wasn't the route for me, I'm going try this school thing." She shared that she attended an event with Harvard Alumni who were bringing a Harvard Leadership program to campus, explaining: "I don't even know why I was there, I don't want to go to Harvard, but now I'm a part of the Harvard Leadership program because I'm sure it will be a good opportunity."

This study's findings showed me that Black women are not the problem. They are doing all of the things we tell students to do to be successful. As evidenced by the demographic questionnaire and the interviews, Black women at RCCC are going to office hours, utilizing

academic and student support resources, they are involved on campus, through work or co-curricular programs, they use health and wellness resources, and take advantage of financial and basic needs support when needed. Yet, they have experiences such as the ones shared by Amanda and Wilma at the First-Year Experience center and Keke's incident on the shuttle van during which the school forced her to interact with the police. This dictates that the responsibility to change the experiences and improve the educational journey for Black women at RCCC lies with the institution.

Classroom Experiences

The classroom experiences described by the women in the study were varied. The most overarching common theme was a sense of being either invisible or hypervisible or both. Examples of this were provided in Chapter 4, but range from being ignored by the instructor when attempting to participate, not being included by peers in group projects, having instructors publicly call them out if they are a few minutes late or have to leave a few minutes early, having to be mindful of their tone when speaking up so they are not labeled loud or angry, and being asked to represent the Black race if and when a topic involves a Black context.

Invisibility and Hypervisibility

The women's experiences with feeling invisible or hypervisible are consistent with other research about Black women (Lewis, et al., 2016; Mowatt et al., 2013). In their study of invisibility and hypervisibility in the field of Leisure Studies, Mowatt et. al (2016) stated that "Black women exist in a state of systemic invisibility or problematic visibility." This often plays out through stereotypes assigned to Black women such as being perceived as unmotivated to learn, lacking intelligence, loud angry Black women/Sapphire, the Mammy, or Jezebel.

Several participants shared incidents about receiving comments about how they were

dressed and being questioned by instructors and administrators about the appropriateness of their attire. D'artagnan shared an experience when she was told that her attire was not proper for her leadership role. The comment came from a member of the executive leadership and was in reference to whether her clothing was appropriate for a full-figured woman and that her hair was not always acceptable. D'artagnan said she was embarrassed and did not know what to do because she could not afford to buy a new wardrobe and that she did the best she could. She said the most insulting aspect of the situation aside from being judged because of her body, was that "the person who said this, directed someone else to deliver the message" to her. This was body shaming of a Black female body perpetrated by two non-Black women executives upon a Black female student. They acted upon the stereotype of the Black woman as a mammy, an image by which "Black women are not deemed as attractive or feminine by White standards, barely recognized as being women" (Mowatt et al., 2013, p. 651). This behavior by the top leadership of the college toward a Black female student is reprehensible and harmful.

June Baby, D'artagnan, Sweets, and others spoke of not seeing themselves in the curriculum, even in courses that center women as the subject. This reflects the perspective that instructors and others who are responsible for curriculum development are failing to consider the voice or inclusion of Black women in courses, thus perpetuating a structure that relegates Black women as invisible and centers whiteness as the standard teaching.

As shared by June Baby and Amanda in the previous chapter, their desire to understand and learn is characterized as being annoying, pushy, and aggressive, while their peers who are not Black are praised for their participation and contributing to the learning environment. The effect of this negation can result in Black women ceasing participation in class for fear of being rebuked in front of their peers.

Microaggressions

I found that daily incidents of microaggressions were such an insidious part of the lived experiences of Black women, on and off-campus, that many participants explained that they don't respond or react to them every time though they are very aware of what is being done. Sweets said, "girl, if I responded to every microaggression that happens to me, I would be exhausted…now if it happens when I am feeling some kind of way…then someone is going to catch it, even if it is a teacher…it's not my job to teach them about that."

Weaver similarly revealed: "Oh I know when it's happening, it happens a lot from Asian students in class and White male teachers…if the Asian students are international students I may tell them that's not something they should say…but teachers, I feel they should know better, I feel like they just don't care because they have the power...it's usually older white men."

As mentioned in an earlier chapter, Lewis et al. (2016) conducted a study on the types of gendered racialized microaggressions that were experienced by Black college women on a predominantly White campus. Their results identified themes that are congruent with those experienced by the Black women in this study. The broad types of microaggressions centered on projected stereotypes, feeling silenced and marginalized (and thus made invisible), and being harmed by assumptions about style and beauty. Sub-themes included the struggle for respect, assumptions about communication styles, the expectation of the angry Black woman, invisibility, expectation of the Jezebel, and assumptions about aesthetics. One salient point that supports the findings in this study was the silenced and marginalized theme, which "indicated that Black women experienced a power struggle for respect where their authority and intellect was questioned" (Lewis et al, 2016, p. 773). Their study supports the findings and discussions related to the lived experiences of the Black women in this study, though this is not a predominantly

White institution, but a community college that is predominantly non-White. In my study, the women have used their funds of identity to counter the regular onslaught of microaggressions they encounter by calling it out, avoiding it, or reporting it.

Relevant and Affirming Practices and Pedagogy

The purpose for educators to recognize and understand the funds of identity of Black women is to make an intentional connection between teaching and curriculum to the lived experiences of students (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014). The concept of funds of identity has been limitedly applied to higher education settings. However, the positive classroom contexts described by the women in the study reflected the tenets of funds of identity. In Sweet's example of positive interaction with an instructor, it was not that the content of his lessons or assignments were about Black women, but rather that he provided her space and created the environment to select topics of discussion and for work that she deemed relevant to her. His recognition of her and other students as the masters of their own experience, validated her and the direct result as she put it, "I participated fully in that class, not just for participation points. He actually let me teach the class about sexual health and choices for women."

Wilma shared a story about her biology class in which the instructor noticed that some of the students for whom English was not their primary language were struggling to understand the course content. Wilma said the instructor had been very flexible and regularly checked for understanding and tried to relate the lessons to real life. The instructor decided to have all of her lessons translated into Mandarin so that all of the students could learn and participate in class. For Wilma, though the effort was not directed toward her, she recognized that the instructor valued the students in her class and wanted to make sure all students could learn, as she put it "for a teacher to do that kind of thing, and I know she paid for it herself, lets me know that she

cares about us, not everyone does that." Additionally, Wilma shared that the same instructor had offered to give rides to a field trip to students who didn't have cars. "That was huge too for me because this class is on Saturday and my kids have activities on Saturday and we have one car. She didn't make anyone feel uncomfortable about needing a ride, she just put it out there." Wilma's instructor recognized and affirmed the multiple identities of her students and, rather than ask them to adjust to her, she adapted to create an inclusive learning environment.

The positive examples of teachers specifically included the voices of Black women and their intersectional identities or provided a learning environment that was welcoming and free of judgment to allow Black women to feel comfortable being their authentic selves and contributing to the classroom. The outcome was the same for all participants with these instructors: they were more engaged learners in those situations. This was not only evident in the stories participants told but the energy and excitement with which they told them. There was a distinct shift in body language when the women moved from discussing negative experiences to describing their positive experiences; their faces lit up, they sat up, and their expressions became animated. That tells me that just as microaggressions and other forms of gendered and racialized oppression can negatively affect Black women, I have to believe that culturally relevant, engaging, and affirming faculty and classrooms can have a positive, meaningful impact on the experiences of Black women as students.

Overall Campus Experiences

Overall, the women described having positive experiences at RCCC, whether through their own agency and advocacy or through their relationships with staff or faculty women. The most meaningful interactions for the women in the study were seeing Black women staff, faculty, and administrators on campus. Though I did not include the results of the map activity in the

findings chapter, I will discuss it here as it relates to where the Black women feel validated on campus.

With the exception of one participant, as the women circled and discussed spaces where they feel affirmed, I realized that it was not the physical spaces that mattered, but rather the people in those spaces. The spaces they identified were spaces staffed and/or headed by Black women. Kimberly shared that her favorite space was her office because "I know when I come to work, I'm going to see other positive Black women, and other women in general, who support me, and let me be me." Amanda spoke about a staff person in the Transfer Center: "I love going in there, the director is a Black woman, a lot of the staff are Black women…there's so many Black women that I can look up to. There's no way in the world I can say I cannot do it because I see it…I know it is possible for me." For Amaya, she centered her campus life around the Black Student Success Center because "You know it's a family there, if something is going on during my day I can go there and know I will receive support and love from Dr._____ and the other women there…they kick me in my butt when I need it too, but it is done with love because they want me to succeed."

D'artagnan stated that her home base while on campus was the Office of Student Life. It was then that she stated:

> You may not remember this, but you were the person who made me feel good about running for office. I didn't really know you, but you would always speak to me…you asked me why wouldn't I run? You told me, "you are already a leader, you are smart, you have a lot to offer…we need you." I will never forget that day, because you were running to a meeting and you stopped to make sure I heard that.
>
> At that moment in the interview, I knew that in one instance that I had taken for granted

made this Black woman feel visible and affirmed. That is what we need to do for Black women in all spaces on campus: see them, affirm them, give them space to have a voice, take them where they are, as their authentic selves, with all of their lived experiences. This is how their funds of identity become assets to the college.

Recommendations for Practice

From their Eyes: Participants

I will begin this section by sharing the recommendations the students had in regard to what RCCC could do to support Black women. The common responses were that the college needs to see them for who they really are, to hire more Black women faculty, to recruit more Black students, and to have a safe space where Black women can go to decompress and be authentic. Wilma expressed a need for programs for Black women who are not just out of high school because "not everyone is just out of high school. We are diverse, there shouldn't be a one size fits all program for Black students." Kimberly said that Black women need mentors, "even now, I think about if I had a Black woman as a mentor, someone to guide me, someone to talk to when you get off track or even when things are going good." The women suggested having campus-wide events to celebrate all aspects of Black womanhood. Sweets said having intentional study groups for Black women is important because "I find I usually do better when I have friends with me…female friends to take classes with and study with, I find I usually do better in class." A few women said that teachers and staff need to be educated about Black women and have anti-racist training, including Amaya, who shared: "We are not who they think we are. They have their minds made up from stereotypes, that's not who we are. They need to learn that, so they know how we shine when we come to class!"

Figure 2

Word Cloud of Participants' Recommendations

Note. Participants shared what they believed RCCC could do to improve their support of Black women students.

From my Eyes: Researcher

Winkle-Wagner (2015) states "Lack of focus on the experiences of Black women hinder the efficacy of institutionalized policies that can maximize the academic performance, reduce attrition and enhance the college experience for Black women…research looks at emphasizing individual factors instead of institutional or socio-cultural practices that are barriers" (p.172).

A good portion of the research conducted about Black women in education focuses on creating change on an individual level with support programs, events, and mentoring. The common recommendations reflect the desires of the students in this study. I believe the gendered

racist experiences of Black women in community colleges will not change until institutions dismantle the gendered, racist, transphobic, and patriarchal structures that allow Black women to be treated the way they are in the classroom and in other campus spaces.

- Colleges must change curriculum development processes that would allow for a women's studies course to be approved with little or no inclusion of Black women and other women of color. In order to do that, the curriculum development committees must-have Black women at the table and not be composed almost exclusively of white faculty.
- Institutions must get beyond a one size fits all approach to serving Black students. As I heard from some of the women in the study, focusing exclusively on recent high school graduates, attending full-time, does not serve all Black women.
- Colleges need to create and promote a safe process that enables Black women to report microaggressions by faculty and other employees.
- Colleges must not only disaggregate their data for Black students but must conduct intentional qualitative research that reflects the authentic experiences of Black women.
- Institutional data needs to be transparent about disaggregated data for Black women.
- Equity plans need to specifically address the needs and experiences of Black women and not only include them in the aggregate of Black students.
- Institutions must stop projecting a deficit narrative that Black women just drop or stop out of school and attributing that solely to external factors such as financial or family burdens. This study indicates that Black women drop classes in order to assert their agency and not be subjected to microaggressions. Additionally, there must be consequences for faculty who tell Black women they do not belong in a class and pressure them to drop a class.
- There must be consequences for gendered and racist behavior toward Black women at ALL

levels. All personnel must get anti-racist training throughout the year.

- Black women must be acknowledged and affirmed for the rich, lived experiences they bring into classrooms and other campus spaces.
- Instructors must create welcoming environments for Black women, where they are seen and valued, and that course content is relevant.
- Hiring processes need to be reviewed and changed to include more Black women faculty, staff, and administrators. Additionally, there must be a path to advancement for Black women, so that students can see that the college values Black women at all levels.

I agree with the recommendations put forth by the women in the study, who used their voices to tell us what they need from us as educators and practitioners. My recommendations are for the systems that that erect barriers for Black women and impede their journey toward their educational goals.

Limitations

One limitation of this study was the small sample size that may not make it generalizable to Black women broadly. Conducting the study on only one campus limits the contextualization of the experiences. More research is needed on campuses of different sizes, locations, resource availability, and student and community demographics to discover more about Black women's experiences as students on a variety of college campuses. Classroom observations would also have added an additional viewpoint of classroom structures, environments, and dynamics, and could be included in future studies building off this research. Lastly, my perspective as the researcher may have been expanded or altered had I conducted research on a campus on which I was not employed.

Conclusion

Funds of identity are the jewels and gifts of the lived experiences Black women absorb into their individual selves. This includes events, environments, and interactions that are difficult or painful. This study taught me that these Black women are not simply resilient but are in fact transformed through their own positive self-image. Some of their experiences should have shut them down; however, they have utilized their funds to pivot and adapt to thrive in the college environment. What these women shared through their bold honesty is not reflected in the data that depicts Black women one-dimensionally, if at all. It is not they who have to change, it is the institution and the system. I agree with the students that we need programs that speak to their intersectional identities, they need to see themselves in faculty and administrators, and they need to see themselves in the curriculum. But it is our responsibility as educators and institutions to take action against the microaggressions and structural exclusion that Black women experience, to believe them when they say they have experienced gendered racism, and then act proactively as well as preventatively in response. If they stop out or drop out, it is the responsibility of the institution to ask what we may have done to make them leave, not to assume they left for some external reason, and then to ask how we can support them in staying. We see stopping out and dropping a class as their failing, but it is evident from their stories that some of that responsibility lies with us, as community colleges for pushing them out. Why would we expect them to stay to be abused? At this time when we are examining the real impact of systemic racism and anti-Blackness, let us make sure to acknowledge the impact these structures have had on Black women students.

This study has but opened a door to the identities, the funds, and the experiences of Black women in community colleges. More research needs to be done to examine how teachers and

staff perceive Black women and what they have done to create open and inclusive environments that affirm and support them through pedagogy and practice. Additional research needs to be done about how gendered racist experiences on campus compounds the trauma that may have occurred in the lives of Black women, as well as how we can integrate healing into their lives as students. This study contributes to the gap in research about Black women in community colleges and shines the light on the funds of identity that have enabled Black women students to survive in spite of our neglect and abuse as an educational system.

I embarked on this study to know more about what it was like to be a Black female student at RCCC. The students who participated in the study provided insight into the research questions and more. I did not expect to hear what participating in the study meant for them. Each one told me that they had never been asked about who they are or what their experiences had been. Many disclosed that they had shared information with me that they had never shared with anyone. They thanked me and asked me to keep thinking of them and other Black women and to make them a priority in both professional and research roles. It is my hope that this study serves as a launching point for further and more detailed study centering Black women's educational experiences. More so, I hope it challenges how community college structures and decision-makers deconstruct the barriers and eradicate the structural gendered and racist environment that has become obstacles to Black women being able to exist and thrive to their full capacity as students.

Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Black Women in Community Colleges

Interview Protocol Final

Pseudonym: _____ Interview Date:_____

Interview Time:_____

Part 1: Getting to Know the Student: 20-30 Minutes

I will ask a series of questions to get acquainted with you.

This section will involve asking semi-structured questions, with probing questions to deepen the conversation, as needed.

1. Tell me about yourself and your upbringing.
2. Tell me about your family: What are the dynamics like? What are your relationships like?
3. Describe your community.
4. Growing up, describe what it was like for you in school?
5. Growing up, what were some of the messages you received about what it means to be a Black woman?
    a. Where did these messages come from?
    b. How have you interpreted these messages? Have they impacted you at all?

6. What made you decide to go to college?
    - Are you attending college for the first time?
    - What and/or who influenced you to attend college?
7. How did you decide to attend this college?
    • What is your educational goal at this college? Overall?
    - What, if any, expectations did you have of the school's environment before you started attending this institution?

Part 2: Self-Identity Drawing: 20 minutes

In order to get to know a little bit more about you, I would like for you to participate in a self-reflection activity. I will give you a piece of paper and colored pencils.

On this paper, I would like for you to show me, by drawing a self-portrait, who you are at this moment in life. You may add, if you want, the people, objects, institutions, and things that, for you, are the most important and the most significant.

You don't have to be an artist. Just take some time and think about how you identify and what and who shape your identity.

When the participant has completed the drawing*:*

Please share with me what you drew, or wrote, and explain the drawing. You only have to share and explain as much as you are comfortable.

How did you feel creating the drawing?

Probe: Was there any aspect of this activity that was challenging for you? If so, what was that?

Probe: Were there some things you thought about including but didn't? Please explain.

Thank you for sharing your drawing.

Part 3: Getting to Know her as students on campus—Walking Interview: 30-40 minutes

I am interested in gaining an understanding of how you, as a Black woman, experience campus. I would like for us to take a walk around campus. You will lead this walk; I would like for you to take me to places that are significant or meaningful to you or that are part of your everyday routine as a student. For example, you can take me to your classrooms, places you may hang out when you are not in class, etc.

I will ask questions as we walk, but I am also interested in capturing your feelings and experiences being on campus; therefore, feel free to discuss any feelings, thoughts, reflections that come to you as you are walking.

If you are not comfortable walking around campus during a regular school day, we can meet and walk around on a weekend day or you can walk me through relevant spaces by using a copy of a campus map.

1. What has your overall experience been at [RCCC]?

2. What is it like for you in the classroom?
3. How comfortable do you feel about participating in class?
    a. What encourages your participation?
    b. What deters your participation?
4. Do you see yourself, community or background reflected in your courses? Do any of your instructors teach in a manner that is affirming/engaging for you?
    a. If so, what does this look like? How do you feel about that?
    b. If not, how or what could your teachers do to affirm your identity or experiences?

5. What do/can you bring to your classes?

6. Describe your interactions with faculty?
    a. In the classroom?
    b. Outside the classroom?
7. Describe your interactions?
    a. With staff?
    b. With other students? (males, same race, different races)

8. As a Black woman, have you had any negative experiences on campus?
    - If so, what were they?
    - How did you respond to this experience?
    - How did you feel about the experience?
    - How, if at all, has this affected you?
9. When and where do you feel validated on campus? Is there a certain group, individual, space that makes you feel validated as a Black female student or related to your identities?
10. In what ways does the college support you through your college experience?
11. What type of support would you like to see for Black women on campus?

Is there anything else that you would like to share with me about your experiences as a Black woman at [RCCC]?

How are you feeling about participating in this study? Do you have any questions for me? Any concerns?

This concludes our interview. The information you provided me will be extremely useful to my research capturing the experiences of Black women on community college campuses. Our interview will be transcribed by an external transcription service. I will then e-mail you a copy for your review. This will enable you to make any corrections or clarifications prior to finalization. You can then send any changes you have made. This part should only take about 30 minutes of your time.

Observation: Optional

Would you like me to attend one of your classes in order to have a better understanding of what you experience in the classroom setting? This can be a class in which you feel you are affirmed as a Black woman, or one in which you have had some negative feelings/experiences.

This part will involve me sitting in the class observing and taking notes of the classroom environment and interactions within the classroom. I will have to have the permission of the instructor to sit in the class, but I will not identify you as the person who invited me.

- ☐ Yes, you would like me to do a classroom observation.
- ☐ No, you decline the classroom observation.

Thank you so much for your time. Feel free to contact me if you have questions or concerns regarding this study or your participation in this study.

Appendix B

Demographic Survey

Funds of Identity and the Experiences of Black Female Students in Community Colleges

Thank you for participating in our survey. Your input is very important.

* 1. Thank you for your willingness to participate in an interview that will provide your college and the field of higher education with important information about the experiences of Black women students attending California Community Colleges. I am a UCLA doctoral student and I am collecting data for my dissertation examining the experiences Black women students have on community college campuses.

Print Name

Date

Pseudonym

1

Funds of Identity and the Experiences of Black Female Students in Community Colleges

2. Please select the racial description that best aligns with your racial identification (select one)

- [ ] Black/African-American
- [ ] Caribbean/Afro-Caribbean
- [ ] Black/Latina/x
- [ ] Bi-Racial/Multi-racial
- [ ] African
- [ ] Other (please specify)

3. Gender/Gender Identification: Please select the gender/gender description that best aligns with your gender/gender identity. (select one)

- [ ] Female
- [ ] Transgender
- [ ] Non-Binary

4. Please select your age range (select one)

- [ ] Under 18
- [ ] 45-54
- [ ] 18-24
- [ ] 55-64
- [ ] 25-34
- [ ] 65+
- [ ] 35-44

5. Please select the item that best describes your sexual orientation (select one)

- ◯ Lesbian
- ◯ Heterosexual
- ◯ Bi-sexual
- ◯ Queer
- ◯ Questioning
- ◯ Asexual

6. Describe the make-up of your immediate family

7. Please select the income range that best describes your (or your family's if you are a dependent student) annual income. (select one)

- ◯ Under $15,000
- ◯ Between $75,000 and $99,999
- ◯ Between $15,000 and $29,999
- ◯ Between $100,000 and $150,000
- ◯ Between $30,000 and $49,999
- ◯ Over $150,000
- ◯ Between $50,000 and $74,999

8. What is the highest level of school your Parent/Guardian 1 completed or the highest degree they have received?

- ◯ Less than high school degree
- ◯ High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)
- ◯ Some college but no degree
- ◯ Associate degree
- ◯ Bachelor degree
- ◯ Graduate degree
- ◯ Unknown

9. What is the highest level of school your Parent/Guardian 2 has completed or the highest degree they have received?

- ◯ Less than high school degree
- ◯ High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)
- ◯ Some college but no degree
- ◯ Associate degree
- ◯ Bachelor degree
- ◯ Graduate degree
- ◯ Unknown

10. What is the highest level of school your siblings have completed or the highest degree they have received?

- ◯ Less than high school degree
- ◯ High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)
- ◯ Some college but no degree
- ◯ Associate degree
- ◯ Bachelor degree
- ◯ Graduate degree
- ◯ Unknown

11. What is the highest level of school your siblings have completed or the highest degree they have received?

- ◯ Less than high school degree
- ◯ High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)
- ◯ Some college but no degree
- ◯ Associate degree
- ◯ Bachelor degree
- ◯ Graduate degree
- ◯ Unknown
- ◯ Not applicable

12. What is the highest level of school your siblings have completed or the highest degree they have received?

- ◯ Less than high school degree
- ◯ High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)
- ◯ Some college but no degree
- ◯ Associate degree
- ◯ Bachelor degree
- ◯ Graduate degree
- ◯ Unknown
- ◯ Not applicable

13. Select the item that best describes your current enrollment status (select two)

- ☐ New Student/First Time Enrolled in College
- ☐ Continuing Student
- ☐ Transfer Student/Transferred from another college
- ☐ Returning Student/Attended college previously with gap
- ☐ Full-Time
- ☐ Part-Time

14. How long have you been a college student?

15. How many semesters have you attended Pasadena City College

- ◯ 1
- ◯ 2
- ◯ 3
- ◯ 4
- ◯ 5
- ◯ 6
- ◯ More than 6
- ◯ Returning student (you attended previously, left and are coming back)

16. What is your major?

17. Please select the item that best describes your current educational goal.
(select one)

- [ ] Associates Degree only
- [ ] Certificate
- [ ] Transfer Only no Associates
- [ ] General Education-no degree
- [ ] Associates Transfer Degree
- [ ] Personal Enrichment

18. Please select the item that describes your long-term educational/training goal (select all that apply)

- [ ] Associate's Degree
- [ ] Professional Degree (law, medicine etc.)
- [ ] Bachelor's Degree
- [ ] Job/Profession Internship or Apprenticeship
- [ ] Graduate Degree

19. How many hours do you work per week?

- ( ) 1-20
- ( ) 20-40
- ( ) 40+
- ( ) I do not work

20. Are there other terms that describe your student status? (ex. first-generation, returning student, formerly incarcerated or system impacted, former foster youth, international student, undocumented etc. There can be multiple.

21. Are you currently involved in any student clubs or organizations?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

If yes, which one(s)?

6

22. Do you participate in any of the following programs? (Mark all that apply)

- [ ] Blacademia
- [ ] Ujima
- [ ] Pathways
- [ ] Transfer Bound
- [ ] EOP&S/CARES/CAFES
- [ ] Honors Program
- [ ] Veterans Resource Center
- [ ] MESA
- [ ] CORE(Community Overcoming Recidivism through Education)
- [ ] QUEST Center (Queer & Undocumented Empowerment for Students to Thrive)
- [ ] Intercollegiate Athletics
- [ ] Academic Athletic Zone
- [ ] Cross Cultural Center
- [ ] I am aware of these programs but do not participate in any of them
- [ ] I am not aware of these programs

Would you like information about any of the above programs? If so, which ones?

23. I use tutoring /Student Success Centers

- ◯ Every day
- ◯ A few times a week
- ◯ About once a week
- ◯ Which center do you use most frequently?
- ◯ A few times a month
- ◯ Once a month
- ◯ Less than once a month

24. I visit my instructor(s) office hours...

- ◯ A few times a week
- ◯ About once a week
- ◯ A few times a month
- ◯ Once a month
- ◯ Less than once a month
- ◯ I do not go to my instructors' office hours

25. I have utilized the following services as a student at PCC (mark all that apply)

- [ ] Lancer Pantry (food pantry)
- [ ] Rapid Response Emergency Financial Assistance
- [ ] Student Health Center
- [ ] Disabled Student Services & Programs
- [ ] Social Services Coordinator
- [ ] Personal Counseling (mental health counseling)
- [ ] Freeman Career Center
- [ ] I am not aware of these services
- [ ] I am aware of these services but have not used them

Would you like additional information about these services? If so, which ones?

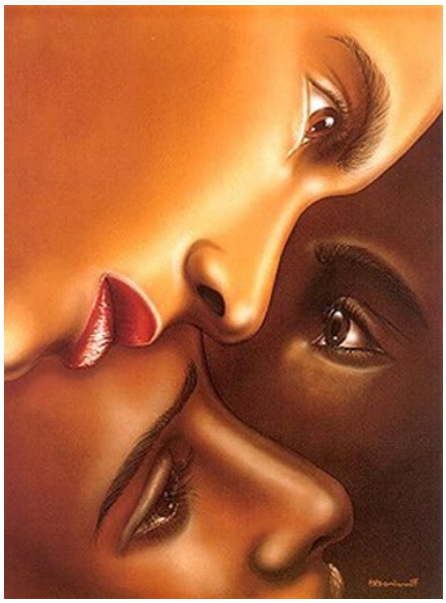
8

Appendix C

Recruitment Flyer

Black Women: Time to Tell *Your* Story!

Participants needed for a UCLA Research Study



- Do you identify as a Black/African American Woman?
- Are you 18 years or older?
- Are you a currently enrolled student at Pasadena City College? (Fall 2019 or Spring 2020)
- Would you like to talk about what it means to be a Black woman on a community college campus?

My name is Rebecca Cobb, I am a doctoral candidate at University of California, Los Angeles, in the Educational Leadership program. I am conducting a research study to examine the unique experiences of Black female community college students. The study will focus on how Black women develop their core identities and how they integrate those identities with their roles as students, and in response to their experiences on campus. This study will benefit community colleges by providing a much needed insight into how to support the needs of Black women and the achievement of their educational goals.

As a participant in this study you will be asked to participate in a 60-90-minute interview on campus, as well as possibly a classroom observation (optional). Each woman who is selected and completes the study will receive a Black Woman's Empowerment swag bag, with $10 food gift card.

For more information about the study or to volunteer for this study, please contact Rebecca Cobb at blackwomencc@gmail.com or stop by the Office of Student Life, CC105.

Appendix D

Invitation to Participate

Invitation to Participate in Study

Dear PCC Student:

My name is Rebecca Cobb, and I am a doctoral candidate at University of California, Los Angeles, in the Educational Leadership program under the guidance of Dr. Cecilia Rios-Aguilar. I am writing to invite you to participate in a UCLA research project I am conducting to understand the lived experiences of Black female students in community colleges. This study will benefit community colleges by providing a knowledge base in order to better serve and support Black female students on campus.

What is the study?

The purpose of this research study is to examine the unique and complex experiences of Black female community college students. The study will focus on how Black women develop their core identities and how they integrate those identities with their roles as students, and in response to their experiences on campus.

What is required to participate?

You must be 18 years old, identify as a Black/African American woman, be enrolled in at PCC (Fall 2019/Spring 2020).

If you decide to participate in this study, there is no cost to you. Interested individuals will contact me, we will discuss the study and then selected individuals will be invited to participate in an individual interview on campus. I will ask you questions about yourself and your experiences at PCC. Each interview will last 60-90 minutes. If you are interested, I will attend one of your classes with you to gain a better understanding of what you experience in your classroom (this is optional). Your identity will be protected, and confidentiality maintained.

What is the benefit for you?

As a participant in the study, you will be given a $10 gift card to a local restaurant, a Black Woman Empowerment swag bag and a list of campus and community resources that are relevant to Black women. Your participation will contribute greatly to the understanding community colleges have about the identities of Black women and their experiences on campus, particularly in the classroom.

What to do next if you are interested in participating?

If you would like to participate in this UCLA research study, email me at blackwomencc@gmail.com. Please provide me with your email contact information (the one you check most regularly). I will follow-up with you to discuss the study and scheduling an interview.

Questions?

If you have specific questions about this project before you decide to participate, please contact me, Rebecca Cobb, at blackwomencc@gmail.com or my faculty supervisor, Dr. Cecilia Rios-Aguilar at riosaguilar@gseis.ucla.edu or (310) 794-7914.

Thank you for your consideration,

Rebecca Cobb, M.S.
Doctoral Candidate, Educational Leadership Program
University of California, Los Angeles

Appendix E

Gatekeeper Memo

Dear _____:

My name is Rebecca Cobb and I am a doctoral candidate at University of California, Los Angeles, in the Educational Leadership program. I am seeking your assistance with my dissertation study titled: ***From Their Eyes:*** **Using Funds of Identity to Explore the Experiences of Black Women in California Community Colleges**.

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to examine the unique and complex experiences of Black female community college students. The study will focus on how Black women develop their core identities and how they integrate those identities with their roles as students, and in response to their experiences on campus.

My formal request is that you distribute email request(s) in order to solicit the participation of Black women students who are enrolled for Fall/Spring 2019-2020. My contact information will be included in the email solicitation and after they have contacted me, I will determine if they are eligible to participate. I will schedule interviews once I have identified eligible participants.

All information we discuss will be confidential and their identity will not be revealed on any documentation associated with this study. No identifiers will be used for this research with exception of a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality and the documentation of their demographic information.

Participation will include the following:

Individual In-Depth Interviews (target participants: tentatively 15 currently enrolled Black women.

- I will audio-record interviews and take reflective notes throughout the conversation.
- The interviews will be transcribed by a transcription service and provide each participant a copy of the transcribed interview for her review and verification.
- Each participant will be interviewed separately with each interview lasting between 60-90 minutes.

Classroom Observation (optional for participants) Participants will be asked if they are willing to allow me to attend one of their classes.

Benefits to Participants

Upon completion of their participation in the study, students will receive a Black Woman's empowerment swag bag, that will include a $10 gift card for a local restaurant and a list of campus and community resources that support Black Women. Participants will be contributing significantly to filling the gap of research on Black women in community college.

Please feel free to contact me at blackwomencc@gmail.com or 626-201-1870 if you have questions about this request or the study itself.

Appendix F

Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

Title of Study: Exploring the Intersectionality of Black Female Students and their Experiences on Community College Campuses through a Funds of Identity Lens

My name is Rebecca Cobb and I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership Program at the University of California, Los Angeles under the guidance of Dr. Cecilia Rios-Aguilar. You have been selected as a possible participant in this study because you are over 18 years of age, have self-identified that you are a Black/African-American female and are enrolled in credit units at Pasadena City College.

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this study is to examine the unique and complex experiences of Black female community college students. The study will focus on how Black women[1] develop their core identities and how they integrate those identities with their roles as students, and in response to their experiences on campus. This study will benefit community colleges by providing and much needed insight into how to support the needs of Black women and the achievement of their educational goals.

What will happen if I take part in this research study?
If you volunteer to participate in this study, the researcher will ask you to do the following:

- Choose a pseudonym that will be used throughout the study to protect your identity.
- One 1-1 60-90-minute audio recorded interview, a portion of this will be a walking interview, during which we will walk around the campus at Pasadena City College. You will have the option to conduct this portion during a regular school day, on a weekend day or you can use a campus map to discuss spaces that are relevant to you.
- Allow me to do a classroom observation of a class of your choice to enable me to understand your experiences within the classroom. This portion is **optiona**l and will last approximately 50 minutes or a regular class session.
- Be available for follow-up or clarification of what you share in the interview or that may occur during the classroom observation (if applicable).
- Be willing to be contacted following the interview to receive a copy of the interview transcript to ensure the accuracy of the transcript.

[1] This study will use the terms Black and African American interchangeably to encompass all women who identify as Black. Some of the literature cited use the term African American exclusively.

Appendix G

Black Woman Empowerment Swag Bag

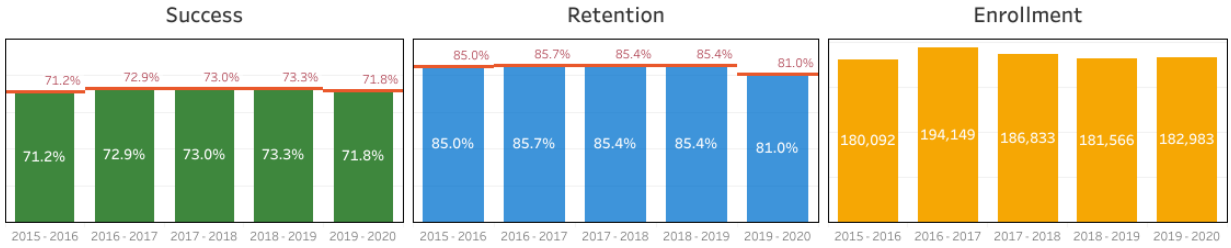
Appendix H

RCCC Equity Dashboard Data

Figure 3

Overall Equity Data

Welcome to our college's Equity Dashboard. PCC has developed this tool as a way to further explore our students' experiences with academic success. We hope that it will generate inquiry, dialogue, and action that complements the continued efforts of our faculty, staff, and administrators as they support students in the completion of their goals at PCC.



Division: All Subject: All

Choose Division
All

		2015 - 2016	2016 - 2017	2017 - 2018	2018 - 2019	2019 - 2020	5yr Average
TOTAL	Success	71.2%	72.9%	73.0%	73.3%	71.8%	72.4%
	Retention	85.0%	85.7%	85.4%	85.4%	81.0%	84.5%
	Enrollment	180,092	194,149	186,833	181,566	182,983	185,125
By Ethnicity		2015 - 2016	2016 - 2017	2017 - 2018	2018 - 2019	2019 - 2020	5yr Average
African American	Success	61.8%	63.6%	64.4%	63.1%	61.7%	62.9%
	Retention	80.6%	81.8%	80.7%	81.1%	75.8%	80.0%
	Enrollment	6,654	7,146	6,804	6,644	6,596	6,769
Asian	Success	78.5%	80.0%	80.0%	80.4%	81.0%	80.0%
	Retention	87.6%	88.3%	88.2%	88.4%	86.8%	87.9%
	Enrollment	46,500	49,920	47,996	49,113	48,298	48,365
Hispanic	Success	64.9%	67.1%	67.0%	67.0%	65.0%	66.2%
	Retention	82.7%	83.3%	82.9%	82.7%	76.9%	81.7%
	Enrollment	86,330	94,376	90,712	86,200	87,995	89,123
Native American	Success	58.3%	70.1%	73.6%	65.2%	55.5%	64.5%
	Retention	76.1%	85.3%	86.1%	82.6%	69.1%	79.8%
	Enrollment	180	197	201	178	191	189
Pacific Islander	Success	74.7%	75.1%	67.9%	75.0%	72.4%	73.0%
	Retention	85.3%	87.0%	80.1%	81.1%	81.6%	83.0%
	Enrollment	190	185	196	164	228	193
Two or more	Success	75.3%	74.0%	72.9%	73.9%	71.1%	73.5%
	Retention	86.3%	85.7%	84.7%	84.9%	79.8%	84.3%
	Enrollment	7,508	6,471	6,272	6,703	6,979	6,787
Unknown	Success	82.1%	83.4%	85.1%	86.2%	82.1%	83.8%
	Retention	93.4%	93.2%	94.0%	94.4%	88.6%	92.7%
	Enrollment	9,128	9,123	8,846	7,804	8,571	8,694
White	Success	76.7%	78.9%	79.0%	79.3%	77.4%	78.3%
	Retention	86.0%	87.6%	87.5%	87.5%	83.6%	86.4%
	Enrollment	23,602	26,731	25,806	24,760	24,125	25,005

Note: Enrollments under 10 have been suppressed. All data above is based off of Enrollments and not Headcounts.

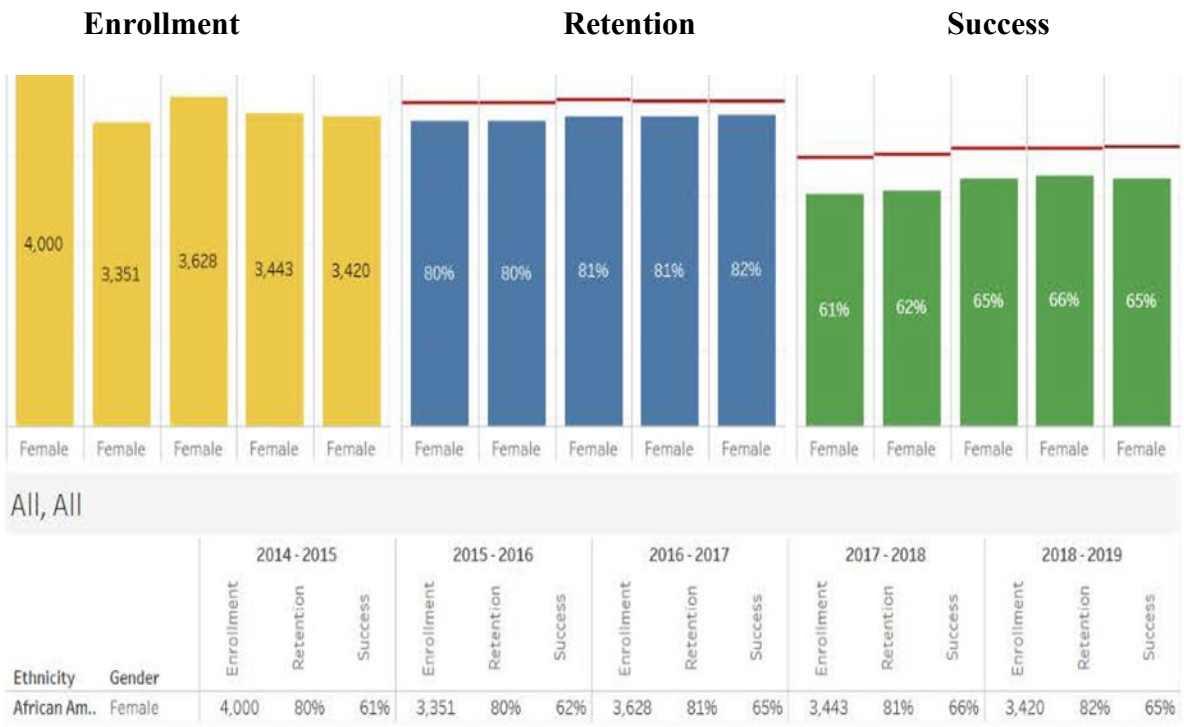
Choose Subject
All

Reset Filters

Note: Enrollment, retention and success measures for all students (RCCC Office of Institutional Effectiveness, 2020).

Figure 4

Equity Dashboard Data for Black Women



Note. Enrollment, retention, and success measures of Black women (RCCC Office of Institutional Effectiveness, 2020).

Appendix I

Table 8

HEDS Survey Results

College Narrative Statement	Survey Question related to statement	Responses of Black Students	Comparison of result for Black Students v. Narrative	Questions about Data
Most respondents believed that PCC's senior leadership demonstrates a commitment to diversity & equity. Although most students agreed that the campus is free of tensions related to individual or group differences, only a small minority of faculty & staff agreed.	• Recruitment of historically marginalized students, faculty, and staff is an institutional priority. • Retention of historically marginalized students, faculty, and staff is an institutional priority. • Senior leadership demonstrates a commitment to diversity and equity on this campus.	11% Strongly Agree 55% Agree 22.2%Neither agree nor disagree 11.1% Strongly Disagree 11.1% Strongly Agree 33.3% Agree 44.4% Neither agree or disagree 11.1% Disagree	Students in the study stated repeatedly that there were not enough Black students, faculty and on campus. Older, returning women who had attended the College previously in the 90s and early 2000s commented on the noticeable decline of Black students, faculty and administrators.	Do students understand this question? Do they assume that because they see and hear that it is a priority that they are agreeing with that?

College Narrative Statement	Survey Question related to statement	Responses of Black Students	Comparison of result for Black Students v. Narrative	Questions about Data
	• The campus environment is free from tensions related to individual or group differences.	11.1% Strongly Agree 33.3% Agree 33.3% Neither agree or disagree 22.2% Strongly disagree 22.2% Strongly agree 22.2% Agree 44.4% Neither agree or disagree 11.1% Disagree		
A small number of respondents reported that they had experienced discrimination on the grounds	• Have you ever been discriminated against or harassed on this institution campus, at	77.8% No 22.2% Unsure	Participants in the study reported multiple incidents of discrimination in form	How was discrimination defined? Were acts of microaggressions, exclusion of racial and culturally

College Narrative Statement	Survey Question related to statement	Responses of Black Students	Comparison of result for Black Students v. Narrative	Questions about Data
of the campus. Of the incidents reported, most had occurred in the past year.	an off-campus residence, or at an off-campus program/event affiliated with this institution?		of microaggressions and being told they should drop classes.	relevant curriculum, etc.
	• Did any of these incidents of discrimination or harassment at this institution occur in the last year?	This question did not appear in the responses when filtered for Black students only .	Participants who were in attendance at the time of the survey described incidents of discrimination and/or harassment.	Why was there no data available from Black students in response to this question?

College Narrative Statement	Survey Question related to statement	Responses of Black Students	Comparison of result for Black Students v. Narrative	Questions about Data
Among the group of respondents that reported experiencing discrimination on campus, the majority reported that the discrimination was because of their racial or ethnic identity.	• Because of my racial and/or ethnic identity	Data missing for this question for Black students	Study participants shared stories of incidents of discrimination based on race.	Why are responses missing and not available for Black students?
The most commonly reported types of discrimination were hearing derogatory remarks and being deliberately ignored, isolated, left out or excluded.	• Being Isolated or ignored • Being denied access to resources and assistance • Derogatory comments • Derogatory written statements	Data missing for this question for Black students	Study participants reported multiple experiences of feeling isolated, invisible or hypervisible because of their intersectional identity as Black women, age and gender identity. Participants also reported being denied help	Why are there no responses for this question for Black students?

College Narrative Statement	Survey Question related to statement	Responses of Black Students	Comparison of result for Black Students v. Narrative	Questions about Data
			in student service, academic support areas and by instructors	
Most respondents reported that they would know whom to contact if they observed an act of discrimination on campus. However, fewer understood the process for investigating and reporting discrimination.	• If I experienced or observed an act of discrimination or harassment while at this institution, I know whom to contact to report the incident. • The process for investigating acts of discrimination or harassment at this institution is clear to me. • The process for reporting	22.2% Strongly agree 33.3% Neither agree or disagree 22% Disagree 22.2% Strongly Disagree 11.1% Strongly agree 11.1% Agree 22.2% Neither agree or disagree 44.4% Disagree 11.1% Strongly disagree	The disagreement with these statements among Black students is than any other racial/ethnic group except Native American students.	

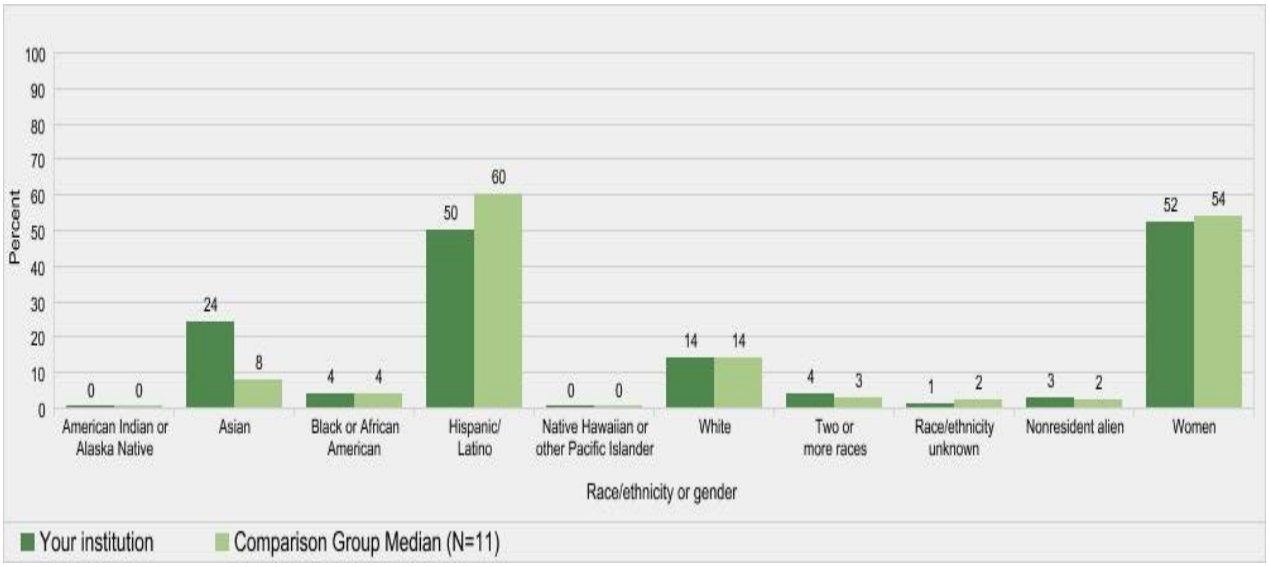
College Narrative Statement	Survey Question related to statement	Responses of Black Students	Comparison of result for Black Students v. Narrative	Questions about Data
	acts of discrimination or harassment at this institution is clear to me.	11.1% Strongly agree 11.1% Agree 11.1% Neither agree or disagree 44.4% Disagree 22.2% Strongly disagree		
Faculty members reported the most frequent interactions and highest level of comfort with the various groups on campus. Students had the highest ratings of RCCC's climate of diversity and inclusion			The questions related to this statement were not provided, nor were the responses disaggregated by race/ethnicity.	

Note. Key stakeholders were asked about perceptions of the institutional diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Appendix J

Figure 5

Enrollment Data for RCCC versus Other Community Colleges by Race



Note. The proportion of Black or African American students at RCCC was comparable to the enrollment at other community colleges (U.S. Department of Education, 2019).

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