THE BUSINESS OF DIVERSITY: VALIDATING THE HIDDEN NARRATIVES OF BLACK WOMEN EARNING A BUSINESS DEGREE

By

MARGARET BAILEY

Bachelor of Science in Business Administration
Oklahoma State University
Stillwater, OK
2016

Master of Science in Higher Education Administration
Northeastern State University
Tahlequah, OK
2020

Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate College of the Oklahoma State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
May, 2024
THE BUSINESS OF DIVERSITY: VALIDATING THE
HIDDEN NARRATIVES OF BLACK WOMEN
EARNING A BUSINESS DEGREE

Dissertation Approved:

Dr. Jon Smythe

Dissertation Adviser

Dr. Erin Dyke

Dr. Hongyu Wang

Dr. Susan Stansberry
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am profoundly grateful to God, whose boundless love and guidance have been the cornerstone of my journey. Galatians 3:28 (NIV) reads "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." This verse signifies the equality and unity of all people in the eyes of God, irrespective of race, social status, or gender, has illuminated the path, reminding me to embrace compassion and equality in every step of this life.

To my unwavering rock, Joseph Bailey, your steadfast support, encouragement, and understanding have been my constant source of strength. Your belief in me fueled my determination, and I am forever indebted for your unwavering presence throughout this demanding yet rewarding endeavor.

To my dear friends and classmates, your camaraderie, insightful conversations, and unwavering solidarity have enriched my academic and personal growth immeasurably. Your diverse perspectives and support have made this journey an enlightening and joyful one.

I also wish to offer my heartfelt gratitude to the courageous individuals who participated in this study. Your openness, honesty, and willingness to share your personal experiences, challenges, and triumphs have been the cornerstone of this research. I am sincerely humbled by your trust in me, allowing me to delve into your innermost thoughts.

Acknowledgements reflect the views of the author and are not endorsed by committee members or Oklahoma State University.
and experiences. Your contributions are invaluable, and I am deeply appreciative of the
time and trust you've extended to me throughout this journey.

Finally, I extend my deepest gratitude to my esteemed dissertation committee and
the dedicated faculty members who have been instrumental in shaping my academic
voyage. Your mentorship, guidance, and invaluable teachings have sculpted me into the
scholar I am today. I am immensely grateful for your wisdom, encouragement, and
continuous support.

Acknowledgements reflect the views of the author and are not endorsed by committee
members or Oklahoma State University.
Name: Margaret Bailey

Date of Degree: MAY 2024

Major Field: CURRICULUM STUDIES

Title of Study: THE BUSINESS OF DIVERSITY: VALIDATING THE PERCEPTIONS OF THOSE IN THE MARGINS

Abstract:
This study explores the intricate narratives and experiences of Black women navigating the landscape of post-secondary business education. Drawing from Black feminist theory, this research aims to shed light on the nuanced challenges and triumphs faced by Black women within the confines of business education. Employing qualitative methods, narratives from Black female business students across diverse educational institutions were collected and analyzed. The findings highlight the complex interplay between identity, curriculum, and lived experiences, illuminating the ways in which these women negotiate and resist marginalization within the business school environment. Themes of identity formation, intersectionality, curriculum inclusivity, and the impact on professional trajectories emerge, highlighting the need for more inclusive and culturally responsive pedagogies. Ultimately, this study advocates for a reconceptualization of business education to embrace diversity, equity, and inclusivity, offering insights to enrich educational practices and foster supportive environments for Black women pursuing business degrees.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I ........................................................................................................................ 1
INTRODUCTION .............................................................................................................. 1
  Background and Context .............................................................................................. 1
  Problem Statement ...................................................................................................... 3
  Research Purpose ....................................................................................................... 5
  Research Questions .................................................................................................... 5
  Theoretical Framework ............................................................................................... 6
    Black Feminist Theory ............................................................................................... 6
    Black Feminist Theory in Education ........................................................................ 10
  Study Design ............................................................................................................... 11
  Researcher Reflexivity .............................................................................................. 12
  Rationale and Significance ........................................................................................ 14
  Definition of Key Terms and Concepts ................................................................... 14

CHAPTER II ..................................................................................................................... 16
REVIEW OF LITERATURE ........................................................................................... 16
  Introduction ............................................................................................................... 16
  Women in the Business Industry ............................................................................... 17
  Racial Minorities Working in the Business Industry ............................................. 20
    Black Women Working in the Business Industry ............................................... 21
  Black Women Enrolled in Higher Education ...................................................... 24
  Black Women in Business Schools ....................................................................... 29
  Contextualizing Culturally Responsive Teaching in Business Education .......... 32
    Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) 33
    Black Feminist Thought and Culturally Relevant Teaching .......................... 35
    Intersecting Black Female Student Experiences and Curriculum Frameworks 36
  Conclusion ............................................................................................................... 37

CHAPTER III ................................................................................................................... 38
METHODOLOGY ........................................................................................................... 38
Introduction and Overview ........................................................................................................ 38
  Research Purpose .................................................................................................................. 38
  Research Problem .................................................................................................................. 39
  Research Questions ............................................................................................................... 39
Theoretical Perspective ............................................................................................................. 40
Narrative Inquiry ........................................................................................................................ 42
Sampling ..................................................................................................................................... 43
Research Design ......................................................................................................................... 47
Data Collection ........................................................................................................................... 48
  Phase I: Writing Prompt ......................................................................................................... 49
  Phase II: Interviews ................................................................................................................ 49
  Phase III: Photo Voice ............................................................................................................ 50
  Phase IV: Open Coding and Member Checks ......................................................................... 51
Data Analysis .............................................................................................................................. 52
  Analyzing Qualitative Data ..................................................................................................... 52
  Analyzing Narratives .............................................................................................................. 53
Ethics .......................................................................................................................................... 54
Trustworthiness and Rigor ......................................................................................................... 55
  Creditability ............................................................................................................................ 55
  Dependability ........................................................................................................................ 56
  Transferability ......................................................................................................................... 56
Strengths and Limitations .......................................................................................................... 57
Chapter Summary ...................................................................................................................... 58
CHAPTER IV ................................................................................................................... 59
PERCPECTIVES FROM THE MARGINS ..................................................................... 59
  Introduction ............................................................................................................................ 59
  Lauryn: A Journey Towards Corporate Law ............................................................................. 60
Preparing for the Future ........................................................................................................ 61
Business Curriculum Experiences .......................................................................................... 64
Eve: Navigating the Business Terrain with Tenacity .......................................................... 66
Navigating the College Journey ......................................................................................... 67
Business Curriculum Encounters ....................................................................................... 72
Missy: Breaking Barriers for Women in Sports ................................................................... 73
Shaping Identity and Forming Goals .................................................................................... 74
Business Curriculum Encounters ....................................................................................... 77
Kim: An Enthusiastic Entrepreneur ...................................................................................... 79
Balancing Life and Aspirations ......................................................................................... 79
Business Curriculum Encounters ....................................................................................... 84
Chapter Summary ...................................................................................................................... 85
CHAPTER V .................................................................................................................... 87
Introduction ............................................................................................................................... 87
“Minding my Ps and Qs.”: Navigating Double Consciousness .......................................... 88
Belonging ............................................................................................................................... 89
Exclusion ............................................................................................................................... 92
Conformity ............................................................................................................................ 95
Representation ..................................................................................................................... 97
“Don’t Let Other People Get to You”: Resisting from the Margins ................................... 99
Resistance ............................................................................................................................. 101
Resilience ............................................................................................................................. 103
“Don’t Be So Curriculum”: Seeking a Deeper Connection .............................................. 105
Empathy ............................................................................................................................... 106
Understanding and Perspective ......................................................................................... 108
“So, what do we do?”: Taking Steps Toward Change ..................................................... 112
Conclusion ............................................................................................................................. 113
CHAPTER VI ................................................................................................................. 114
CONCLUSION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiential Duality</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intersectional Identities in Curriculum: Perceived Space</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intersectional Identities in Curriculum: Constricted Space</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For Instructors</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For Student Support and Service</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For Research</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations of this Study</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Research</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploring Dropout Perspectives</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparative Analysis of Formal and Informal Curriculum</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intersectional Analysis of Race, Gender, and Curriculum Experiences</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Reflections</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDICES</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1: Study Participants</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2: Participant Data Collections</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1: &quot;This was not in the bathroom last year! Okay! Look at the college showing up for the girls. The pad say ‘keep playing’ I needed the encouragement today&quot;</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2:&quot; So many clubs to join. I feel awkward though. Will I fit in?&quot;</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3:&quot;Everyone is gone, I can take a sample without people judging me.&quot;</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4: &quot;I love the talk about how economic status affects quality of life. People that do not have as much do not live as long. We all have to work on fixing that.&quot;</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5:&quot;African American Business Student Association, one of the first places I felt connected to college.&quot;</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background and Context

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2022), 64% of students that began working on an undergraduate degree in 2014 graduated by 2020. More specifically, graduation trends indicate that females who attend public or nonprofit universities are about 6% more likely to complete their undergraduate degrees than their male counterparts (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). After digging deeper into graduation data, it quickly becomes apparent that though females are typically more successful in college, there are certain subgroups of women that are more likely to perform better than others. Data collected by a university in the Southern Midwest Region of the United States shows that students who identify as Black or African American and as female who are enrolled in the Business College of a Primarily White Institution (PWI) experience lower retention and graduation rates than their peers (Retention and Graduation Rate Trends, 2020). According to data published by this university, graduation rates of Black or African American female students in the College of Business has been significantly lower than their white counterparts for the last four academic years (Retention and Graduation Rate Trends, 2020).
So, why is it that Black women are less likely to earn their degrees? According to Bowers et al. (2020) Mills (2020) and Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso (2000), Black students who attended higher education institutions felt as if they were actively being excluded from on campus activities or did not belong on the campus at all. These students expressed that while it would have been nice to see and talk to students that look like them, participants longed for faculty and staff at the institution to make them feel welcome and included (Bowers et al., 2020). Furthermore, many African American students attending higher education institutions interpret the isolation that they encounter on campus as a microaggression used to reinforce the notion that they are not welcome on campus (Mills, 2020). Situated in resilience theory, Mills (2020) argues that experience of isolation and microaggressions leads Black students to drop classes, change majors or leave the university entirely due to the lack of resources available to them to aid in being resilient at an institution that they do not feel has welcomed them (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000).

In a study focusing solely on the experiences of students that identify as both Black and female, Kelly et al. (2021) report that without validation from staff and faculty, Black female students are often left feeling like they have no opportunities for involvement with their curriculum and no one to advocate for them. Approval from university officials does not only affect their experience in traditional academic curriculum but also in learning experiences that happen outside of the classroom (Kelly et al., 2021), hindering their ability to form meaningful connections that promote the sense of belonging and achievement that they crave.
Intersectionality aids in explaining the hardship that women of color face because of their combined historically minoritized identity traits such as race, religion, social class, and gender. Further illustrating the lack of awareness of intersectionality in business, workplace trends of isolation and disengagement are similar to those experienced by Black students at pursuing post-secondary education. (Dicken, Womack, and Dimes, 2019; Bowers et al., 2020; Mills, 2020; McClain and Perry, 2017). Research shows that Black female business professionals feel a heightened sense of pressure to achieve than their White counterparts to prove their value to the workplace (Dicken, Womack, and Dimes, 2019; Bowers et al., 2020; McClain and Perry, 2017).

Longing to increase their sense of belonging, Black women in business often experience many instances of identity shifting throughout the workday to fit into the predominantly White cultural norms of the work environment (Dicken, Womack, and Dimes, 2019). The prevalence of hypervisibility and tokenism in the predominantly white classroom and the predominately white business industry (Dunn, 2021), warrants deeper investigation into the experiences of Black women who are studying to enter the business industry to illuminate ways they can better be accepted into post-secondary business curriculum.

**Problem Statement**

Graduation and retention rates of Black female students enrolled in colleges of business are significantly lower than their peers (National Center for Education Statistics., 2022). In addition to this, Black female students face challenges related to building camaraderie and a sense of belonging in this academic setting (McDougal et al., 2018; Solórzano, Ceja and Yosso, 2000; Mills, 2020). After experiencing issues
positioning themselves in their academic setting, Black females tend to struggle with feelings of isolation and pressure to conform in the professional business industry (Reynolds-Dobbs, Thomas and Harrison, 2008; Ray and Davis; 1988).

Literature exploring the experiences of Black female students during their pre-professional years within the business education realm is scarce. Current research often focuses on the experiences of Black women in relation to graduation rates, retention, and the challenges of combating stereotypes. However, these studies typically encompass all Black female college students, rather than specifically addressing the experiences of those studying business (Harper, 2012; Perez, 2017; Porter & Dean, 2015; Corbin et al., 2018; Sealey-Ruiz, 2013; Kuh et al., 2010). The absence of studies dedicated to this particular phase overlooks crucial details and pivotal moments within Black women's early experiences in business education. These moments form the lens through which they perceive and navigate their professional careers. Understanding these pre-professional experiences is vital not only for comprehending the broader landscape of exclusion within higher education but also for gaining insights into the specific challenges and barriers Black women face as they navigate the business domain.

Examining this crucial juncture allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to their feelings of isolation, pressure to conform, and sense of unwelcomeness within business education. This literature gap represents an oversight in our collective understanding of the obstacles encountered by Black women in both educational and professional spheres.

Additionally, existing literature primarily offers general discussions on barriers encountered by Black women in education and business, providing limited insight into
their interactions with formal and informal curriculum components. This gap in the literature fails to examine the experiences of Black female students navigating the details of formal business education. By overlooking these crucial interactions, this gap diminishes our understanding of how curriculum structures and classroom dynamics impact Black women's educational journeys and subsequent professional trajectories. This lack of detailed exploration into their encounters with formal and informal curriculum within the business education domain hinders efforts to create tailored resolutions that could address the specific challenges these students face. Inclusive research in this area is important to reveal the complexities of their educational experiences and to inform targeted strategies aimed at fostering inclusive, equitable learning environments within business education.

**Research Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to understand the educational experiences of Black women pursuing business degrees within higher education institutions. Through qualitative exploration, it seeks to investigate the unique journeys, challenges, and accomplishments of these individuals throughout their academic journey. The study focuses on capturing a detailed understanding of the complex experiences, perspectives, and barriers faced by Black women within the context of business education.

**Research Questions**

Three research questions guide this study:

- What are the storied experiences of Black female students seeking undergraduate degrees in business?
• What parts of the curriculum, both formal and informal, do Black female business students perceive made space for their intersectional identities?

• What parts of the curriculum, both formal and informal, do Black female business students perceive constricted space for their intersectional identities?

**Theoretical Framework**

*Black Feminist Theory*

Black Feminist Thought (BFT) was originally formulated by feminist scholars, including bell hooks (1980) and Patricia Collins (1989). It emerged in response to the omission of the oppression experienced by Black women in mainstream feminist theory. Taking Kimberle Crenshaw’s (1989/1991) notion of intersectionality a step further, Black feminist theory specifically focuses on the experiences and perspectives of Black women, who have been historically marginalized by both racism and sexism. Black Feminist Thought emphasizes the importance of recognizing the unique experiences of Black women and the ways in which they have resisted and challenged oppression.

Intersectionality and Black Feminist Thought share some common theoretical similarities. The most prominent similarity is their focus on the experiences of marginalized groups and emphasis on social justice. In relation to one another, intersectionality serves as a broader framework that can be applied to diverse groups, while Black Feminist Thought specifically focuses on the experiences of Black women. Therefore, Black Feminist Theory will be used as the theoretical framework in this study because of its ability to frame both the positive and negative experiences that come from being a Black business student. Black feminist theory acknowledges the struggles that
Black women must endure in a society that has become deeply entangled with white masculine supremacy. However, it also mounts a view of resilience and hardiness that has flourished within Black women that has allowed them to resist and prosper in threatening conditions.

In a society where knowledge and meaning are created by white men, Black Feminist Theory (BFT) validates interpretation of the Black female experiences by Black females (Collins, 1989). BFT stresses the importance of interpretation. Collins (1989) argues that it is impossible to validate the experiences of Black women under the dominate epistemological norms of white masculine thought because of the uniqueness each experience holds. As a result of this, Black Feminist Theory asserts that Black women do not have to face oppression in the same way for their experiences to hold significance or be valid.

Overtime, scholars have expanded the founding principles of BFT to include a variety of concepts and frameworks that seek empower Black women. Womanism is a term coined by Alice Walker (1983) that describes a form of feminism that is grounded in the experiences of Black women. Womanism emphasizes the importance of community, spirituality, emotional expressiveness, and values the contributions of women to their families and communities (Walker, 1983; Collins, 1996; Kohzadi et al., 2011). Developed by Patricia Hill Collins (1990) and influenced by Kimberle Crenshaw’s (1989/1991) concept of intersectionality, the matrix of domination describes the intersection of power systems that are used to oppress and shape the experiences of marginalized groups. Black feminist theorists have used the matrix of domination to understand the ways in which race, gender, and class intersect to create unique forms of
oppression and privilege for Black women (Collins; 1990; Gouws; 2017; Limpangog, 2016).

Though each branch of Black feminist theory may focus on different aspects the Black female experience, they all share the same goal, moving away from the Eurocentric masculinist knowledge-validation process. Black feminist thought argues three key points: (1) that Black women thrive in environments that accept their perspectives on reality, (2) personal oppression of Black women is directly bound to the political oppression of Black women, and (3) accepting the standpoint of Black women grants them the same amount of humanity given to dominate social groups (Collins, 1989, p. 751).

Patricia Collins (1989) describes an ethics of care that is essential to appreciating the emotional encounters of Black women and promoting resiliency among Black women. By practicing an ethic of caring, Black women can build companionship with those who are capable of supporting the individual uniqueness of their lived experiences. Drawing on the narratives of Black women pursuing a post-secondary degree, Minnett, James-Gallaway, and Owens (2019) describe Black feminist thought as a thread that tied together a group of Black women to persist and care for one another through oppression during their graduate studies. Finding mentors, teachers, and friends that share a belief in accepting perspectives that differ from the hegemonic norms allows for Black women to gain strength from one another while fighting for recognition from those that do not respect the views of Black women (Minnett, James-Gallaway, and Owens, 2019; Chang, Longman and Franco, 2014). Engaging in conversation with other Black women that validates the emotions and understandings of how Black women exist in the world serves
as method to promote resistance while also encouraging Black women to continue existing and pushing for change. Instead of becoming overwhelmed with negative interactions with society, Black Feminist thought inspires Black women to stand up to and gain motivation from actions of discrimination.

While it is common to see the use of Black feminist thought to describe the narratives of women in their workplace, schools, and relationships, it is important to understand the how this philosophy describes the experiences of Black women in a political power structure (Collins, 1989; Simien, 2004). Because dominate cultural norms are based on the standpoints of white men, Black women are forced to self-define and validate their own experiences (Collins, 1989; Minnett, James-Gallaway, and Owens, 2019; Collins, 2000). Because of this self-validation, the credibility of Black women is often questioned. Questioning the credibility of Black women in their places of employment and institutions of learning spills into their everyday lives to destroy their credibility on social and political matters (Simien, 2004). Stunting the involvement of Black women in society aids in reproducing the actions and thoughts that oppress these women. Accepting the unique views of Black women in academia, is one of the first steps to changing perspectives in society.

The goal of Black feminist thought is to achieve humanity among a group of people that have been oppressed for decades (Collins, 1989; Collins, 2000). To overcome social differences, society must learn to view those who have a history of being oppressed as fully human. In the case of Black feminist theory, realizing full humanity results in Black women being recognized for the paid and unpaid work they do, looked at
as political, economic, and intellectual equals and valued for their independent thought (Collins, 1989).

**Black Feminist Theory in Education**

Within education, Black feminist theory focuses on the experiences of Black women and the intersection of race, gender, and learning. It seeks to understand the ways in which educational experiences are shaped by cultural and historical contexts, as well as the ways in which power and privilege operate in educational settings (Showunmi, 2023; Acuff, 2018; Minnett, James-Gallaway, and Owens, 2019). At its core, Black feminist theory and curriculum intersect to investigate the ways in which educational institutions reproduce and perpetuate social inequalities. Recognizing that most educational institutions are not neutral, Black feminist scholars argue that traditional curriculum reinforces dominant cultural narratives that exclude the experiences of marginalized groups, including Black women (Hardaway, Ward, and Howell, 2019; Acuff, 2018).

Black feminist curriculum researchers have emphasized the importance of understanding the ways in which identity shapes educational experiences. They argue that Black women's educational experiences are shaped by intersecting forms of oppression, including racism, sexism, and classism, and that these experiences offer valuable insights into the complexities of formal and informal curriculum disseminated in schools (Showunmi, 2023, Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995). To create a more equal education experience for Black students, Ladson-Billings (1995; 2004; 2014) introduces idea of cultural relevance. This concept emphasizes the importance of valuing diverse cultural perspectives and engaging with the experiences of marginalized groups in educational
settings. Black feminist theorists argue that by valuing diverse perspectives and engaging with the experiences of Black women, curriculum can become more comprehensive and better able to address the needs of all students (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Acuff, 2018). Another key concept in reforming education through the lens of Black feminist theory is the notion of critical consciousness (Jemal, 2017). Critical consciousness asserts that understanding the ways in which power and privilege operate in educational settings and developing the skills and knowledge necessary to challenge dominant cultural narratives will create more equitable educational experiences (Jemal, 2017; Perez, Ruiz, and Mora, 2016).

Overall, Black feminist theory offers a valuable framework for understanding the experience of Black women in business colleges. By valuing diverse perspectives and engaging with the experiences of Black women, Black feminist theory can aide in developing curriculum that is not only more inclusive, but also aids in teaching Black female students’ ways they can resist racism in sexism as a business student and professional.

**Study Design**

This qualitative study explores the experiences of four Black female business students—Eve, Missy, Lauren, and Kim—based in the southern Midwestern region of the United States. Motivated partly by my own experiences of isolation and discomfort as a Black female undergraduate business student, this research aims to uncover the hidden feelings of oppression experienced by these women. It investigates a range of scenarios, from feelings of isolation in classroom settings to moments of support and connection in
small group activities. The study utilizes writing prompts, one-on-one interviews, and photovoice methods to illuminate these hidden narratives.

The data analysis process employed in this study followed a systematic approach involving coding, categorization, pattern recognition, and theme identification, all guided by principles of Black Feminist Theory. This analytical framework prioritizes authentic storytelling and deepens understanding of power dynamics, societal norms, and cultural influences shaping the participants' experiences. The findings shed light on the challenges and triumphs faced by Black female business students within the context of higher education, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of minority experiences in business education.

Furthermore, the study's insights offer valuable guidance for business faculty, staff, and administrators, informing discussions on policy procedures, curricular development, and the implementation of culturally responsive teaching practices within business colleges. This research serves as a bridge between the existing literature on minority business education and the growing need for inclusive and equitable educational approaches in post-secondary institutions.

**Researcher Reflexivity**

There are many intersections between my research and my identity. In this study, I face the duality of holding both an insider and outsider role. As a Black female alumnus of a Business College at a PWI, I hold the position of an insider to the study participants. However, since graduating from a PWI, I have returned to higher education in the role of
an Instructor, Academic Advisor and Program Coordinator. Correspondingly, these roles position me as an outsider to the participants of my study, as instructors, coordinators and advisors within higher education institutions typically have power over students that can influence experiences for Black or African American students both positively and negatively. Balancing the positionality of both roles simultaneously can lead to issues in the field involving authenticity, subjectivity, and bias (Brayboy and Deyhle, 2000; Peshkin, 1988). To combat potential issues with bias and subjectivity, I actively worked to identify areas of my subjectivity while I conducted research so that my experiences did not shape participant narratives. Peshkin (1988) argues that subjectivity can never completely be removed. However, by reflecting and being aware of your own subjectivity during the research process a researcher can better separate the feelings of themselves versus a study participant by recognizing when they are showing bias or personal interest during data collection (Peshkin, 1988).

Building rapport in a qualitative study is imperative to ensure that participants are encouraged to be as authentic as possible. To aid in the building of rapport and authenticity with study participants as outsiders, Brayboy and Deyhle (2000) advise a reflexive interview style. During data collection I asked broad questions, letting the participant guide the direction of the interview. This approach was taken to increase the level of researcher authenticity by showing that I was interested in presenting the narratives told by the participants as organically as possible, rather than repeating a predesigned conversion.
Rationale and Significance

This study was designed to aid in illuminating the experiences of oppressed groups attending higher education institutions. To better be able to accommodate the needs of Black female students in higher education, their authentic stories must first be told then accepted as valid. According to Neimand et al. (2021), the first step toward accepting historically marginalized groups is to provide inclusive narratives that demonstrate the need for social change and equality. The purpose of this study is to uncover the hidden narratives of one of the most oppressed groups of business students with the goal of encouraging college wide change to improve the success of Black female business students.

Rooted in Black Feminist Theory, this study also serves to remind students and higher education institutions to view their experiences and the experiences of their students critically. When it comes to creating a learning environment that welcomes diversity and promotes equality, (Montano and Gallagher-Geurtsen, 2022) suggests utilizing the 8 Cs to ensure inclusivity; cultivating empathy, celebrate and honor people, center and place high value on all knowledge, critique racism, challenge imperialist views, connecting to the past and conceptualizing new possibilities. Findings from this study will prove useful in helping students and higher education leadership become familiar with and learn from the experiences of Black females in their college.

Definition of Key Terms and Concepts
**African American:** People who were born in the United States and have African ancestry (Chavez, 2020).

**Black:** Dark-skinned people of African descent, no matter their nationality. Many people use the term Black and African American interchangeably (Chavez, 2020).

**Business Industry:** Careers related to the tertiary sector of employment; entrepreneurship, marketing (including sales), business management, accounting, finance, and economics.

**Historically Black College and Universities (HBCU):** Any historically Black college or university that was established prior to 1964, whose principal mission was, and is, the education of Black Americans, and that is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency (The Higher Education Act of 1965).

**PWI or Primarily White Institution:** Institutions of higher learning in which Whites account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment (Lomotey, 2010).

**Formal Curriculum:** Any structured and obligatory components of academic learning; including textbooks, recorded and live lectures, homework, creative projects, and writing assignments.

**Informal Curriculum:** Any activity structured or unstructured, that occurs outside of formal curriculum. Including club meetings, study groups, academic advising sessions, and career counseling.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to understand how students who identify as a female and Black or African American that are pursuing a business degree navigate and engage with formal and informal curriculum designed to prepare them to enter the male dominated, predominately white business industry. In this writing, the terms African American and Black will be used interchangeably. This literature review explores existing works related to the studies research questions notated in chapter one of this writing.

I began this literature review by exploring texts that discuss the experiences of women already established in the professional business world. My goal was to understand the landscape these Black female business students are aspiring to join. Following that, I reviewed literature focusing on the professional journeys of Black women who have graduated from business colleges or are currently active in the industry.
This exploration centered on how they navigate issues related to intersectionality and the feeling of being 'othered' within the business domain. Building on this foundation, I explored writings that narrate the experiences of African American female students in higher education, capturing their experiences both inside and outside the classroom. Emphasizing the significance of lived experiences, I then synthesized recurring themes pertinent to Black female business students enrolled in public Predominantly White Institutions as well as Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Lastly, I studied literature covering Culturally Relevant Teaching and the Reconceptualization of Curriculum Studies. This phase aimed to position and contextualize this study within the framework of postmodern education.

Women in the Business Industry

Decades of legislation has made discrimination based on gender illegal. Though many places of employment have begun to diversify their staff (Holder et al., 2015), people of color are still underrepresented in corporate America and an extreme bias toward what has historically been thought of as feminine traits still exists (Moudry and Thaichon, 2020; Martin et al., 2020; Ladge et al., 2019). Moudry and Thaichon (2020) examined the experiences of female entrepreneurs in the business industry, specifically in the retail or professional selling field. Looking past typical gender discrimination based on outward appearances, this study looks at the difference between feminine and masculine traits. The authors assert that society has constructed traits that inherently should be partnered with people of a specific gender (Moudry and Thaichon, 2020). Linked with femininity, is the notion that women will be more risk adverse and step away from difficult situations. Whereas masculine traits embrace confrontation, differing
viewpoints, and high levels of risk (Ladge et al., 2019). Females in business, regardless of their race, are thought of as being passive and compassionate business owners or managers that allow for their feelings to guide their decision making (Carvalho and Fernandes, 2019). Though these traits are sought after in some industries, the status quo for leadership in the business industry favors personality traits associated with males, such as aggressiveness, competitiveness, and outcome orientation (Homes, 2006; Carvalho and Fernandes, 2019).

One of the traits commonly associated with women in business is the ability to nurture and mother others. Ladge et al. (2019) suggest that women in business should embrace the traits that are come naturally to them, whether they are considered inherently female or masculine, to become better leaders, entrepreneurs, and managers. Results from their study indicate that women do not need to develop more masculine traits to survive in business, but they need to build self-efficacy in their ability to lead with the skills that they have, instead of seeking to learn how to be more masculine (Ladge et al., 2019). In practice, some women have found embracing feminine traits can lead to success in the business industry. Harper (2018) investigated women in CEO positions in the Global Airline Industry. Harper reports that while only 2% of CEOs in the Airline Industry are female, 36% of Human Resource directors are female (2018). In business, Human Resource professionals often need traits associated with femininity to be successful in their role, such as the ability to be people oriented, encouraging and sympathetic. Data presented in Harper’s 2018 study suggests that there may be a correlation between the feminine trait to nurture and the type of leadership women prosper in as business professionals. Echoing Ladge et al. (2019) and Harper (2018) is a study conducted among
female business owners by Martin et al. (2020). All five narratives used in this study (Martin et al., 2020), show women who have started their own company as taking on the maternal, nurturing role in their company. In this role, they were able to assess aspects of their business that posed great risk and shielded their company from this risk. Though women are often thought to be too emotional to successfully run a business, their emotion when properly channeled is what helps them to thrive (Martin et al., 2020).

Conversely, other studies of women in business leadership roles indicate that females may perform better in the industry when they assume masculine traits (Moudry and Thaichon, 2020; Gupta et al., 2009; Sexton and Bowman-Upton, 1990). Gupta et al. (2009) conclude that when launching a business, women tend to be hesitant to break into the industry because they associate the skills needed to run a company with those that are present in males. Furthering the idea that masculine traits are more valuable in the business industry, Moudry and Thaichon (2020) find that women are more successful in business when they adopt masculine traits. In a study collecting the narratives of 10 women that own their own business, those who were raised in families that valued stereotypically masculine traits found it easier to succeed in business. Female entrepreneurs that were raised with brothers, had mostly males’ friends, played contact sports or bonded more with their fathers reported having an easier transition in to business leadership than those that grew up learning inherently female traits (Moudry and Thaichon, 2020). Literature indicates that there are differing views on the impact of femininity and masculinity in the business industry. However, data indicates that men are much more likely to start and lead companies across the globe (Gupta et al., 2009; Sexton and Bowman-Upton, 1990).
Racial Minorities Working in the Business Industry

Intersectionality describes the recognition that socially constructed identity categories interact with each other, along with broader societal and power structures, to construct experiences of oppression and privilege based on a person’s race, class, gender, and sexual orientation (Crenshaw, 1991). Specifically, intersectionality in business aids in explaining the disadvantages, discrimination, and hardship that women in business encounter that also belong to an Ethnic or Racial minority group (Kele, Ford and Watson, 2022; Arifeen and Syed, 2020; Marshall, 2017). In this section, literature will be reviewed that discuss the experiences of all minorities in business, with an emphasis on the Black female.

Kele et al. (2022) investigates the experiences of BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) female professionals working in the selling industry. Much like the Global Airline industry mentioned above (Harper, 2018), females rarely make it into the senior management of retail companies (Kele, Ford and Watson, 2022). Interviewing twelve women, Kele, Ford and Watson (2022) asked questions centered around feelings of inclusion and value interwoven with questions about having an ethnic background and their interpretation of racial discrimination. Researchers in this study found gender alone does not account for the disadvantages described by study participants. Their gender along with their Ethnic Minority status resulted in their feelings of isolation and insignificance. Women belonging to Racial minority groups that were interviewed in Arifeen and Syed’s 2020 study also reported feeling pressure to assimilate to dominant culture norms of the workplace in order to be valued and seen as a part of the team. Interviewing 37 women about their experiences as professionals, the authors illuminate
an emerging pattern of ethnic women feeling as if they have no value or connection to their organization unless they can exhibit traits of masculinity and whiteness (Arifeen and Syed, 2020).

Aside from being expected to display masculine traits and blend into the predominately White culture of the workplace, Arifeen and Syed (2020) report refusal to adopt white cultural norms hindered their ability for career advancement. Minority women feel that a lack of diversity in senior management creates a perception that minority women do not have the “right look” to be able to join organizational leadership (Kele, Ford and Watson, 2022). Essentialism as defined by Kele, Ford and Watson (2022) is, “the generalization of separate identity categories into one collective identity”. Kele, Ford and Watson (2022) found that essentialist views on culture leads to misinformation about individual cultures in the workplace and allows for stereotypical traits of a one ethnic group to be assigned everyone that is not a member of the dominant cultural force. As a result of this, women working in business industry tend to experience feelings of inferiority and confinement in their roles (Arifeen and Syed, 2020).

**Black Women Working in the Business Industry**

Specifically, this study focused on Black women that are currently working towards earning a degree that will grant them admittance into the professional business industry. To better situate the experiences of Black women in post-secondary business schools, experiences of Black women who have already entered the business industry will be investigated. While most women encounter a glass ceiling that allows for them to peak at the upper tier of management, Black women often are met with a concreate ceiling that inhibits their ability to climb the corporate latter high enough to catch a
glimpse of senior level management (Holder et al., 2015; Ray & Davis, 1988; Catalyst, 1999). Black women that can make it to mid-level management in an organization are often met with “race-based stereotypes in the workplace can adversely impact Black women’s careers and relationship with colleagues at work (Holder et al., 2015, p. 165). In this section, Black women’s experiences with invisibility, hypervisibility, representation, and racial stereotypes will be examined.

In the business industry, Black women report experiences of invisibility and social isolation in the workplace and around their coworkers (Holder et al., 2015; Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008; Kilgore et al., 2020). Participants in a study focusing on Black women in corporate America uncovered that Black women are often excluded from social gatherings held by colleagues both during and after the workday (Holder et al., 2015). Feelings of invisibility and isolation are echoed by Kilgore et al. (2020) who proposed invisibility to be a microaggression that Black women endure in the workplace to further the divide between Black women and the predominately White office culture. At the same time, Black women in the business industry report dealing with issues of hypervisibility and tokenism in the workplace (Kilgore et al., 2020; Holder et al., 2020; Jackson & Sanyal, 2019). Black women that succeeded in breaking through the concrete ceiling and obtaining a position in senior level management report feelings of hypervisibility (Holder et al., 2015). These women describe feelings of being showcased in their roles as an example of a company’s commitment to inclusion while simultaneously having their competency level and qualifications questioned (Holder et al., 2015). In many cases, Black women in business feel as though they are treated as second class employees (Holder et al., 2015) while at other times they feel as though they
are constantly on display as either a confirmation or negation of the Black female stereotype (Kilgore et al., 2020).

Since there are very few Black women in executive level management positions in corporate America (Taylor and Nivens, 2011), those that do make it to the top feel pressure to negate stereotypes and become a perfect representation of a leader in the industry (Womack, 2016; Kilgore et al., 2020; Jackson and Sanyal, 2019). Research indicates that Black female professionals feel a heightened sense of pressure to achieve than their White counterparts to prove their value to the workplace (Dicken, Womack, and Dimes, 2019; Womack, 2016). Coupled with this heightened need to perform is the need to break away from the “Angry Black Women” and intellectual inferiority stereotypes. Womack (2016) indicated that of 13 female Black executives interviewed in her study, all of them felt that they must be always professional and any slip up in behavior would prove stereotypes of Black women to be correct. In fact, with the “Angry Black Women” persona hanging over their head, Black women in leadership roles find it difficult to perform certain functions of their job, such as providing constructive critiques to their team (Domingue, 2015). Jackson and Sanyal (2019) quote one of their interviewees when stating, “women do not fit the stereotypical image of a business owner or an entrepreneur…. Entrepreneurs are seen as a white man in a business suit with a red tie (p.237).” While some women internalize stereotypes of Black women leading to an inferiority complex, other use the stereotypes as motivation to perform to the best of their ability and prove others wrong (Jackson & Sanyal, 2019). Though some use stereotypes as motivation, it is likely that countless Black women leave the business industry all together in favor of a career path that may be more accommodating.
When dealing with feelings of invisibility, hypervisibility, racial stereotypes, and lack of representation in the workforce, Black women have been found to cope in many ways. Some women find mentors to help them through emotionally troubling situations while other turn to identify shifting or religion to get them through (Holder et al., 2015). While all these methods may help them to cope with their struggles in the workplace, these are all things that are done after experiencing negative incidents. Serena, a Sr. VP and Director of Sales Management and Business (Womack, 2016) states “I think being a Black person you need to have a degree. I think if you're in a large market like New York, Chicago, or the East Coast, an advanced degree will help you because it's so competitive (p. 81).” With a college degree being so integral in the success of business professionals, one might think that it would a requirement for business schools to prepare their Black female students for these happening before they enter the industry in hopes of helping them cope better and preparing them to be agents of change in what can be a hostile work environment for Black women.

**Black Women Enrolled in Higher Education**

Student success in higher education is usually defined in terms of academic performance, persistence (retention) and completion of a degree (Kuh et al., 2010). However, Black Women in higher education student success tend to define success in higher education in different terms. Instead of focusing on university Center metrics, Black women have a tendency to measure their success in terms of identity development, enduring discrimination and successfully fighting stereotypes (Harper, 2012; Perez, 2017; Porter & Dean, 2015; Corbin et al., 2018; Sealey-Ruiz, 2013). In this section, writing on the experiences of Black women in higher education will be examined, paying special
attention to topics involving belonging, institutional support, combatting stereotypes and providing counternarratives.

Many Black women feel isolated on campus, like they do not belong. They do not feel like their culture is represented by institutional support systems, peers, staff, or faculty (Porter and Byrd, 2021). To belong at most higher education institutions, Black women must first figure out how people who belong to the racial and gender majority travel through the college. Then these women are tasked with figuring out how they can navigate through the same environment with their intersecting identities. Navigation of the college campus usually requires Black women to create a distinction between their “home” and “campus” personalities to adapt to institution norms, find belonging and achieve acceptance. While shifting identities in search of a Campus connection, many Black women struggle to find a deeper understanding of their unique identity as individual during their formative years (Porter and Byrd, 2021; Marbley et al., 2014). Once Black women have achieved an understanding of the social norms at the institution, they tend to find safety and belonging in organizations that are created for them, such as Black Sororities (Bartman, 2015). Those that are not able to find organizations that are geared towards females or members of a racial minority cope with their feelings of isolation with faith, humor, or trying to add culturally diverse resources to the institution for the next generations. Dahlvig (2010) reports that to belong on campus, Black women learn “White People 101.” Conforming to White cultural norms helps these students begin to create a connection with their surroundings (Dahlvig, 2010).

Institutional Support and experiences look different depending on the type of school a student chooses to attend; PWI, HBCU, mid, small, or large (Patton & Croom,
A Predominantly White Institution (PWI) is defined as a higher education institution where individuals that identify as White make up greater than 50% of the institution’s staff, faculty, and student population (Lomotey, 2010). While student demographics play a huge role in determining if an institution can be labeled a PWI, so do the institutions practices (Bourke, 2016). PWI’s are also known as institutions where academic practices perpetuate the culture of whiteness as dominate (Bourke, 2016). Catering only to the masses, Black students attending PWIs have feelings of isolation and a lack of belonging on campus (Bowers et al., 2020; Mills, 2020; McClain and Perry, 2017). In a study completed by Bowers et al. (2020), researchers found that Black graduate students that attended a PWI feel as if they are actively being excluded from experiences on campus or do not belong on the campus at all. These students expressed that while it would have been nice to see and talk to students that look like them, participants longed for faculty and staff at the institution to make them feel welcome and included (Bowers et al., 2020). Furthermore, many African American students at PWIs interpret the isolation that they encounter on campus as a microaggression used to reinforce the notion that they are not welcome on campus (Mills, 2020). Situated in resilience theory, Mills (2020) argues that experience of isolation and microaggressions leads Black students to drop classes, change majors or leave the university entirely due to the lack of resources available to them to aid in being resilient at an institution that they do not feel has welcomed them (Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso, 2000). Consequently, Black students attending PWIs long for approval and acceptance from their faculty and staff to combat the isolation faced in their day to day lives on campus.
In hopes of alleviating some stress from Black students at a PWI, some predominately white campuses have implemented African American student groups, such as peer to peer mentoring, to relieve the isolation through building a community of likeminded peers (McDougal et al., 2018). Though these efforts have been found to have positive effects on Black students, African American student associations and mentoring opportunities alone are not enough to leave students feeling welcome (McDougal et al., 2018). Not receiving the support or approval needed to thrive at a PWI, Black students are left underserved and constantly seeking from the institution as an affirmation that they belong.

While PWIs are the most prevalent category of higher education institution in America, other identifiers do exist to classify colleges. Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) are higher education institutions established before 1964, during the period of Jim Crow segregation, with the objective of educating African American students (Lomotey, 2010). A large higher education institution is typically given the identifier of being large when it has around 15,000 students (College board, 2022). Small post-secondary education institutions are those that have fewer than 5,000 students, leaving any school between 5,000 and 15,000 in the mid-range (College board, 2022). Nevertheless, Black female students attending a range of colleges and universities from small PWI Christian schools to large public HBCUs find importance in having a strong mentor that can relate to them during their time as a college student (Dahlvig, 2010; Domingue, 2015; Porter and Byrd, 2021). Black women in higher education actively seek out mentors. They hope to find faculty and staff within the college that can aid in supporting them (Dahlvig, 2010). Black students also crave the presence of more faculty
and university leaders that look like them, to increase their self-efficacy and reassure them that they belong there (Bartman, 2015; Bowers et al., 2020). Looking for support to help them through their higher education is the most prevalent reason Black female students seek out mentors, however, another crucial reason is to obtain career advisement (Dahlvig, 2010; Porter and Byrd, 2021; Russell and Russell, 2015). Russell & Russell (2015) found in their study of Black female college students that many of these women felt unprepared to enter the workforce because while they had some academic support, they severely lacked career advisement. Though Black female leaders serve as great mentors to Black female students, some research indicates that it is possible for a White individual to successfully serve as a mentor to Black students (Dahlvig, 2010). These White mentors of Black students must be able to engage in multiple open conversations where the mentor has the sincerity to accept and validate a Black student’s interpretation of reality (Dahlvig, 2010). With literature pivoting back and forth on the necessity of a Black female’s mentor or support group to match her identifying traits, literature does agree that the absence of a mentor, at any type of post-secondary institution, makes it easier for Black women to feel like they have to identify with the stereotypes of the Black women (Porter and Byrd, 2021; Domingue, 2015; Dahlvig, 2010).

Stereotypes mischaracterize and misrepresent Black women. Like stereotypes in the business industry, the “Angry Black Women” stereotype is present in higher education alongside many others (Porter and Byrd, 2021; Domingue, 2015). Black women in higher education can easily fall victim to Black archetypes that have been present since the mid-20th century, such as the Jezebel (a seductress), the Mammy (a nurturer), or the educated or exceptional Black women (a Black female that is the rare
exception from all other Black women) (Domingue, 2015). Battling double consciousness, a duality between how the world sees them portrayed in HipHop or media versus how they view themselves in relation to how their family and support system molded them, Black women feel like they do not have the ability to change the dominate narrative of Black women at their college (Domingue, 2015). Feeling silenced, many Black women in higher education accept the stereotypes that are assigned to Black women in general and hope to be types under the exceptional Black women category to fit in with their peers in a post-secondary learning environment (Bartman, 2015; Dominigue, 2015).

Themes that are present in the Business profession are also heavily present in higher education institutions. Black women must fight for feelings of acceptance and against stereotypes as early as their freshmen year of college. Fighting against silence and looking for ways to voice their needs as higher education students, Black women at colleges of all size and classifications persist through perilous experiences to earn a degree. Bonner et al. (2014) studies the experiences of Black women at a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI). Though the population of this school is not predominantly White and is a more inclusive of historically minoritized groups, Black women still feel a since of isolation. The isolation at an HSI leads Bonner et al. (2014) et al. to ask the question “Can the university be all things to all people?”

**Black Women in Business Schools**

According to the most recently published data (2019–2020 school year) from the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), African Americans,
Hispanics, and American Indians or Alaskan Natives combined constituted just under 26% of full-time faculty at business schools whereas the census data show that these minority groups constitute approximately 40% of the U.S population (United States Census Bureau, n.d; Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business, 2018; Moshiri and Cardon, 2016; Moshiri and Cardon, 2019). Keeping this data in mind, literature revolving around students that identify as Black or female who have taken business coursework will be examined. Specifically writing that discusses the interactional experiences of business staff, faculty and Black female students will be reviewed.

In a study of 247 Black undergraduate business students, 39% female, Raile et al. (2022) assert that business curriculum embodies masculine traits through implicit sexism. According to Raile et al. (2022) Faculty inadvertently make pedagogical decisions that reinforce the masculine nature of business topics. During first year seminars for business students only, female students are introduced to these masculine traits as normal aspects the business industry and carry this knowledge with them throughout their academic career (Krishna and Orhun, 2022; Raile et al., 2022). King and Kabot-Farr (2022) echo this in their findings when they suggest that women must be taught how to navigate their historically minoritized status early in their collegiate career. By taking notice of implicit assumptions, faculty could work explicitly in their curriculum to alter any gender bias in their teaching style and learning materials. Explicit efforts to close the gender gap in business schools cannot stop inside the classroom, an effort must be made to create a women-friendly environment throughout the entire business college.
For those enrolled in a college of business that have the intersectional identity of being a woman and Black, more adversity occurs in their academic journey. When looking specifically at HBCUs in America, these higher education institutions offer less coursework around the topics of business and entrepreneurship (Addae, Singh and Abbey, 2014). They are also less likely to offer coursework that prepares students developing new technology focused businesses endeavors, which account for a large portion of new companies being launched today (Addae, Singh and Abbey, 2014). Likewise, many business colleges at HBCUs tend to have less connections with the private sector to support the partnering of young entrepreneurs and people already in the industry, increasing the difficulty surrounding finding employment after college (Andrews et al., 2016). Broadening the scope to look at the experiences of Black women at all higher education institutions, at some institutions the most meaningful contributions to a business school that a Black women can make is improvement of retention and graduation rates (Moshiri and Cardon, 2019; Andrews et al., 2016). While at other institutions, collegiate leadership has begun to prioritize diversity and the need for diversifying faculty and those in administrative roles (Moshiri and Cardon, 2019.) Recently at business colleges across America, the experiences and impacts of Black faculty have been explored.

While it appears either being a woman or Black and enrolled in a college of business provides less opportunities to develop business related skills, there is very little literature that discusses if the same feelings of isolation, lack of belonging and misrepresentation that are present in studies on higher education are present in post-secondary business schools. There is an overflow of literature available on the
amount/types of business courses offered on the collegiate level, how many students earn business degrees and even the number of students that wished their business college was more diverse. However, little literature exists on the unique experiences of these students.

**Contextualizing Culturally Responsive Teaching in Business Education**

In this section, I transition from exploring literature focusing on the unique experiences of Black women in academia to a broader discussion encompassing the current landscape of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), including Culturally Relevant Pedagogies (CRP) and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies (CSP). CRT underscores the creation of inclusive and culturally affirming learning spaces, fostering academic success for all students (Gay, 2013). This exploration intends to delve into how teaching methodologies, curriculum frameworks, and institutional cultures can potentially influence the academic and social encounters of Black women within the context of business school education.

Additionally, I seek to extend the exploration of literature into the realm of Curriculum Studies, particularly the ongoing reconceptualization of this field. This broader perspective enables an examination of how this study contributes to advancing the field of Curriculum Studies by shedding light on the intersection of Black female student experiences and educational frameworks. Through this lens, the discussion will investigate the implications for curriculum design, pedagogical approaches, and the overall educational environment, aiming to offer insights into fostering more inclusive and supportive spaces for Black women pursuing business education.
Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP)

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) is an approach to teaching and learning that recognizes the cultural backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives of students as central to effective education (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995). CRP aims to bridge the gap between students' home culture and the academic environment by incorporating students' cultural knowledge, experiences, and values into the curriculum and instructional methods (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995). Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) is an educational approach that goes beyond recognizing and valuing diverse cultures in the classroom to sustain, support, and perpetuate cultural identities and practices within the learning environment. Developed by Django Paris and H. Samy Alim (2012; 2017), CSP acknowledges the importance of maintaining and nurturing students' cultural backgrounds, languages, and ways of knowing. While Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) emphasizes incorporating students' cultural backgrounds into the curriculum and teaching practices, CSP takes it a step further by aiming to sustain and amplify these cultural elements (Paris and Alim, 2017, Ladson-Billings, 2014).

Banerjee (2022) argues that there is little room for culturally sustaining pedagogies in business curriculum due to an “epistemic blindness” (p. 1074). This suggests a gap in the understanding and implementation of culturally responsive and sustaining practices within the context of business education. While the literature on CRP and CSP predominantly focuses on post-secondary education, the specific application of these pedagogies within business administration education remains underexplored. This gap presents an opportunity for further research to explore the integration of culturally
relevant and sustaining practices specifically tailored to business education, aiming to address and rectify this apparent “epistemic blindness” within the discipline (Banerjee, 2002, p. 1074). Existing literature addressing this topic critiques the European-centric approach applied in teaching business management, particularly concerning its applicability to aspiring entrepreneurs aiming for international ventures or operating within communities that diverge from Anglo-Eurocentric ideologies (Thind and Yakavenka, 2023; Alcadipani et al., 2012; Cooke, 2003).

Thind and Yakavenka (2023) assert that the teachings of prominent White business strategists like Philip Kotler, Michael Porter, and Amy Edmondson dominate formal business curriculum, increasing the difficulty of infusing CSP into the learning space. Business management strategies stemming from the ideologies of these scholars are often portrayed as the only approach to business studies though they overlook the legacies of slavery and racism (Thind and Yankavenka, 2023). In addition to this, curriculum derived from this school of thought often disregards the importance of Indigenous cultures, religious practices, spiritual beliefs, and caste systems in the study of management (Thind and Yankavenka, 2023, p. 2-4; Banerjee, 2022). Thind and Yankavenka (2023) argue that increased education and training focused on pedagogy can effectively tackle the deficiency of (CSP) within business curriculum. While business education instructors possess expertise in the field of business administration, there might be a gap in their pedagogical skills. This training gap stresses the necessity for specialized pedagogical training tailored to address the unique requirements of diverse learning environments within business education. Strengthening pedagogical
competencies alongside subject expertise can foster a more inclusive and culturally responsive approach to teaching in business programs.

**Black Feminist Thought and Culturally Relevant Teaching**

Culturally Relevant Teaching (CRT) and Black Feminist Thought present distinct yet interrelated theoretical frameworks within education. CRT, as proposed by Ladson-Billings (1995), Geneva Gay (2013) and H. Samy Alim and Django Paris (2017), emphasizes the integration of students' cultural backgrounds, experiences, and identities into pedagogical practices. It operates on the premise that education should be responsive to diverse cultural contexts, fostering inclusivity, and validating students' lived experiences within the learning process. Conversely, Black Feminist Thought, articulated by scholars such as Collins (2000) and hooks (1984), centers on dismantling oppressive structures by highlighting the unique experiences and perspectives of Black women. Black Feminist Thought's emphasis extends beyond gender and race, encompassing a complex analysis of identity, power dynamics, and social justice.

The intersection of CRT and Black Feminist Thought highlights a critical examination of educational systems and curriculum. CRT advocates for culturally responsive instructional strategies that validate and integrate diverse student backgrounds, aligning with the central tenets of Black Feminist Thought that emphasize intersectionality and an understanding of power dynamics beyond race and gender. Together, these frameworks call for educational environments that not only acknowledge but also honor diverse experiences and perspectives. This intersection encourages educators to create inclusive learning environments that validate the lived experiences of
Black women and marginalized groups while challenging systemic inequities within educational settings.

**Intersecting Black Female Student Experiences and Curriculum Frameworks**

The term reconceptualism in curriculum studies, as identified by Slattery (2013), emerged during the 1970s, signifying a shift from perceiving curriculum studies as a purely "scientific management" approach toward a more interdisciplinary field (p. 306). This transformation emerged in response to concerns that the American educational system was lacking in curriculum that addressed intrinsic personal development and overlooked the value of an individual's lived experiences (Eisner, 1992; Pinar, 1975). The reconceptualization of curriculum studies aimed to move away from homogenizing individuals as simply "diverse" and instead focus on recognizing their unique contributions and needs (Slattery, 2013).

This shift calls for curriculum to pivot from solely emphasizing skills geared toward financial gain or societal recognition and, instead, prioritize fostering individual development and understanding personal aspirations (Slattery, 2013; Eisner, 1992). Emphasizing the distinctness of each individual's diversity, this approach has prompted scholarly attention towards areas such as aesthetics, narratives, the process of becoming, indigeneity, and imagination. Moreover, this reconceptualization redefines the educator's role, highlighting teachers as architects of well-rounded, holistic student experiences, as opposed to merely preparing students to serve the mechanisms of private enterprise (Slattery, 2013). In the context of research on Black female business students, this reconceptualization within curriculum studies is crucial. It underscores the necessity of
acknowledging and respecting the individuality of each student, including their diverse lived experiences and unique contributions. By prioritizing personal development and understanding students' desires beyond traditional business ideals, this approach could offer insights into how curriculum design and educational practices can be more inclusive and responsive to the needs of Black female business students.

**Conclusion**

In this literature review, writing surrounding the gender gap in business and intersectionality have been discussed. Issues surrounding gender gaps in the professional business industry and in business colleges have been well studied. Likewise, problems plaguing individuals that identify as Black who are enrolled in higher education institutions have been explored in detail. However, there is a significant gap in the literature available on Black women that are explicitly attending a higher education institution to earn a degree in business and enter the male dominated, predominately White business industry. In studies that do sample the Black female population in business schools, retention and graduation rates are the focus. This study will accentuate the stories of a group of college students that typically exist in the margin. Centering the experiences of Black women seeking to earn a business degree, this study will dig deeper than data driven facts that are usually used to measure a student’s success in college to unveil the perceptions and sentiments of Black women.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction and Overview

Research Purpose

Using qualitative methods, the purpose of this study is to uncover the repressed narratives of Black female students seeking to earn a business degree. Understanding the lived experiences of this historically oppressed group of students serves as a form of resistance to the notion that the reality of the dominant social group in the business industry is the only reality in existence. Looking specifically at the formal and informal curriculum stories of Black women, this study uncovered the experiences of Black women enrolled in a college of business through the perspective of Black women. To critically unveil these stories and capture the feeling of being an outsider-within (Collins, 1989), a qualitative research design was selected to guide this study. To be able to immerse oneself in the experiences of Black female students requires rich descriptions that allows multidimensional understanding of a series of encounters (Patton, 2010). Qualitative research welcomes the use of people-oriented inquiry. It utilizes techniques that respect the individual interpretation documents, observations, and dialogue (Patton, 2010; Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Using quantitative
methods in this study would not provide enough information to answer the proposed research questions. Using finite methods that are standard in quantitative methods negates this study’s ontological viewpoints (Patton, 2010; Bloomberg and Volpe, 2019). To honor the fundamental thoughts of Black Feminist Theory, a form of qualitative research must be used to recite the unique antidotes of those that exist in the margins (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 1989; Patton, 2010).

**Research Problem**

Graduation and retention rates of Black female students enrolled in a college of business are significantly lower than their peers (National Center for Education Statistics., 2022). In addition to this, Black female students face challenges related to building camaraderie and a sense of belonging in this academic setting (McDougal et al., 2018; Solórzano, Ceja and Yosso, 2000; Mills, 2020). After experiencing issues positioning themselves in their academic setting, Black females tend to struggle with feelings of isolation and pressure to conform in their professional experiences in the business industry (Reynolds-Dobbs, Thomas and Harrison, 2008; Ray and Davis; 1988). Little literature exists on the experiences of Black female students during their pre-professional years to explore experiences that directly lead to Black women feeling isolated during their time as a business student.

**Research Questions**

- What are the storied experiences of Black female students seeking undergraduate degrees in business?
• What parts of the curriculum, both formal and informal, do Black female business students perceive made space for their intersectional identities?

• What parts of the curriculum, both formal and informal, do Black female business students perceive constricted space for their intersectional identities?

**Theoretical Perspective**

This study used a critical approach towards storying the experiences of its participants. From the critiquing and action-oriented roots of critical theory, theories surrounding race, gender and discrimination have emerged. Concentrating on characteristics that directly relate to the population of this study, Black feminist theory was used to orient this research.

Issues surrounding sexism and feminism have been heavily researched and discussed since the early 1800s. However, it is common for individuals that belong to a lower social class or minority race group to be excluded from these conversations. Gaining popularity in the late 19th century and early 20th century, scholars such Ida Wells, bell hooks, Patricia Collins and Kimberle Crenshaw began to research the relationship between social identity (race, gender, and class) and racism (Schiller, 2000). According to Black feminist theory, a more specific branch of intersectionality, “race, class, gender, and sexuality are co-dependent variables that cannot be separated or ranked in scholarship, political practice, or in lived experience (Ransby, 2001, p. 1218).” African American women are what Simen (2004) refers to as “status deprived” because they are victims of discrimination based on both their gender and race. Because of their multiple disadvantages, Black women have more barriers to overcome when comes to education, employment, and wellbeing (Simen, 2004; Ransby,
2001, Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991). By examining these barriers critically, issues involving inequality are highlighted to pinpoint where exactly action needs to be taken. Black feminist theory proposes that not only are Black females facing more barriers to personal, academic, and professional success, but are also met with consistent confrontation when describing their inability to separate their minority statuses (Naper, 2000; Simen, 2004). Black Feminist theory aims to disrupt the heterogeneous socio-political and socio-economical views to allow for more diverse outlooks to enter the mainstream way of thinking (Simen, 2004; Ransby, 2001, Collins, 2000).

This study explores into the tenets of Black feminist thought, with a specific focus on Patricia Collins' three pivotal concepts: Black female standpoint, resistance, and knowledge validation (1989). These principles underscore the essence of Black feminist thought, highlighting how Black women engage in day-to-day resistance against intersecting oppressions of race, gender, and class. Instead of being passive victims, Black women have cultivated a unique perspective challenging dominant narratives on oppression (Collins, 1989). This standpoint is deeply rooted in their distinctive experiences, providing an alternative lens through which to perceive reality. Furthermore, Collins (1989) emphasizes the crucial role of validating knowledge claims in affirming their legitimacy. Historically, Black women have grappled with obstacles in validating their own knowledge, facing exclusionary processes orchestrated by the white male-dominated establishment. Collins stresses the importance of institutions within Black communities in validating knowledge, asserting that these communities support an Afrocentric feminist perspective, affirming the knowledge derived from Black women's lived experiences (Collins, 1989, pp. 755-758).
Resistance, a key aspect of Black feminist thought, is paramount in challenging systemic injustices. It serves as a powerful tool for Black women to confront and dismantle oppressive structures, fostering empowerment and resilience within their communities. In the context of this study, understanding the significance of resistance within Black feminist thought provides valuable insights into how Black women navigate and resist oppressive forces in the education landscape.

**Narrative Inquiry**

Supporting the critical interpretivist framework used in this study, narrative inquiry serves as the methodology for this study. Narrative Inquiry serves as method for gathering experiences (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Connelly and Clandinin, 2006). Citing Dewey (1938), Clandinin (2006) refers to narrative inquiry as a technique to understand an individual in relation to their social context, as it is the interaction between a person and their surroundings that generates an experience. The assembling of experiences then creates a story that situates an individual’s views on truth and reality (Clandinin, 2006; Sipe and Constable, 1996).

Specifically in this study, narrative inquiry is used to gather the stories of Black females that are attending a College of Business. According to (Eligio, 2017), narrative inquiry considers lived experiences, including social, cultural, and institutional narratives, to explore how experiences frame individual perspectives on reality. To intensely investigate the stories of Black females striving to earn a business degree, narrative inquiry goes beyond studying just the outward actions and appearances of these students to dig deeper into their internal feelings and emotions (van Manen, 2016). Through examining the emotions and
feelings of this population of students, narrative inquiry will help to unearth underlying insights and assumptions that their stories display. Gathering narratives created the space needed for me to be able to present a holistic compilation of participant experiences. Bell (2002) references Canagarajah (1996) when she writes, “narratives function in opposition to elitist scholarly discourses and that their use in research offers an opportunity for marginalized groups to participate in knowledge construction in the academy.” Since participants in this study belonged to historically marginalized groups, authentic narratives aided in uncovering the hidden and disrupting the standard. Scholars in African American traditions and customs have found that oral storytelling is an integral part of Black culture (Banks-Wallace, 2002; Carter-Black 2007; Fabius, 2016; Boone, 2020). Carter-Black (2007) presents storytelling as the primary way that stories are told from generation to generation. Narrative inquiry provides the Black females participants in this study with a way to communicate their views in a manner that they are comfortable with. While it may be common to review the outcomes of Black female students in higher education, it is uncommon to find value in their experiences as interpreted by the student.

**Sampling**

To complement the study’s methodology and theoretical perspective, purposeful sampling was used in this study. According to Patton (2010) and Palinkas et al. (2015), purposeful sampling in qualitative research is one of the most effective ways to collect rich information from study participants. In this study, participants needed to be enrolled as an undergraduate in a college of business at a university located in the southern, Midwest region of the United States. Study participants self-identified as both a female and a member of the African American or Black race (Appendix A). Participants in the study also were required to
have access to a mobile device that can capture and send photos. Participants selected for this study came from a variety of social backgrounds, educational systems with diverse demographics (ability, sexual orientation, age, etc.).

Unlike sampling with quantitative studies, developing a generalization is not the purpose of this study (Palinkas et al., 2015). Since the focus of this study will be on the individual experiences, factors such as age and major within the business college will not be a determining factor in population sampling. In addition to this, participants from multiple schools offering a bachelor’s degree in business administration will be invited to participate. Participants can be from a variety of backgrounds, including urban, suburban, and rural communities.

Participant recruitment for this study involved a multifaceted approach aimed at reaching Black female business students in the southern Midwestern region of the United States. Initially, emails were sent out to university students, accompanied by flyers to advertise the study, and encourage participation. However, the most successful recruitment strategy emerged from contacting advisors of programs specifically designed to support Black students, such as TRIO or McNair. These advisors served as invaluable gateways to reaching potential participants, as they had direct connections with Black female students enrolled in business programs across various universities. Through personal introductions facilitated by these advisors, I was able to describe the significance of the study, emphasize the importance of amplifying the voices of Black women in business education, and invite students to participate in sharing their experiences.
The approach of engaging with advisors from programs supporting Black students proved highly effective in building rapport and trust with potential participants in some cases. In other situations, many potential participants expressed hesitancy and apprehension about participating in the study. They feared that their involvement might make them more visible and vulnerable to potential repercussions from college administration or faculty members if their opinions were perceived negatively. This reluctance highlighted the complex dynamics and challenges faced by Black female students in navigating academic spaces, where voicing opposition or sharing critical perspectives can sometimes be met with resistance or disciplinary measures. However, this targeted recruitment strategy not only facilitated access to a diverse pool of participants but also fostered a sense of community engagement and collaboration between academic support programs and research initiatives focused on promoting inclusivity and representation within higher education.

Table 1: Study Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>University or College</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Classification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eve</td>
<td>Crenshaw College</td>
<td>Business Management</td>
<td>Junior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauryn</td>
<td>Collins State University</td>
<td>Business Sustainability</td>
<td>Junior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim</td>
<td>Collins State University</td>
<td>Entrepreneurship and Marketing</td>
<td>Senior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missy</td>
<td>Hooks University</td>
<td>Entrepreneurship</td>
<td>Junior</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Four students were selected to participate in this study (Table 1). Participants in this study came from 3 different colleges and universities, Hooks University, Collins State University and Crenshaw College.

Crenshaw College is a two-year junior college, with a student population of approximately 5,000 students, distributed across three campuses within the same state. The
majority of students enrolled at this college self-identify as White with 9% identifying as Black or African American and 57% female. Although a significant number of its students eventually pursue bachelor's degrees at affiliated universities, Crenshaw College itself grants Associate Degrees in various fields, including Arts, Science, and Applied Science. Within the category of Applied Science Degrees, Crenshaw College provides programs in areas such as Business Management, Office Management, Entrepreneurship, Hospitality, and Accounting. These degrees offer students a foundation in practical and applied skills, preparing them for careers in their chosen fields or providing a steppingstone towards further academic pursuits.

Hooks University is a private, four-year institution with an enrollment of about 5,000 students. This Predominantly White Institution (PWI) maintains a balanced gender split, with a 50/50 distribution, and includes a student body in which 8% of individuals self-identify as Black or African American. The university offers more than 100 undergraduate programs. Among its offerings, Hooks University grants degrees in business administration, allowing students to specialize in various areas, including accounting, business analytics, business law, information systems, economics, energy business, finance, entrepreneurship, international business, management, marketing, and real estate. This diverse range of specializations equips students with the knowledge and skills necessary for a variety of career paths within the business field.

Collins State University is a Division One public institution, catering to approximately 20,000 undergraduate students across two campuses. Within the student body, 4% of individuals identify themselves as Black or African American, and 53% identify as female. The university offers an extensive array of academic programs, nearly 200 in total. Of these, nine academic programs are housed within the College of Business. Students at
Collins State University have the opportunity to pursue degrees within the College of Business, specializing in fields such as accounting, economics, entrepreneurship, finance, hospitality, international business, marketing, management, and information systems.

**Research Design**

This qualitative study sought to illuminate the experiences of Black female students enrolled in a college of business by displaying narratives produced through interviews, photo voice and writing prompt analysis. The list below outlines the steps used to carry out this study:

1. Before conducting data collection, a literature review was completed to become familiar with similar research that has already been completed in this field. Literature was reviewed around the areas of Predominately White Institutions, Historically Black Colleges and Institutions, Intersectionality in business, marginalization within higher education institutions and culturally relevant pedagogies. Reviewing literature from these areas gave insight into the lives of female Black students in higher education and the challenges they face. By examining literature from these areas, interview questions were created to fill in gaps left by previous researchers. Review of the literature also included review of graduate and retention rates of undergraduate Black female students from colleges located in the midwestern region of the United States.

2. After the literature review was completed, IRB approval was sought. All procedures and processes were developed to ensure that all standards were met for the study of human participants.
3. Following IRB approval, a call for participants was made, and participant selection began. Potential research participants were contacted via university email addresses, which were provided by the university's Institutional Review Board and faculty/staff advisors of the African American Business Associations. Those who showed interest in participating were then emailed the informed consent form and demographic questions. All students that expressed interest in the study were able to participate.

4. After participant selection, a writing prompt was distributed, and participants were asked to recall and describe a time when they had feelings of comfort, discomfort, inclusion or exclusion during their degree program.

5. Interviews were conducted via Zoom or in person with four Black female students who were pursuing a business degree. The interviews were transcribed, open-coded, and then sent back to the interviewees to ensure accuracy.

6. Next, students participated in creating a visual narrative of their experiences by collecting photographs on their smartphones. Photos were then anonymously shared with researcher and other study participants via a private social media group.

7. Interviews, photos, and writing prompts were coded and analyzed for emerging themes and patterns.

**Data Collection**

To increase trustworthiness in this study, triangulation of methods was used when collecting data. By drawing on multiple data sources researchers can increase the credibility and dependability of data gathered and provide a multidimensional perspective (Denzin,
In this study, participants were provided with a writing prompt to respond to (Appendix B). They were asked to describe a time when they felt included, excluded, comfortable, or uncomfortable in their degree program to shed light on how space is or is not created in the formal and informal curriculum. Students were requested to recall a specific instance in detail when they experienced excitedness, hopefulness, anxiety, apprehension, or nervousness. Participants were encouraged to keep their written responses concise, although no specific page limit or word count was imposed, allowing them to provide as much detail as they felt comfortable sharing. Study participants were directed to respond to this writing prompt before scheduling their interviews, facilitating the collection of memories or narratives they wished to share in the subsequent phases. While the study's purpose was communicated to participants before they consented to participate, this writing prompt served not only as a data collection method but also to set the study's tone. It offered participants insight into what the remaining data collection methods would entail. Additionally, the writing prompt functioned as an icebreaker between study participants and me. Discussing instances of discomfort with a stranger can be challenging, but sharing a brief text about these experiences may have eased the process.

Phase II: Interviews

Interviews were used as a data collection method to establish an informal, semi-structured conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee (Appendix C). Some of the
interview questions used in this study required participants to be open and honest about what might have been considered a traumatic experience. The one-on-one interview technique was deemed ideal for this study, as it helped create a safe space for participants to share their truths without concerns of retaliation or skepticism, as suggested by Patton (2010). In line with Kimberly Crenshaw's insights, which highlighted how the most privileged or dominant societal group often marginalizes the voices of those who are "multiply-burdened" by holding two minority statuses (1989), conducting in-depth interviews with study participants provided a platform for individuals existing at the margins to reclaim a part of their humanity.

*Phase III: Photo Voice*

Most used in participatory action research, photovoice serves to highlight the experiences of those who have been historically marginalized. Through a collection of images photographed by Black female business students, study participants were provided with an opportunity for their voice to be heard (Latz, 2017). Participants were asked to photograph 5-7 images of their surroundings that aid in telling their story as a Black female pursuing a degree in business at the post-secondary level. After photographs were captured, participants were asked to provide narration of their photographs with the researcher via text or social media. Photos and captions could be submitted anonymously to a private social media group where study participants were encouraged to interact with each other’s images. Allowing research participants to describe their interpretation of a photo that represents a piece of their lived reality promoted resistance to the narrative that would have been created by the dominant social class when looking at the image. In line with Black Feminist
Thought, counter storytelling that disrupts hegemonic norms aids in validating the thoughts and encounters of Black women (Collins, 1989; Crenshaw, 1989).

**Phase IV: Open Coding and Member Checks**

After meeting with interviewees for their initial interviews, receiving their photo arrays, and collecting completed writing prompts, I transcribed and open-coded their interview transcriptions and photos for meaning. Upon concluding the transcription and open-coding process, the transcriptions and open-coding notes were returned to the participants, along with any outstanding questions that had arisen during the transcription or coding phases. Participants were also asked to review the transcriptions and coding for accuracy. In cases where participants desired follow-up communication after reviewing their transcriptions, a second meeting or phone call was scheduled to ensure that their voices were accurately portrayed. While member checking traditionally functions to enhance trustworthiness and credibility in qualitative research, it served a more profound purpose in this study. The manipulation of the voices of Black women to conform to societal norms or expected narratives of hardship and adversity is a frequent occurrence. Member checking in this study played a crucial role in preserving the integrity of the Black female perspective, ensuring it was respected and conveyed authentically from the source.

**Table 2: Participant Data Collection**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Writing Prompt</th>
<th># of Photos Submitted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eve</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Submitted</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauryn</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Submitted</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Submitted</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Submitted</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Analysis

During the data analysis phase of this study, writing prompts, interview transcriptions and photos were analyzed to develop the stories of participants. According to Kim (2016), it is important to remember during the data analysis process that we are qualitative researchers before narrative researchers. This means that before focusing on the specifics of analyzing narratives, it is important to ensure that the basics of analyzing qualitative research are covered first. In addition to analyzing data collected in this study through the lens of qualitative narrative inquiry, the goals and intentions of Black Feminist Theory will serve as a guiding perspective through this analyzation.

Analyzing Qualitative Data

Analyzing qualitative data is typically divided into four steps: coding, categorizing, identifying patterns, and deriving themes (Saldana, 2009; Creswell, 2018; Kim, 2016). In the coding phase, I reviewed the data to assign words or short phrases as descriptors for specific data segments (Kim, 2016; Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Following the creation of a set of codes from the raw data, similar codes were clustered into larger categories. Once the categories were established, I sought to identify patterns or recurring phrases within the codes and categories. Subsequently, after identifying these patterns, themes were constructed around the emergent patterns (Kim, 2016; Creswell and Creswell, 2018). After undergoing multiple rounds of the four-step coding process as suggested by Saldana (2009), I was able to thoroughly analyze the dataset and unearth any concealed codes or themes through the lens of this study’s theoretical framework.
The overarching framework of this study, Black Feminist Theory, serves as a means of self-liberation from oppression. Black Feminist perspectives aims to establish more inclusive and equitable systems that acknowledged and addressed the intricate intersections of social identities and their impact on people's lives. The data collected in the study is intended not only to empower minorities advocating for themselves but also to aid college administration, staff, and faculty advocating for policies and practices that address the specific needs and experiences of individuals holding multiple marginalized identities. Black Feminist Theory calls for the validation of Black female standpoints (Collins, 2000).

Analyzing Narratives

Narrative inquiry seeks to understand unique human experiences through their stories (Kim, 2016; Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Connelly and Clandinin, 2006). Kim (2016) references Polkinghorne (1995) when making the distinction between analysis of narratives and narrative analysis. Analysis of narratives, also known as paradigmatic mode of analysis, attempts to sort features or details into different categories to help them fit into a larger pattern. Narrative analysis attempts to configure data into a whole to create a story that is rich in detail (Polkinghorne, 1995; Kim, 2016). In this study, narrative analysis will be used to highlight the unique, rich details that are prevalent in the story of participants. In a society where white women typically speak on behalf on womenkind, it is important to disrupt this narrative with authentic stories form those that may are enduring more discrimination and marginalization because of their double minority status (Crenshaw, 1989).

Kim (2016) asserts that during the analysis stage of narrative inquiry, analysis and interpretation work together to reveal genuine stories of human experience. To stay true to the narratives provided by participants who have often had their stories edited or “corrected”,
the researcher must look for narrative threads and tensions that weave through an individual’s emotions and social settings (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). To identify these threads, the researcher must pay attention to actions, events, and emotions that are presented during the data collection phase (Kelly, 2016). Presentation of data from any narrative inquiry methodology should place emphasis on keeping stories intact and pulling multiple perspectives from the data collection triangulation to display the full story experienced by the study participant (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Kelly, 2016).

**Ethics**

Informed consent and participant privacy were prioritized throughout this study. I shared an informed consent form outlining the purpose, benefits, and dangers of the study with all participants immediately after they expressed interest in participating in the study. I informed all study participants that if at any point during an interview, coding, or data analysis they decided that they no longer wished for their data to be a part of the study, I would destroy all their data immediately. All members that began the study participated until completion.

To ensure that analysis of the data is free from researcher bias and misunderstanding, I had all interview transcriptions reviewed by interviewees for accuracy and meaning and coding. All names will be removed from interview transcriptions and field notes immediately. All transcriptions and notes were stored on a password protected drive.

Throughout this study, I kept my biases in the forefront of my mind. To be extremely transparent to all my participants, I shared my background as a Black female student that earned an undergraduate degree in business at a PWI. I also shared my current professional
position as an instructor and program coordinator in a college of business. Gordon (2005) encourages researcher reflexivity to combat biases and blind spots that may appear when collecting and analyzing data. Using Researcher Reflexivity, I will engage in reflection about biases as I develop interview questions, facilitate interviews, observe, and write fieldnotes instead of just during data analyzation.

**Trustworthiness and Rigor**

Because of the subjective nature of qualitative research, rigor and trustworthiness replaces the concepts of reliability and validity that are typically present in quantitative research. In a qualitative study, rigor can describe the appropriateness of a study’s research design and methods. A primary approach to establish rigor is to ascertain trustworthiness in a study. According to Cypress (2017), trustworthiness is defined as the authenticity and quality of the research findings as well as the credibility, dependability, and transferability of a study.

**Credibility**

Credibility was established in a study by examining the research methods ability to answer research questions (Connelly, 2016). Methods used in this study, interviews, writing responses, and photo voice, all aimed to capture the experiences of Black female students as they navigate through their academic expeditions. To build a narrative based on the genuine experience of these students, data collection methods were selected that will provide multiple perspectives into their lives.
**Dependability**

Data was collected via written responses, photo voice and interview. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Transcriptions included spoken words, gestures, and body language. Images and texts submitted were coded twice, once through the eyes of the study participants and one looking for general representation of diversity. Open coding occurred with interview transcriptions before returning them to participants to ensure accuracy. When codes were determined, like codes were grouped into categories. Grouping of categories continued to be shuffled until all codes had been adequately sorted. Then I analyzed categories for overarching themes and potential answers for research questions.

**Transferability**

Great attention to detail was used when analyzing the data collected from this study. In an effort to capture as much information as possible from a participant's environment, they were asked to engage all their senses when describing their experiences. Transcriptions included not only verbal language but also body language, and this was verified through member checking to ensure that the interpretations drawn from the participants' words accurately reflected their intended meanings. As Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) noted, achieving transferability in qualitative research necessitated the creation of rich descriptions, comprehensive background information, and thorough contextual details about the participants, research, and the researcher.

In alignment with the philosophical foundations of Black Feminist Theory, authenticity was a central focus throughout all phases of this study. This, coupled with strategies to ensure credibility and confirmability, contributed to the overall trustworthiness of the study. As the
study progressed, detailed notes, interview transcriptions, reflection on potential biases, and member checking worked together to uphold rigor and maintain the study's integrity.

**Strengths and Limitations**

Like most research, this study had strengths and limitations. Narrative inquiry serves as a methodology that strengthens the ability to illuminate the unique experiences of the individual. However, used only in conjunction with the interpretivist framework, narrative inquiry falls short of examining the aspects of societal structures that shape an individual’s narrative. As briefly mentioned earlier in this writing, the population of this study, Black female students, belong to a historically marginalized group. Their identifier of being a member of a marginalized group and oppressed by dominant power structures must be investigated in this study in conjunction with their narratives to fully understand and accurately narrate their experiences and stories. An additional strength of this study is the researcher as instrument. Holding the position of an outsider-within (Collins, 1989), the researcher be able to relate with study participants allowing for a more authentic and insightful flow of discussion.

Specifically, when answering RQ1 [What are the storied experiences of Black female students seeking undergraduate degrees in business?] and RQ3 [What parts of the curriculum (formal and informal) constricted space for Black female business students?] there were limitations related to getting study participants to respond openly and honestly in data collections methods. Discussing experiences of racism were be emotionally difficult for study participants. Issues involving race, discrimination and inequality are politically charged subjects that can lead participants to skew their responses to provide the “right answer” or
not to offend anyone. To help mitigate this limitation, I ensured participants continuously throughout the research process that their identities will remain anonymous and there is no single right answer to any questions, only their interpretations.

Chapter Summary

The chapter presented narrative inquiry as the methodology of this study with Black Feminist Theory serving as its theoretical framework. Seeking to better understand the experiences of Black female students enrolled in a college of business, this study used photo voice, writing prompt analysis and interviews to gather data. Once data had been collected, analysis of the information was conducted to present themes and narratives that surfaced from the word and interactions with study participants. Most importantly, this chapter outlines how narratives of Black female students were valued and presented from their own perspectives rather than the dominant masculine viewpoint.
CHAPTER IV

PERCPECTIVES FROM THE MARGINS

Introduction

In my role as a researcher, my primary aim is to bring clarity and transparency to the narratives shared by study participants. In this chapter, I share the profiles and background information of these participants. This data is crucial for gaining insights into the subsequent findings chapter and, more importantly, for providing a contextual foundation for understanding these women’s experiences as business students. The participants' profiles are not just dry statistics; they are the essence of this research. They constitute a rich tapestry of information, encompassing demographics and personal experiences, serving as the scaffolding upon which their study is built (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In acknowledging the pivotal role of context, I extensively explore the background of each woman by leveraging the candid insights shared during interviews and subsequent conversations. Additionally, I utilize photos and the narratives gathered during the photovoice phase of data collection to enrich the depth of information about their lives and experiences. This multi-dimensional approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the participants' journeys, capturing nuanced details that contribute significantly to the overall narrative and analysis. Each participant's story begins at different stages of their life, following their own
unique timeline. Some participants go into great detail in their stories, while others keep things a bit more ambiguous. Some women in this study told their story over a span of 5 years while others focused solely on their time as a college student. The flexibility in temporality allows for the consideration of various aspects that shape their stories, including their childhood locations, age, race/ethnicity, relationship status, and career aspirations. To safeguard the privacy of study participants, real names have been replaced with pseudonyms to provide anonymity while preserving the integrity of their narratives in our research.

Lauryn: A Journey Towards Corporate Law

Lauryn and I first met while she was on an outing for a business student organization. An organization that I later found out was for women pursuing a career in business. I stopped Lauryn on her way out of a headshot appointment for a student organization she participates in. She was one of the only visibly identifiable Black women in the group. After I introduced myself, I told her about my research study. She was immediately intrigued. Many of the reasons I wanted to conduct this research aligned with the reasons she felt the need to join a women’s only student organization within the business college. We exchanged phone numbers and set up a time to meet through text conversations. When Lauryn arrived at my office, she did not seem nervous like some of the other participants. She walked in with confidence. She greeted me by name, walked into my office with assurance and closed the door behind her. She maintained eye contact throughout our entire talk projecting a sense of power, self-confidence, and pride. During our time together, Lauryn mostly talked about her time as a college student. All her stories, experiences, and encounters mentioned during our discussions took place between her first year of college and her junior year.
Preparing for the Future

Despite Lauryn's outward display of self-confidence, one of her initial revelations to me was her ongoing battle with anxiety, a challenge that frequently causes her to overanalyze various aspects of her life. When I asked her about the root of her anxiety or if she felt more anxious at certain times than others, she responded by letting me know that most of the time her anxiety came from feelings of inadequacy. While she possessed a high sense of self-worth, societal pressures surrounding her constantly highlighted her imperfections. Before leaving her apartment and heading to campus, Lauryn spends some time taking care of herself. As she diligently follows her skincare routine, she takes a moment in front of the mirror to repeat a series of affirmations, each one serving as a powerful mantra to bolster her mindset and emotional resilience. These phrases, echoing in the quiet moments of self-care, serve as a daily reminder:

"You can do this" – A gentle yet firm reminder of her own capabilities and inner strength.

"Put your best foot forward" – Encouraging herself to approach each day with confidence and a proactive attitude.

"Don't let other people get to you" – A shield against external influences and a call to maintain her own sense of self-worth.

"Do not let your emotions overtake you" – A commitment to emotional balance and self-control.

"Don't overthink things" – A prompt to keep things in perspective and avoid unnecessary stress.
In the quiet reflection of these affirmations, she finds the strength and clarity to face the day with resilience and confidence.

In trying to get to know Lauryn, I noticed her strong passion for a career in law. It served as the purpose for all the things she hoped to achieve. Her future career was the first things she wanted to talk about after beginning the interview. Lauryn's career aspirations center on the field of law, with a specific focus on corporate law and the concept of business sustainability. During our conversation, Lauryn emphasized a distinct preference for a career in business law over criminal law. Citing the potential dangers associated with certain roles in criminal law, such as the safety of her family and herself, Lauryn is determined to learn the ins and outs of business sustainability to further her career.

What became apparent during our discussion was Lauryn's desire not only to excel in the legal profession but also to be a catalyst for positive change within organizations and communities. Lauryn recognizes that these fields offer opportunities for both personal and financial growth while allowing them to make a meaningful impact on a broader scale. As we embarked further into our conversation, Lauryn shared her long-term career goals and plans. Lauryn decided that it would be best to get practical experience within the legal profession before attending law school. She plans to start her legal career as a paralegal, an approach aimed at building a solid foundation of knowledge and expertise in the field. This approach reflects Lauryn's desire to enter the law field but hesitancy to commit to funding an additional three years of graduate school.

With Lauryn already looking toward the future, I asked her what she thought the day to day of her life as a corporate attorney would look like. She talked about attending
conferences and meetings with clients, but she also talked a lot about what her future self would look like. Lauryn described herself as wearing skirts with length past the knees on days that she must appear in court and capris on warm days she did not need to appear before a judge. She talked about wearing heels on days she needed to dress up and sandals on days that she could be more casual. Lauryn mentioned that she typically runs a bit cold, so she imagines always wearing a long sleeve shirt or a blazer to keep up her comfort and professional appearance. The outfits that she described were quite different from what she was wearing when she came into my office, a crop tank top and shorts. I asked her about the discrepancies between what she was wearing and how she imagined Lawyer Lauryn, and she responded by letting me know that she knew she was entering a profession that came with dress code expectations and she was willing to adhere to them. Lauryn admitted that she would feel comfortable walking into her place of employment sporting the dreadlocks that she currently wore in her hair. She felt that her hair was the one piece of her that could not, and should not, conform to that status quo look of a corporate attorney.

When Lauryn begins a new semester, she finds herself over thinking a bit about where to sit. While she tries to only take classes where she will know at least one other student, she still puts a lot of thought into what part of the classroom she plans to stake a claim to for the remainder of the semester. Lauryn prefers classrooms with doors in the back, this way she can walk in and analyze where everyone is sitting before she has to make her selection. “Girls usually sit by girls and boys by boys” is an observation she shared with me. She also highlighted an observation about how students tend to form social circles, which sometimes align with their racial backgrounds. It's not that all Hispanic, Indigenous, or Black students exclusively sit together; rather, they often move toward one another in pairs or small
groups, creating a diverse array within the classroom. Lauryn attributes this phenomenon to the natural inclination people have to connect with those who share their cultural or ethnic backgrounds.

Lauryn takes a different approach towards finding a seat in class. If she has a friend in the course, she will sit with them. If she does not, she tries to make new connections. If she is participating in a course in which she would like to form a bond with the instructor, she sits up front. If she feels like she needs to branch out and form new peer relationships, she will sit with someone that is already sitting alone. In situations where Lauryn feels awkward or uneasy, she finds herself sitting in the back of the class or near a wall. When asked about feelings of awkwardness and uneasiness in the classroom, Lauryn respond by stating that, even when she maintains a quiet and inconspicuous presence in the classroom, she often grapples with the sensation that all eyes are on her, creating a subtle but intense sense of self-consciousness.

Business Curriculum Experiences

To prepare herself for a career in law, Lauryn takes both sociology and business coursework. When talking about her time in the classroom, she noted that her sociology classes tended to take a more diverse outlook on life than her business courses. She thought that the intentional mix of viewpoints in her sociology classes made her feel at ease in certain situations but uneasy in others.

According to Lauren, her experiences in business specific coursework did not include any notable stories related to diversity. She could not recall any instances in her coursework where their class discussed content related to race, gender, or social class. After we explored
her thoughts on cultural diversity topics in her sociology class at length, I prompted her once again to think deeply about her experiences in business studies. She pondered my question for a while, taking about 15 seconds to reflect. During that brief yet contemplative pause, it became apparent that Lauryn couldn’t readily recall any specific instances from her business courses that highlighted diverse perspectives regarding corporate beliefs and behaviors or topics around general inclusion. Whether Lauryn's difficulty in recalling these classroom moments was due to a temporary memory lapse or the genuine absence of such moments, she discovered a positive aspect in the situation. The absence of such recollections meant she also couldn't remember any moments that had made her feel uncomfortable. In essence, this absence of memorable events surrounding her race, gender, culture in her business coursework emphasized the stark contrast between her sociology education, where diversity was a prominent theme, and her business studies, where such discussions seemed to be less emphasized, if not entirely absent. Lauryn also felt it important to note the diversity in her sociology faculty compared to instructors she had interacted with in business courses. While she pointed out a lack of Black professors in both disciplines, she noted there were more women teaching sociology courses than business. She also noticed that there was more ethnic diversity across the sociology faculty than business.

Concluding my discussions with Lauryn left me in a state of inner conflict. On one side of the spectrum, she projected a commanding sense of self-assuredness and strength. However, she also candidly shared her inner struggles with feelings of insecurity and anxiety. This duality in Lauryn's demeanor, alternating between confidence and vulnerability, left me pondering which aspect truly represented her genuine sentiments as a Black female student in the realm of business education. Lauryn navigated a spectrum of emotions and occurrences,
shifting between assertiveness and moments of hesitancy, each facet revealing a layer of her multilayered experience. This dynamic emphasizes the complexity of her journey and emphasizing the importance of recognizing that individuals can hold varying, and sometimes contrasting, emotions and attitudes within themselves, especially when navigating the intersection of race and academia. Lauryn's experiences mirror a prevalent theme found in current literature, capturing instances of inclusion and happiness during campus activities, yet also revealing a persistent desire for more substantial support to achieve likeness with their peers (McDougal et al., 2018; Dahlvig, 2010; Bowers et al., 2020).

**Eve: Navigating the Business Terrain with Tenacity**

I first met Eve on a Wednesday afternoon in my office. Our meeting was long awaited. We had been texting and emailing for about a week before we were able to settle on a time for us to get together. Eve is a 3rd year business student from a large urban city in the Midwest. Her ultimate career goal is to open a full-service beauty salon in her hometown. To achieve this goal, she decided that it would be best to attend college and earn a degree in business management. As Eve sat in my office, her legs were crossed. Her palms were stacked neatly, one on top of the other. Immediately after she sat down in my office, she asked me about some photos I had hanging on the wall of my family. As I narrated the photos for her, she began to smile, relax a little, and tell me more about where she grew up. She was dressed casually. She had on a crop top and shorts. Her hair was long, with wavy curls pinned to one side. She mentioned that she had thought about dressing up to come to our meeting. She mentioned that she decided against it because she did not have time to dress up and because she wanted to be authentic. I assured her she was dressed perfectly for the occasion and authenticity was the goal of our entire meeting. During our moments speaking
with each other, Eve shared information about her life spanning from her high school years to
the present. She wanted to ensure that her story was told with all the necessary context to
understand the complexity of her current situation.

_Navigating the College Journey_

Eve lived in the same neighborhood, more specifically in the same home, for 15
years. Her connection with her community runs deep. As she was growing up, she had many
friends in the neighborhood and her home became the “the spot”, a place where her and her
friends could gather to talk, laugh, and relax. Though she and her friends found solace at her
home, things were not always peaceful there. Living through some turbulent family
disturbances in her childhood, Eve also found comfort at school. When things would get
tough at home, she felt as though she could not control the environment, she was living in.
During these times, she held tight to the aspects of her life she knew she could excel in, the
most predominate being school. Throughout her time as a secondary school student, Eve
achieved spectacular grades. She prospered at studying, reading, and writing. Her grades
were always good. Despite some difficult circumstances in her own life, Eve was happy
growing up. The connections she built with her community, friends, teachers, and coaches,
nurtured her. She always felt supported.

Late in Eve’s high school career, she had the opportunity to begin vocational training
at her local Career Technical Training Center. This Career Tech center offered a robust
cosmetology program that concluded with students taking the certification exams to be
licensed to do hair, make up and other esthetician services. Since Eve was ahead in her high
school studies, she jumped at the opportunity to begin working towards her ultimate career
goal, starting her own salon. By the time Eve graduated high school she was halfway to her goal of becoming a licensed cosmetologist and had been accepted into a four-year university located about an hour and a half away from the home she grew up in.

Eve started college in the Fall following her high school graduation. Her mission was to continue towards her licensure as cosmetologist while learning the business administration principles needed to own and operate her own business. She was confident that she would achieve her goals; school had always been easy for her. To continue in her cosmetology program, Eve had to attend class two times a week. She was confident that this would not be a problem because she strategically arranged her college course schedule around the days she would be an hour and a half away from campus. Eve was also happy to be going back to her hometown at least twice a week. She wanted to keep her connection to her community, and boyfriend back home, tight. Feeling the pressure of needing to make her dreams come true, Eve spent the first 2 years of her college career driving back and forth between her college campus and her hometown. Within her first semester, she noticed that her division between two realms was affecting her academics and ways of thinking. Spending all her free time back home, she was unable to make connections on campus that would motivate her to engage with university life. She found herself going to class, turning in assignments, then hitting the road back home. The transition to college life was harder than she thought it would be. During Eve’s first semester on campus, she was exhausted from driving and being a student at two post-secondary institutions and lonely.

Throughout the first two years of Eve’s time in college, she felt torn between two communities and fully immersed in neither. Eve spent 3-4 days a week in her hometown, she noticed changes in people and relationships. Her community was changing around her and
the place she called home and the people she knew as friends started to move in directions that she was unfamiliar with. Though her community was transforming, she still had cosmetology school, the one place she felt confident in her ability to predict the environment and her success in the responsibilities. As Eve was grappling to keep up with her community, college courses, and vocational school courses, her personal life collapsed. Eve and her boyfriend broke up. Though they were no longer in a relationship, he remained close to the family. Shortly after the breakup, her boyfriend was shot at an altercation in Eve’s hometown community while standing up for Eve’s younger brother. Though he survived, he spent weeks in the hospital recovering.

During this time, Eve took her licensure exam at cosmetology school. Though she passed the practical part of the exam, she failed the written portion. She was unable to get her license. Her plan to open her own salon was derailed. She describes it as a crushing blow, a punch to the gut that threatened to knock the wind out of her dreams. Her immediate reaction was one of devastation and frustration. As she talked about failing her cosmetology exam, tears formed in the corner of her eyes. Her face was serious and sullen, almost more so than when she described her boyfriend’s injuries. He made a full recovery, her career path towards entrepreneurship had not.

Life as a college student was not getting much better. Eve spent much of her class time during the second semester of the second year as decompression time. Instead of learning in class, she found herself sitting in front of her instructor trying to process the trauma that was happening at home. In previous years, when Eve had situations happening at home that affected her academics, she had a strong support team. Her teachers and her coaches were part of her tight-knit community. Therefore, they knew when Eve maybe
struggling at home and were always there to offer support, emotionally and academically. She felt connected. In college, she felt that she had no one in her corner. During her first 2 years of school, she can only remember one instructor who checked in on her. This instructor asked her to stay after class and asked her why it appeared that she was dozing off in class. After explaining her situation to this instructor, she had sympathy. She told Eve that she would put out an academic alert and someone from the university would reach out to offer guidance and support. No one ever did. Eve was open about her life and struggles back home. She shared her experiences with anyone who asked. In her mandatory semesterly appointment with her academic advisor Eve let her academic advisor into the troubles of her world. She talked about her boyfriend’s hospitalization, her failed cosmetology exam, and her feelings of loneliness at college. Her academic advisor gave her the contact information for university mental health resources. The ball was now in her court to reach out for help, no one followed up.

In the spring of 2022, things took a challenging turn for Eve in her college journey. Her GPA had dipped below the 2.0 mark, leading to her placement on academic probation and the very real threat of being expelled from the university. During that semester, Eve decided to explore academic avenues that were directly related to her career goals. She enrolled in an introductory entrepreneurship course and a business analytics class, hoping to reignite her passion of opening her own business. These were subjects she believed she would have enjoyed if she had been in the right frame of mind, but the weight of her academic and personal struggles weighed her down, making it difficult to fully engage with the material. To improve her academic standing and get back on track, Eve made the choice to take summer courses in 2022. Her intentions were admirable, driven by a strong desire to
succeed. However, the reality turned out to be more challenging than she had anticipated. The summer courses proved to be an obstacle, one that she wasn't emotionally or academically prepared to tackle.

As the summer progressed, Eve grappled with coursework that felt increasingly overwhelming. Despite her best efforts, she found herself unable to focus on the academics before her. In early August of 2022, a letter arrived from the university, delivering the news that her low GPA had led to her suspension from the institution. Eve was no longer able to attend the university she was accepted into directly after college. She appealed the suspension citing her recent life events but was told that she must get her GPA up before she could reapply and enroll in more courses. Eve did not let this stop her. She immediately enrolled at a junior college near the university she initially attended. Keeping her business management major, she continues to take classes with the goal of transferring back to the four-year university to complete her undergraduate degree. Eve has obtained a job in the town her college is located in. She no longer travels back to her hometown 2-3 times per week. Instead, she may go for a visit a couple times a month. Eve is trying to “learn from her mistakes.” She is dedicated to being a more “prestigious” college student.

Concluding my meeting with Eve was the most difficult interview to end. She was vulnerable with me. She told me everything. By the end, she had teared up three times. I comforted her but I was not convinced that she was completely consoled. As she walked out of my office, I felt like she had just given me a piece of her and I was looking for something to give her in return. All had was an offer to be there for her if she needed someone to talk to and a promise that I would present her story as accurately as possible.
Eve perceives a sense of invisibility in her business classes, and she believes she's not the only student experiencing this. She attributes this feeling to her instructors lacking the passion required to establish meaningful connections with their students. Eve sees a part of this issue stemming from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the inherently impersonal nature of the business field. As a result, she often feels that her business instructors are delivering information in a one-sided manner, speaking at her rather than engaging with her. Eve describes herself as someone who is emotionally expressive, openly displaying her feelings. Due to this emotional nature, she has a deep need to establish an emotional connection with the material she is learning, taking concepts beyond the superficial level. In the classroom, she appreciates the valuable skills she is learning. However, she wishes that her instructors would make more effort to relate academic principles to real-life applications in various aspects of contemporary life.

During her undergraduate journey, Eve attended two different business colleges. She distinctly remembers that there were very few female instructors and none of them were Black. However, during her time at the second college, she found a strong connection with her academic advisor, who happened to be a Black woman. Echoing the thoughts of Eve, believes that it's easier to connect with individuals who share common experiences. Although her new academic advisor has only known her for a short period, Eve already feels a strong bond with her.

Eve hasn't personally encountered overt racism directed at Black individuals during her time as a student, and she can't recall any direct instances of sexism. However, she has
noticed a certain tension in her courses, particularly between domestic and international students and faculty. She often hears comments about people who speak English as a second language having accents that make them seem less capable as instructors. Additionally, there are comments about international students needing to excel academically to avoid disappointing their parents. While she doesn't fall into the category that's being scrutinized in these instances, Eve often considers what these same individuals might say about her race when she's not present.

**Missy: Breaking Barriers for Women in Sports**

I was very excited to interview Missy. As a college athlete, I knew her perspectives would be unique. Our interview was conducted via Zoom, and I was sure to log in a few minutes early in case there were technical difficulties. After a couple of moments spent staring at my reflection in the camera, I began to worry that Missy had forgotten our meeting as it was now a few minutes passed our scheduled meeting time. Just as I began to pull her consent form to get her contact information, she appeared in the zoom room. I was instantly relieved. Missy appeared to be logging into our call from her bedroom. In the background, I could see the back half of her bed that was covered with a pink comforter. I could also see blue lights strung around the ceiling of the room. The lighting in her room was dim. I could see the bottom of long dark curtains over a window that blocked out the bright sun. There was just enough light coming from a small lamp behind her desk to illuminate her face. She wore her hair in long Black and brown braids. She had on a plain white t-shirt and small gold hoops in her ears that she played with between her fingers as we talked. Missy’s body language was relaxed. She propped her head up with her hands as she stared into the screen.
When she was not talking, she always had a slight, subtle smile on her face. She spoke passionately and made eye contact with me throughout the entire interview.

In my previous interviews and interactions with students, I had made a deliberate effort to understand the individual as a whole. My goal was to gather as much information about them as they were comfortable sharing, in order to provide as much context as possible to their experiences. Missy's approach made this task challenging. Missy had requested the interview questions in advance, and it was evident that she had thoroughly prepared for our meeting. She arrived with a clear focus on specific stories she deemed important to share. I attempted to initiate a more personal conversation with Missy, aiming to learn about her on a deeper level. However, she was eager to delve straight into what I would describe as the more serious topics. Only talking briefly about her time before college, Missy chose to concentrate on her 2 years in college and experiences as a student athlete during our dialogues.

*Shaping Identity and Forming Goals*

Ethnically, Missy is biracial. According to her, she is both of Hispanic and African American decent. Though she can speak Spanish, she noted that she typically identifies as Black. Missy believes that she is privileged because of her ability to claim two ethnicities. She noted during our interview that there have been times, both in an academic setting and in casual surroundings, that switching from speaking English to Spanish or letting her Hispanic accent shine through changed the way people interacted with her. Growing up in a large metropolitan area, Missy noticed that being Hispanic in certain situations got her more respect than she acquired from identifying as being Black.
When reflecting her choice to identify as Black women, instead of holding on to both pieces of her identity, Missy recalls being forced to choose. Cliques at her high school were formed according to race. While there was great diversity among the student body, different races did not interact. She recalled walking into the lunchroom on the first day of school and feeling torn about which group she should sit with. She knew that once she chose a group, interaction with students from the other group would be extremely limited. Meaning, if she elected to sit with the Black kids, she would not be “allowed” to talk to the Hispanic students and if she opted to dine with the Hispanic students, her interactions with the Black students would be virtually nonexistent. At the time, Missy felt like she had more in common with the Black students and fell into that social circle. Her experience during her high school years let her to conclude that though she has two ethnic backgrounds, she chooses to identify as a Black woman.

Missy is an entrepreneurship major. Throughout our interview Missy kept referring to “the agency” which is the business she plans to start. With a passion for athletics and sport competitions, Missy hopes to open her own Sports Agency after graduation. She loves playing soccer and would love to join a profession league after graduation, but she feels like becoming a sport agent is a more realistic career path. Aside from practicality, Missy feels called to represent athletes due to the lack of female agents in the industry. She hopes that a stronger female presence in the sports management industry will help put an end to unfair contract negotiations and gender biases that tend to affect female athletes.

Missy has a very specific vision of what the agency will look like and how it will run. During an internship that she participated in during a previous summer, she had the opportunity to shadow different sports agents and tour sports agencies around two large
metropolitan areas. Missy was one of four selected for this internship opportunity. She was also the only female. After being emersed in the world of talent representation for 8 weeks, she concluded her internship by drafting some founding principles that her agency would be built on:

1. Gender Equity: Missy's agency will prioritize gender equity in all aspects of its operations. She is committed to providing equal opportunities, representation, and support for both male and female athletes. Her agency will actively work to eliminate gender-based disparities in sports representation.

2. Inclusive Representation: Missy believes in representing athletes from diverse backgrounds, including race, nationality, and sexual orientation. Her agency will actively seek out and support athletes from underrepresented communities, ensuring that their voices are heard and their needs are met.

3. Mental Health and Well-Being: Missy recognizes the importance of athletes' mental health and overall well-being. Her agency will prioritize the mental and emotional health of its clients, providing access to resources, counseling, and support to help them thrive both on and off the field.

4. Holistic Development: Missy's agency will focus on the holistic development of athletes, not just their athletic careers. This includes educational support, career planning, and life skills training to ensure athletes are prepared for life beyond sports.

Missy's approach during the interview remained consistently focused and on-topic, displaying a notable reluctance to deviate from the primary purpose of our discussion. It raised the question of whether she felt compelled to adopt such a direct and no-nonsense attitude in order for her words to be treated with the seriousness they deserved. Missy is very
aware of her racial identity, but her concerns appeared to be more deeply rooted in the realm of gender inequalities, likely stemming from the persistent stereotypes associated with female athletes. According to Simien et al. (2019), Black female athletes often feel invisible and silenced. In conversations surrounding athletics and competitive sports, there tends to be a prevalent bias favoring men, even Black men. This bias is evident in the limited attention paid to Black female athletes by media, coaches, recruiters, and in team funding (Simien et al., 2019; Bruening, 2005; Rhoden, 2012). Missy’s awareness of stereotypes that paint female athletes as emotional and high maintenance could explain her apparent reluctance to delve into more emotional or reflective aspects of our conversation. This left me questioning if her demeanor was possibly a strategic choice to avoid reinforcing any preconceived stereotypes that might hinder her mission for gender equity in the sports industry.

*Business Curriculum Encounters*

Missy's experience in her business classes has left her feeling uncomfortable. She perceives that the views on business management are predominantly presented through the lens of white men who face no significant entry barriers. In her human resources class, Missy recalled learning about the corporate hierarchy, where entry-level business professionals typically begin as assistants, progress to associates, and eventually move into supervisory roles, which could lead to assistant manager positions and, ultimately, director positions. Her instructor emphasized that hard work, academic certifications, and a positive attitude were the key attributes necessary for advancing in the corporate ladder. Missy believed that these qualities might be sufficient for men but thought that women would need to go the extra mile to gain recognition in the business world. While she acknowledged that many general lessons in management, accounting, or finance were applicable to all learners, she felt that there was
a gap in the academic curriculum when it came to navigating the specific challenges of being a woman in a male-dominated field. Despite her and her male peers taking the same coursework and being required to maintain the same GPAs to graduate, she consistently found that they were perceived to be one tier ahead of her. In her classes, Missy often found herself among only 10 or 11 women in a class of 40. During her internship at a management company, she was the sole female among four interns. At this point, Missy believed that success as a business student and professional hinged on standing out, not necessarily due to unique skills, but rather for the ability to conform and fit into the existing male-dominated landscape.

Missy finds solace in classes and extracurricular activities linked to her college's career services center. Despite the fact that the staff is entirely composed of white individuals who are primarily males, she holds the belief that she has gained valuable insights for advancing her career and advocating for herself from them. Missy appreciates that the members of the career services team provide personalized advice that directly applies to her, as they rarely adopt a one-size-fits-all approach. When she meets with a career counselor or participates in a class led by a career coach, Missy feels like she can genuinely be herself. She argues that this is the only group of people she has come into contact with inside the business college who are genuinely interested in assisting her in navigating the business industry, as opposed to merely assigning her a grade.
Kim: An Enthusiastic Entrepreneur

Balancing Life and Aspirations

Kim and I were acquaintances before she agreed to participate in my study. We had the occasional chat once or twice a semester for about a year before I started gathering data for this research project. Kim and I have quite a bit in common; we both come from the same hometown and share a high school alma mater. Though I graduated about 5 years before she started attending the school, we always found ourselves chatting and joking about past teachers, questionable cafeteria food and the stairs that were exhausting to climb no matter how physically fit you were.

Kim is a bundle of energy and brilliant. Every time I have a conversation with her, she exudes this aura of sincere happiness and genuine care. When we met for our interview, she was her normal chipper self. She was wearing a bright green top and I could see the top of her powder blue pants at the bottom of the camera frame. It was interesting to see the wall behind her. She told me that she was sitting at her desk in her room at her apartment. Though the wall behind her was white, it was covered with sketches of clothing designs. Some sketches were in Black and white, others were entirely filled with color. Kim smiled as I started to ask her about a day in her life as a business student. Her smile never left her face for more than a couple minutes throughout our entire meeting, even when she talked about the difficulties she encountered throughout her college career.

Kim embarked on her college journey with big dreams. As a freshman, she arrived on campus with a sense of excitement and enthusiasm. Her decision to double major in Marketing and Entrepreneurship was driven by her desire to start her own fashion line.
Maintaining a positive attitude was Kim's guiding principle from the very beginning of her college career. During our chat, Kim shared with me that she tries to smile through the turbulence of transitioning through college. She smiled through the initial homesickness, the unfamiliarity of dorm life, and the academic adjustments.

Kim had been told by her mother from an early age that her optimism was infectious. With people constantly being drawn towards her, she always finds it easy to make friends. Growing up Kim's personality made her the heart of any gathering. In school, she effortlessly made friends. However, it was in college that Kim truly honed her ability to connect with people. As a business major, Kim thought there would be great value in networking and forming meaningful relationships. Kim's genuine care for others and her unwavering positivity not only helped her make friends but also made her a well-known student in the business school. Kim noted that one of her favorite aspects of being a business student was consistently being greeted by college students, faculty, and staff in the hallways of the business building.

In her first year of college Kim found herself immersed in the world of business courses. Her professors noticed her enthusiasm for learning and her capacity for thinking outside the box. They soon recommended her for special projects, research opportunities, and leadership roles within student organizations. As Kim got deeper and deeper into her college career, she felt like she could not afford to turn down any opportunities that could bolster her resume. She entered every entrepreneurial contest the college held and presented her ideas about fast affordable fashion to all the marketing analytics competitions she could. In addition to being heavily involved in extra curriculars, Kim excelled academically. Thinking
back to the first half of her college career, she remembers keeping detailed schedules to ensure that she was allotting enough time towards academics.

From Kim's current perspective, she places a higher value on her involvement in extracurricular activities compared to the content she encounters in her regular classes. These activities have taken on a deeper significance in her college experience, offering an energetic and hands-on learning opportunity that extends beyond the boundaries of traditional classroom education. Being part of clubs, organizations, and special projects has allowed her to acquire practical skills, refine her leadership abilities, and expand her network; all of which she now regards as fundamental aspects of her overall education. Kim has discovered that she often feels more at ease and connected during a club meeting than in a traditional classroom environment. While she acknowledges the importance of her coursework, Kim firmly believes that her engagement beyond the classroom not only complements her academic journey but also supplements it with valuable life experiences.

Kim navigated the social landscape with ease, quickly making friends who shared her passions and ambitions. However, amidst the excitement of forging new connections, Kim found it increasingly challenging to maintain the close bonds she had with her friends back home. As her college life unfolded, Kim thinks that her new friends subtly influenced her, leading to micro adjustments in her personality and preferences. Semester after semester, she noticed herself adopting new interests, adapting her speech, and even altering her style to better align with her college friend group. Kim explained to me that that some of these changes reflect her personal growth and maturation. However, during one of our conversations she pondered if she was conforming to fit in with her new circle. This internal conflict left Kim feeling torn between her old friends and the exciting, evolving world she
had entered at college. Kim seeks to strike a balance between preserving her authentic self and embracing the experiences and opportunities that her college friendships offered. According to Kim, she is on a “delicate journey of self-discovery” in which she learns more about herself every day.

When asked to describe her college friends group Kim depicted a group of people who were mostly female and white. Among her college circle, Kim appreciated their shared love for outdoor adventures, such as hiking and camping. Together, she and her friends also enjoy volunteering and community service. Kim also found common ground in their passion for art and music, regularly attending concerts and visiting galleries to explore their shared creative interests. Their strong friendships were built on shared hobbies and values, creating a tight-knit group that encouraged each other to push through challenges that higher education presents. In contrast, Kim described her high school friends as coming from diverse backgrounds. From her recollection, her hometown was more ethnically diverse than the town she attends college in. Their friendships served as a source of comfort when college pressures got to be too much. Though Kim does not see her friends from high school as much as she sees her newer college friends, she still holds both groups as equals in comradery.

Kim knew that her passion for fashion would always lead to a career in the apparel industry. However, as she delved deeper into her business classes, she noticed a disconnect between her chosen path and the traditional business careers her peers were pursuing. It became apparent that the fashion industry was not always taken as seriously in her business classes, which often prioritized fields like finance or management consulting or data analytics. Kim felt a subtle skepticism from some of her professors and classmates, who seemed to view her fashion aspirations as less legitimate or academically rigorous compared
to more conventional business tracks. Always having to defend her career choice left Kim with a sense of frustration and isolation. During our time together, Kim began to explain some of the intricacies of the fashion world. She talked about the science behind buying merchandise for retail stores, developing intense targeted marketing campaigns to launch new fashion lines and the skill that is required to create digital sketches that can be sent to manufactures for creation. Despite her passion and the depth of her knowledge in the fashion sector, she sometimes felt that her contributions in class discussions were met with indifference or a lack of appreciation. Kim believes that business management and entrepreneurship should not be tied to one career or discipline. Classes she appreciates the most are those that base their lessons off the interests of their students.

Despite what she refers to as “annoyances”, Kim remains confident in her pursuit of a fashion career. She believes that her unique perspective and determination will ultimately help bridge the gap between the fashion industry and traditional business education. While she recognizes the need for greater awareness and acceptance of non-traditional business paths, Kim remains committed to proving that a career in fashion is not only valid but also a thriving sector of the business world deserving of serious consideration and respect.

Kim and I could talk for hours. Actually, I think that Kim could probably talk to anyone for hours. Though Kim does enjoy actively talking in a conversation, she is equally as enthusiastic about listening. I believe our acquaintance has transformed into a friendship through this research project which has also given me the opportunity to witness firsthand the qualities that make Kim stand out. As Kim shared her story, I couldn't help but admire the delicate balancing act she had undertaken, navigating the transition from her old friends to her new ones while preserving her authentic self.
While Kim never believed that her physical safety was at risk in her business classrooms, she did recall experiencing emotional tension and a general sense of uneasiness. Although she couldn't recall any explicit instances where faculty or peers verbally expressed her inferiority, she did remember multiple occasions during her business-specific coursework where she felt her words, thoughts, and ideas were regarded as less valuable compared to those of her classmates or the course materials. Kim was aware that she was often the only Black woman in the room, which made her feel a heavy responsibility. This sense of responsibility led Kim to feel the need to consistently provide the right answers, communicate clearly and concisely, and maintain model behavior to demonstrate that Black women can contribute valuable insights. Kim recounted feeling invisible and hypervisible at the same time. She did not feel that she should contribute much to class discussions, but when she did she also felt the burden of dispelling stereotypes and preconceived notions that others might hold about Black students in higher education. Kim frequently overheard people making jokes about affirmative action policies in college admissions. Although she hadn't encountered these jokes on her campus or in her courses, she was determined to ensure everyone understood that she had been admitted to her university based on her intelligence and merit, rather than her race.

In her effort to establish her sense of belonging, Kim noticed a change in her behavior. While she still maintained her authenticity in certain aspects of her college life, she observed herself attempting to conform to the behaviors of her peers within the classroom.
For instance, she started bringing her laptop to class even though she typically preferred taking notes by hand. Additionally, she found herself adjusting her vocabulary to align more closely with that of her classmates. During our interview, Kim raised a thought-provoking question regarding whether altering her way of speaking was a component of the process of becoming "educated." This reflective moment highlighted her ongoing exploration of identity and adaptation within the academic environment.

Kim's college offered a selection of business courses with a "diversity" designation, and she had a plan to enroll in all of them. During our interview, Kim repeatedly returned to her experience in one of these diversity courses, specifically one that delved into managing diverse environments. This particular class stood out for her as it was the only one where she felt entirely comfortable being herself. What made the difference, according to Kim, was the instructor—a Black woman. The presence of a Black female professor seemed to transform the classroom atmosphere, making it feel "easy, laid-back, and cool" in Kim's recollection. She also remembered that there were at least three other Black girls in a class of 40, as well as several Black male students. When I asked her whether she believed her white classmates found the class as easygoing as she did, she simply shrugged.

**Chapter Summary**

Lauryn, Eve, Missy, and Kim have each undergone unique life experiences that have significantly influenced their perspectives as business students. In this chapter, as we recount their stories, we provide a broad overview of their experiences and viewpoints. Subsequently, in the following chapter, we will delve more deeply into their experiences as business students, offering a more concentrated investigation. In examining these women’s stories
from a broader perspective, it becomes evident that all four of these study participants exhibit remarkable qualities of resilience, persistence, and determination. Their narratives serve as powerful reminders of the theoretical framework that guided this study, Black Feminist Theory (BFT).

Black Feminist Theory acknowledges the historical and ongoing resilience displayed by Black women in the face of entrenched systemic racism, sexism, and various forms of discrimination (Collins, 2000). Within the context of Lauryn, Missy, Kim and Eve’s narratives and the founding principles of Black Feminist Theory, Black feminists consistently highlight the extraordinary strength and resilience that is used by Black women who have endured centuries of oppression to navigate through their everyday life. This resilience is not seen as just an individual trait but as a source of empowerment and a testament to the unwavering human spirit's capacity to persevere in the face of adversity. Likewise, Black Feminist Theory places emphasis on the notion of persistence in the pursuit of realizing goals that had previously been unachievable due to oppression, such as earning a business degree. It asserts that confronting and dismantling deeply entrenched systems of oppression necessitates unceasing and sustained efforts (Collins, 1989). The journeys of Lauryn, Eve, Missy, and Kim have contributed to their empowerment through self-affirmation and the recognition of their personal worth and agency. These qualities, deeply rooted in resilience and persistence, highlight the transformative power of their narratives within the context of both their academic pursuits as business students and the broader landscape of social justice.
CHAPTER V

INTERWEAVING EXPERIENCES

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I retold the narratives of Missy, Kim, Lauryn, and Eve focusing both on their experiences as business students and unique individuals from their perspective. In this chapter, I analyze the intersections of their stories and highlight common threads that run through each of their narratives through the lens of Black feminist theory. Drawing upon three fundamental tenets of Black feminist thought—Black female standpoint, resistance, and knowledge validation—I have structured the experiences of these women, spotlighting recurring themes and infusing their narratives with a richer significance. The purpose of this study is to reveal the suppressed narratives of Black female students who are pursuing business degrees. While the primary objective of this study is to gain insight into the lived experiences of this historically oppressed group of students, it is important to note that these participants do not speak on behalf of all Black female business students. However, their stories and the themes that have emerged from their experiences can aid in providing understanding of ways their experiences have created or constricted space for them to learn and grow into business professionals.
“Minding my Ps and Qs.”: Navigating Double Consciousness

In Porter and Bryd's (2021) study on the experiences of Black women in higher education, they collected data from Black female undergraduate students, which indicates that the majority of Black female undergraduate students grapple with feelings of isolation. Though they were surrounded by thousands of other students, they felt as though they were outsiders among their peers. Similarly, Missy, Lauryn, Eve, and Kim all encounter unique experiences that lead them to discuss issues surrounding belonging, conforming and representation. Though they took different courses, belonged to different social groups and in some cases attended different colleges they all longed for a deeper sense of inclusion at their place of learning. Kim, the enthusiastic aspiring entrepreneur, mentioned in her interview that she always must “mind her Ps and Qs” when interacting with other business students, staff, and faculty. She felt that if she was not on her best behavior, she may not be able to keep her status as a “heavily involved and influential business student.” In this section, I'll intertwine the threads of isolation, belonging, and assimilation as described by the study participants. These strands highlight the persistent sense of loneliness these women faced daily as business students while balancing the complexities of double consciousness and the effort to conform within the existing educational structure without causing disruption. Despite enduring discomfort, these women not only persevered but also conscientiously upheld their best behavior, striving to navigate their challenges within the educational landscape.
Belonging

When it comes to belonging, participants in this study described many instances in which they felt like they belonged in their place of learning and times when they did not. Feelings of belonging often left these women feeling empowered and ready to break through barriers built around their gender and race. Kim feels a strong sense of belonging outside of the traditional classroom. When discussing places and time she felt the most comfortable, she kept returning to the phrase, “on the 1st floor, like near the Student Services Center…. everyone is just trying to get work done there.” According to Kim, the Student Services Center houses the business college’s advising offices, career services, retention services and student business incubator. There is also study space and a computer lab reserved for business students only. Kim alluded to the notion that when students are working on the first floor, there is a strong sense of community because everyone is discussing their unique projects, assignments, or degree progressions with one another. The fact that everyone is working on a different project unifies the group. Kim does not believe that there is a “normal” in this setting. It is just a place for business students to “come, sit down and vibe.”

Missy echoes Kim’s feelings about encounters with student services. Though they attend different higher education institutions, Missy recalled feeling as though she belonged most when talking with her career coach, John, in the Business Student Career Center. Missy recounted many instances in which her career coach, who was designated to work with
Entrepreneurship students only, encouraged her to take advantage of opportunities that would allow for her to be an advocate for womenkind. When speaking about her career coach, Missy stated, “John, he really did help me make connections. Getting into Sports is hard. It’s all about who you know. John did that for me. He made sure I was in the room with all the right people.” When I inquired about how Missy’s male counterparts may have gotten in the room with the “right people”, she informed me that recruiters for sports management firms and event planning services usually attended male sporting events to mingle with the players, but they rarely came to female events. Missy felt like she was welcome in her student services office because John “always had my back.”

Lauryn feels confident and comfortable in her extracurricular activities, especially those that are designed for women and minorities. When talking about a group she attends for female business majors, Lauryn said,

Okay, as a woman, I'm going into this to a male dominated field, but I have but like I have connections. I have a way that I can talk. I have a way that like I have people who can help me reach out and, like, make me a better person, and have done the same things. Like just because you know, it’s male dominate doesn't mean that I can enter it and probably dominate over some of them.

Engaging with clubs and organizations beyond her formal business curriculum, particularly those designed for students who have historically felt marginalized, helps Lauryn establish a
sense of belonging in college. Lauryn’s experience personifies one of the fundamental principles of empowerment in Black Feminist Theory. Collins (1989) suggests, institutional support is essential for validating the process of creating meaning among Black women, especially in traditional African American communities. This support can take various forms, including Black extended families, Black churches, and, in Lauryn's case, Black extracurricular activities. When Black women come together in these spaces, they have the opportunity to define their own experiences, resulting in a deeper sense of self-worth rooted in their individuality. Collins (1989) further asserts that Black women who share this knowledge with their peers serve as role models for relationships that prioritize connection and a sense of belonging without the need for uniformity and standardization.

Belonging for Eve occurs when her college faculty and staff accept her for who she is, rather than trying to turn her in to their idea of the model college student. In one of her business classes, Eve’s instructor created a playlist completely consisting of her student’s favorite songs. When they were working in groups or independently in class, Eve recalled her instructor playing the songs the class had selected in the background. No song was off limits. Whenever Eve heard her favorite song play from the speakers below the screen at the front of the classroom, she felt included. Eve stated, “when my song came on, I felt like I helped to build the classroom mood. Like I had some say in something.” In the realm of higher education,
education, the sense of belonging is a complex tapestry woven from diverse threads of individual experiences and perspectives. As I’ve explored, students' feelings of belonging are vital in their overall perception of their educational journey. Yet, the story is not always one of unity and inclusion. Just as the feeling of belonging can be empowering, the lack of it can be deeply disheartening, often felt as exclusion or isolation. Understanding both sides of this narrative is crucial in crafting educational environments that encourage inclusivity, empower students to thrive, and foster a sense of belonging for all, paving the way for diverse voices to be heard and valued in the higher education setting.

*Exclusion*

Though all the women who participated in this study felt a sense of belonging in their school at one point or another, they also went through periods of exclusion. These feelings of exclusion can be directly tied to the lack of control Black women have in the knowledge validation process leading to their everyday experiences being categorized as abnormalities. According to Patricia Collins (1989), “Since the general culture shaping the taken-for-granted knowledge of the community of experts is one permeated by widespread notions of Black and female inferiority, new knowledge claims that seem to violate these fundamental assumptions are likely to be viewed as anomalies” (p. 752). These anomalies resulted in Kim feeling as though she does not belong in most of her business classes. She attributes this sense of isolation to the “intimidating demographics” of her courses. Kim feels that her gender and race have deprived her of the opportunity to learn from failure. In contrast to her classmates, who have the chance to learn from their mistakes and openly discuss their shortcomings in class, Kim believes that she's expected to always have the correct answer. If she doesn't, she fears that her peers might treat her as if she doesn't belong. Missy shared
Kim’s complaint about not feeling like she could be her authentic self for fear of exclusion. For Missy, exclusion meant not being able to express herself. During our initial interview, Missy stated,

We're [Black women] definitely going to have a strong opinion about a lot of topics in like the business world and just know like we're not trying to like be aggressive or trying to. We're passionate about this and we want this to work and be successful.

In her classroom experiences, Missy found herself to be envious of white classmates who were able to express unhindered emotions. When they were excited, they were allowed to express excitement. When they were upset, they were allowed to express distress. No one ever accused them of being too emotional or prompted them to reign in their feelings. Their passion was allowed to flourish and motivate their business decisions. Missy felt that in most of her classes if she expressed any emotion other than compliance and satisfaction, she would be labeled as aggressive. Womack (2016) echoes Missy's sentiments. In the business industry, Black women are constantly trying to escape from the “angry Black women” stereotype (Womack 2016). Missy and the women interviewed in Womack's study on the experiences of Black female business professionals frequently feel the need to censor their words and actions, or else they risk being excluded by their peers.

Expanding upon Missy's experiences, Lauryn often perceives herself as being excluded from achieving the highest recognitions in the business industry, including her ultimate aspiration of becoming a corporate lawyer. Due to the predominance of men in the corporate law sector, Lauryn feels that she has been systematically excluded from accessing the upper echelons and is expected to assume a role as an assistant or secretary who simply
"supports the man." Adding to her hesitations about entering the business industry is the organic arrangement of most of her classes. Lauryn notes that in most of her classes, there is a natural separation of the races that occur. Though no one has explicitly told her that she cannot sit next to a man or a white female, Black girls tend to sit together. In fact, most people tend to sit with someone of their own race and gender. Lauryn hopes that the natural divisions among students based on their gender and race won't persist in her career in law.

Eve has trouble feeling as though she belongs in places where she feels like she is being judged, which in her eyes can be anywhere. Whether she is going to class or studying a public space, Eve feels thought she must “wear a certain thing or act a certain way or people will judge me.” According to Eve, judgement from her peers can occur anytime she separates her actions from those of the dominant social group. Because of this, Eve has a hard time connecting with other business students, staff, and faculty. She believes that her experiences are unique and that no one has had to endure the same type of struggle that she encountered as a college student. When she is honest with anyone, from a white instructor to a male peer, she feels as though she is instantly being judged because her experiences do not align with those in the dominate social class in business schools. The judgement and fear of future judgement cause Eve to withdraw, leading to feelings of isolation and loneliness within her degree program.

Figure 3: "Everyone is gone, I can take a sample without people judging me."
Conformity

To find belonging in situations where Missy, Kim, Eve, and Lauren felt alone, these women sometimes felt pressure to conform to the dominate social norms around them. In a predominantly white learning space, Kim “learned to adapt.” She adapted to the predominant cultural norms and expectations, assimilating to fit into the established social framework. Kim's experience reflects the challenging reality faced by many Black female business students seeking belonging in spaces where they are in the minority. The pressure to conform can be significant, leading to a subtle erosion of one's authentic identity in exchange for acceptance. Lauryn tries to fight the urge to adapt as much as possible, but she feels as though she will have to slightly assimilate into the cultural norms of business professionals to find employment in the industry. As a business student, she has already begun to identify things she will have to alter to fit in with her business peers. In our interview, Lauryn said, “I'm not about to change my entire being like clothing existence, how I talk down to my hair, that's everything I wear. To change just for your accommodation, like we can meet in the middle ground.” Lauryn expressed commitment to certain non-negotiable aspects of her identity. However, she had admitted to willingly surrendering certain facets of her authentic self to conform to the preexisting norms of the business landscape. This acknowledgment sheds light on the point of tension that exists between individual identity and the pressures to assimilate within the business realm, highlighting the ongoing negotiation between staying true to oneself and navigating the existing professional landscape.

Eve often felt that she needed to try harder to fit in with her peers. However, she did not believe that she had to conform because of her race and gender specifically. Instead, she felt that her personal life experiences did not align with those of a traditional business
student, saying “I definitely would say more so like I try to blend in because like I haven't had the normal college experience.” Eve does not want to be seen as inferior because of the difficulties she had to overcome during her first couple of years of college. To prevent others from viewing her as inferior, she “calms herself down” in an attempt to hide any outward indications that her college journey has been different that her peers. However, much like Lauryn, Eve will not completely let of who she is to fit the mold of the traditional business student.

I do feel that pressure to try to like kind of calm myself for try to fit in, but it's hard because, like just who I am. The way I talk, the way I dressed, and these tattoos like it crosses my mind, but I'm just me.

Though Eve and Lauryn may not realize it, holding on to pieces of their authentic identity is a form of resistance against the dominant social norms. According to Collins (1989), Black feminist thought encourages “developing and owning a Black women's standpoint” (p.7). Collins goes on to assert that Black feminist thought encourages a collective identity by offering Black women a different view of themselves and their world than that offered by the established social order, and that this different view serves as a tool of resistance to all forms of subordination (1989, p 750-751). By embracing their unique identities, Lauryn and Eve challenge the conventional model of a business student. In doing so, they not only disrupt established norms but also carve out a space where their individuality is celebrated and perceived as an asset rather than a deviation.
When faced with pressure to conform and feelings of isolation, Missy, Eve, Kim, and Lauryn all felt that more representation of Black women in their educational environment would make them feel more comfortable to be who they are. The issue of representation came up in two ways during data collection. Initially, participants mentioned a lack of diverse representation in the coursework, suggesting different perspectives are not well-represented in what students’ study. All the women interviewed for this study believed that they were able to find values in most of the concepts being discussed in their business classes.

When describing the formal curriculum Missy said, “Basically they're giving us like I don't know like examples and like definitions and like words that I can use like when to speak for like a product or something. So, I feel like it's equal towards everybody.” However, outside of classes that specifically had “diversity” in the title, Missy, Eve, Lauryn, and Kim all agreed that their formal curriculum was not designed to discuss how to navigate being othered in business. Missy expressed concerns about how her course content tiptoed around the glass ceiling that women face in the industry. Eve was impressed when her economics class discussed race and its correlation to social status and life expectancy. However, she was disappointed that the conversation...
ended there. She questions, “so now we know, what do we do?” Lauryn believes that talking about the struggles Black women face breaking into the business industry will illuminate problems that business students who belong to the dominate social group never realized. She thinks that the classroom is one of the safest places a discussion surrounding privilege and oppression can occur.

Secondly, these women argue that there's a shortage of diversity among college staff and faculty, showing a broader problem in making sure the people teaching and supporting students come from various backgrounds. Missy stated that she “hasn’t seen a lot of Black teachers in her life” and that she has only had one Black instructor in her college tenure. She went on to state that she saw “way more” female teachers in her K-12 experience than she has at her business college. Eve echoed Missy’s thoughts when she told me “I’ve never even seen a Black professor.” Lauryn added that while she had instructors from a variety of ethnic backgrounds in her sociology classes, all her business professors had been white. When asked about ways to improve the college experience for Black female business students, all four participants suggested they would be more comfortable if there were more people that looked like them in positions of authority at the university. Missy stated that she is always looking for role models. Specifically, she is looking for Black women who have transcended social barriers and made their way to the top stating, “if she can do it, so can I.” Eve has found support in her Black female academic advisor. She has successfully communicated her background to her advisor, who actively seeks ways to support her instead of marginalizing her for not conforming to the typical image of a business student.

While Kim noted that she only has had one Black female professor, she believes that she would find the most comfort in seeing more students who look like she does in her
classes. Kim recalled that in her Introduction to Entrepreneurship class there were over 150 students attending in a large lecture hall. Of those 150 students, she recalled five of them to be Black. To her those are troubling demographics. She went on to state that growing up in a predominately white state has desensitized her to some of the feeling that come with being a minority, but she expressed that it “feels different in an enclosed space.”

No participant in this study could distinctly describe the boundaries between belonging and exclusion. At various intersections, these women experienced both a sense of flourishing and moments of constriction. While there is no singular solution to capture how to enhance an authentic sense of belonging for these women, the vivid examples of the discomfort they navigate in their daily lives emphasize the intricate nature of their experiences. Moving forward, it becomes imperative to acknowledge and address these complexities, fostering environments that genuinely embrace diversity and cultivate a culture of inclusivity, thus paving the way for a more equitable and supportive educational landscape.

“Don’t Let Other People Get to You”: Resisting from the Margins

During their tenure as business students, Missy, Eve, Kim, and Lauryn encountered situations where they had to actively resist instances of oppression and marginalization. In the aftermath of these challenges, their resilience became evident as they navigated through adversity, demonstrating strength and determination in the face of systemic obstacles. According to Black Feminist Theory, resistance can be defined as "Black women's everyday acts of resistance" to their oppression (Collins, 1989, p.747). Collins (1989) argues that Black women have sustained a long-term and widely shared resistance to their victimization within
systems of race, gender, and class oppression by utilizing a shared standpoint about the meaning of oppression and the actions Black women can take to resist it. These efforts are essential to the shape and goals of Black feminist thought. On the other hand, in the context of Black student resistance, resilience can be defined as racial cohesion or having a stake in the success of other Black people (McDougal et al., 2018). Lauryn demonstrates active resistance to oppression within the business college by contributing her inherent value to student organizations designed for Black students while also excelling in organizations where she may be in the minority. Despite feeling intimidated by the idea of joining predominantly white business student organizations, she exhibits strength by not only flourishing in them but also challenging and countering stereotypical narratives associated with Black students. Her actions reflect resilience and a commitment to breaking down barriers within the academic environment. Before leaving her apartment every morning, Lauren reminds herself, “don’t let other people get to you.” Her morning mantra serves as a powerful blend of resistance and resilience; it involves resisting the anticipated oppression she expects to encounter during her school day while mentally preparing herself to attend nonetheless, with the determination to excel in every aspect of her endeavors. In this segment, I will intertwine the narratives of resistance and resilience,
illustrating the persistent journey of these women as they strive to attain an undergraduate
degree in business.

Resistance

During their time as a business student, all the women interviewed recall
experiencing at least one instance of general unease. They were unable to put their finger on
what made them feel discomfort, but something about the experience triggered warning signs
in their mind that needed to approach the situation with caution. For Eve, this occurred when
she heard one of her white male faculty members made a comment about the number of
international faculty that worked at a neighboring higher education institution. When
recalling this instance she said,

Actually, this semester one of my math teachers, he had a comment on the very first
day like ‘you know, if you're at the other school, when you walk in and there's like
200 people in the classroom and there's a professor standing in front of you that
barely speaks English, and that is the same age as the student looking confused. You
can just come on and walk on over to this school. Tell your advisor to drop that class
and come take it over here where you have a professor who speaks English……and I
look around and there's only me and one other person who has some melanin into
their skin, I feel some. I feel some type of way. It's not directed at me, but it's that
subtle like that. If you have a prejudice toward those people, then what are you
thinking about me? Like, if you're talking like this behind their back, what are you
doing behind my back?
Kim felt discomfort during a class discussion when her business faculty told students there was no reason to live in fear. She recalled her professor telling the class that a successful business person should be bold; harm rarely comes to the unsuspecting but will always find those that are looking for it. Kim immediately thought about Trayvon Martin and Breonna Taylor. The lack of diverse perspective on that statement left Kim saying, “the entire conversation just rubbed me the wrong way.” Lauryn recalled a similar instance of unease when she recounted her experience with contributing to conversations centered on diversity in the classroom. She stated,

So, like with class, I feel like it's a thing like also being outnumbered. Like when you're in a class, you think you're going to be the only Black person that goes into that classroom. OK, then it’s like when you get into the classroom, maybe you actually are the only Black person. So, it's like with just that, it just automatically, like, feel like you're outnumbered or like, it comes out, like, when the professor is, like, talking about Black culture things. It's kind of like, oh, let's get your perspective. And it's kind of you're the one who's pointing me out.

While Lauryn thinks that the classroom can be a great place to have conversations about differences and diversity, she was left feeling hypervisible when her instructor abruptly turned the class over to her for perspective. Likewise, Missy indicated that she always feels a sense of discomfort when stating her opinion in a class that is mostly men. She says,

…. there’s a lot of males in the class as well, so it's like I don't really get like a lot of ideas off of like women side, I feel like it's more of men’s side, so like when I express
my feelings, I feel like it's an argument and a strong debate going from one gender to another.

Eve did not laugh with her classmates when the instructor made the joke about faculty from abroad. Kim spoke up about the definition of fear being different for her then it may be from the white male perspective. Lauryn composed herself quickly to tell her classmates that she cannot speak on behalf of the entire Black community, but she could share her experiences. Though Missy does not love confrontation, she continues to express her feelings. In the moments that could be considered insignificant to some, Missy, Lauren, Kim, and Eve resisted. They stood strong in their standpoint and refused to be marginalized.

Resilience

Despite the challenges, discomfort, and an overall feeling of not being fully welcomed, these four aspiring businesswomen demonstrated remarkable persistence. Kim's initial perception upon starting business school was that "Black women are invisible. No one is even going to know that I am here." Despite these feelings of smallness, she refused to succumb to the pressure to become invisible. Instead, she countered by embracing her natural energy, transforming into a social butterfly, and actively engaging in networking. Kim chose resilience over retreat, asserting her presence and sharing her entrepreneurial spirit with those around her.

When discussing the disappointment of having to leave her initial choice of a higher education institution, Eve expressed sadness but proudly stated, "I'm still here," as if acknowledging the magnitude of her resilience. For Eve, persistence meant pursuing her education after facing an academic suspension. Despite not feeling the same level of support
as her white peers, she describes her entire college journey as "an experience," placing emphasis on the fact that she has endured and persisted. Lauryn found strength and autonomy in her resilience. In her academic and personal experiences, Lauryn found herself staying close to her community. Community for Lauryn referred to the other Black students that were attending her college. When talking about deciding which classes to take or what extracurriculars to engage in, Lauryn stated,

I was one of those. It was like, ‘oh, I'm stay with my community only. But then I had, like, started thinking about things like, OK, maybe this is not all of what I want, but it still goes through like my mind. When we all participate in that way and be unified in that way it does not leave room programs or anything like that that I really want to try out for my personal self.

In some situations, Lauryn found strength in numbers. When she was with her community she felt at ease; like she could be her authentic self. However, after she grew strong in her standpoint, she began to have the confidence to seek out the things she wanted, even if they were not specifically designed for people like her. Despite persistently feeling like an outsider, she recognized the necessity of pushing beyond the initial sense of unwelcomeness. She understood that by overcoming these barriers, she could access elements of the informal curriculum crucial for advancing her career.

Missy never thought she would secure an internship with a nationally recognized sports agency. The recruiters for these positions never even attended women’s sporting events. Though the path ahead of her appeared to be blocked, she pushed through. She harnessed the resources that were available to business students to help close the gap between
her and her male peers. When discussing how she overcame this gender barrier, she responded with “I just made sure I was heard. I got louder and louder until I knew they could hear me.”

Though these acts of resilience show great strength, I think it is important to note that Black women do not inherently have a higher tolerance to stress than their white peers. As Womack (2016) points out, many successful Black women are labeled as a “superwoman” that is able to withstand anything. Though this may sound positive, it actually can be a harmful stereotype that sets unrealistic expectations for Black women (Womack 2016; Goodkind, Brinkman, and Elliot, 2020). In this instance, it is crucial to consider the facets of life that demanded resilience from these students. Was it driven by their personal tenacity and grit, or were there systemic factors compelling them to overcome challenges? Understanding the sources of resilience provides insight into the various forces shaping their experiences and the strategies they employed to navigate and triumph over adversity.

“Don’t Be So Curriculum”: Seeking a Deeper Connection

For decades, Afrocentric feminist epistemology has prioritized “talking with the heart” or an ethic of caring (Collins, 1989, p. 765). This ethic of caring suggest that dialogue, emotion, and empathy are crucial in validating the knowledge and experience of Black women (Collins, 1989). According to Collins (1989), every individual is unique, has valid emotions and needs to have the capacity for empathy. When these three facets of caring are embraced, Black women are able find community in their surroundings and find deeper connections in their environments (Collins, 1989). Missy, Kim, Lauryn, and Eve were constantly waiting for their perspective to be validated by their business instructors and
classmates. While they were hesitant to speak up for themselves, their desire was to receive care in a manner they deemed appropriate. For Lauryn and Eve especially, life as a business student consistently involved seeking out understanding and empathy from their peers and instructors. Instead of instructors focusing solely on the planned formal curriculum. These women longed for those around them to engage them as individuals with specific learning needs. This section will explore the need for empathy and understanding that Missy, Eve, Laury and Kim craved as they moved through their college careers.

**Empathy**

Eve has never had a Black business instructor, yet she found herself feeling a stronger connection to some instructors more than others. When recounting an experience with an instructor she felt like she had a connection with, she said,

Actually, my first like my first ever business seminar class was like last fall semester. That teacher, she was kind of a older she was a white woman, but I don't know. I guess since we had a smaller class, you know, she still engaged, like, came around, checked our computers like. Oh, OK. I like that. You know, engaged me. Not just okay you say something, let us learn information on our own, and grade us on it. She was kind of dealing with her own things at the time, but like, you know that's when I lost my grandma so she you know, definitely during that time she extended my assignments. She got me like 2 extra weeks to get my work and everything done like, you know, definitely kind of gave me that sympathy.

Eve passed this class. While she was grieving for her grandmother and healing from the trauma associated with her boyfriend getting shot, she made time to complete the
assignments for this class. She felt connected to it. Eve felt that if her instructor was going to put in the effort to accommodate her needs, she needed to reciprocate that effort by turning in all the assignments completed to the best of her abilities. The empathy and care she received from this instructor gave her the drive she needed to persist. While Eve admitted that she would be the most comfortable around instructors that shared her race and gender, she said it is not hard for someone who doesn’t look like her to build a meaningful relationship with her as long as they are authentic. Eve recounted this story when discussing the difference between her instructor who had empathy and her academic advisor who did not.

“I mean, I had to, you know, let her know what was going on with me. Like everything that I had going trying to see if she could like help me, give me any assistance and it was pretty much kind of like, oh, you know we have our counseling services and things like that like. I mean, she gave me the resources, but not really the Sympathy, like or the empathy like it was kind of like you still have to figure it out.”

On paper, Eve’s advisor checked all the boxes. She had a student who was struggling emotionally and mentally who she referred to University Counseling Services. However, Eve sensed that she was not genuinely worried or concerned about Eve’s situation. She knew that her academic advisor was just doing her job and nothing more. Eve did not go back to her academic advisor to discuss anymore of her problems or the effects they were having on her academic performance. Eve’s advice to business college faculty and staff is “don’t be so curriculum.” According to Eve, she “wears her heart on her sleeve” and if you show her consistently only present her things at the “surface level only” she knows that her feelings, thoughts, and emotions are not being taken as seriously as they should be.
Lauryn sought empathy from her classmates more than college staff and faculty. Lauryn frequently found herself feeling uncomfortable or yearning for more during interactions with other students when delving into topics of race, class, and privilege. After a male student in one of her courses called Black hair “nappy” she found herself thinking, “I am just going to pause and be like ‘what?’ ‘Are you?’ ‘Who raised you?’” In this moment, she wished that her classmate had stopped to think about how the words coming from his mouth may affect the Black people in the room. After the word left his mouth she said, “all eyes turned to me and my friend, the only Black girl in the class.” She was embarrassed and uncomfortable but no one else in the room appeared to care as the conversation went on until the end of class.

**Understanding and Perspective**

The women in this study wished that the college did a better job accepting different perspectives to promote understanding. Changing the culture of business school is the first step in improving the culture of the professional business industry. Business students who are educated to comprehend, respect, and create space for challenging conversations, along with making an effort to understand diverse viewpoints, evolve into empathetic business professionals. While some assert that the business industry should maintain objectivity for the sake of competition, profit, and free market (Detert, 2022; Objectivity in business as a determining factor of success, 2021), the women in this study argue that there should be a degree of subjectivity in industry operations to accommodate those who do not conform to the traditional mold. Black feminist theory critiques mainstream political theories that aid in shaping the existing professional business landscape (Collins, 1989; Collins 1990). According to Black feminist thoughts, mainstream politics ignore the experiences and...
perspectives of Black women and argue that these theories fail to recognize the ways in which race, gender, and class intersect and shape individuals' experiences (Collins, 1989). Collins (1989) stresses the significance of acknowledging the political nature of Black feminist thought. This perspective aims to challenge and transform oppressive power structures deeply rooted in contemporary sectors, particularly those reliant on capitalism, such as the business realm.

Lauryn believes that her instructors need to be better trained on how to lead conversations in the classroom surrounding diversity in the workplace. When I asked her if she though the classroom should be a safe place to discuss the social issues involving race and she said,

I do. I feel like it’s... I feel like it's more so, like understanding. Like I say for a like a Black person is more so like understanding, understanding their perspectives that they feel…. And it also gives us like an insight on like, okay, well maybe they know this, but maybe they don't know like everything that went wrong with that. Maybe they know some of like, the things that are happening, but maybe they don't know about this, maybe specific situation that has influenced this entire thing.

Lauryn believes that understanding of the Black female condition can be obtained partially through educating the dominate group about how the existing structure can be harmful towards certain groups. She believes that instructors should go beyond just stating the facts in this situation. She wants them to encourage students to internalize what they are learning to build genuine understanding. She went on to state,
“…hearing it from like, okay, a white woman's perspective, a male white man and then like a Black woman, a Black man, like it’s different, hearing those, at least those four different perspectives, no matter who it is like, is it good to hear….They don't know if it's going to be offensive or not. But it's like when do they have this time to like if not in class, to be around somebody around that's Black to know what is offensive and what is not offensive?

In a text message conversation during the member check, Lauryn and I delved into her definition of "offensive" in the mentioned statement. She articulated it as actions or words that cause harm to the feelings of Black business students sharing physical space with their white peers. Nonetheless, I perceive that the harm or lack of understanding Lauryn is addressing could potentially be detrimental to the business industry as well, as it may fail to adequately prepare students to engage and collaborate with those historically marginalized.

Similarly, Kim wishes that her business faculty would have a stronger understanding of how classroom demographics affect the natural tone of the room. When talking about understanding Kim said, “Honestly, at first, I thought it was gonna be like a very intimidating class, just because like the demographics in there.” Kim desires her instructors to be aware of the demographics in the classroom and leverage that awareness to foster a welcoming environment for women to share their perspectives. She contemplated, “Do they even notice they are the big group here? Or is this just normal so they don’t pay attention?” Kim believes that instructors with a deeper understanding of what it's like to be a minority in a class could adapt their teaching methods to ensure everyone feels at ease. Moreover, she suggests that instructors creating space for women in the classroom would set an example for male students to replicate such inclusivity in their professional endeavors.
Eve longed for any of her business college staff or faculty to understand her situation and its implications on her academic performance. When recounting how they couldn’t comprehend she tried to shrug it off and said,

It’s hard to relate to what someone's going through if you've never experienced it yourself, like for example, that's like trying to relate to someone who's trying to quit an addiction but you've never touched drugs. You can sympathize for them. You know if that's what's in you. But it's hard to kind of relate to that but it does put extra emphasis with the difference of cultures because there's so many different experiences, just even the environment that you grew up in. We have a completely different upbringing, you know, we probably both read each other wrong if that makes sense. How I perceived it and probably how she perceived what I was going through was probably, you know. Different. Yeah, maybe miscommunications, maybe.

Eve offers understanding to her white male peers and instructors. She understands how skewed perceptions can lead to accidental harm. Being on the opposite side of this accidental harm had made Eve more emotionally aware. Though she is not angry with her white female peers or white male instructors, she does hope for more.

In Missy’s experience, “men are top tier.” Missy found support in her business career coach, John, who, despite being a white man, possessed a profound understanding of the challenges faced by minorities in the business world. Recognizing the need for tailored assistance, John went above and beyond for Missy. Rather than merely directing her to career fairs, he facilitated personal introductions. Instead of guiding Missy in crafting a
conventional resume for online professional platforms, he assisted her in creating a dynamic portfolio featuring videos and images showcasing her athletic achievements. Missy thrived with someone who not only understood her experiences but actively supported her unique journey.

“So, what do we do?”: Taking Steps Toward Change

Before concluding my interview with Missy, Eve, Kim, and Lauryn, I asked them all “So, what do we do? How do we make this better?” The answer was different for everyone. According to Kim, highlighting Black owned business and diverse population in formal course work would make her overall experience as a business student better. Talking specifically about what college administration, faculty, and staff could do to make her experience in college more enjoyable she said, “I think training and understanding on topics that are important to diverse populations, so not just so linear.” Eve’s suggestion on what could have improved her experience as a college student was “Mental health”. There needs to be more training on how to handle minority mental health.” Lauren’s advice, “Give students the right tools to discuss hard topic in class.” Missy took a different direction with her response. She was not convinced that the business college would ever be able to change so instead of giving advice to the college, she offered some to future Black business students, “I mean the advice that I would give is try to stand out. The more you stand out, the more people are going to notice you and like identify your differences between males.”

Missy, Kim, Lauren, and Eve thought that their recommendations for college enhancements and faculty development were biased, and in the realm of business, biases can be considered detrimental. They sensed feelings of isolation, discomfort, and anxiety and
were fairly certain their Black female peers in the college experienced similar sentiments. While acknowledging a collective struggle, they doubted it was enough to prompt the college to make changes. Assuming that the majority of business students were content, Kim questioned, "It's impossible to make everyone happy, right?"

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the narratives of Missy, Kim, Lauren, and Eve provide a nuanced understanding of the challenges and experiences faced by Black women in business education. Their stories highlight moments of resilience, resistance, and a continual quest for belonging in an environment that often feels unwelcoming. These women navigate a complex landscape where their identities intersect with race and gender, influencing their sense of self and how they are perceived by others. Data from this study highlights the importance of creating more inclusive spaces within business education, acknowledging the impact of systemic biases, and fostering a supportive environment that empowers all students, regardless of their background, to thrive and succeed. It is essential to recognize that their experiences are multifaceted and at times messy, with contradictions that reflect the complexity of their individual journeys. While their stories may differ, these contradictions do not diminish the validity of their experiences. Instead, they emphasize the need for a more nuanced and intersectional approach to understanding the challenges faced by Black women in business education. By embracing these complexities, institutions can work towards creating a more equitable and inclusive environment for all students, fostering a community where diverse perspectives are valued and celebrated. This inclusive approach, grounded in the principles of Black Feminist Thought, not only serves to rectify existing disparities but also paves the way for a more just, equitable, and empowering educational landscape.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I dove into the narratives of Missy, Eve, Lauryn, and Kim, exploring recurring themes through the lens of Black feminist theory. Here, I aim to extend that exploration, drawing comprehensive conclusions from the interpretative analysis of these themes. This chapter seeks to address the research questions guiding this study, offering insights grounded in the multilayered experiences of the participants of the study.

Research Questions

• What are the storied experiences of Black female students seeking undergraduate degrees in business?

• What parts of the curriculum, both formal and informal, do Black female business students perceive made space for their intersectional identities?

• What parts of the curriculum, both formal and informal, do Black female business students perceive constricted space for their intersectional identities?
Going beyond the narratives themselves, this chapter seeks to extract the broader implications embedded within these stories for post-secondary business education. It also seeks to navigate the limitations inherent in this study while envisioning future research avenues that can further enrich our comprehension of the intricate challenges faced by Black women in business colleges. Lastly, this chapter ends with a reflection on the journey undertaken throughout this research endeavor. It aims to distill the essence of this exploration, acknowledging its profound significance and potential impact on reshaping the landscape of educational inclusivity and empowerment for Black women perusing business degrees.

Findings

Throughout this research journey, Missy, Lauren, Eve, and Kim participated in comprehensive one-on-one interviews, each spanning over an hour. These sessions served as vital platforms for these women to share their narratives as they navigated the challenges of pursuing a business degree. Moreover, these women engaged in extensive follow-up discussions and member checks via email, text, and phone. These interactions were crucial in ensuring the accuracy and integrity of their experiences portrayed in Chapter 4 of this study's findings. In the upcoming sections, I will explore the insights collected from the rich narratives shared by Kim, Missy, Eve, and Lauryn. Although these findings are rooted in their narratives, it's important to note that as the researcher, I curated these findings based on their stories rather than the participants themselves.

*Experiential Duality*
My first research question centers on the experiences of Black female business students. In chapter 4, I retold the stories of Kim, Missy, Lauren, and Eve as they recounted their experiences as college students with a declared business major. Although each story was different, there were some common threads that ran through all their stories. At times, these women felt included. Other times, they felt as though they were purposefully being barred from certain aspects of student life. In an effort to persist, Eve, Kim, Lauryn and Missy all conformed in one way or another because they were determined to earn their business degree. Like any story, their experiences are a mixture of ups and downs.

Lauryn starts her day with a pep talk, reinforcing her worth and value before heading to class. Unlike her white counterparts, this particular type of self-preparation is a necessary routine. She grapples with finding her place in a predominantly white learning environment, struggling to feel included. The stress of choosing a seat and assuming the responsibilities that come with being the only Black individual in the course adds to her overall unease and anxiety as a business student. The troubles faced by Lauryn run parallel to problems experience by women in business. In the business industry, women often face significant stress as they feel compelled to mirror the traditionally masculine traits of aggression, competitiveness, and assertiveness in their daily lives (Ladge et al., 2019). This stereotype suggests that women lacking these characteristics may be perceived as lacking the capacity to drive successful outcomes in business (Carvalho and Fernandes, 2019). For Lauryn, the expectation to conform to masculine norms becomes a draining demand, necessitating a self-boost before she steps out the door. Simultaneously, Lauryn finds some joy in her experiences as a business student. She enjoys building and interacting with a community that supports her career aspirations. She likes learning about corporate law and finding
opportunities for growth in sectors of business she finds interesting. Though she endures troubling moments, she still experiences times of pleasure and delight.

Eve encountered a series of challenges throughout her academic journey. She could not separate her personal life from her academics, a trait that would be frowned upon in the business industry (Moudry and Thaichon, 2020; Gupta et al., 2019). In the midst of personal challenges at home, Eve's academic performance began to decline. Despite being surrounded by instructors, advisors, and classmates, she felt a profound lack of understanding or concern regarding the impact of her home life on her academic abilities. While she theoretically had a support network, she experienced a sense of isolation. Her struggles were perceived as outside the scope of a traditional business student's experience, leading to a lack of understanding from those around her. Although these encounters often stirred feelings of exclusion and isolation, Eve discovered a sense of belonging in specific courses and interactions with faculty. Amidst her academic journey, she recalled instances where she found enjoyment in her business classes and experienced camaraderie among her peers. Additionally, she shared anecdotes about forging relationships with college staff, which provided her with the resilience to persist.

Missy, on the other hand, felt that she experienced isolation primarily because of her gender, although she also recognized the influence of race on her experiences. While absorbing valuable lessons in her courses on business structure, financing for new ventures, and effective team leadership, she realized these teachings predominantly reflected the experiences of individuals without racial barriers to entry. Holder et al. (2015) addresses the 'concrete ceiling,' a tangible barrier faced by many Black women aspiring to ascend the corporate ladder. Like the 'glass ceiling' experienced by most women, this concrete barrier
not only obstructs Black women from reaching the upper tiers of business management but also limits their visibility into the activities at those levels. Missy, seeking ways to overcome this concrete barrier, found herself in crowded lecture halls, surrounded by numerous students, yet experiencing a sense of isolation. At the same time, Missy found positive experiences at college when interacting with specific staff and faculty members. She enjoyed learning business principles and expanding her business intelligence, which contributed to her positive experiences in the college environment.

Kim grappled with the weight of breaking stereotypes, serving as a representative of all black people and womenkind in her business courses. Striving to showcase her capabilities were equal with peers of different races or genders, she carried the burden of disproving stereotypes about Black individuals. Taylor and Nivens (2011) explored the experiences of Black women in executive positions, revealing similar pressures to break stereotypes and find inclusion within the business industry. These women felt compelled to challenge stereotypes not just for their own advancement but also to create opportunities for future Black businesswomen. To achieve this, they believed they had to perform flawlessly across all tasks (Taylor and Nivens, 2011). Amid Kim’s struggle, she found positivity in the business college through friendships and connections that could significantly impact her future professional career.

The experiences of Black female business students in this study are multifaceted and varied. They sought a more inclusive, empathetic, and genuine college experience while striving to navigate the challenges they faced. Despite their concerns about being undervalued by others, they persisted in making the most of their education. Their
experiences are a blend of conflicting emotions—both positive and negative—which often create confusion and stress as they pursue their higher education degrees.

**Intersectional Identities in Curriculum: Perceived Space**

The second research question that guided this study sought to identify area in formal and informal business curriculum that created space for the intersectional identities of Black women. In analyzing the narratives of Kim, Missy, Eve, and Lauryn a pattern arose that seemed to highlight two particular places when these women felt comfortable, included and safe.

When discussing formal curriculum, participants of this study perceived that the most space for their identities to flourish was in courses that were structured around diversity. Missy, Eve, Kim, and Lauryn recalled taking courses that had a diversity focus, such as Managing Diversity in the Workplace, Women and Minorities in Entrepreneurship and Sociology and Race. In these courses, they felt as though they could be more of their authentic selves. The sense of ease experienced was credited to a student demographic that fostered comfort and a more inclusive mindset among fellow students enrolled in these specific courses. Moreover, the presence of instructors from minority backgrounds, often women, significantly contributed to this atmosphere. In these courses, Kim, Missy, and Lauren could actively engage with the curriculum without being hypervisible. They also felt as though they were learning knowledge, skills and abilities that could directly affect their future success as business professionals. Outside of these diversity focused classes, Eve, Missy, Lauryn, and Kim were often left feeling like their formal curriculum was missing
something. They found value in the terms, definitions, and foundational concepts they were learning; however, they wanted more information on practical applications.

While most women in this study discovered instances within the formal curriculum that accommodated their identity, every participant also identified space within the informal curriculum. This included involvement in clubs and organizations, utilization of career services, and engagement with academic advising. Kim felt as though she could be herself when participating in extracurricular activities. Though many of the other students in the organizations she was active in were white and males, they all shared a passion for entrepreneurship. In this less formal environment, they emphasized shared interests, allowing them to foster a relationship rooted in mutual respect. Despite instances where Kim found herself in direct competition with other organization members for scholarships and start up capital, they collectively pursued their goals individually, without the pressure to conform to specific standards. Missy and Eve felt that they were able to grow under the guidance of business college staff or mentors. Echoing the finds of Dahlvig (2010) and Domingue (2015), they found that meeting one-on-one with a business staff member allowed for the staff member to get to know them better and accommodate their unique needs. Eve discovered that while not all college staff were supportive of every business student's personal success, some staff members truly facilitated her most significant moments of growth. Lauryn participated in clubs and organizations that we created to nurture minorities in higher education, a tactic that many Black women in higher education tend to utilize to find belonging (Bartman, 2015; McDougal et al., 2018). In these settings, she was able to gain the confidence that she needed to participate in student organizations that were centered around business and law. In business student government and similar organizations, Lauryn
perceived a collective effort among herself and her white peers to improve the business college for all students. Being present in these settings allowed her to be a voice for absent Black classmates. Engaging in tasks like drafting student legislation and representing fellow students at faculty events was enjoyable for her. Although it took some time to build her confidence to join these groups, she felt a sense of belonging and was welcomed once she became involved.

Collectively, these women discovered environments where their true selves were embraced and valued. These spaces either actively welcomed diversity or shared a common goal of inclusivity, fostering a sense of unity among individuals from varied genders and racial backgrounds. After examining the narratives of Kim, Missy, Lauryn, and Eve, it became evident that these women found solace and acceptance within the informal curriculum spaces of their academic journey. Unlike formal educational settings, these spaces offered a more relaxed structure, alleviating the pressure to conform to specific norms. Here, the absence of strict guidelines allowed for open interpretations and encouraged discussions. Additionally, interactions within student organizations and engagement with support staff tended to be more personalized. Rather than fixating on achieving academic perfection or meeting standardized criteria, informal curriculum settings prioritized catering to students’ individual needs, separating from a system driven by academic rankings and institutional profit.

*Intersectional Identities in Curriculum: Constricted Space*

The third and final research question in the study sought to understand the elements of formal and informal curriculum that constricted space for Black female students in the
college of business. The stories of Kim, Missy, Lauryn, and Eve suggest that Black women feel most oppressed when engaging in aspects of formal curriculum.

As highlighted in the previous section, the women in this study expressed a desire for their formal business curriculum to transcend theoretical concepts and offer practical strategies for navigating diversity in the business world. This longing is echoed in existing literature, indicating that Missy, Eve, Lauryn, and Kim's aspirations are shared by others. In numerous business programs, faculty inadvertently perpetuate the masculine essence of the field through pedagogical choices. Early years of undergraduate study often immerse students into a 'conventional' business framework that largely aligns with white masculine perspectives (Krishna and Orhun, 2002). Rather than nurturing their inherent traits to shape their identity as businesswomen, Kim, Missy, Eve, and Lauryn encountered an educational environment demanding them to discard aspects of their personalities contrasting with the structured curriculum. Conforming to the predetermined mold of a business student was deemed necessary, leaving little room for embracing their individuality. Any deviation from this expectation risked academic obstacles or perceived failure.

Though some of Lauryn’s business courses discussed issues related to diversity, she did not feel comfortable with the delivery of the curriculum. Instead of leading dynamic discussions on resisting oppression from the margins or using love as a counterhegemonic force (hooks, 1990), she found herself in a situation where her contributions were sought hastily, almost as an afterthought, to lend a sense of authenticity to a lesson the instructor seemed disinterested in delivering. In Eve's course, the instructor's lack of engagement was evident as they quickly presented facts about how socioeconomic status impacts quality of life without probing into the underlying reasons behind these differences. The formal
curriculum did not prioritize this aspect, making it unlikely for Eve's potential contributions to be valued in such discussions.

Missy found herself frustrated by the predominantly male perspective dominating the practical lessons in her business courses. This continual exposure to teachings centered on values and approaches solely from a male standpoint devalued her instinctual responses. On the other hand, Kim faced a different challenge: she felt compelled to filter every contribution she made in class through multiple lenses to align with the norms predominantly set by her white peers. This constant need to ensure her words aligned with the expectations of her white classmates created an added layer of effort and scrutiny in her academic discussions.

In reflecting on the experiences of Kim, Eve, Lauryn, and Missy within the formal business curriculum, it is evident that their journeys have been marked by constriction rather than liberation. The constraints placed upon them forced these women to navigate a rigid landscape that often stifled their authentic expressions and perspectives. The predominance of a male-oriented framework and the subtle expectations of conformity created an environment where their diverse identities were overshadowed or dismissed. These limitations within formal curriculum not only hindered the development of a more inclusive and empathetic educational space but also maintained a narrow understanding of what it means to be a successful business student. The narratives of these women underscore the urgent need for a shift in formal post-secondary business education, one that embraces diversity, values multiple perspectives, and recognizes the richness that comes from the intersectionality of identity.
Implications

This section explores the implications of this study for various stakeholders involved in Black women's experiences in business education and the professional business industry. The findings of this research hold significant implications for not only Black women pursuing business degrees, but also for teaching, research, and service opportunities within the higher education landscape. Furthermore, this study contributes to the validation of knowledge for Black women studying business by acknowledging and amplifying their experiences, affirming the validity of their realities that often diverge from conventional norms within academia and the business sphere. Specifically, it serves as a testament to the resilience and agency exhibited by Black women in navigating structures that marginalize them, highlighting their ability to enact transformative change despite facing systemic barriers (hooks, 1990).

For Instructors

This study emphasizes the need for enhanced training among business college faculty and staff to promote social justice and anti-oppressive education, particularly concerning the intersectionality of Black women within the curriculum (Baszile, 2016). Baszille (2015) stresses the importance of inclusive curriculum that embraces counterstorytelling—incorporating diverse narratives in contrast to traditional ways of knowing within formal education spaces. This approach cultivates empathy and understanding among students while ensuring representation for Black females. It's imperative for business faculty and staff to advocate for their Black female students, intentionally creating learning environments that embraces “all sides with multiple perspectives (Baszile, 2016, p. 46).” Faculty and staff
within business education can use the narratives and insights gathered from this study as an initial step toward fostering a more inclusive learning environment. This involves customizing the curriculum to meet the specific needs of incoming Black female students within their classes. By utilizing the findings and stories shared within this research, educators can embark on the path of creating tailored educational approaches that better resonate with and support the diverse experiences of Black women in business education.

**For Student Support and Service**

This study's implications extend beyond curricular adjustments to encompass a holistic approach to fostering inclusive and empowering educational environments for Black women in business education. Beyond revising formal curriculum, there's a critical need to consider extracurricular spaces, structural changes, and systemic reforms. Practitioners in business education, including faculty and administrators, must engage in ongoing professional development and actively work towards creating supportive environments that prioritize equity, diversity, and inclusion. This includes the development of targeted programs and initiatives designed to support the unique needs of Black female students, such as mentorship programs, counseling services, and networking opportunities.

**For Research**

This study makes a significant contribution to the existing literature on Culturally Relevant Pedagogies (CRP) and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies (CSP), emphasizing their crucial role in empowering and supporting Black female students within the realm of business education. By showcasing the demand for CRP and CSP frameworks in addressing the unique challenges faced by Black women, this research underscores the importance of
adopting culturally responsive teaching approaches to create inclusive and equitable learning environments. Additionally, this study bridges the gap between literature on Culturally Relevant Pedagogies (CRP/CSP) and the field of business education. This bridge prompts scholarly and educational discussions, fostering a critical dialogue on the intersection of culturally responsive teaching and the criteria defining quality business education. It encourages a shift towards centering Black women's experiences, voices, and perspectives in both educational research and practical implementation. This perspective not only enriches discussions on CRP/CSP but also expands the scope of business education literature by integrating critical insights on diversity, equity, and inclusion. By amplifying the narratives of Black women within educational contexts, this research advocates for a deeper understanding of intersectional identities and the complexities inherent in navigating business education as a marginalized group. Ultimately, this study calls for a transformative approach to educational paradigms, urging stakeholders to prioritize the voices and experiences of Black women in shaping inclusive pedagogical practices and policies.

Limitations of this Study

The research is subject to several limitations. Primarily, the sample size comprising narratives from Kim, Missy, Eve, and Lauryn is limited and may not fully encompass all perspectives among all Black women in undergraduate business degree programs. This limited scope could raise concerns about the study's representativeness and generalizability. However, I think it is important to note that this study’s theoretical framework seeks to discourage generalizability in favor of validating unique standpoints. While these narratives provide valuable insights, the diversity within this demographic is wide-ranging, and the
study may not fully capture the spectrum of challenges or experiences faced by a broader group.

Examining the narratives through the lens of Black feminist theory, while illuminating the intersectional challenges faced by Black female business students, introduces certain limitations. This theoretical framework, while insightful in unveiling power dynamics, intersectional identities, and resistance, might inherently focus on particular facets of the participants' experiences. By emphasizing power structures and intersectionality, the analysis might overlook other critical aspects that do not align with the theoretical constructs. This approach may prioritize certain themes or dimensions that fit within the framework while unconsciously excluding experiences that fall outside the theory's view. Furthermore, the interpretation of these narratives through a specific theoretical lens might overshadow other socio-cultural or personal dimensions that contribute significantly to the experiences of Black women pursuing a business degree, such as geographic disparities, socioeconomic backgrounds, or cultural influences. These omitted elements may influence the experiences and perceptions of Black women enrolled in business colleges.

Finally, the reliance on self-selected participants could introduce bias into the study's findings. Those choosing to share their experiences may hold unique perspectives compared to those who declined participation, potentially skewing the representation of challenges or positive experiences encountered by Black female business students.

Future Research
While this research illuminated the hidden perspectives of some Black women enrolled in business colleges, there are still many factors that contribute to their experiences that have not been examined yet:

**Exploring Dropout Perspectives**

Investigating the narratives of students who discontinued their business studies presents an opportunity to uncover factors contributing to leaving their program early. Conducting interviews with these individuals could reveal specific challenges within both formal and informal curriculum that influenced their decision to leave. Analyzing their experiences may provide insights into areas where formal curriculum may fall short for diverse students and encourage strategic educational plans to help discomfort.

**Comparative Analysis of Formal and Informal Curriculum**

Conducting a comparative study that contrasts the impact of formal and informal curriculum, examining the viewpoints of both continuing and dropout students, can provide a deeper insight into the experiences of Black female business students. This research could examine how students perceive and engage with these different learning opportunities, highlighting the potential positive role of informal spaces and addressing the limitations of formal coursework. This research could provide valuable insights into patterns of student satisfaction, academic performance, and their sense of belonging.

**Intersectional Analysis of Race, Gender, and Curriculum Experiences**
A deeper exploration into the intersections of race, gender, and curriculum experiences among students who discontinued their studies could offer unique insights. Understanding how these intersections influence students' perceptions of formal and informal curriculum, their navigation within these spaces, and their ultimate decision to discontinue studies could be crucial in addressing equity and inclusivity within business colleges. Conducting this research could also contribute to creating a more inclusive learning environment and addressing issues related to diversity and representation.

**Final Reflections**

The journey into researching the experiences of Black female business students has been an eye-opening endeavor. One of the earliest challenges I encountered was the difficulty in recruiting participants. I anticipated the scarceness of this demographic in the business education setting, still the reality was bleaker than I expected. The rarity of Black female business students became apparent early on, and I realized the depth of their underrepresentation in this academic sphere.

Gaining the trust of these students was another significant hurdle. They held legitimate concerns about the confidentiality of their identities and experiences. Building rapport required patience, empathy, and a deep commitment to ensuring their anonymity and privacy. It was crucial for them to feel assured that their stories, vulnerabilities, and unique perspectives would be safeguarded within the research. Their need for confidentiality emphasized the sensitive nature of their experiences and the vulnerability they felt in sharing their stories. This stressed the seriousness of the responsibility I held in portraying their narratives authentically, respectfully, and ethically. These women entrusted me with their
truths, and I recognized the weight of that trust in revealing the realities of being a Black female in a predominantly white, male-dominated academic landscape.

Reflecting on my own experiences as an undergraduate, this journey stirred up memories of navigating a similar academic landscape. The challenges I faced then echoed in the stories shared by these Black female business students. It validated the struggles I encountered during my own educational journey, igniting a deep resonance with their narratives. Recalling the complexities of being a minority in a predominantly white academic space, I empathized with their journey and realized the shared reality of feeling marginalized within such environments. These reflections brought back the duality I experienced as a Black undergraduate business student. However, at this moment in time, I grappled with the dilemma of either empathizing with the participants by sharing stories similar to their current challenges and encouraging them to persevere while maintaining an appropriate amount of objectivity in conducting this study.

Through this research journey, I have realized the importance of my role as a connection between these students and academic institutions. As someone working closely with college faculty and staff, I can advocate for the unique needs and challenges of Black students in these spaces. The insights gained from these narratives have positioned me to advocate for more inclusive and responsive policies, programs, and practices within educational institutions, fostering environments that genuinely support the diverse identities and aspirations of all students. This experience has been humbling and enlightening, highlighting the critical need for inclusive and equitable academic spaces that honor the multifaceted identities and voices of all students. It has reinforced my commitment to
championing diversity, equity, and inclusion within educational settings, ensuring that every student feels seen, heard, and valued.
REFERENCES


139


https://doi.org/10.22439/jba.v8i2.5850


https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412971966.n193


Retention and Graduation Trends. (2020). Retrieved April 21, 2022, from
https://pubviya.edu/SASReportViewer/?reportUri=%2Freports%2Freports%2Fb60fd06-6dbe-4427-b8ea
295f024f934b&page=vi6&sso_guest=true&informationEnabled=false&commentsEnabled=false&alertsEnabled=false&reportViewOnly=true


https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijme.2023.100870


https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045221


https://archive.org/details/frommaxweberessa00webe
Wells, Ida B. Papers, [Box 8, Folder 9], Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library


APPENDICES

Appendix A

Tentative Demographic Questions (to be attached to consent form and used for participant selection)

Name: ____________________________

Age: _______

Classification: ___________________________________________

Major(s): ________________________________

I identify as a Black female: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Which best describes your higher education institution:

☐ predominately while institution (PWI)

☐ historically Black college or university (HBCU)

☐ I am not sure
Where did you attend high school (School Name and Location)? ___________________

The high school I graduated from can best be described as located in which of the following? Check one.

☐ Rural
☐ Small town
☐ Urban
☐ Tribal land
☐ Suburban

What industry are you seeking to enter upon graduation?

Are you a First-Generation College Student ☐ Yes ☐ No

Please List any Student Organizations that you are a part of below:
Appendix B

Writing Prompt

Briefly describe a time you felt welcome, unwelcome, comfortable, or uncomfortable in your degree program.
Appendix C

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

- What is a typical day in the business college like for you? Walk me through a typical day. What time do you arrive, what do you do first, etc.?
- Talk about a time when you felt comfortable or welcome in your degree program.
- Talk about a time when you felt uncomfortable or unwelcome in your degree program.
  - Have you ever witnessed or had any experiences of racism or sexism as a Black female student while studying Business at your institution?
- Tell me about what types of things (events, classes, extracurricular activities, interactions, etc.) made you feel welcome in your degree program?
- How do you resist these negative narratives/actions that work to keep them invisible.
- At your Predominantly White Institution or Historically Black College or University, what recommendations would you make to improve recruitment and retention of Black female students into the business program?
Appendix D

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: 05/12/2023
Application Number: IRB-23-237
Proposal Title: THE BUSINESS OF DIVERSITY: A LOOK INSIDE THE HIDDEN NARRATIVES OF BLACK WOMEN EARNING A BUSINESS DEGREE

Principal Investigator: Margaret Bailey
Co-Investigator(s): Jon Smythe
Faculty Adviser: Jon Smythe
Project Coordinator: Research Assistant(s):

Processed as: Exempt
Exempt Category:

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in 45CFR46.

This study meets criteria in the Revised Common Rule, as well as, one or more of the circumstances for which continuing review is not required. As Principal Investigator of this research, you will be required to submit a status report to the IRB triennially.

The final versions of any recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are available for download from IRBManager. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:
1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be approved by the IRB. Protocol modifications requiring approval may include changes to the title, PI, adviser, other research personnel, funding status or sponsor, subject population composition or size, recruitment, inclusion/exclusion criteria, research site, research procedures and consent/assent process or forms.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any unanticipated and/or adverse events to the IRB Office promptly.
4. Notify the IRB office when your research project is complete or when you are no longer affiliated with Oklahoma State University.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact the IRB Office at 405-744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu.

Sincerely,
Oklahoma State University IRB
VITA

Margaret Bailey

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy


Major Field: Curriculum Studies

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Curriculum Studies at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May 2024.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Science in Higher Education Administration at Northeastern State University, Tahlequah, Oklahoma in 2020.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science in Business Administration at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in 2016.

Experience:

2021-Present  Online Program Coordinator  Oklahoma State University
2021-Present  Adjunct Instructor  Meridian Technology Center
2019-2021   Academic Advisor  Oklahoma State University
2017-2019  Business Admin Instructor  Career Systems Development
2016-2019  Sales Manager  Dillard’s

Professional Memberships:

NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advisors Phi Kappa Phi
National Honor Society
UPCEA: The Online and Professional Education Association OLC: The Online Consortium
ITSE: International Society for Technology in Education