Nothing to Lose But Our Chains: Voices of Black Women's Activist Experiences on a Predominantly White Campus

By

Brittany Hisa Ota-Malloy

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

(Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis)

at the

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

2019

Date of final oral examination: 05/09/2019

The dissertation is approved by the following members of the Final Oral Committee:

Rachelle Winkle-Wagner, Professor, Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis
Xueli Wang, Associate Professor, Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis
Elton Crim, Clinical Professor, Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis
Michael Thornton, Professor, African American Studies

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Acknowledgments

There are many people who have encouraged me in the completion of this project. To Rachelle Winkle-Wagner, my dissertation chair, thank you for your gentle guidance, expertise, and unrelenting support of me as a #mamascholar. To the rest of my dissertation committee, Xueli Wang, Elton Crim, and Michael Thornton, thank you for sticking with me to the end. You each have made a profound impact on my research and me. To the many other instructors I have learned from over the past 4-years, thank you.

My campus-based family, who I love deeply, has especially impacted my time as a doctoral student. Thank you to my ELPA family: Barb, Shari, Jenny, & Weijia for allowing me the space to be a contributor in the department. Thank you to my student affairs family: Rachael, Kathy, Lori R., Cleda, etc. Special thanks to former Dean of Students, Lori Berquam, and Jasmine Clay, the women who initially inspired me to pursue student affairs as my life passion. Thank you to my personal "friendtors" Leonard, Whitney, and Ada who each contributed to my life in their own special ways. To the students & staff who trusted me to serve them, thank you.

I would not be here today without the loving support of my husband, Donovan. You have shown me what unconditional love is in your partnership and in your fathering of our son, Collin. I am also grateful for Tori Moses, my best friend of over 18 years, for doing the work to make me feel loved from afar. To both of my mothers, Diana and Lynn, my dad, Keiichiro, and my siblings, Jullian, Danielle, and Jasmine, thank you for believing in me even when I didn't believe in myself. And to the rest of my village, you know who you are, thank you for the many ways you lift me up and remind me of my own greatness by shining your light in my life.

Lastly, and most importantly, thank you to the Black women who participated in my study for their honesty and trust. I wish you all success in your journeys in college and beyond.

Abstract

In recent years, there has been an increase in college student activism that is connected to the larger societal realities that govern the everyday life of people on and off college campuses. Through American history, Black students have been integral in the reformation of a more just society for all people. In the virtual absence of specific studies of Black women's activist contributions in college, this study explores the activist experiences of Black women at a predominantly White institution. Drawing from literature on Black women in college, student activism in college, and institutional responses to student activism in college, this study is an adaptation of the Critical Case Study, which brings into view the unique experiences of Black women from the vertical and transversal perspectives. Four conclusions arise from the vertical examination: (a) Black women's activism aims to positively impact the college experiences of Black women, Black men, and other minoritized identities, (b) Black women see their activist self as rooted in but separate from their "natural" self, (c) the intersection of race and gender specifically impacts Black women's activist experiences in college, and (d) despite their claims, the institution is not open to student activism. Three conclusions arise from the transversal perspective: (a) the legacy of Black activism directly informs current activism at the site (BTU), (b) the experiences of Black women at BTU have not changed much over time, and (c) Black women's contributions have increased. (d) the erasure of Black women's contributions continues.

Keywords: Black women, activism, Black-feminism, college student affairs

Chapter I: Introduction

Student activism has historically been a mainstay within the American college landscape. In recent years, there has been an increase in activism on college campuses across the country (Smith, 2017). As part of this increased activism, students at the University of Missouri led campus protests in the fall of 2015 that sent shockwaves through the nation (Landsbaum & Weber, 2015; Pearson, 2015). The Missouri protests inspired students to mobilize on social issues, such as the building tensions between communities of color and police seen in Ferguson, MO and across the nation. Students at other campuses quickly followed suit. In solidarity, at the University of Wisconsin – Madison (UW), students groups such as the UWBlackout and The Black Voice held several protests, marches, and demonstrations over the following year (Zhong, 2016). Recently, college students took to social media in support of activist efforts to end sexual violence against women. Their participation in the social media campaign #MeToo shined a light on sexual assault on college campuses and sent a call to campus leadership to address a culture of sexual assault within their academic communities. In direct response, colleges and universities have reevaluated their commitments, either directly or indirectly, to craft campus environments intolerant of sexual violence, and to support survivors within their communities (Gluckman, Read, & Mangan, 2017). These actions serve as a reminder that students are a powerful force on college campuses, and that their attitudes and actions about campus, education, and the broader society affect on-campus politics, academic choices, and climate (Altbach, 1991). Within this peer group, Black women college students are vital to activist work.

Throughout history, Black women have played an integral role in developing an American society that justly serves its people (Barnett, 1993; Hine & Thompson, 1999). The contributions of women like Dorothy Height, the godmother of the Civil Rights Movement who

served as president of the National Council for Negro Women for 40 years, and Septima Clark, colloquially named *the Mother of the Movement* who played a key role in obtaining equal pay for Black school teachers, have directly created cultural shifts in American society and shaped important world events (Clark & Brown, 1986; Height, 2001). Yet, situated at the intersection of race and gender, where both womanhood and Blackness present unique social challenges, Black women's contributions are not extensively documented or researched (cf., Collins, 2000; Guy-Sheftalll, 1995; Jones, 2009; Patton & Croom, 2017; Winkle-Wagner, 2009).

In the context of college, Black student activists are equally impactful. The infamous "sit-in," an organized protest where a group of people peacefully occupy a space and refuse to leave, was first established by Black college students at North Carolina A&T ("The Greensboro Sit In", 2010). Recently, in protest of their university's nonresponse to racial bias on campus, Black students across the country organized sit-in protests to occupy offices of university leadership and other change-makers (e.g., local and state government officers), demanding evolution in how universities handle race and racism within their campus communities ("The Demands", 2015). Though researchers have studied activism in college since the 1950s (Gouldner, 1954), most of this work focuses on specific activist movements (Dominguez, 2009; Renn, 2007) and institutional responses (Fisher, 2017) without specific interest in the racialization of activist work. While some research examines Black students' involvement in activism (Pounds, 1987; Rosenthal, 1975), Black women's experiences are not disaggregated in this work. It is incumbent upon scholars to examine the experiences of Black women and to give import to their lived realities and contributions to college campuses.

This study began with the following inquiry: *How do Black women describe their participation in activism on college campuses?* I was also interested in learning how activism

impacted their college experience from the perspective of the student. Understanding this experience uncovered new ways of thinking about activism on college campuses by incorporating Black women who are change agents in the greater American sociopolitical landscape.

Background

Drawing from literature on Black women in college, student activism in college, and institutional responses to student activism in higher education, this study sought an understanding of the Black women's activist experiences at predominantly White institutions (PWIs). The focus on Black women was not meant to overshadow the experiences of other women, especially other women of color. Nor was it meant to contend with the experiences of Black men. Indeed, my focus on Black women was intentional. Black women's oppression lives at the intersection of race and gender (Collins, 1986; Guy-Sheftalll, 1995; hooks, 1981). Their experiences are regularly misconstrued, poached, or deemed unimportant (Beale, 2008; Collins, 2000; Lorde; 1984, and their voices are largely absent in dialogue about the conditions of students' experiences therein (Commodore, Baker, & Arroyo, 2017; Patton & Croom, 2017). Although researchers have started to investigate their experiences in college (e.g., Fleming, 1983; Tate, 2017; Winkle-Wagner, 2009, 2014), Black women remain generally understudied and their activism misunderstood.

This focus on Black women's activism should be seen as part of a rise in student activism on college campuses across the country; there were over 160-recorded protests or other activist events held in the 2014-2015 academic year alone (Johnston, 2014). Though activism has always been a feature of college life, today's students know activism as commonplace and understand college to be a prime time to take action. Much of the early research about college student

activism is concentrated on a period of activism in the 1960s that focused on social issues of that time, such as the desegregation of public spaces, nuclear weaponry, and assisting urban poor people (Altbach, 1989; Duncan & Stewart, 1995; Flacks, 1967). Today, college students activate to address issues such as race and racism, sexism and gender bias, politics, and most recently, gun rights and gun violence on campuses (Yee & Blinder, 2018).

Knowledge about when, why, and how students participate in activism is important for several key reasons. First, understanding why students choose to participate in activism may reveal some of the barriers to success they face on the road to degree completion (DeAngelo, Schuster, & Stebleton, 2016; Kimball, Moore, Vaccaro, Troiano, & Newman, 2016). In their qualitative study using a grounded theory approach, Kimball et al. (2016) collected data from 59 college student activists with disabilities and found that these student activists used storytelling as a way to mitigate any stigma they faced around being differently abled. Studies also showed that participation in activism positively influences student's identity development and leadership experiences (Astin, 1977; Chambers & Phelps, 1993; Hamrick, 1998; Jacoby, 2017; Sax, 2004). In his qualitative study about learning outcomes of activist participation in college, Quaye (2007) found that activism supported multiple elements of student's development, including solidifying their values, beliefs about their identities, and voice. The study also noted that activism can help students to see their role in cultural contexts outside of their normal frame of reference (Quaye, 2007). Thus, knowledge about student activism is essential in understanding opportunities to engage students in conversations about change on their campuses, and expose them to the rippling effects beyond the campus environment. This knowledge is also important in understanding issues impacting the retention of Black women and other activist students who often stop-out or leave institutions in response to unwelcoming campus environments.

Black college student activism has been especially efficient throughout history. Since Black people are twice as likely to participate in activism in college (Eagan, Bates, Aragon, Rios-Aquilar, & Eagan, 2015), it makes sense that their work has created structural and cultural shifts in the American higher education system. Black student activism birthed African American studies departments, cultural centers, and changes to classroom curriculum, admission policies, and campus resources (Franklin, 2003; Patton, 2005; Shields, 2015). Furthermore, their work serves as the foundation for cultural inclusion of other racially minoritized groups in college. After the creation of African American studies departments and Black Cultural Centers, it became more commonplace to see the same changes implemented for other racial groups like Latinx and Asian interest groups (Patton & Hannon, 2008).

Although it is clear that Black people play an integral role in shaping a just society, Black women's contributions are not disaggregated in that work. The absence of specific studies that focus on Black women's activist experiences presents a skewed representation of Black people's impacts. This is especially true today, when most historical Black social justice figures who are celebrated are male, e.g., Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. To further illustrate this point Deray McKesson is the most prominent contemporary Black activist who currently trends second on Google searches for "Black Activist" for his work with the #BlackLivesMatter movement, a movement founded by three Black women, Patrisse Khan-Cullors, Alicia Garza, and Opal Tometi. Critical investigation of Black women's contributions to activism in college is important in understanding the role institutions play in creating the learning environments they advertise to students, parents, and donors. As research on Black women continues to evolve, it is important to study their identities as linked and intersectional. This disaggregation would problematize and

highlight the unique experiences of Black women in order to harness the leadership potential of college students.

Summary of Methodology

This project takes place at Big Time University (BTU), a large, predominantly White, land-grant university in the Midwest where both racial tensions, defined by reported instances of hate and bias in a campus-wide climate survey, and student activism are prominent features of campus life. I explored the ways in which Black women college students' activism colors their campus experiences. To do so, I conducted 20 semi-structured interviews with Black college women and 5 interviews with institutional insiders, i.e., Black women who had deep knowledge about the experiences of Black women at BTU. I also performed observations of activism on campus and analyzed other relevant data at BTU including media releases, campus archive information, and BTU's campus policies. This study is a critical, qualitative, comparative case study (CCS) that analyzes the activist experiences of Black college women using Black Feminist Thought (BFT) as its theoretical spine. A critical approach brought into view the history of racism and racial construction in America. By placing Black college women's activist experiences within the larger sociohistorical landscape, I position these women as experts in their own lived experiences. The CCS method facilitates examination of life from vertical, horizontal, and transversal perspectives. The vertical analysis is interested in the multiscalar influences in the microsphere, mesosphere, and macrosphere (defined later) of the case (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2016). Horizontal analysis compares similar experiences within distinct socially constructed locations (Massey, 2005). Finally, transversal analysis situates the case in history and is helpful in understanding the case's evolution over time (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2016). In this study, the vertical and transversal analyses were used to create an understanding of Black women's activist

experiences at BTU. Implications from the analyses were drawn by peeling away the layers of the experiences described by Black women activists with information about BTU's campus climate, their campus policies that impact activists, and the sociopolitical landscape that influences life on and off college campuses (e.g., Donald Trump's ongoing presidency, #Blacklivesmatter Movement, #Metoo Movement, etc.).

The data collected in this study included individual, semi-structured interviews, observations, and campus media. The data analysis plan was three-fold. First, data were coded and reduced using primary and secondary deductive codes based on BFT (Carspecken 1996; Manning, 2017). Inductive code arose from the data and brought to light, for the first time, a picture of Black women's activism at a PWI. The deductive codebooks for this study relied on the primary suppositions of BFT and include the following codes: self-definition, self-valuation, intersectionality, and Black women's culture (defined later). Secondary codes brought in necessary elements of power as defined in BFT and include: structural power, disciplinary power, interpersonal power, and hegemonic power (also defined later). These same codebooks were used in analyzing archival texts and other media forms as well. Inductive codes were determined from the data through coding exercises where I reviewed data collected for consistencies among participants to code (Boyatzis, 1998). Second, data from the institutional insider interviews, observations, and media were used to deepen what is learned in interviews with Black women activists by opening the boundaries of study to include relevant information across space and time. These data were collected and analyzed in conversation with interviews with Black women activists in college. Finally, analytical questions strategically formulated to address the vertical and transversal analyses of this study were posed to reduce the data, intentionally organizing it into manageable and focused categories (Neumann, 2009).

Summary of the Findings

This study offers evidence that Black women's activist experiences are intentional and focused. The women's contributions are valuable beyond their tenure at the institution. Through an understanding of the women's multiscalar influences across the micro-, meso-, and macro levels, I make four claims about Black women's activism from the vertical perspective: (a) Black women's activism aims to positively impact the college experiences of Black women, Black men, and other minoritized identities, (b) Black women see their activist self as rooted in but separate from their "natural" self, (c) the intersection of race and gender specifically impacts Black women's activist experiences in college, and (d) despite their claims, the institution is not open to student activism. From the transversal perspective, the data supported three claims relative to Black women's understandings of and contributions to the legacy of activism, especially, Black activism at the site: (a) the legacy of Black activism directly informs current activism at the site, (b) the experiences of Black women at BTU have not changed much over time, and (c) Black women's contributions have increased. Together, the data inform an understanding of the women's experiences of activism and illuminates the risk involved in their activist participation.

Significance

In 2015, about 1 in 10 freshmen responding to the CIRP American Freshman Survey indicated that there is a "very good chance" they would participate in student protests on their campus – a 2.9% increase from the 2014 survey responses (Eagan et al., 2015). It is reasonable to expect active students to continue their activity through their college careers, meaning campuses could continue to grapple with the impacts of activism for at least the next few years (New, 2016). Research also suggests that students who are engaged in activism in their college

years are likely to continue activity through life, further developing their sense of social agency and understandings of their personal identities (Altbach, 1989; Rhoads, 1997). A recent report on expected trends in higher education suggested that violent activism and balancing free speech might occur on campuses (Rudgers & Peterson, 2018). This report claims that campuses may begin to move the #Metoo Movement into academia, and administration will be forced to reckon with the history of racism within their realm. In the current campus political climate, where many instances of hate and bias were reported in the week following the 2016 presidential election, this study adds to previous student activism work by presenting a clear picture of current student participation and foregrounds a population of students that are often underrepresented in educational research: Black women. This study also adds to Black Feminist Thought by providing clarity about how Black women experience activism in college. Specifically from the perspectives of Black women, this study unveiled their needs in the context of college, their contributions to campus activism, and understandings of power at play in their college experiences.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to illustrate the ways in which Black women college students are participating in activism on college campuses and to learn, from the perspective of the activists, how they are impacted by such participation. This information adds to growing bodies of research on student activism and on Black women college students. It can also inform students, staff, and faculty across the nation as they interact with students on their campuses, especially students of color. Using a constructivist approach consisting of individual interviews, observations, and analyses of other relevant data, I created a snapshot of this experience at Big Time University, a predominantly White institution in the Midwestern United States. As staff

and faculty at colleges across the country continue to grapple with increasing demands for a just campus, engagement with activism and activists on campus produces unique opportunities for universities to harness the leadership potential of its students.

The next chapters delve into the literature on the topic in order to consider what has been studied relative to Black women's activism on college campuses. Below is a glossary of terms and how I operationalize them in the current study.

Glossary

Black Woman – A self-identified woman of African descent. This definition includes all women (cisgender and transgender) born of the African diaspora and includes African women, African-American women, multiracial African-American women, Afro-Latina women (e.g., Brazil, Haiti, Dominican Republic), and Caribbean women (e.g., Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana). To be included in this study, the women must also self-identify as Black women. This information was collected using a participant demographic worksheet.

Activism – This study uses Chambers & Phelps' (1993) definition of activism as "active" participation of individuals in larger group behavior for the purpose of creating change – in attitudes, knowledge, behavior, and/or symbols (p. 20). The expected change can be directed toward individuals, groups, and/or systems. In this study, "active" participation includes all forms of activism, from organizing to participating and supporting. Activism also includes all non-traditional methods employed by Black women as forms of resistance, such as their racial and gender performances, their choices not to participate in particular movements, and their efforts for self-care or self-preservation.

Predominantly White Institution (PWI) – a term used to describe colleges or universities in which White people account for 50% or more of the student population. Generally, at

predominantly White institutions, White people also account for the majority of staff and faculty members that serve students within their campus communities. In this study, White students make up approximately 90% of the student population at BTU.

Chapter II: Literature Review

This study is an examination of Black women's activist experiences in college from a Black Feminist Thought (BFT) standpoint. To construct an understanding of this experience, this study draws from literature on Black women in college, student activism in college, and institutional responses to student activism in college. Together, these bodies of knowledge paint a picture of the challenges Black women face in college that ignite activist responses, the historical and contemporary approaches students employ to do activist work, and how institutions respond in the face of campus unrest. The literature confirms that students are indeed influential in changing college campuses and that Black women, whether seen or unseen, play essential roles in creating change on campus.

Black Women in College

In her 2017 Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) conference keynote address, Melissa Harris-Perry illuminated the role of Black women as both critical and central in considerations about policy and practices in higher education, particularly for students of color (Martinez, 2017). She asserted that because Black women's oppression lives at the intersection of race and gender, and because Black women's experiences are often misconstrued or poached from, centering Black women in practice and in research is a necessary step in combatting oppression for everyone. Her thinking is not new; in fact, Harris-Perry's sentiments are echoed in the work of several other Black women scholars (see especially: Beale & Cade, 1970; Collins, 2000; Commodore et al., 2017; Harris-Perry, 2011; hooks, 1981; Lewis, 1977; Lorde, 1984). At the intersection of race and gender, Black women's experiences are also often overshadowed by their Black male counterparts, whose experiences are studied more frequently and with greater import (Commodore et al., 2017; Patton & Croom, 2017; Winkle-Wagner, 2015).

Against all odds, Black women have made many breakthroughs in higher education (Patton & Croom, 2017; Winkle-Wagner, 2014). Still, there is much misinformation about Black women's collegiate experiences. By the 1950s, when colleges had already endured a period of rapid expansion in accessibility, Black women's access to economic stability through education and employment had not significantly changed in over a century (Evans, 2008). This trend is mirrored in Black women's college experiences today. Contemporary enrollment trends paint a picture that Black women are enrolling in college more than ever before and also more than other groups of non-White women (Bennet & Lutz, 2009; Blalock & Sharpe, 2012; Commodore et al., 2017). Though Black women are enrolling in college at a high rate, the data on Black women's college completion rates are lower for Black women than for other racial groups (Tate, 2017).

Following rapid decline in enrollment in 2011, this trend is also influenced by the disproportionate amount of Black women that enrolled at for-profit institutions from 2000 to 2010 (Commodore et al., 2017). Although an enrollment decline was experienced across institutional type (i.e., 2-year, 4-year, for-profit, not-for-profit), Black women most frequently disenrolled from for-profit part-time institutions (Cottom, 2017). This disparity suggests that Black women experience difficulty on the road to degree completion and that structural barriers limit Black women's abilities to persist in college. Understanding the specific barriers to Black women's college success is complex. Most research on Black student success does not disaggregate Black women's experiences from Black men's, which blurs the realities of Black women whose oppression is uniquely raced and gendered (Lewis, Mendenhall, Harwood, & Huntt, 2013; Winkle-Wagner, 2009). Also, growth in research on Black men specifically has outpaced similar work for Black women (e.g., Cuyjet, 1997; Harper, 2012; Strayhorn, 2008). This is likely influenced by notions that position Black women as higher achieving than Black

men in multiple areas of American higher education (Strayhorn & Johnson, 2014). As research on Black women's college experiences continues to grow, separating their experiences from those of Black men is necessary to interrogate the ways that gendered racism influences Black women's collegiate outcomes. This is essential in defining the unique experiences of Black women at the intersection of race and gender in the context of postsecondary educational pursuits. Since activism is often a response to injustice, examination of Black women's participation in activism may elucidate some of the barriers they face in their collegiate experiences.

Researchers have studied Black women's identity development in relation to their college environment. Some researchers have examined how they make meaning of their experiences in and outside of the classroom (Lee Williams & Nichols, 2012; Porter, 2015), and where Black women fit within current conversations about the broader college experience (Patton & Croom, 2017; Winkle-Wagner, 2015). These works suggest that Black college-going women's identity development is inherently linked to their overall collegiate experience. That is, when Black women feel included on campus, their identity development is in stark contrast to those who develop in unsupportive campus environments. When Black women are supported in college, they are free to excel at college rather than survive it. Research has shown that Black women at historically Black colleges and universities perform better academically than their peers at PWIs, where their identities might be challenged more frequently (Allen, 1992; Fleming, 1983). However, when Black women are not supported, they face unique challenges as they work toward degree completion.

In her critical ethnography of Black college women, Winkle-Wagner (2009) introduced the concept of *unchosen me.* She contended that in unsupportive environments, Black women

had to perform in certain ways to achieve success, acceptance, and recognition in college. She found that Black women were not always free to choose their identities, hence, *unchosen me*. In her findings, their marginalization was exacerbated because the characteristics they were forced to accept often minoritized the women further and limited their choices in how they identified (Winkle-Wagner, 2009). For example, Black women in the study described a sense of contention about how they were represented in and outside of the classroom as being on polar opposite ends of the spectrum as either "too ghetto" or "too White." When Black women are not free to be who they choose to be and must adjust their performances of themselves to accommodate the needs of dominant groups in college, feelings of disempowerment and oppression can ensue (Winkle-Wagner, 2009). Researchers have also examined Black women's college successes (Fries-Britt & Turner-Kelley, 2002; Griffin, 2006) and challenges. Such challenges include the fear of success (Puryear & Mednick, 1974), microagressions (Lee Williams & Nichols, 2012; Lewis et al., 2012), psychosocial competence (Jones, 2004), and the intersectionality of their identities (Lorde, 1984; Wilkins, 2012). Dr. Kimberlé Crenshaw, scholar of critical race theory, law, and Black feminism, coined the term *intersectionality* in 1989 (Museus & Griffin, 2011). The term is used to illuminate the experiences of Black women as interrelated across identities and to show that Black women's oppression is compounded by the intersectional relationship of their race and gender (Mitchell, Simmons, & Greyerbiehl, 2014).

One study argued that because issues of racism and sexism compound their experiences, Black women's understandings about microagressions should be viewed from a perspective of intersectionality (Lee Williams & Nichols, 2012). These researchers suggest that Black women regularly encounter microagressions both in and out of college that are unique to their status as both Black and female. These microagressions support stereotypical notions of Black women as

either inferior, super powered, out-of-the-norm, or beyond traditional scope (Lee Williams & Nichols, 2012).

Altogether, the literature often situates Black women's identities within their college contexts, drawing connections between campus demographics (PWI or Historically Black College or University [HBCU]) and Black women's performance on campus. Researchers suggest that there are ecological differences between such campus demographics that influence variance in Black women's performance in college (Fleming, 1983; Willie, 2003). At PWIs, Black women are minoritized and often targeted by students, staff, and faculty, while at HBCUs, Black women are generally expected to be present and protected within the campus environment. At PWIs, Black women made self-reliance and assertiveness their goals due to feeling alienated both in and out of classroom campus experiences. For example, when surveyed about their college experiences, Black women at PWIs described college from a survivalist perspective: they learned to look out for themselves in an environment where they felt no one else would (Fleming, 1983; Stewart, 2002).

By questioning the impact of campus demographics and climate on the experiences of Black women, researchers have pinpointed several coping strategies this group employs to endure academia at PWIs (Domingue, 2015; Lewis et al., 2013). For example, in her phenomenological study of Black women's student leadership experiences at a PWI, Domingue (2015) used interviews to uncover sources of nourishment that Black women utilized to combat challenges they faced, such as racial and gendered microagressions. The study found that Black women's relationships with their mothers were key in keeping the student motivated, as were mentoring relationships with teachers and educational leaders. Black women also found solace in learning about Black women's historical significance; they felt a sense of gratitude for those

early contributions and saw historical Black women as role models for their work (Domingue, 2015).

The aforementioned coping strategies position Black women as discerning and powerful during their college experience. While it is important to understand the coping responses Black women employ in the college context, more research is needed to examine the place activism holds within these coping responses or as a coping response itself. Furthermore, understanding the issues that exist in varying higher education contexts is essential, especially at PWIs.. Uncovering the specific issues that impact Black college women within these contexts can clarify strategies to optimally support Black women and, therefore, all students.

Issues facing Black college women. Existing research on Black women in college has exposed several issues that impact their experiences on the road to degree completion. Understanding these issues is essential in rationalizing their activist responses in college. Among the issues examined to date, two overarching issues appear to be highly impactful in Black women's collegiate experiences. First, Black women's sense of belonging is shaped by experiences of isolation on campus (McCabe, 2009; Watt, 2003; Winkle-Wagner, 2009, 2015). Isolation is especially prevalent at PWIs, where Black women make up such small proportions of the student body. At the BTU examined here, Black students, both male and female, only made up 2% of the student body in the fall 2017 semester. This demographic trend is a reality at several universities in the United States where Black students remain underrepresented despite policy advances like affirmative action (Ashkenas, Park, & Pearce, 2017). In this context, it is highly possible that Black women are alone in their academic experiences and feel isolated from other Black women, men, and their non-Black peers (McCoy, 2014).

Other experiences also impose a sense of isolation for Black women, such as participating in the dating scene (or lack thereof) and enduring stereotypes from their peers. For example, Black students at selective PWIs are often regarded as "scholarship kids" or recipients of affirmative action, and are therefore deemed undeserving of their admission to the university (Commodore et al., 2017). The stereotypical treatment also spills into the classroom, where Black women are perceived as loud, aggressive, or argumentative, and may be selected last for group work regardless of their knowledge or skill (Morris, 2007; Weitz & Gordon, 1993). When regarded in this way, it is reasonable that Black women experience isolation in college, whether it is self-imposed or a result of displacement by others.

Yet, some isolated experiences supported Black women's cognitive and social development in college. For example, qualitative studies using interviews and focus groups with Black women across varying institution types revealed that Black women formed sister circles – support circles for Black women by Black women – as isolated communities of support (Patton & Harper, 2003; Winkle-Wagner, 2009). Also, in a qualitative study about Black women's friendships in college, researchers found that Black women formed both instrumental and meaningful friendships (Winkle-Wagner, McCallum, Luedke, & Ota-Malloy, 2019). Their meaningful friendships were described as familial and necessary to their success in college. For instance, Black women in these small friendship groups shared important information about which activities were appropriate to participate in on campus, which professors were tolerant of Black women, and which spaces were physically and psychologically unsafe. While isolation from several social groups can cause Black college women to see themselves as "aliens," meaning they may not see themselves as belonging in *any* social sphere within the college

landscape at PWIs, some isolated experiences at PWIs caused them to forge strong social support networks.

A second issue facing Black college women is that they endure unique psychosocial stressors in the context of college that other women may not face. Because Black women's experiences rest at the intersection of race and gender (Collins, 2000; Evans-Winters, 2015; Lorde, 1984), they are also impacted by systemic racism and sexism in college (Crenshaw, 2018; Lewis et al., 2013). Access to education for women and Black people has expanded over time, but many oppressive structures exist today that continue to blatantly limit Black student success overall. This blend of oppression, i.e., sexism and racism, simultaneously juxtaposes images of the angry Black woman with those of Black matriarchal super-women (Fleming, 1983). The resulting dichotomy situates Black women's identities in extreme polarity and can cause undue stress during college. Stereotype threat, another common psychosocial stressor, is a person's fear of judgment from others based on their representation of their identities and knowledge (Donovan & Guillory, 2017; Steel & Aaronson, 1995). For instance, in the classroom context, Black women may be hesitant to share their life stories for fear of being stereotyped based on their lived experiences. They might also be fearful of completing a difficult math problem on the board because they worry that getting it wrong would look badly for all Black students, beyond themselves. Black women also experience an onslaught of microagressions in the context of college, such as racial/sexist slurs and being silenced. Microagressions include both conscious and unconscious insults; they work to minimize Black women to their race and gender (Doharty, 2018). In their qualitative study using interviews and focus groups with 17 women, researchers found that Black women employed coping strategies for handling microagressions including using one's voice as power and leaning on one's support network (Lewis et al., 2013).

As research on Black women in college continues to develop, it is important to study the ways that other people impact them through their actions and inactions. However, what is learned in that research must be repositioned to problematize oppressive people and structures in colleges. If researchers begin to interrogate the nature of Black women's oppression in college, and also hold accountable the people and structures that maintain Black women's oppression, real change can be made for all students. This focus has great potential to ameliorate Black women's experiences with psychosocial stressors, influence cultural shifts that celebrate Black women's contributions, and discourage racist and sexist behaviors in college.

Black women leadership in college. Since their early presence on college campuses, Black women have played a role in shaping the college environment for everyone (Patton & Croom, 2017). It is therefore important to understand their contributions to leadership in college. Leadership opportunities in college exist through student employment and government, through student organizations, participation in Greek-lettered organization, etc., and influence students' leadership development in college (Dugan, 2011). However, access to leadership opportunities was not granted to early Black women in college. The first Black women to attend colleges and universities in the United States did so with bravery and intentionality. Leadership opportunities were not readily available to Black women then, and in many ways may remain unclear and inaccessible today. Fanny Jackson Coppin, the first Black woman school principal, created her own leadership opportunities in college (Collier-Thomas, 1982). As a student activist at Oberlin College, Fanny used her evenings to teach freedmen and women literacy skills (Perkins, 1982). Others like Mary McLeod Bethune, who was a champion for education for Black people, also contributed to the college landscape for Black men and women (Commodore et al., 2017). These women attended college during times of historical unrest. Simply attending college at this time

was a triumphantly bold approach for Black woman leadership, one that has created lasting impacts for all People of Color in the United States.

Although their access to leadership opportunities was severely limited early on, Black college women created leadership opportunities through the formation of Black Greek-lettered organizations (Kimbrough, 2003). Through the establishment of these organizations, new opportunities for leadership and social action were created (Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998; Patton, Bridges, & Flowers, 2011). Black sorority women have worked to address many social issues, such as women's suffrage, fair employment, and other civil rights in direct ways. One sorority was essential in the establishment of the Nonpartisan Council for Public Affairs (Gasman, 2011). Their support in these movements unequivocally moved the needle forward in viewing Black women as capable contributors within American society. Today, Greek letter organizations continue to provide leadership opportunities to Black college women outside of traditional opportunities (e.g., student government, student organizations, athletics) generally available to students on college campuses. In a phenomenological study about Black women's student leadership, respondents reported interpersonal experiences of oppression, like the microagressions and stereotypes described above (Domingue, 2015). Black women leaders were most often described as angry and aggressive rather than skilled, competent, or qualified. Furthermore, the study found that Black women drew from historical traditions of Black women leaders in their approaches to leadership as a means of self-preservation or persistence (Dominigue, 2015). Understanding the leadership experiences of Black students is important because their unique experience is situated at the intersection of race and gender. The knowledge gained through research and practice uncovered opportunities to better serve Black women

enrolling in colleges and unveiled methods that encourage successful completion for this student group.

Summary

Taken as a whole, research on Black women's experiences in college is on the rise. Most of the current research is qualitative in nature and studies employing quantitative methods do so utilizing survey data from larger projects not specifically aimed at Black women. Much of this research is critical, in that the authors position Black women's voices as most powerful in describing their experiences. This is evidenced by the wide use of interviews and focus groups as modes of data collection. The size and scope is a general limitation of these studies, although many of the studies did not aim to generalize, but rather, were trying to point out the unique experiences Black women have on college campuses. Because Black people's experiences are different based on many external and internal factors, sample sizes and compositions must expand to include a diversity of Black women's voices. Understanding that there is a disparity between enrollment and completion for Black college women, longitudinal research is needed to unveil some factors that influence departure along the way. More can be done to contextualize what is known about Black women's leadership in college. Specifically, in the current sociopolitical climate, it is important to understand what role Black women play in social movements on and off campuses. Also, critical investigation of Black women's relationships in college would uncover new opportunities for university practitioners to be intentional advocates for Black women in their service of the broader student body.

Student Activism in College

In this section, I review literature on college student activism with specific interest in the activist experiences of Black students and students of color. Insofar, research is largely

concentrated on a period of activism in the 1960s, but modern studies begin to expand what is known about student activism by interrogating issues such as the use of social media in student activism (Velasquez & LaRose, 2015), student activist's impact on curricular change in higher education (Arthur, 2016), and student activist's characterizations of their campus' administrators and environment (Broadhurst & Martin, 2014; Ropers-Huilman, Carwile, & Barnett, 2005). Together, these studies create a historical backdrop for the study of modern activist experiences. They suggest that student activism today remains rooted in similar social issues as before, but that new activist methodologies might influence greater efficacy in student's activist work.

Research on activism on college campuses is largely centered on the sustained period of student activism in the 1960s (Altbach, 1989; Altbach & Cohen, 1990; Sampson, 1967; Van Dyke, 1998). During this time, public opinion polls indicated that the most important concern of the American people was campus unrest (Altbach & Cohen, 1990). Although activist movements of this time were initially focused on desegregating public spaces, the scope of student concern was broad, including nuclear arms, urban poor communities, and the Vietnam War (Duncan & Stewart, 1995; Flacks, 1967). Flacks (1967) suggested that romanticism, or student's desires for self-expression, was a primary proponent for activist participation, and that students with such a propensity found it difficult to adjust to campus expectations. To say so appears short-sighted, even in the 1960s college landscape. At that time, the doctrine of *in loco parentis,* meaning in the place of the parent, undergirded many campus rules. These rules regulated student's contact with people of different sexes, authorized curfews and dress codes, and allowed parents of young students to access their academic records (Broadhurst, 2014). Students' inability to conform to the campus environment and decision to protest the doctrine was likely impacted by this reality.

Knowledge about how students participate in activism is essential in shaping approaches to research and practice. One qualitative study about students' levels of participation in activism found that there are varying levels of student participation in activism on college campuses. Altbach (1989) defined three levels of activist participation: (a) the core leadership who often display a more radical commitment to the cause and set core values for the movement, (b) active followers, including students willing to get involved in demonstrations that are generally aware of social and political issues at play, and (c) a third, larger group, sympathetic to the broader social and political issues driving the movement but less directly engaged as others (Altbach, 1989). Students with different participatory behaviors may still share the same views with others but prefer a different approach. For example, during a period of racial unrest at the UW, two Black male students became the most prominent figures in the dialogue, so much so that they became commonly mistaken for one another (Jeschke, 2016). The students present at protests and other activist events were part of the second level: active followers.

While understanding students' participatory behaviors is important in addressing activism on campus, it is also important to problematize the labeling of activists based on their levels of involvement. In 2017 the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation released a report where they labeled Black activists as Black Identity Extremists (Leight, 2018). Black Identity Extremists are defined as: "those who feel oppressed and respond with violence (Leight, 2018, p.1)." Under this vague definition, Black people are subject to being labeled as identity extremists simply for being angry about the social conditions affecting Black people today. They are also subject to consequences related to that labeling (e.g., surveillance, unjust arrests, death). In the context of college, researchers must also consider what unintended consequences arise in their labeling of activist behaviors. Researchers have also questioned the ways that student

activists crafted and understood their relationships with university administrators (Ropers-Huilman et al., 2005). Using interview data from 26 student activists, the study found that students' characterizations of administrators influenced their actual and desired relationships with administrators. Students' primary characterizations of administrators as systemic gatekeepers and enemies are echoed in modern activist movements as well. During the same period of racial unrest at the UW, Black student leaders felt their university chancellor was silent when it mattered most. The students questioned the university's commitment to alleviating rifts in campus climate and ability to make decisions without student leaders at the decision-making table. In sum, the students characterized administrators as gatekeepers who, "…act like [they're] listening and completely dismiss [students]" (Jeschke, 2016, p.1). Understanding the activist participatory behaviors as college students and their characterizations of administrators is essential and can reframe our beliefs around racial involvement and the people that make up social movements. More work that uncovers student's methods, participatory behaviors, and beliefs about their impact would further texture this knowledge.

Over the years, activism has taken shape in a variety of ways. This variation can be attributed to shifts in historical context, levels of socio-political development, and the conditions of political and educational systems, and therefore depicts the multi-faceted nature of campus life for modern college students. But for a few outliers, student activism has been historically sporadic in nature and generally does not exceed a period of one to two years (Altbach, 1989). Researchers suggest that activism movements are not sustained over longer periods of time because activist movements are not purely a function of the campus environment; external forces, such as the media, matter in sustaining student activism (Semmel & Gitlin, 1983). Also, since students make up activist movements in college, the movement's life span is directly

impacted by the departure of its students. Social class is also a mediating factor as some students must spend their time working and have limited time to participate. Other students who receive financial support from the institution may not feel safe to participate in activism. Finally, student activist movements are also often tethered to larger social and political issues and seek to influence developments beyond the limits of the university (Altbach, 1989). As an example, debates about people's rights to free speech are occurring at colleges across the country as students who invite controversial speakers to their campuses are met with protest (Bauer-Wolf, 2017). In the fall 2017 semester, students at the University of California – Berkeley protested controversial speaker Milo Yiannopoulis and successfully shut down the event where he was scheduled to speak (c.f. Payne, 2019; Svrluga, 2017).

Free speech debate is also echoed in the national news scene, as evidenced by contentions around football star Colin Kaepernick's decision to kneel during the United States' national anthem (Strauss, 2017). This connection to larger social issues beyond the boundaries of the university is also examined in a quantitative analysis of how three activists group's experiences used social media for activism (Velasquez & LaRose, 2015). Using survey data of 222 student activists, researchers found that social media political efficacy, or a person's belief that social media posts about politics influence their political environment, was positively related to success in activist experiences using social media. This is especially important today where hash tag culture can quickly mobilize people in cyberspace. Although websites like Facebook and Twitter were important platforms where activism was successful, social media activism is at the mercy of current trending topics, which dominate the social media landscape at unpredictable lengths of time (Gerbaudo, 2012). Under these conditions, student activist's social media campaigns must be highly strategic, fast-paced, and connected to current trends in the larger sociopolitical

landscape. It should also be noted that alongside their undergraduate peers, graduate students are effective activists within campus communities as well. (Dache-Gerbino et al., 2018). In their mixed methods study utilizing field notes and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) data, researchers examined the ways graduate students brought the classroom into the community of Ferguson, MO to support activism after the unlawful killing of Michael Brown at the hands of police (Dache-Gerbino et al., 2018). The authors situate their findings within Hooks' (1994) notion of teaching to transgress, where professors are willing to take risks and make their classrooms sites of resistance. In this way, experiences within the classroom work to transform the curriculum to be more just, challenging the systems of domination that influence oppression at the college level (hooks, 1994).

Most research on college student activism remains concentrated on the period of activism beginning in the late 1960s. From this historical perspective, it is clear that little has changed from that time to the present: students still face similar issues around politics, college affordability, access, etc. The studies employed both qualitative and quantitative methodological approaches and produced complementary findings that suggest student activists are powerful in creating changes on college campuses and in the broader social communities to which they belong. Although researchers rarely disaggregated the experiences of students of color from the broader student body, they were able to make strong inferences about their contributions to the college activism landscape. Deeper investigation of the experiences of students of color, particularly Black students, can encourage thoughtful engagement from administrators, staff, faculty, and students in their pursuits for social justice for all.

Black college student activism. According to a national freshman survey about student activist aptitudes, Black students are twice as likely to participate in student protests than their

White peers (Eagan et al., 2015). Black student activism has been effective and has resulted in both structural and cultural shifts on college campuses (Biondi, 2012; Rogers, 2012). In the spring of 1968, Black students at Columbia University successfully protested the lack of resources available to students in the Black areas of campus. Their work produced a Black studies program (Franklin, 2003). In collaboration with their non-Black peers, the same occurred at the UW in 1969; a yearlong protest resulted in the creation of the African American studies department (Shields, 2015). As Black student populations rise at colleges across the country, particularly in the PWIs Black people were previously excluded from, they are expected to assimilate to the current hegemonic culture already living on campus (Franklin, 2003). Instead, Black students protested this expectation and demanded Black faculty, staff, and students, inclusion of Black ideas in academic curriculum, and facilities safe from harm (Patton, 2005). By the late 1960s, colleges started to get on board and the first Black cultural centers and departments of African American studies were founded (Ladson-Billings, 2012; Patton, 2005). One of the first in the nation resulted from the 1969 protests at UW (Shields, 2015). Today, many universities house a Black cultural center, multicultural center, or the like.

The contributions of Black student activism are not only felt for Black students. Cultural centers for Latinx, Asian, and many other groups were subsequently developed (Patton & Hannon, 2008). This is perhaps best understood in the defining of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement as a network rather than a movement by co-founder Patrice Cullors-Brignac (Khan-Cullors, 2016). A network approach recognizes that constituents reside at different ideological intersections in relation to the issue and, when paired with skillful implementation of technological resources, maximizes individual's and group's impacts no matter the depth. The BlackLivesMatter network consists of disparate groups unified around one common goal: to

raise public awareness about the lack of justice for Black victims and families killed in America, and to challenge dominant ideologies that position Black people as without value in American society (Taylor, 2016; White, 2016). College students have also participated in the BlackLivesMatter network. In one quantitative analysis of 533 Black and Latino students' involvement in the #BlackLivesMatter Movement and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Movement, researchers found that Black and Latino students reported more involvement with BlackLivesMatter than DACA (Hope, Keels, & Durkee, 2016). Translating the ideas of the network to their campuses, Black students across the nation sparked dialogue about the value of Black students in college. They have challenged college communities to consider Black student's contributions as valuable and to produce college environments and resources that expect and respect Black student involvement.

The studies reviewed in this section provide information about the historical and contemporary efforts of Black college activists. Although it is clear that Black student activist experiences have influenced major shifts in the college environment, extant research on Black college student activism does not currently disaggregate Black women's experiences from others. The absence of specific studies about Black women's activist experiences in college creates both a skewed representation of Black student's experiences, since Black men leaders are seen more often than Black women leaders, and an incomplete depiction of social movements over time, since Black women's experiences are especially raced and gendered. The absence of specific studies of Black women could also render them invisible in social movements. As we continue to theorize campus activism, it is important to understand the people who make up the movements and to recognize Black women's efforts within activism. If college constituents

deeply consider the experiences of Black women, and make visible their specific participatory behaviors, the resultant changes are liberative for all (White, 2016).

Institutional Responses to Activism in College

In the wake of campus unrest, universities must be strategic in their responses to all forms of student activism. As student groups across the nation continue to demand accountability from administrators on issues of inclusion and demand that their experiences and contributions be honored and respected on campus, institutional responses to these students' activist efforts become increasingly relevant. One study examined the institutional responses to a single activist event at a large public university (Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016). The study found that administrative responses often recentered majority culture by placing systemic issues, experienced by oppressed groups for generations, on the backs of students of color. The induction of cultural awareness and bias response programs staffed by students of color is a strong example of this. These students are expected to facilitate dialogue about injustice and inclusion, to share their personal experiences with others, and to give grace to *learning* students as they unlearn oppression (Commodore et al., 2017. Although the study examined only one activist movement at one institution, its findings are mirrored in the experiences of students today. During their 2016 presentation at ASHE, researchers reviewed emails from university administrators using discourse analysis of text and found that an institution's students of color were negatively impacted by written communication to students. As an example, the presenters claimed that in emails about campus crimes, the names of students of color were disproportionately released when compared to their White counterparts (Forbes & Rogers, 2016). When institutional administrators further marginalize disempowered student groups, developing

a sense of understanding around institutional responses becomes crucial for campus sustainability.

From a historical perspective, the rise of Black cultural centers and African American Studies departments are direct structural and curricular responses to student activism. Black cultural centers provide more than sanctuary for Black students on campus. They are also spaces that signal to Black students that they belong, providing a sense of ownership on campus, a place that is "ours" (Patton, 2006). Black cultural centers tend to be positively impactful in Black students' initial transitions to college and also serve as a safe haven for Black student interests on campus (Patton, 2006a). In another study about Black cultural centers, Patton (2006) suggested that more than simple sanctuary for Black students, Black cultural centers should also be regarded as high quality educational spaces for all students, Black and non-Black. These centers often partner with academic entities on campus, including African American Studies programs and their faculty, student researchers, etc. They may also house robust digital and print libraries with information about Black student's histories and experiences in that context. In spring 2018, Vanderbilt University added three dedicated spaces to their cultural center. The walls of each space are lined with the history of Black students at Vanderbilt (Moran, 2018).

Activism has been a mainstay in institutions of higher education since the Civil Rights Movements of the 1960s. It is reasonable to expect that institutional responses to activism have a long history in the college landscape. Institutional responses take shape in numerous ways, from individual sanctions to structural/environmental adjustments. Although little research examines these responses specifically, research suggests that institutional responses to activism often perpetuate dominant ideologies and centralize dominant thinking regardless of their ethical position. Intentional study of institutional responses needs to expand to include more about

students, staff, and faculty perceptions toward institutional responses. In relation to the current research, further study of supportive faculty and staff might reveal opportunities for partnerships across constituency groups in higher education.

Summary

The goal of this study is to shine a specific light on Black women in college. Specifically, this study expands what is known by examining Black women's activist experiences in college. Although there is a growing body of research on student activism, particularly in diverse environments, I found only two articles that focused on American Black women's activists in college (Flowers, 2005; Mavuso, 2017). Upon review of literature about Black college women, college student activism, and institutional responses to activism, we know that the college landscape is irreversibly changed by the presence of Black women. Black women have widened access to higher education for women and People of Color, they have been actively engaged in social issues on and off campus, and do so in the absence of strong resources or networks of support. The literature supports notions that students are powerful change agents. Student activists have influenced changes since their inception, and Black students have been especially important in college activism since the Civil Rights Movement. Black activism was essential in the establishment of Black cultural centers and Black studies programs, and continues to impact college campuses today. Studies about college student activism rarely examine institutional responses. Rightfully so, the research situates student experiences at the center of their inquiry. Critical investigation of these responses is important in understanding the role institutions play in creating the safe learning environments they promise students who choose to enroll. As the growing bodies of research in these areas continue to take shape, researchers should be conscious of Black women's intersectional realities. They should continue to problematize Black women's

representation in college and challenge the traditional modes of thought that cause psychosocial stress on Black college women. Future study should disaggregate student's activist experiences based on race and gender and bring stories of institutional support from faculty and staff into the fold. In doing so, knowledge about Black women's contributions to higher education and opportunities to engage Black women activists as leaders in college only becomes clearer.

Chapter III: Theoretical Approach

Black Feminist Thought (BFT) is born of a primarily feminist concern: Black women should create their own standards for evaluating Black womanhood and what they create (Collins, 1986). Consisting of ideas produced by Black women, BFT works to clarify a standpoint of and for Black women (Collins, 2000). Anthologies of Black feminist voices provide strong foundation for understanding Black women's lived experiences and contributions to American society (e.g., Guy-Sheftalll, 1995; James & Busia, 1993). Through such writings, it is apparent that Black feminists have firmly established their viewpoints about the condition of Black women in American society.

Patricia Hill Collins (1986) defines BFT using three underlying assumptions. First, while others may record Black Feminist Thought, Black women always produce it. Because their site of oppression exists at the intersection of race and gender, Black women are uniquely qualified to make claims about Black women. The second assumption is that Black women possess a unique perspective about their experiences and that there will be certain commonalities of perception shared by Black women. This claim extends the first by adding in collective knowledge about the social conditions of Black women. For example, common notions about Black mothering are informed by generations of shared history regarding the raising of Black children. Finally, the third assumption claims that while living life as Black women may produce certain commonalities of outlook, the intersecting relationships of class, religion, age, and sexual orientation that shape individual Black women's lives result in different expressions of these common themes. Following the previous example about mothering, although most Black mothers in today's sociopolitical climate worry about the risk that their child might be killed simply because they are Black, some Black families experience economical advancement, live in

"safer" communities, etc. This difference in perspective might temper Black women's beliefs about their child's safety.

BFT is simultaneously a critical analysis of the past, present, and future conditions of Black women that explores several themes, giving parity to the social conditions of Black women in a given time (Collins, 1986). Multiple key themes emerge in Black feminist epistemologies. This study focuses on three overarching themes with specific interest in Black women activists. The first theme, *self-definition and self-valuation*, involves challenging externally defined stereotypical images of Black women and replacing those externally derived images with authentic Black female imagery. In her 1851 address to a crowd of nearly all-White woman, Sojourner Truth asked, *"Ain't I a woman?"* In doing so, she started a conversation about the ways that Blackness has excluded her from social privileges customary to White women (Guy-Sheftall, 1995). Subsequently, bell hooks (1981) wrote on the social conditions of Black women. She suggested that combating issues like sexism and the devaluation of Black women, or the persistent and pervasive nature of patriarchy, was essential in shaping Black women's sense of self and value.

The second theme examines the *interlocking nature of oppression*. This viewpoint shifts focus from investigating individual systems of racism, classism, and gender inequality to investigating the links between the systems, placing no form of oppression over another. This is echoed in the writings of Elise Johnson McDougald (1925). McDougald wrote, "Negro women are a race which is free neither economically, socially, nor spiritually… the Negro woman has been forced to submit to over-powering conditions…both from without and within her group." In this example, Black women are impacted by the simultaneity of racial and gendered oppression.

The final theme, understanding the *importance of Black women's culture*, involves

redefining and explaining Black women's cultural significance. Most importantly, knowledge about and celebration of Black women's culture may be especially critical in Black women's self-definitions and self-valuations. Today the social media hashtag #BlackGirlMagic has promoted positive images of Black women's culture. The idea that Black women see themselves as magical can influence young Black women to empower themselves to that level. Black feminists have uncovered unexplored Black women experiences and identified relevant areas of social relations, which feed self-definition and self-valuation in handling the interlocking, simultaneity of oppression they feel.

Furthermore, BFT extends traditional notions about what counts as activism. Traditional notions of activist work paint a picture of a sort of "burner activism" where students' activist approaches challenge existing societal power structures, including the rules governing activist work on campuses. Students might intentionally go directly against their institution's protest policies; they may sit-in or block traffic on a major road (Purcell, 2003). In contrast, another traditional form of activist work, "builder activism," occurs in the aftermath of burner activism with aims of building relationships that might support future activism (Purcell, 2003). Builder activism can look like petitioning others, starting a new organization, or producing research. BFT also includes the idea that nontraditional forms of activism are still activism. Possibilities for activism exist within multiple structures of domination (Collins, 1986). This means that Black women's choice to preserve their voice under harsh conditions is also a form of activism that should be respected and recognized.

Consciousness situates Black women apart from one another in a given time. Their degree of "wokeness," or their awareness of social issues impacting Black people of their time, is especially important. Collins (2000) describes knowledge as a key element mediating

understanding and responsiveness to the oppressions that Black women experience. Depending on their understanding of themselves, their histories, and the choices they have, Black women develop spheres of influence that may or may not authenticate Blackness in their lives. Sister circles play an important role here, as Black women's interaction with their peers are simultaneously validated by the sense of community that exists therein (Winkle-Wagner, 2009). The work of constructing positive spheres of influence rich with Blackness may also be considered a form of activism, as it affects the perceptions Black women hold regarding choices offered by oppressive structures and the choices they actually make.

Collins (2000) makes clear the importance of knowledge for empowerment. For Black women working through self-definition and self-determination, developing a deep knowledge of the self is hard work requiring a duality of change. Activist work supports this change. Both the individual consciousness of Black women and the unjust social structures where they operate must undergo transformation. This transformation could support a paradigmatic shift in how to conceptualize power relationships and address the power dynamics that inform what counts as knowledge. Collins (2000) describes power as, "An intangible entity that circulates within a particular matrix of domination and to which individuals stand in varying relationships" (p. 274).

In BFT, power exists in four domains: structural, disciplinary, interpersonal, and hegemonic. The structural domain is interested in understanding how social institutions are organized to reify Black women's subordination over time. From a historical analysis of Black women's lack of access to higher education to the silencing of their theoretical and practical contributions, systemic oppression is of special interest to Black college women. Structural power lives in these oppressive actions. The disciplinary domain is interested in management of power relationships; it is a form of modern day social control. By relying on bureaucratic

hierarchies and techniques for surveillance, social and political institutions can control population size and content. As evidenced by the over-policing of Black girls in K-12 schools, controlling the narrative about Black women as aggressive and untenable in schools, administrators are able to rationalize abuses of power against Black women. The interpersonal domain of power involves seducing people to replace their individual and cultural ways of knowing with the dominant ways of knowing. For example, when Black people are able to economically elevate themselves, the cultural traditions of wealth might contend with community-oriented cultural traditions common in communities of color.

Lastly, the hegemonic domain deals with ideology, culture, and consciousness with an aim to justify practices linking oppression across domains. To maintain power, dominant groups use stereotypes against minoritized peoples and manipulate ideas to support their leadership over others. For example, dominant groups insinuate hierarchical dimensions between races by valuing, overtly and explicitly, Asian Americans over Blacks. As a result, Asian American women experience the world differently than Black women and may also derogate Black women in their own self-definitions (Collins, 2000). The hegemonic domain is also understood in the case of multiracial Black women who might experience Blackness differently than other Black women. Multiracial Black women's other race(s) are often valued over their Blackness and their more desirable characteristics are attributed to their mixed race rather than their Blackness. In an essay about my experiences with colorism as a Black and Japanese-American woman, I described how my hair is seen as "good hair," influenced by Robinson's (2011) work on "good hair," and how my choice to wear it naturally is welcome in all spaces. At the same time, Black women's hair that is kinkier in nature is not always welcomed in the same spaces (Ota-Malloy, 2020; Robinson, 2011). This distinction between good and bad hair is rooted in Eurocentric

beauty standards and serves as a basis for discrimination against Black women's natural untamed hair and preference for my multiracial hair.

In qualitative research, Black Feminist Thought is an ever-evolving tool through which Black women experiences become clearer. Created by Black women for Black women, BFT, from a critical perspective, gives power to Black women's descriptions of themselves and their experiences, positioning them as experts in their cultural lives. In this study, I used BFT to redefine conceptions of Black women activists in college, placing them within their greater contexts and time. Through this work, I expand BFT to encompass Black women's activist contributions in college for the first time.

Chapter IV: Methodology

This qualitative study explored the lived experiences, impacts, and media representations of Black women participating in activism on college campuses. The following research questions guided this inquiry: (1) how do Black women describe their participation in college student activism at a predominantly White institution? (2) From the perspective of the women, how are they impacted by participation in college student activism? (3) How, if at all, are Black women's activism experiences represented in campus media?

Rationale for a Qualitative Study

In this study, I sought a critical understanding of the experiences of Black women as activists at a PWI. From the perspective of Black women, I uncover their motivations to participate in activism and perceptions about their contributions to activism. Additionally, I brought into view the personal impacts of Black women's participation in activism on college campuses. There has been previous research on student activism in college (Arthur, 2011; Ropers-Huilman et al., 2005; Velasquez & LaRose, 2015), although few specifically focused on Black college women (Flowers, 2005; Mavuso, 2017). While activism within the university commonly has a goal to directly impact current students on campus, e.g., challenging tuition increases, fighting for equity in admissions, or specialized campus resources, campus activism is often tethered to the broader social issues affecting people not enclosed within the context of the university. College student activism can influence and be influenced by modern social conditions, and at the same time, college student activism has a horizon; activist movements are born from students, sustained by them, and often wither away as students graduate or burn out (Altbach, 1989). From a historical perspective, Black women have played an essential role in social activism, addressing oppression across identities, and their work was often undervalued

and has gone unrecognized over time. When Black women's contributions go unseen, it is difficult to make claims about Black women's contributions to society as we experience it today. This makes it easier to ignore the importance of Black women in changing social conditions. Therefore, it is important to understand the qualitative experiences of Black college women who give of themselves through activism, and do so using their voices and experiences.

I used qualitative inquiry to understand, beyond any quantitative measure, people's interpretations and meaning-making of their experiences of and in the social world (Merriam, 2009). Ontology refers to the study of the nature and properties of the social world. It is concerned with analyzing the various entities in the world that arise from social interaction. A prominent topic in social ontology is the analysis of social groups (Epstein, 2018). From an ontological perspective, qualitative research allows inquiry into how people understand the nature of reality; it positions the person's conceptions of the world as methodologically important (Pasque, Carducci, Kuntz, & Gildersleeve, 2012). Critical qualitative research gives greater import to the historical, sociopolitical, and intercultural complexities that impact in/equity in people's realities. With interest in connected relationships between historical and contemporary times, critical approaches work to confront the social norms that produce/reproduce oppression (Cannella et al., 2015). Furthermore, a critical approach is liberative, bringing the voices of oppressed and invisible communities to focus and seeking solutions to issues they raise (Cannella et al., 2015). Disrupting traditional divisions between social sciences, humanities, and biological sciences, critical inquiry's inter/multidisciplinary reach connects concepts of race, class, and gender to contexts and systems of inequality within the world.

The role that both participants and researchers play is distinctly different in critical qualitative inquiry, which I used for this study, as compared to traditional qualitative inquiry. The participants played a more integral role in the research process and the researcher has responsibility to act and create change for participants (Denzin & Giardina, 2015); the relationship is more reciprocal. For my study, I relied heavily on narratives of Black women who participated in activism in college, their conceptions about their experiences therein, and their understandings of internal and external impacts.

A critical approach situates this study within Pasque et.al's (2012) distinct philosophical assumptions and scholarly principles: (a) that oppression is multifaceted and reproduced by subscription to dominant ideologies, and (b) that mainstream acceptance of data as objective fact reproduces social oppression (Kincheloe, McLaren, Denzin, & Lincoln, 2005). A critical approach is particularly important when examining the experiences of Black college women. A critical approach made way for analysis of the history of racism and racial construction in the United States with connection to identity development, experiences, and impacts for Black people on and off campus. By placing Black women's narratives within the larger social context and existing systems of inequality through the use of critical social theory, new connections are made that may influence pragmatic scholarly and professional work for this group.

A comparative case study (CCS) design is best suited to conduct this research because I seek an understanding that is unbounded, allowing deep consideration to a broader range of data within the ecology of Black women's campus-based activist experiences at a PWI (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2016). Most case study methodologists support an approach that is bounded by both space and time (Creswell, 2008; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2015). CCS diverges from traditional case study inquiry, and its original iteration, by bringing into view the horizontal, vertical, and

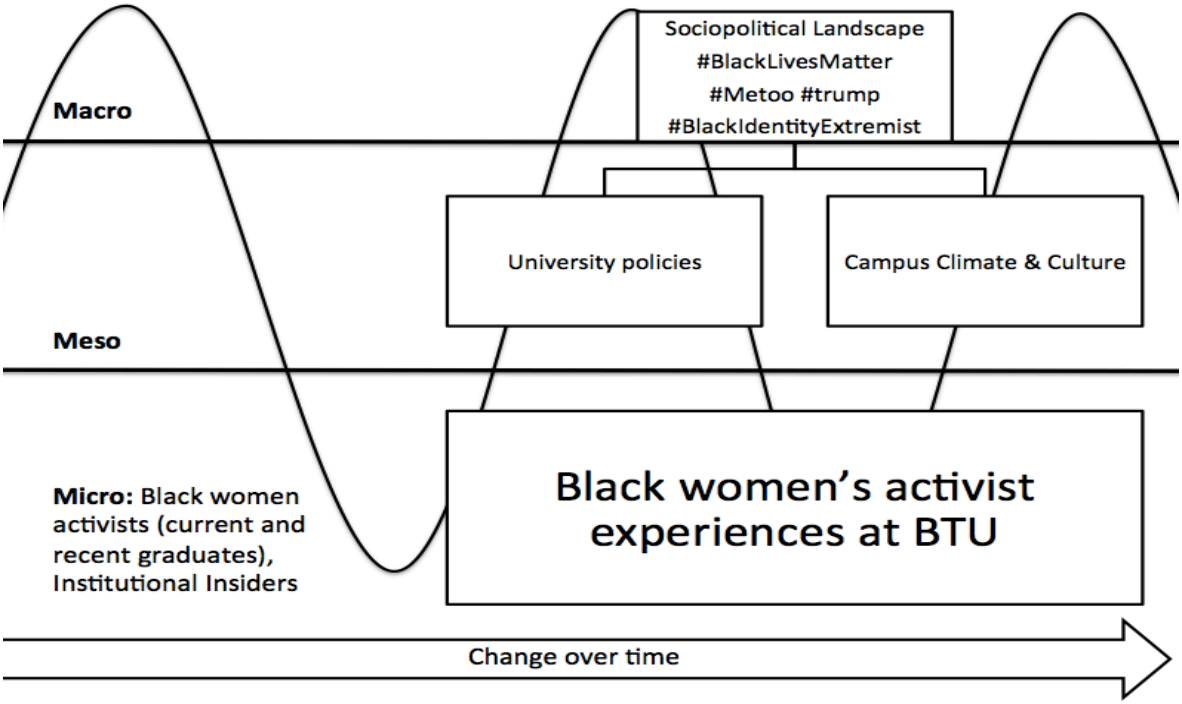
transversal relationships within the larger case (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2006). In the absence of set boundaries on what a case can be, CCS encourages comparisons across social contexts in order to consider how the data relate to larger societal issues. The vertical analysis requires simultaneous focus on the scaled ecology (micro/meso/macro-spheres) of any given experience, policy, or practice. The microsphere includes influences that most directly impact the experiences of Black women in college. In this case, the microsphere includes the student's peers, institutional insiders, advisors, and social/academic groups, all in the campus context itself. All of the interactions within and between a student's microsystems influence their mesosphere. Interactions between students and their universities, such as protests and other activist approaches, occur in the mesosphere, and also include the campus policies, culture, and climate produced from those interactions.

Finally, the macrosphere is made of the ever-changing sociocultural contexts of Black women activists. For example, the impact of the hashtag on the international social media landscape has been massive since its first use eleven years ago (Romano, 2017). A hashtag is a word or string of words preceded by the pound sign (#) used to organize associated social media such as a tweet, Facebook, or Instagram post. The rapid and rampant successes of activist movements such as #Blacklivesmatter, #MeToo, and #BringBackOurGirls are examples of moments when political activism, hashtags, and action converge. In CCS, the transversal analysis "historically situates the processes or relations under consideration" (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2016, p. 3). Illustrating the transversal analysis of this study, I examined the ways in which Black women's activism in college has changed over time, including their motivations and impacts on curricular and non-curricular developments at the site. The horizontal analysis compares similar experiences within distinct socially constructed locations (Massey, 2005). This study does not

contain a horizontal analysis because I sought an understanding of the unique experience of Black women activists at a PWI. While not generalizable, inferences made about these women's contributions may be mirrored within similar campus contexts. Though I do not utilize the horizontal analysis as described by Bartlett & Vavrus (2016), I was able to make horizontal-like inferences via the vertical and transversal perspectives. In viewing two distinct moments in time (the 1960's and 2010's) I compared across the vertical axis (micro, meso, and macro) the experiences of Black women at BTU during these distinct times. In essence, each snapshot of the institution, from the 60's and today, was compared as an individual case. In doing so I interrogated the ways in which the history of activism impacts today's college women's activist motivations and the actions the take.

The vertical analysis across the micro, meso, and macro spheres in this study helped to point to conflicting epistemologies that undergird practices or policies at each level. Also, vertical analysis allowed me to problematize the tensions existing between motivations, needs, and actions in each sphere of influence. Through the transversal analysis in this study, I examined the ways in which Black women's activism at BTU has evolved over time, impacted the broader campus community, and been represented in campus communications and media. These axial comparisons are not mutually exclusive; they also interact with one another, overlapping or blurring based on various sociopolitical factors. For example, university policies are influenced by and influence the sociopolitical landscape. Those same university policies are structured to address student behaviors and also inspire students to act. Simultaneously, the same sociopolitical landscape can shape students' daily lives on campus and student activism can in turn put necessary pressure on the sociopolitical landscape. Figure 1 below illustrates my approach to this case study.

Figure 4.1. CCS Depiction Of Black Women's Activist Experiences At BTU



Research Site

Big Time University (BTU) is a large, predominantly White, land grant institution in the Midwest region of the United States. As a flagship university in its region, BTU confers baccalaureate and graduate degrees to its approximately thirty thousand students across several academic colleges. The population of Black students is approximately 2%. Student activism at BTU is generally initiated and sustained by its students, but is also addressed by university leadership, including its faculty and staff. Black-led student activism has occurred on campus since at least the 1960s, when the university's Black students protested, like their peers at universities across the country, for the right to sit at lunch counters. Such activist work was instrumental in shaping the academic experiences of Black women at BTU today. BTU is an ideal location for this study because the institution is seen as a relatively common representation of a PWI, particularly in the Midwestern United States.

Participant Recruitment

Participants included current BTU Black women, alumna, and institutional insiders. Participants in this study were selected if they identified as a Black woman (see glossary of terms), they completed at least one semester living on campus as an enrolled student, and they currently lived within the United States. Current undergrad and graduate students as well as recent alumni (up to three years post-graduation) were included in this study. Including women at these different stages was supportive of both the vertical and transversal analyses. Together the women described their current activist experiences (current students) and their reflections about college activism (recent alumna), including personal and social changes over time. Distance learners, or students who had never lived on campus, were excluded from this study because their campus experiences are often vastly different than traditional on-campus learners (Valentine, 2002). The study was limited to students living within the United States so that I could situate the study within the country's greater socio-historical context and add to the growing understanding of Black women in college. Black male intuitional insiders, men having similar knowledge about Black women's experiences at BTU, were excluded because they lacked the significant lens of womanhood. From a critical perspective, notions about Black women should be formulated using the experiences of Black women as told by Black women (Collins, 2000).

I recruited 20 students who had completed at least one semester living on campus because these students would have more on-campus experience from which to draw. The women likely have participated in some form of activism on campus. Currently enrolled students were useful because their experiences were freshly linked to the contemporary social conditions of college. Their voices were the backbone of this study and have impact across all spheres of

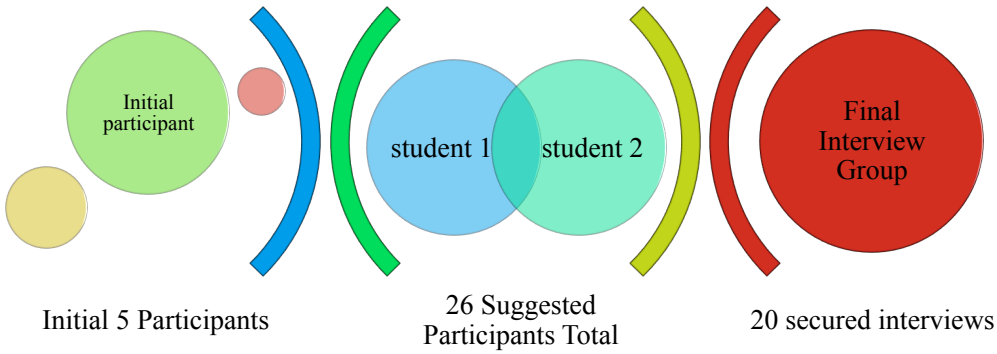
influence in the vertical analysis. The inclusion of five recent alumnae supported the transversal analysis of this study. Over time as a person's understanding of their identities mature, meaning associated with past experiences is shaped by new understandings and reflections of the lived world (Daudelin, 2000; McLean & Pratt, 2006).

Additionally, I interviewed a smaller group of five institutional insiders. For this study, institutional insiders were defined as Black women who have strong historical knowledge about Black women at BTU. They were in positions on campus as staff or faculty, had earned and been rewarded emeritus status, or had a recorded history of activism on campus. Insights from these women addressed both the vertical and transversal analyses of this study by providing a critical analysis of current and historical activism at the university. Data garnered from these women were especially useful in making inferences about the contextual nuances that motivate Black women's participation in activism and uncovering relationships between motivation and ecological context.

Since identifying as an activist on campus may carry unintended social and academic consequences for participants, the population of interest, i.e., Black women activists, is hidden (Salganik & Heckathorn, 2004). The women were purposefully selected. Purposeful selection is useful when persons are thoughtfully selected for their knowledge as it relates to the study (Suri, 2011). As a result, participants were selected using respondent-driven sampling, a purposeful sampling procedure seeking to eliminate well-known biases in its predecessor chain-referral approaches (e.g., snow-ball sampling). A hallmark of this sampling procedure is that it does not simply ask participants to provide names of other possible participants. Instead, I asked participants to invite their peers into the study – to bring them onboard (Heckathorn, 1997). Initial participants were five students that I have developed relationships with over the past four

years on campus. These relationships with students were built through my involvement across campus as a facilitator of Black student support groups, instructor of freshman seminars, supervisor of Black students at work, and through my participation in activist movements at their side. Using this method, I was able to collect contact information for 26 Black women and I secured 20 interviews of women from this pool. The students also shared names of institutional insiders who they know to have worked closely with Black women at the site. I was able to secure 5 institutional insider interviews from the 8 insider names provided by the women. Below is a visualization of my sampling method.

Figure 4.2. Depiction of sampling procedure



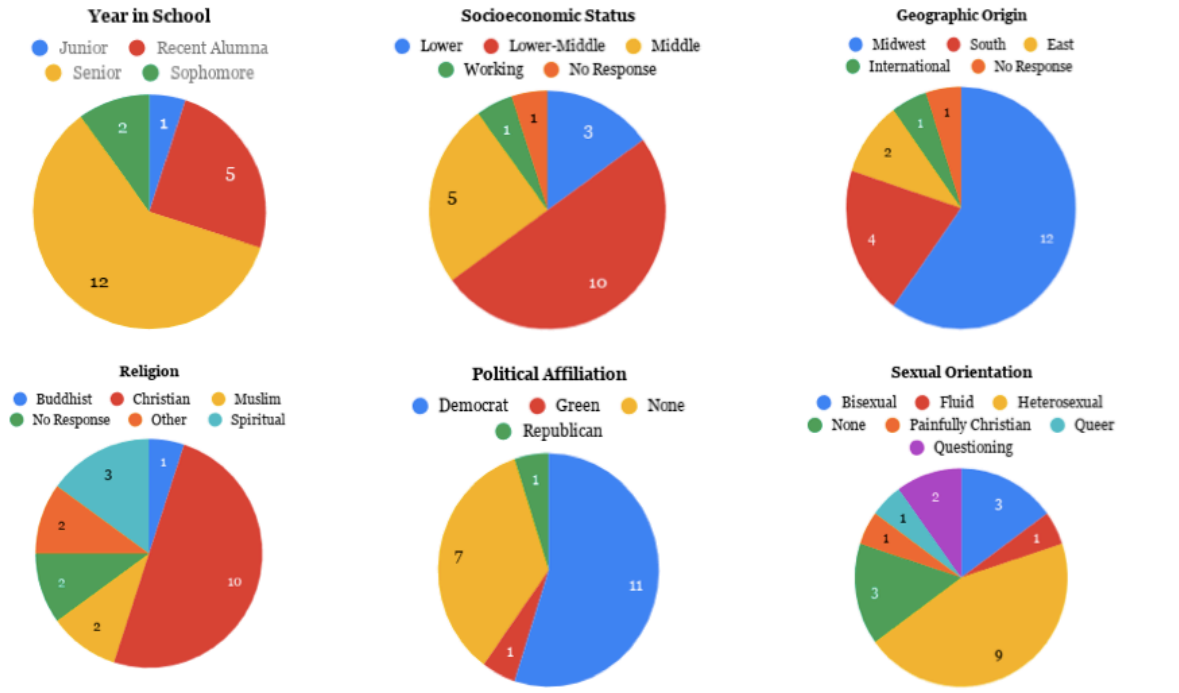
In many of these settings, there was a power dynamic at play; I may have been seen as having power or as a leader in these communities. Five initial contacts were made via email to prominent student activists on campus and I asked these initial participants to invite two other potential participants each. Another hallmark of Heckathorn's (1997) respondent-driven sampling approach is a primary and secondary incentive model. This incentive structure

supported compliance through group-mediated control where participants are rewarded for both their own participation and for the participation elicited from others (Heckathorn, 1990). Incentives were provided in this study in the form of $5 coffee shop gift cards. Participants were given $5 for their participation and another $5 for two additional participants, should they be successfully interviewed for the study. Under the advisement of one of the women initially contacted for this study, I was able to recruit many of the student participants by messaging them via social media platforms, i.e., Facebook and Instagram.

Student Participants

I interviewed 20 Black college women from Big Time University (BTU). To better understand the women represented in this study, I asked each participant to complete a brief demographic worksheet at the start of their interview. Figure 4.2 depicts some of the participant's demographic diversity.

Figure 4.3. Student Demographic Information



Although the majority of women self-identified as Black, the study includes women that identify as Black, Biracial, African, and African American. Out of all the participants (N=20), five were recent alumna of BTU, having graduated in the last two years. The overwhelming majority of participants were current seniors (n=12). In addition there were two sophomores and one junior as well. Half of the study participants saw themselves as lower-middle class (n=10), about a quarter as lower or working class (n=4), and the remaining students identified as middle class (n=5). For the most part, these socio-economic descriptors were also applied to and mirrored in family status, meaning families were not necessarily seen as better off financially than the college women themselves. Though several students shared that their parents and older siblings had attempted college, more than half of the study participants identified as first-generation college women (n=12).

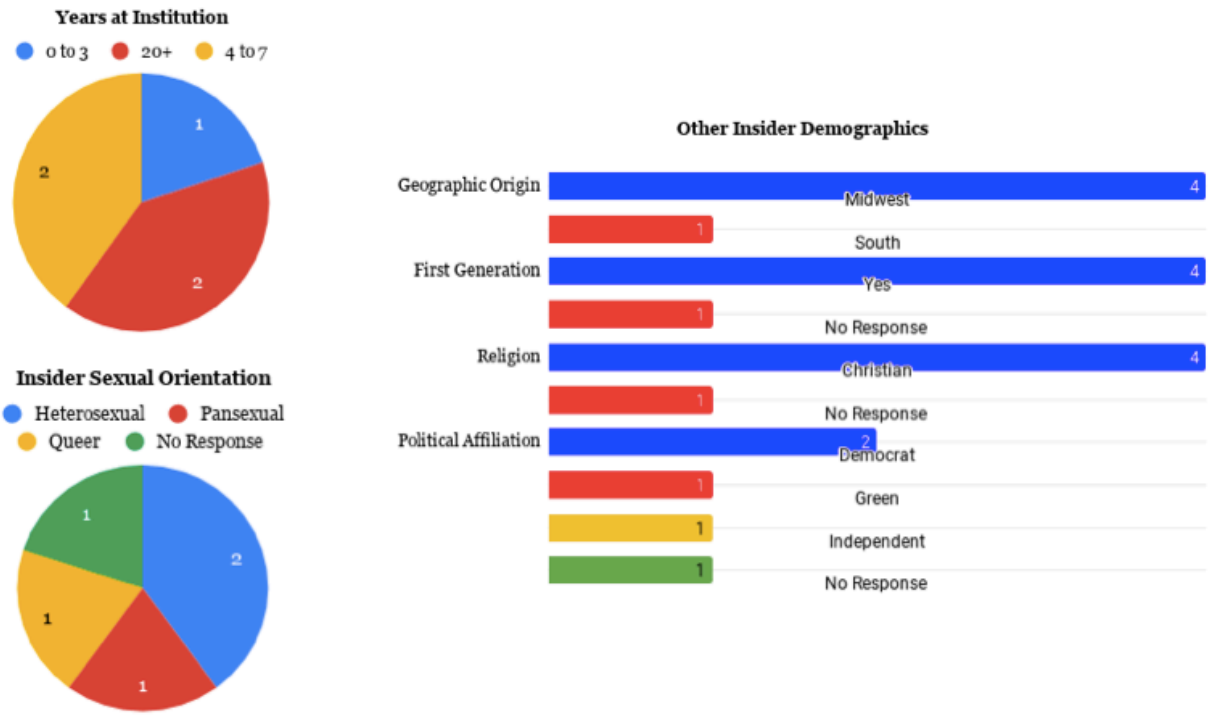
The women represented here were largely raised in the Midwest from Milwaukee, Madison, Kenosha, and Chicago. Another large group of women, nearly a quarter of participants, came to BTU from the South. Other women made their way to BTU from the East coast or abroad from Senegal, Nigeria, and Gambia. Twelve of the study's participants identified as Christian, although there was wide variation in their Christian involvement. Some of the women were culturally Christian and generally only celebrated Christian holidays, some went to church weekly, and some experienced Christianity as a painful reality in their lives. Two Muslim women and one atheist are also represented in this group. The remaining women described themselves as spiritual rather than religious. Interestingly, over a quarter of the study participants did not name a political party with which they are aligned (n=7). Of those who did, half of the women are democrats (n=11), one is republican, and one is aligned with the green party. Lastly, when asked about their sexuality, nine of twenty women stated they were heterosexual while the

remaining eleven participants were situated elsewhere on the spectrum of sexual orientation. Responses included queer, questioning, bisexual, fluid, and painfully Christian. There is some richness to the diversity among the women included in this study, as can be seen in all areas examined, except year in school since most of the study's participants are seniors at BTU.

Insider Participants

In order to explore a broader spectrum of Black women's experiences at BTU, I also interviewed five institutional insiders for this study. Institutional insiders were defined as women who worked directly with Black women at the site as faculty, staff, mentors, etc. These women have engaged with Black college women at BTU in several important ways. Figure 4.3 depicts some of the insider demographics.

Figure 4.4. Insider Demographics



Some of the insiders would be considered "Black history" themselves, having contributed to the BTU campus for more than 20 years. These women spoke from a place of remembrance

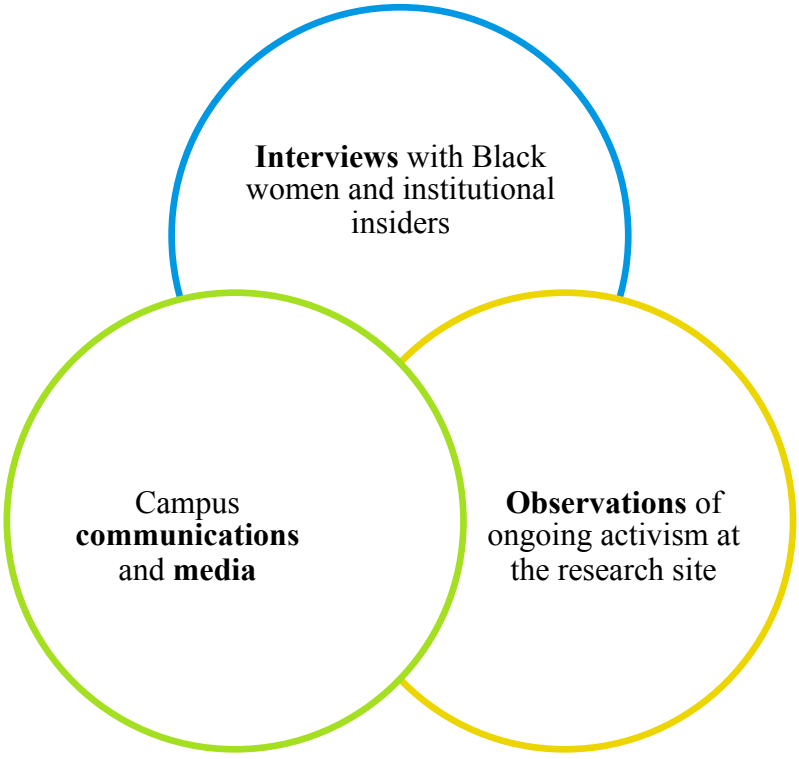
and offered insights into the study that otherwise might have been devoid. Serving in several capacities across campus, the insiders who participated in this study have been working on campus from three to more than 20 years. Two of five actually attended and obtained degrees from BTU. All but one of them earned an advanced degree. Like the student group, the insiders are a diverse group of Black women. One of the five women is a Biracial Black woman who, having been adopted and raised by White parents, saw herself as perpetually learning what Blackness means to her. This experience was a hallmark of the student group in women who also identified as Biracial. The insiders come from the Midwestern and Southern regions of the United States. Although they also have parents who started and dropped out of college, they all were the first in their family to complete a college degree. Politically, they see themselves as members of the democrat, independent, and green parties. Like the students included in the study, the insider group was also diverse regarding sexual orientation. They are heterosexual, queer, and pansexual women. Having been selected by the student group as institutional insiders, it may be so that the commonalities between the student and insider groups are not happenstance. Rather, it is these commonalities that bring the students and insiders together. As Black women on campus, the insiders still experience campus similarly to the students. Like in the student demographics of campus, the numbers of Black women staff and faculty are also small. Therefore, the need for community around their varying identities is real for both groups of women. The insiders all felt a responsibility to support the Black women on campus in establishing a sound community to nourish them throughout their time at BTU; they saw themselves as essential within these communities.

Data Collection

To construct an understanding of this experience, I utilized three forms of data collection:

interviews, observations, and current and archival artifacts (i.e., media, institutional policies/responses). The use of multiple data sources strengthened this study because it allowed analysis of information covering different aspects of the same experience or phenomenon (Maxwell, 2012). According to Greene (2008), these data sources should complement each other and expand understandings of the experience. In this approach, each data source contributes to a broader understanding of the experiences of Black women participating in activism in college. Figure 4.4 depicts the data sources I used to substantiate the claims in this study.

Figure 4.5. Data Sources Situated Within Today's Sociopolitical Landscape



Interviews. The interview was the primary mode of data collection for this study. Individual interviews facilitated the greatest opportunity to collect participant's understandings of their personal experiences (Maxwell, 2012). Interviews are also often the only way to garner descriptions of events, particularly those in the past. They make participant's observations of events and experiences accessible that the researcher may otherwise not be privy to (Weiss,

1994). To answer the questions of this research, I conducted 20, 60 – 120 minute, one-on-one semi-structured interviews with Black women at BTU. Additionally, I conducted five semi-structured interviews with BTU institutional insiders. Semi-structured interviews were well suited to the adaptation of the CCS method proposed here. While they provide a sense of consistency across interviews, semi-structured interviews simultaneously allowed freedom within the interview to naturally build conversational trust and construct knowledge (Maxwell, 2012). In total, I collected approximately 550 pages of data from these interviews.

The interview protocol for student participants and alumna was centered on the students' campus experiences, paying close attention to their descriptions of the campus environment and issues facing students at BTU, their personal communities, and their participation in campus activism. Through the interviews, I uncovered when and why Black women feel their participation is effective, or not, by asking participants to describe moments when they felt they were impactful and not impactful. I asked questions that got at their self-definitions, understandings of intersectional identities, and Black women's culture. In the interview, I also interrogated how their activism was situated within the domains of power as described in BFT. I asked questions about what types of student organizations and campus programming they sought, which provided a view of what spaces (i.e., forms, events, centers, discussions, etc.) Black women situate themselves on campus. I performed a words exercise with the study participants to explore the ways they define who they are as a person and who they are as an activist. They selected three words that defined their "activist" self and their "natural" self. Finally, I used interviews to get at how the participants were impacted by participating in activism on campus. The goal in interviewing institutional insiders was to expand understanding of the rich history of Black student activism at BTU as much as possible. In the semi-structured

interview, I asked deliberate questions about the issues that Black women face, the work they have done, and how insiders have played a role in that work. The insider's contributions complemented and expanded what was known from the student data.

In an effort to maintain a neutral playing field between the interviewee and myself, all interviews took place in a comfortable location of the participants' choosing. Most interviews took place at a campus library, but others took place at coffee shops and in the Black Cultural Center. Anyone not currently on campus was interviewed virtually via Skype, Google Hangout, or by phone. Although the process of signing consent forms and completing the demographic worksheet were more strenuous, virtual interviews were as productive as the in-person interviews were. All interviews were recorded using a portable recording device. By allowing participants some level of control during the interview process, they likely felt more comfortable and inclined to openly share their deepest reflections about their activist experiences on campus.

I offered follow up meetings that were intended to be focus groups that would be used both as data and as a form of member checking (Shenton, 2004). My idea for the follow up meetings was to offer an opportunity for participants to review their interview transcripts, communicate any additional reflections, and request necessary adjustments. The three meetings, scheduled in December and January, were unstructured, completely voluntary, and open to all interviewees on a drop-in basis. While I provided light refreshments, there was no additional incentive offered for participation. If preferred, I offered to meet one-on-one with interviewees as well. No participants attended these sessions. This could be due to scheduling – at the end of any semester, students were focused on final tasks for their classes and insiders were likely attending to end of term responsibilities as well. The last opportunity occurred at the end of winter break. Perhaps the participants had not returned to campus yet or had not viewed my

invitation in time. Some participants responded to my invitation declining participation but affirming my work. They trusted that I would "do right" by them and that I would use their contributions appropriately.

Observations. Observations produce direct learning about the behaviors of participants in a given context and provide opportunities to understand perspectives the participants may be reluctant to share (Maxwell, 2012). Intentional observation of study participants and campus demonstrations offered insights about how Black women's activist participation played out in real time. For this reason, I completed three observations of activism at BTU including a march, student government meeting, and Black History Month event. I also collected data via field notes (Carspecken, 1996), which included descriptions of Black women present (including women who did not participate in interviews) and their participation therein. Paired with data from the annual BTU Campus Climate Survey, I observed campus protests and other activist demonstrations between September 2018 and February 2019. To bolster access to observational opportunities, I joined listservs and sought organizational Instagram pages and information about demonstrations on campus as they occurred. Cumulatively, observation notes and all other relevant data gave context around the specific campus culture that directly impacts activism opportunities and its general necessity. When combined with data from interviews, and media analyses, the resulting inferences provided a holistic understanding of the case at hand.

Summary of Observations

Over the period of data collection, September 2018 to February 2019, I became aware of only two organized "traditional" activist experiences on campus, a decline from previous semesters at BTU. It may be the case that other events occurred that I was not aware of and that other events occurred that are not traditionally seen as activism. First, in response to the

confirmation of supreme court justice Brett Kavanagh and his allegations (Kessler, 2018), multiple groups including the Bailout the People Movement (BOPM), which is a national network that was founded in 2008 to oppose the trillion dollar bank bail out and to demand that the people get bailed out instead, the International Women's Strike, and two campus-based student organizations with interest in women's rights organized a walkout in solidarity with survivors of sexual violence, allies, and Dr. Christine Blasey Ford. The walkout took place on the BTU campus and ended at the state capital building. Second, students from several campus organizations attended a student government meeting to protest a new policy regarding campus meal plans for first-year students. In observing these activist experiences, I saw Black women as participants in these events but not as leaders, meaning they did not address the crowd or appear to have coordinated any element of the event. While their presence was undoubtedly important to the outcome of each activist experience, it was clear to me that the women did not participate with the same vigor I had witnessed in previous years at BTU around more relevant topics like racial inclusion and access. In observing these events, I saw little to no involvement from campus administrators or campus police. The campus administrators and police did not deem either event "unlawful." In the absence of additional organized protests and the like during the fall 2018 semester, other forms of activism as defined in this study did take place at BTU. There were also more "non-traditional" forms of activism. I observed Black women organizing programs around issues such as mental health, financial freedom, and HIV/AIDS awareness. I attended a panel discussion that was organized by Black students at BTU about the history of activism at BTU comparing the past to contemporary times. The panel was lead by two Black women, one of whom was interviewed for this study. Later I will make assertions regarding a shift in forms of activism in the current academic year from previous years.

Campus communications and media. The final source of data that I used in this study, current and archival media, complemented the interviews and observations by situating the experiences that Black women described within the larger contextual realities of the institution. This information included media representations about activist movements, e.g., school newspapers, institutional policies, reports, and responses. This information was sourced from BTU libraries, archives, and campus newspapers. Data about institutional responses, i.e., email notification of events, condemnation or support of, materials directed at student activists, etc., were collected from the women whenever possible. For example, a participant mentioned an email she received from campus and said, "I did not like the way the university responded to our protest. The email they sent was not helpful." In this case, I requested that that participant share the email that she described. When students did not have the materials needed, or did not feel inclined to share, I requested specific responses from the university staff. Finally, institutional practices and policies that specifically address activism on campus, i.e., protest policies, trainings, etc., were also collected. I gathered this information as it materialized through the interview process. For example, a participant named an artifact that they felt expressed the university's standing beyond their well-known campus rules regarding activism: "They gave us baseball cards with guidelines for what is and is not lawful at our protest." In this case, the student did not have the baseball card so I requested it from the division of student life.

Two campus newspapers service BTU students: The Proclaimer and The Red Bird. The approach to collecting this data was rooted in the descriptions of Black women participating in this study. From an ecological perspective, I was specifically interested in how the experiences they named were represented across campus media. When participants spoke about specific moments or activist events, I was able to layer what they said with this data. To do so, I sought

news related to those experiences. I made inferences about how Black women are or are not represented in the telling of the same stories within the same experience. Taken as a whole, these materials complement and enlarge what is known about the experiences of Black women activists at BTU.

Summary of Campus Media and Communications

To understand Black women's representation at BTU, I collected materials from the campus' archive library, including their physical and online offerings. Based on direction provided by students and insiders in their interviews, I also reviewed materials from campus newspapers and collected campus communications such as emails, departmental newsletters, and letters to or from students and campus administrators. I sought, in each item reviewed, to understand how Black women's participation was represented, even when they were altogether absent. I spent approximately 16 hours at the campus archives and had two individual meetings with archive staff. Together, this information was helpful in creating a view of Black student activism at BTU from the 1960s to 2019, more than a 50-year span.

The first Black person known to have graduated from Big Time University left the institution in 1875 (Long, n.d.). Given this approximately 144 year history of Black enrollment at BTU, it was disheartening to see how few materials exist in the BTU archive that clearly depict the experiences of Black collegians at the institution, particularly in relation to the sea of documented experiences of White students at the site. Universities that do the work to preserve and promote their institutional histories do so through the documentation of historical moments, traditions, campus buildings, and campus personalities (Thelin, 2009). It is therefore important that archivists seek documentation from all communities making up the campus life. Insofar, university archives at PWIs tend to focus on Black athletes, which can skew the narrative around

Black students and silence others within the institution (Tenenbaum, 2016). This made it difficult to pinpoint and collect archive materials at BTU. I found that much of the documentation around Black students at the site was inadequately documented: Black faces often went unnamed, contributions unattributed, and documents regarding their experiences and history were loosely filed. When asked how materials were collected at the BTU archive, a library archivist noted that most of the materials present in the archives were brought to archivists as donations, who then evaluated and made decisions on relevance. They added that archivists don't have much of an opportunity to seek contributions to the archives as well (personal communication, January 11, 2019). This approach has undoubtedly impacted the collections available for review. As an example, the archives held no materials related to recent activist movements by Black students. Their first collection regarding The TrueBTU campaign will be submitted this semester, at my request of the student organizers.

In all that is available at the campus archives library, I specifically sought and evaluated materials that students and insiders deemed relevant. Information was gathered around specific moments of activism using date ranges that might include institutional responses to that activism, and via one-on-one advisement from archivists at the BTU archives library. This study includes a number of materials collected from the BTU archives: information regarding the Black student uprising of 1969 and the subsequent establishment of the African American studies program, Black student handbooks from the 1970s, The Black Voice newspaper, letters to and from the BTU chancellor from that time, oral histories, images, and two special collections that shined specific light on Black students at BTU and the legacy of activism at this campus.

The archives also provided access to two campus newspapers. The Red Bird is a daily newspaper that began distribution on Monday, April 4, 1892. The Red Bird is one of the oldest

student newspapers across the United States and is the longest standing student newspaper at BTU. The second, born in 1969 as a response to The Red Bird's liberal approach by students seeking a more conservative alternative, The Proclaimer, is distributed daily during the academic year. Based on direction given by both students and insiders, I reviewed archived and online newspapers from 1960 – 2018. Since the newspapers are mainly distributed daily, there are approximately 25,000 releases to review; far too many to review with any focus. To narrow down the search of The Red Bird and The Proclaimer, I specifically sought materials related to activist moments defined by the students and insiders.

Finally, I met with an assistant dean who sits on the Big Time University Threat Intervention Team. The Threat Intervention Team assesses and coordinates a response to threatening situations at BTU. This assistant dean provided materials that are given to students at protests that are deemed unlawful by the BTU campus police or administrators as well as guidelines and expectations for protest attendance and participation. They also discussed what conversations look like with student groups ahead of any known protest, how campus prepares for events they become aware of, and how campus police and administrators engage with students onsite.

Data Analysis

Textual analysis for this project included both inductive and deductive analytical approaches (Maxwell, 2012). This method was chosen because it allowed ideas about qualitative inquiry to be integral to the process of deductive analysis. Additionally, this method allowed the themes of the study to emerge directly from the data using inductive coding. The subsequent data supports both the transversal and vertical analysis of this study. Most interviews were transcribed using an online transcription service. I withheld two interviews from transcription through this

service in an effort to guard the interviewee. In both of these instances, the women shared extremely sensitive information that I felt needed to be protected.

In this study, data collection included individual, face-to-face interviews, observations, and campus media. I analyzed the data in multiple ways: (1) data were coded and reduced using primary and secondary deductive codes based on BFT (Carspecken, 1996), inductive codes came from the data and brought to light the most consistent perceptions about Black women's activism at BTU; (2) institutional insider interviews, observations, and media textured what we know by enlarging our view; and (3) as a final approach to the data, analytical questions (see below) were posed to reduce the data, intentionally organizing it into manageable categories (Neumann, 2009).

Deductive coding utilizes an a priori template of codes, or codebook, to make sense of literature and other data (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The codebook is determined through preliminary review of data or is based on a study's research questions and theoretical framework (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). I created the initial codebook for this study based on the underlying assumptions in BFT, including its notions about power. Codes include: self-definition, self-valuation, intersectionality, and Black women's culture. Secondary codes include: structural power, disciplinary power, interpersonal power, and hegemonic power. Inductive codes are determined iteratively by recognizing important moments and encoding them (Boyatzis, 1998). Over the approximately six months of data collection, I determined inductive codes from the data in bi-monthly coding exercises where I reviewed data collected over the previous two months for consistencies among participants. Analysis of the transcripts included comparison across participants, drawing on identity characteristics that may make more clear the experience at hand, and emphasized recurring patterns in the data (Schensul & LeCompte, 2012). Below is an

example of my codebook and examples of responses that fit each deductive code in the codebook:

Table 4.1. Coding Schema & Possible Coded Responses

PRIMARY DEDUCTIVE CODE BOOK:	Example responses
Self-definition:	*"I see myself as a leader of the movement"*
Self-valuation:	*"My leadership is valuable, I have impacted change"*
Intersectionality:	*"My White mother does not understand why #BlackLivesMatter"*
Black women's culture:	*"Ms. Phillips was the first Black woman to graduate from the BTU Law School. I live in the residence hall named after her."*
SECONDARY DEDUCTIVE CODES:	Example responses
Structural power:	*"We planned a sit in at the Chancellor's office… they need to impose change."*
Disciplinary power:	*"We can be suspended or expelled for our work."*
Interpersonal power:	*"There is strength in numbers."* *"I can influence others to participate"*
Hegemonic power:	*"All students of color are here on scholarship. They've taken a space of a more deserving [White] student."*

When analyzing observations and media, I was primarily interested in the ways in which Black women performed and were represented. Attending to the multiscalar necessities of this study across the micro/meso/macro spheres, I compared how the student, institutional insider, and campus news described the same activist events.

After the other forms of coding, I moved to the data reduction technique created by Neumann (2009). I posed the following analytic questions, which may change throughout the iterative analysis process:

Vertical Analytical Questions:

(1) What do participants perceive of institutional rules impacting campus activism?
(2) How do participants understand campus' administrative structure and bureaucracy?

Transversal Analytical Questions:

(1) Has the experience defined by current participants been reflected over time at BTU?
(2) Are the contributions of Black women activists consistent over time?

Overall Analytic Questions:

(1) How do Black women describe their level of participation in activism on campus?
(2) What do Black women give to and get out of their activist experiences?
(3) Is the activist work Black women describe recognized in current or archival media?
(4) How do the transversal and vertical experiences impact Black college women?

Data Validation

As a Black woman who has participated in college student activism at my site, my ability to develop a familiarity of the culture of the site and participating groups before data collection was strong. This prolonged engagement added validity by establishing trust between researcher and interviewee and increased the likelihood of honest participation. I practiced iterative questioning, which required circling back to topics discussed in the interview in efforts to extract more through rephrased questions throughout the interview process (Shenton, 2004). I also attempted to use member checking, including follow-up meetings throughout the process and having the participants review any transcripts of their dialogue and my analysis of their contributions (Shenton, 2004). This was meant to uncover whether participants felt they were represented well. Finally, I triangulated individual interviews, present and archival observations,

and review of other relevant data, such as local campus policies impacting activism. Finally, triangulation bolsters qualitative research by providing multiple forms of supporting evidence, which should outweigh the limitations produced by each element of the method (Carspeken, 1996). I used multiple sources of data, i.e., interviews, observations, and campus media, and multiple forms of analysis, i.e., inductive and deductive coding and analytical questions. Together these approaches constructed a more informed understanding of the experience at hand.

Researcher Positionality

My interest in this topic was influenced by my own activist experiences in college. My experiences might be similar to women in this study; I also identify as a Black woman, attended a PWI, and participated in college student activism. During that time, I participated in protests against the Center for Equal Opportunity, who claimed that my institution had been discriminating against White students in their admission procedures (Selman, 2011). This was compounded by the controversial publication of a student opinion – that as the number of American students with ethnic sounding last names increased, so did the number of undeserved scholarships (Pacheco & Berquam, 2008). Protesting was affirming for me. It strengthened my understandings of others and myself. I learned that students' collective power is notable and to be revered.

Reflexivity requires critical reflection about how the researcher is positioned within the study and was particularly important in this work. In an article published in 2002, Linda Finlay defined five ways to address reflexivity: introspection, inter-subjective reflection, mutual collaboration, social critique, and discursive deconstruction (Finlay, 2002). As a Biracial Black woman, I am thoughtful that I experience Blackness differently than other Black women, particularly those with dark skin. My visibility on campus as a former staff member in the Dean

of Students Office and graduate student may produce consequences in this research, both positive and negative. My identities may positively influence the study because students see me regularly through activities on campus, from facilitating student dialogues for Black students to instructing freshman seminars to participating in activism. Consequently, they may have pre-formulated notions about my perspectives regarding activism and may make inferences about my alignment with their own experiences. My positioning may influence the study in negative ways, too. Since my interactions with undergraduate students tend to be leveled (me as an instructor, staff member, etc.) and because of my previous employment within the Dean of Students Office, students may have been hesitant in their descriptions of their activist experiences and impacts.

In an effort to strengthen the study's trustworthiness, transparency, and accountability, I started all interviews by signaling that this study had no connection to my employment within the university. I also made clear that although I was not performing this study in connection to my employment, that my responsibility as a campus security authority requires that certain disclosures, such as sexual assault and dangerous crime, be reported to the university. I also practiced reflexive journaling after each interview throughout the study to reveal any potential forms of interviewer bias or influence. For example, in one interview, there was discomfort around my positionality as an employee and scholar on campus and the participant was more inclined to withhold elements of their story to avoid repercussions from the offices where I was employed. She second-guessed herself after sharing the name of another student in her story. To address this concern, it was important to be attentive when this occurred, to reiterate my responsibilities to my academic work versus employment, and establish a trusting and reciprocal relationship with the participant.

Chapter V: Vertical Findings

In this qualitative study, I explored the lived experiences, impacts, and campus media of Black women participating in activism at a predominantly White institution. In examining the data using a critical case study (CCS) approach, I make several claims about Black women's activist experiences that emerged in the vertical and transversal analyses. The vertical analysis, which examined student's activist experiences through evaluation of the women's scaled ecologies, clarified how activism in college impacted and is impacted by the composition of the women's microspheres, mesospheres, and macrospheres (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2016). The transversal analysis of Black women's activist experiences at BTU sought to uncover the ways in which Black women at the institution have contributed to and shaped the legacy and future of activism at the site. Together, this study offers an ecological analysis of Black women's activist experiences at BTU.

Through vertical examination, I am acknowledging that the activist experiences of Black women at PWIs is complex and extends beyond the student group itself to include influences from broader relations of power that govern everyday life at the institution. As a primary focus, inferences in the vertical analysis are made using data from interviews with students. Although the institutional insiders and campus media support many of the claims in the vertical examination, these sources of data are used more extensively to support the transversal analysis. I completed the transversal examination utilizing student and insider interviews, university archives information, and observational data. Cumulatively, this information offers insights into when, why, and for whom Black women participate in activism, how they understand the impacts of their work, what they perceive of institutional policies around student activism, how their activist work is represented or remembered at BTU, and where there activist work is

situated in relation to their campus' legacy of Black activism.

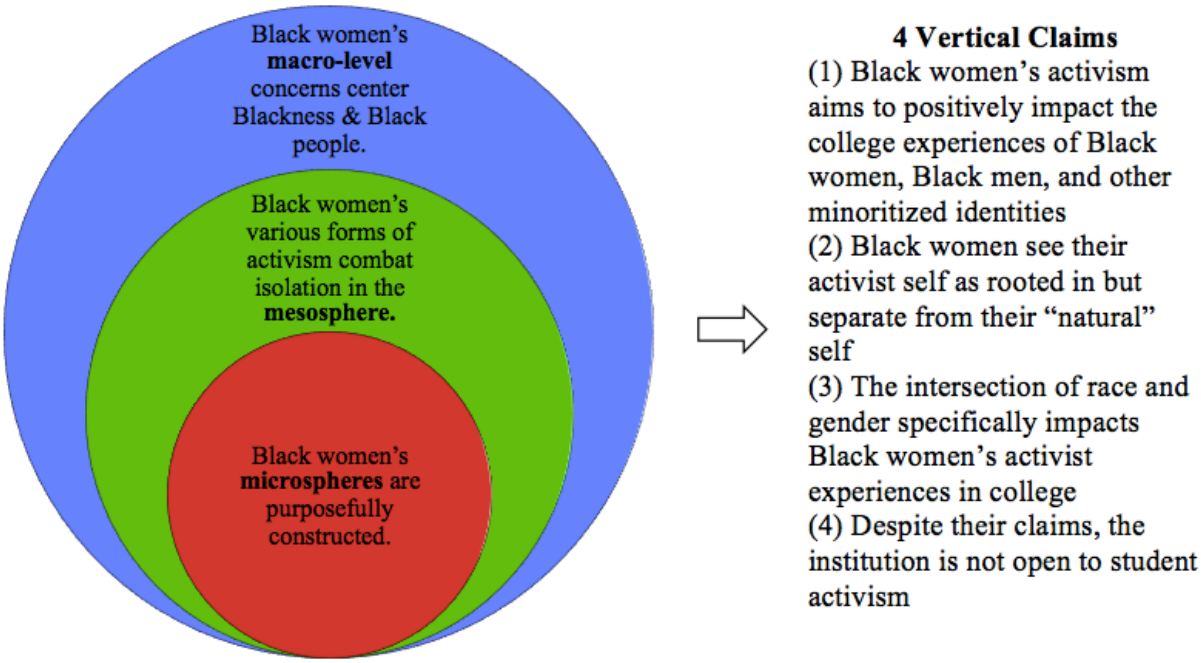
Black Women's Activist Experiences at BTU: A Vertical Perspective

The vertical analysis requires a synchronized focus on the scaled ecology of any given experience, policy, or practice. The vertical analysis across the micro, meso, and macro spheres in this study aims to make clear any conflicting epistemologies (i.e., ways of knowing) that undergird practices or policies at each level and how they impact students' activist experiences on campus. Also, vertical analysis creates a plane on which one can problematize the tensions existing between motivations, needs, and actions in each sphere of influence. The Black women represented in this study provided much insight into the composition of their micro, meso, and macrospheres. With the understanding that this composition is unique to and likely mirrored across PWIs, I define each sphere of influence as described by the women in this study below.

The scaled ecology of Black women's experiences at BTU informs their purposes, beliefs, actions, and inactions regarding activism in college. In understanding the composition of Black women's scalar influences, one can make extrapolations about their activist experiences at BTU. I present four vertical claims about Black women's activist experiences at a PWI based on the data. First, Black women's activism aims to positively impact the college experiences of Black women, Black men, and other minoritized identities. They saw Black women as a priority in their activism. Next, Black women see their activist self as rooted in but separate from their "natural" self. Most of the women used different language to describe who they are as a person and who they are as an activist. I also claim that the intersection of race and gender specifically impacts Black women's activist experiences in college. They can become burdened by either their race or gender in their activism and made to feel that either their race or gender comes first in any given situation. Finally, I find that despite their claims of support for student activism and

rich history of activism, the institution is not open to student's activist work.

Figure 5.1. Depiction of the Vertical Findings



Black women's microspheres are purposefully constructed. The microsphere includes influences that most directly impact the experiences of Black women in college. In this case, the microsphere includes the student's peers, institutional insiders, advisors, and social/academic groups, all in the campus context itself. Black women's microsphere at BTU includes people known and unknown to the women in various spaces across campus. In a campus environment that would have otherwise been isolating, Black women's microspheres at BTU were purposefully constructed to strengthen their connectedness and comfort at the institution through the establishment of relationships with others and participation in culturally nutritive spaces on campus. Elaine, a recent graduate of BTU remembered:

> I would see the same people every day, the same professors, the same peers, and even some of the same people who I never talked to, would just walk by in between

> classes…familiar faces. But in between significant breaks I would always go to the McDowell building, hang out in [my scholarship office] or… in the Black Cultural Center or hang out in the Multicultural Student Center in my younger years. I would just see much more of the community of color in those spaces.

The student experience can become familiar as students go through they day-to-day life on campus. Both the people they choose to engage with and some of those they don't engage with can impact their experience. Being one of a small population of Black women in STEM at BTU, Elaine noted that the people she sees daily and never speaks to also contribute to a sense of familiarity for her. At the same time, she actively engaged in spaces like her scholarship office and the Black Cultural Center, since that is where she would see many more People of Color.

Black women's microspheres at BTU included their academic units like Gender and Women's studies and African American Studies, where several participants are pursuing degrees. Some women established strong connections with faculty in their academic units, especially Black women. Nicole, a senior at BTU described a typical day on campus: "My day tends to be revolved around gender and women studies, that's my major, so I find myself in [those buildings] a lot, just 'cause that's where my classes tend to be." She highlighted a common reality for most of the women in this study and other students: that one's selected major can influence the spatial realities on campus. Based on student's academic and social paths, they might become limited to fewer areas of campus. This is particularly true as students complete the general education requirements. As they go deeper into classes specific to their majors, the class locations may become centralized to specific buildings or areas of campus. Variance across majors is especially noticeable when thinking about the experiences of Black women in majors where they are perhaps the first or only Black woman present like Elaine, who in 2018, became

the first Black woman to graduate with a degree in her chosen major. She visited non-academic spaces where students of color gathered during breaks from her academic unit.

Black women's microspheres also included the women's roommates, family (biological and chosen), friends, advisors and mentors, support animals, line sisters (Greek-lettered organizations), and romantic partners. Dajae describes part of her microsphere on a typical day at BTU:

> I'm also a member of a sorority on campus and so I probably either have a committee meeting or like a conference call or something… I eat with them and all of that. Yeah, and then, at the end of the day, I'm either with my roommates or doing homework with a friend or like some of my [sorority] sisters.

Friendships are a way to make unwelcoming spaces more welcoming. Black women's long-term friendships in college are often meaningful in nature and span several contexts (Winkle-Wagner et al., 2019). Dajae, her sisters, friends, and roommate seemed to be together for most meaningful moments in a day. These people likely have strong influence in Dajae's campus experiences. Like Dajae, most of the women in the study were closest to other Black women at BTU.

Many noted that campus as a whole is centered around Whiteness and, as such, they felt that most campus spaces, i.e., classrooms, residence halls, dining halls, libraries, local public spaces, etc., were not open to or inclusive of their needs. Hiesha, a senior at BTU, shared an experience in class that made her feel isolated from the classroom community:

> This campus is extremely White, I'll say, and that can lead to people feeling lonely in class. I know for me, I'm a psych major and I'll say that there's a lot of White people in that major. Just going in class, I had to sit in the middle [of the row] or I'll find myself ...

People not sitting by me and I was feeling really uncomfortable.

Hiesha explained that in her major classes where there are few Black women, her White peers would rather stand in the back of the lecture hall than sit with her. She eventually began sitting in the front of class in an attempt to lessen her focus on that. In the context of college, classrooms serve as a primary site of interactions between students and instructors. Hiesha's example showed that even passive interactions from other students are influential in how she experiences campus; that the lack of interaction from the White students in her class is as felt as interaction from her own peers. Due to the pervasiveness of Whiteness and the many ways it manifests in the lives of Black women at BTU, the women attributed their persistence in college to the social networks they purposefully constructed and participated. At PWIs, Black students seek out safe spaces such as offices, mentors, peer groups, or cultural centers for social support (Patton, 2006; Pittman, 1994). Black women's microspheres included their workplaces, student organizations, offices of their respective scholarship organizations (when applicable), the Black Cultural Center (BCC), Multicultural Student Center (MSC), their apartments and residence halls, and social media.

Since their establishment in the 1960s on college campuses across the nation, BCCs represent safety and welcoming spaces for Black students at PWIs, like BTU (Patton, 2006). For example, Carol recalled that on a typical day on campus, "During the day I might go to the McDowell building, that's where [my scholarship] offices are, print some things on the low-low. Stop by the BCC and just say 'Hey.'" Although Carol did not spend a tremendous amount of time at the BCC day-to-day, she saw the space as a home base to check in when needed. Adding to the idea of the cultural center serving as home base for Black women activists at BTU, Keisha, a junior, shared her experience of the BCC as her home base. She said, "just being in the BCC

and Black people are there, these people are playing spades. Someone's sleeping on the couch, someone's like, yo, where the food at? And, I'm just like true, like ... To me, those are like the highlight of my experiences and that is what really helps me."

Both Carol and Keisha praised the BCC for its ability to create a strong community of Black students at BTU and to provide meaningful programs for all students to engage with Black students and their stories. Catherine, an institutional insider at BTU, spoke about her pride in the important programming provided through the BCC and in Black women's integral role in programming efforts:

> I felt really proud at the Black student orientation welcome the Black cultural center puts on every year. Being a part of that and seeing so many Black women, not just the students but also the faculty and staff in the different positions that I wasn't really even familiar with. Just being there dedicating their time, being in community.

Black women staff and faculty at PWIs also combat sexism and racism in the campus environment (Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001). They bring their individual histories as college women, if they attended, including their understandings of their campus environments into their interactions with college women today. Like the younger women they serve, Black women staff and faculty attribute their being a part of communities, particularly those including Black women, to their sense of belonging at BTU.

Black women's microspheres at BTU included a wide variety of people and places that have direct influence on their campus experiences related to student activism. Their microspheres purposefully included influences that encouraged their safety and success at BTU, as well as influences that made BTU difficult to navigate or endure. It is possible that the women's micro-level engagement, particularly their participation in alternative spaces like the

Black Cultural Center, is activism. The women's purposeful withdrawal from mainstream campus spaces is a form of resistance. If we position the people and places described by the participants within Black women's vertical realities at BTU, the interactions between those people and places, as well as the environment they help to produce, can be better understood through examination of the meso- and macro- levels of influence for Black women at BTU.

Black women's various forms of activism combat isolation in the mesosphere. All of the interactions within and between a student's microsystems influence their mesosphere. Interactions between students and their universities, such as protests and other activist approaches, occur in the mesosphere, and also include the campus policies, culture, and impact the campus climate produced from those interactions. The mesosphere for Black women at BTU included positive experiences with good people across campus. The Black women in this study described their mesosphere as inclusive of themselves in rich, meaningful ways. Ny, a senior at BTU, described self-love as essential in her choice to participate in activism. She considered herself to be in the "self discovery and truth phase." She shared that her determination to seek knowledge was both self-serving and beneficial to the campus community. Other women engaged in a variety of self-care activities: choosing not to participate in certain forms of activism; choosing not to share their stories when sharing is not of personal benefit; and art, including poetry, dance, and music. When Black women are actively engaged in self-care they are, in effect, interacting at the meso-level as individual micro-level influences. As a result, they may be better equipped to engage in activism. They may be more emotionally adept and informed as activists in the campus community.

Black women saw sharing their art as a form of activism in and of itself. Several participants used spoken word as an activist tool. Jasmine K., a senior majoring in theatre and

performing arts at BTU, uses art in the form of acting, poetry, and music to address "revolutionary change" for Black people in the United States. Inspired by other musicians whose work sits at the nexus of art and social justice like Kendrick Lamar, Jasmine K. wrote a song that critiques the social conditions of Black people and challenges the systems that create those conditions, e.g., religion, White supremacy, anti-Blackness, and Afro-pessimism. Engaging multiple groups at the micro level, the creation and performance of art that is necessarily critical of the everyday realities of Black students at BTU broadens the conversation to include various audiences who might be changed through their experience. For example, Carol, a recent alumna who, when selected as the first Black woman to deliver the student address at BTU's winter commencement ceremony, crafted a message that centered her story and triumphs growing up in a Black family in the southern region of the United States. Her story served as an epitome of finding and living in one's purpose. She was met with roaring applause. Black women's art is vulnerable and supports the women's ability to heal in an authentic way, outside or in spite of the climate they experienced on campus.

The mesosphere of Black women at BTU also includes the troublesome experiences they face within the campus context. When asked what primary issues Black and Brown students face at BTU, several issues arose regarding their classroom experiences with peers and professors. For instance, Elaine, a recent graduate in STEM, said:

> I'm going to say our White peers really just don't ... Even, some of our other people ... Our colored peers don't really want to work with us in a group setting. And so, in all three of my departments, group work was really difficult because I knew that, that wasn't ... Like people weren't automatically going to gravitate toward me and that was difficult, especially for my introductory classes where the classes were 300 people large, and then

> to have the feeling of you like turning to like talk to someone, and they literally turn away from you, get other people around you. That's really difficult. And I feel like that's something that I've seen universally in STEM students and non-STEM students.

(The racial label "colored," in Elaine's words, is generally not seen as appropriate today and has been replaced with "Black" or "African-American;" McWhorter, 2016; Smith, 1992). The alienation in the classroom from peers is further compounded by total disruption of the classroom by complicit faculty.

Elaine also spoke of professors who seemed afraid to engage with Black and Brown students inside and outside of the classroom, even with specific regard to course content, questions, and grading. Faculty members were also seen as complicit in perpetuating issues these students face within the larger context of campus and the broader society within their classrooms. For example, in spring 2016, a Black student was arrested in the classroom for alleged acts of graffiti across campus. Campus administrators, who did not stop the arrest from happening or facilitate a more just means of arrest, accompanied the arresting officers to the classroom and the instructor of the course allowed the arrest to occur, impacting several students in the class both Black and non-Black. A witness of the arrest reported that an arresting officer said, "[the student] has his chance to get his message out and now it's our turn" during the student's arrest and removal from the classroom (Tomsyck, 2016). These types of experiences send a message that Black students and their rights do not add value to the classroom environment. The message resonated with study participants who described feeling under valued in the campus community. Instead, they feel tolerated rather than listened to; they experience direct and indirect forms of racism, queer-phobia, anti-religiousness, sexual violence, and an overwhelming sense of anti-Blackness resulting in resolutions that produce equality (real or not)

rather than liberation.

Veronica, a sophomore at BTU, speaks about her experiences of Islamophobia as one of the mesospheric interactions she had with the university:

> I don't like talking about Islamophobia because there aren't a lot of Muslims on this campus, period… and because of the kind of fear and terror I feel around the word [Islam]. Where I've been in space with people who have welcomed me and as soon as I mention something that pertains to Islam and me being Muslim, it's been a very visceral reaction. As in like, "We can't see you no more." … I will disclose that I'm Muslim and then suddenly it's either the very, "Oh, I thought you were Black." And then that begs the question is like people don"t [think that] Black Muslims exist.

Veronica's experiences as a Black Muslim woman at BTU left her feeling alienated from the broader campus and also from the identity communities she is a part of: Black and Muslim. Her experience told her that the intersection of Blackness and religion was narrow; that her unique reality didn't fit in traditional notions around Blackness and Islam. Disclosing her status in either community (though she is visually Black and doesn't need to disclose that) put Veronica at risk of losing access to or full membership in another.

The mesosphere of Black women at BTU also contains the campus climate and any issues Black women face at the institution. The women included in this study named several issues impacting their campus experiences. First, there is, and has always been, a low population of Black students at BTU. When asked about primary issues on campus, Carol said:

> I think definitely the diversity aspect [is an issue] and there's 2% Black students, 5% Hispanic, 5% Asian and 5% international students as well. Altogether, that's not that bad but when you look at the groups individually, 2%, what am I supposed to do with 300 out

of 40,000? Nothing really. That's what you're doing with it.

At any state institution, the population of students should mirror the state's demographics (Winkle-Wagner & Locks, 2013). Although Black or African American people are the second largest population of people in the state at approximately 7%, they only made up 2.85% of students enrolled at BTU in the fall 2018 semester. Half of all students enrolled in the fall 2018 semester came to BTU from out of state with the largest populations coming from more diverse states such as California, Illinois, and New York. Under these conditions, Black students enrolled at BTU struggle with their sense of belonging within the campus community.

The struggle for a sense of belonging was especially impactful on those Black students enrolling at BTU from "sunnier places," as noted by Anwar who is a Florida native and graduating senior. Kati, a sophomore student from Chicago studying in the BTU School of Business, explained that the absence of Black people and other People of Color in her major made her feel very lonely.

> It's like honestly I didn't think it would affect me, because I knew a lot of people were like, "Oh you know it gets a little lonely in there. Like you think BTU is not diverse, the business school is worse." I was like, "Oh that's nothing, I'm going to be good, I'm going to handle this." Now I'm in there and I'm just looking around like it would be nice to just see somebody doing it you know, just to do it with someone else. It is like just, it's lonely honestly. I thought I would be fine, but it is really lonely.

For Kati, the lack of other Black students enrolled in her academic program is difficult for two reasons. First, she perceived there to be no cultural community to engage with and feel safe. Also, there are no examples of how to persist in the program despite the lack of other Black women and men. These experiences are not always mitigated by the presence of faculty and

staff; the participants also felt that there is a lack of faculty advocacy in the academic environment.

Haven discussed instances when students in the African American studies classes she'd been enrolled in spoke negatively or espoused hateful rhetoric about Black people. She felt that her faculty members did not adequately address these moments by making clear: "I'm not going to accept this. This is not what I'm promoting. I'm actually teaching the opposite of this." She continued, "At some point, you have to also advocate, rather than just teach." Though the purpose(s) of college are hotly debated in higher education communities, college campuses remain a prime location for students to develop an understanding of civic engagement and to practice their skillset at advocating for the college experiences they expect. The compounding effect of the absence of support from faculty and the small population of students of color at BTU is strong. Black women feel their safety at risk in the campus environment. They did not feel protected by the institution.

The women's sense of safety in the campus community extended beyond the classroom to include their experiences in residence halls, organizations, events, and other communities that they engage in. In these spaces, Black women, and other women on campus, also combatted issues related to sexual violence and consent. At BTU, and nationwide, one in every four women will experience sexual assault (Pérez-Peña, 2015). Activism is one way that Black women have addressed the issue of sexual assault on campus. The women bravely discussed how they transformed their experiences of sexual assault into opportunities for empowerment that impact others within their mesosphere. For example, Alicia, a recent graduate in Gender and Women's studies, reflected on her experience of sexual assault as a freshman at BTU:

I turned to my sister first and foremost, and she was there for me immediately after it

> happened and for the days, months, years, following. I also turned to the ladies that I met in Black Women Heal. [They] had gone through similar trying experiences, and [they] really encouraged me to just kind of... be okay with not being okay, and [they] also encouraged me to be patient with myself and love myself very deeply in the tough moments… Also…we can talk about this too, about me trying to find my place in the Black community on campus. But I really, honestly admire, and everything that [Black students] did when I was a young student. I felt like I was able to laugh more when I was with them. Even when I was going through that really tough time. I was able to attend events that made me feel good about being who I was.

In this example, Alicia accessed support from multiple micro-level influences that helped to strengthen her sense of belonging at BTU in the aftermath of sexual assault. As another, perhaps gentler approach to activism in the mesosphere, Alicia understood that the presence of other Black women, be they family, friends, mentors, or even healthcare practitioners, who encouraged self-love in the face of pain, was essential in her ability to persist and graduate from the BTU campus.

Alicia became an active leader in the organization she turned to for support, and led programs for the broader campus community regarding sexual violence against women of color, such as educational workshops and self-care oriented events. Alicia described her experience when she helped to revamp a required program at BTU. The once fully-online program now includes an in person workshop where students engage one another in dialogue around the topic:

> In addition to an online course, first year students had to come in and sit in for a workshop that was, either had to do with healthy relationships and dating, sexual consent, and supporting a survivor…like listening skills. Skills to make sure that you're as

> supportive as you can be.

Given her experience as a survivor of sexual assault, Alicia remembered how she felt when students of color at BTU positively received the program changes:

> There were a few Black and Brown folks, young people, who came up to me after those workshops… They came up to me and said, in so many words, "Thank you so much for doing this." We had groups of all students of color and it was very... It made my heart warm to see that so many people, even at their young age, were able to grasp the concept of consent and apply it enthusiastically to their own lives.

Alicia's experience is an example of creating change that impacts multiple individual influences in the microsphere, where her closest ecological relationships exist. Many of the relationships and places in Alicia's microsphere were impacted by her work to address sexual violence against Black women at BTU. The harm she endured inspired her contributions to activism, which have directly impacted the experiences of other students of color at BTU in a positive way.

Both the experiences Alicia had and her activist responses contributed to the mesospheres, or general impression and experience of the campus, described by Black women in this study. Through this approach of advocating for campus changes using activist methodologies, students were able to vocalize their concerns to the university. However, students felt that campus administrators did not take Black students' needs seriously. They did not feel heard. Bre, a graduating senior and co-chair of the Black History Month planning committee, explained her thoughts on not being heard:

> I don't think people are ready. I don't. I feel like ... the many voices that are speaking through Black women at once, are coming from so many different places that a lot of people are like, "I don't even understand." I know you don't. I know. But it doesn't mean

> you don't have to listen. It doesn't mean that it's not valuable, what's being said. It doesn't mean that this is not a teaching moment or a learning moment. But I think people cast that off as like, "Oh she's crazy." Or, you know, "They crazy. They just yelling, they just loud. They just fussing. Nobody know what they talking about." And I'm just like ... "Y'all going to see. Y'all going to see."

In this example, the voices of Black women were being contradicted by stereotypes against Black women – that they are loud, crazy, or unknowledgeable. Silencing the voices of Black women and other minoritized groups contributes to an environment where the needs of these groups go unaddressed and where harm against these communities goes unchecked. Black women's lack of confidence in institutional recognition of their issues supported the participants' notions that the campus policies do not favor students of color. Black students who organized or participated in activism at BTU felt that campus administrators and policies severely limited their opportunities to demand change within their campus community.

Participants spoke about the establishment of a new policy across all BTU system schools that requires students found responsible of disrupting freedom of expression twice to be suspended and three times to be expelled. The policy further mandates that all "protests and demonstrations that interfere with the rights of others to engage in or listen to expressive activity shall not be permitted and shall be subject to sanction" (Herzog, 2017). As an institution whose history is steeped in activism and whose campus exists as it does today largely as a result of activism, this policy essentially strips freedoms from the very students that activism is meant to elevate, particularly marginalized student groups who, since their initial enrollments at BTU, have used activism to shape the campus community by encouraging, or demanding, equity and justice.

The mesosphere of Black women at BTU comprises all interactions between the women's microsystems. Black women's artistic expressions created opportunity for campus groups to engage in dialogue about the experiences they face while also serving as a source of self-love and self-definition. Their classroom experiences with both students and faculty sustain an environment where Black women do not feel valued. Their survival of sexual assault encouraged intentional engagement with other survivors and supporters, and influenced the creation of learning opportunities around sexual violence against Black women for the broader campus community. Campus administrators discouraged student activism by threatening the student status of scholarship recipients and enacting system-wide policy to quell student activist risings in the future. Cumulatively, the women's experiences at the meso-level made them feel isolated in the campus environment. Given Black women's activist work to combat their sense of isolation and claim space at the institution, it is clear that the social issues that exist in Black women's macrospheres directly impact much of what Black women experience in the mesosphere at BTU.

Black women's macro-level concerns center Blackness & Black people. The macrosphere is made of the ever-changing sociocultural contexts of Black women activists: the social structure that they live in, online and television media, local and global events, politics, etc. Specifically, study participants agreed that the 2016 election of Donald Trump despite national division about his fitness to serve in this role (Berenson, 2016), the confirmation of Brett Kavanagh to the United States supreme court amid allegations that he sexually assaulted Christine Blasey Ford (Kessler, 2018), and the continued abuse of Black men, women, and girls (Emba, 2019; Jones, 2018) were prominent issues in the macrosphere of participants in the study. In her interview, Bri remarked that 2016 was simply a horrible year for the country:

> At the national level, it was just all of the murdering, police brutality, that was happening. Philando Castile [Mumford, 2017], oh my gosh. So many other people that we lost that year. Trump, Lord. It was so much. It's so weird because I always talk to people about this, but I always say 2016 was like 1968, in just how much was going on at that time at the national level.

Bri perceives a relationship between the national political landscape of 1968 and the present. She is making a claim that the national issues around civil rights that occurred in the late '60s, e.g., the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., race riots across most metropolitan cities, and activism occurring at college campuses, impacted the student experience in similar ways that current national issues impact her. She seems overwhelmed by the negativity and racism directed at Black people on and off campus. Several study participants, many of whom studied the history of Black students at BTU, generally echoed her exhaustion. Their knowledge about both the 1968 political landscape and the current landscape made study participants experts in drawing conclusions that link the purposes of activism in each time. All five institutional insiders stated that the reasons for Black student activism today are analogous to the rationale from 50 years ago. When asked about the reasons for student activism during their college careers from 1973, 2003, 2004, 2008, and 2014, in comparison to reasons today, institutional insider Marie, a 1973 BTU graduate said:

> Well, they're very similar to students back then. They're idealists. They want to see the world as a better place. They want things to change. They don't like the societal ills and wrongdoings and they see all of that. They see all the inequalities that go on. They are eager to take a stance and feel that, that's what they are supposed to do, even though, they know they're supposed to be a student, this is a time in their life, on campus, where those

things take place. They want their voices to be heard.

In the late ‘60’s, Black students at BTU went on strike demanding that the university meet 13 demands as defined by Black student leaders of that time. The establishment of the African American studies department is a direct product of that strike. Similarly, beginning in the fall 2015 semester, Black students coordinated several protests that aimed to improve the experiences of Black students at BTU. For instance, Haven, a senior at BTU, remembered her experience in her residence hall. In a disagreement with her floor mates, a non-Black male resident spit in her face. Haven said:

> …There was a time when I was going through a bias incident, and I guess because it happened in my dorm, it made me feel like I was unsafe in my home. And so I would just stay out studying, go to friends’ apartments, anything that I could do. I would stay at home [parents’ house]. Anything that I could do just to not be, I guess, in that space anymore because it made me feel like you never know who you’re living near and how they view you. It just completely changed the way I thought about campus. It made me feel like I was not safe within the spaces that I was supposed to be living in.

Haven’s experience is indicative of a larger issue in the campus climate, that students feel emboldened to harm their Black peers both directly or indirectly in the spaces they should feel most safe.

BTU’s campus climate mirrors the broader social landscape in many ways. BTU students saw Black people and other minoritized communities as targeted, treated unjustly, and killed on a national scale. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) published data that showed a marked increase in White supremacist propaganda across the United States. They reported a 182 percent increase in distribution of White supremacist literature and events totaling 1,187 in 2018, up

from 421 in the previous year (White Supremacist Propaganda, 2019). On the BTU campus, Haven's experience is not unforeseen and did not stand-alone. Her experience is tethered to the big-picture realities of Black students and to other minoritized students within the BTU community. Together, their experiences and subsequent activism secured the re-establishment of the university's Black Cultural Center and cultural centers for other student groups of color.

The macrosphere also includes updated forms of communicating and acting on social issues in the form of social media. The rapid and rampant successes of activist movements using hashtag activism such as #Blacklivesmatter, #MeToo, and #BringBackOurGirls (Chubb, 2018) are examples of moments when political activism and social media converge. Hashtag activism involves the use of hashtags – the use of the hash/pound sign to organize information about a specific topic – for activism. The hashtags are used to coordinate protests, share stories and information, connect communities of people, and create an environment where social change is possible. The Ford Foundation's annual listing of ten technological trends that will impact social justice noted that technology is a growing power in the everyday lives of most people (Negrón, 2018). As technology becomes essential in successful political movements, the Ford Foundation predicted that people may take a more critical look at the impact of social media, other Internet-based platforms, and technology-driven activist models for obtaining power in the Digital Age (Negrón, 2018).

Today, the power of social media in addressing inequity can influence or inspire others to act in different spaces, including college campuses. Carol, a senior at BTU, spoke about her experiences on campus and online. She shared what she saw from people in the campus community:

People hanging etchings of derogatory terms towards women, swastikas drawn on

> peoples doors. On anonymous [online] platforms, I think it's called Yik Yak and on Facebook and Twitter, people posting all types of wild things. Calling Black people animals, anti-Semitism was something new to me. I was like, all White people don't get along? What? Not that all Jewish people are White. Wow, y'all just targeting everybody out here, women, religion, sexuality, race. Who you cool with?

The experience of campus is not divorced from online platforms students' use. However, the ways that students engage online is not governed by the university, and therefore students' online behaviors often go unchecked, even when their actions interfere with other students' sense of safety at BTU.

Alternatively, activists also use social media and other online platforms to spread awareness about the experiences of students of color at BTU and to create lasting change in the campus community. Angel also spoke about social media as a tool that can bolster activist movements. Referring to the downshift in activism at BTU in light of campus policy on protesting, Angel said, "Even though we feel like we can't shake things up on campus, social media is big now, we can make noise there." For example, the #TrueBTU campaign used social media to gain national news coverage exposing the "True BTU" experience to the world. What began as a simple hashtag became a full day art exhibition at the campus's most prominent art museum. The success of the TrueBTU campaign meant that the institution needed to take a good look at the experiences of its Black students to initiate changes across campus that addressed the issues Black students face. For many of the Black women in this study, the use of social media as a mechanism and site of activism means, that the work can accompany them wherever they go, on or off campus. Bri continued:

> Literally the work can follow you home. Literally. And it's just like ... you're thinking

> you got time to energize because, "Oh I'm not in a work setting." Or, "I'm not in an academic setting, so I'm not working." But you're still working. You're still working. You're still taking the time to educate. You're still taking the time to emotionally or mentally support someone else who is not within their own capacity to understand where you're coming from. And most of the time [they] don't even care to understand.

There is a compounded nature to activism today. Not only do students have to coordinate to act in the campus environment, they must also prepare for quick action when conflict occurs online. Students are expected to maintain an awareness of social issues and to engage in the work of creating changes in their campus environments. Their days do not end with classes, work, or any extracurricular activities they choose.

As activism gains traction online, it can also permeate other influential realms, such as television and film. This is clear in the apparent surge in documentaries and dramas that explore various social injustices against Black people. Anwar spoke about the injustices against Black people that have been sensationalized: "I don't like when people make Black Death a genre, which I also feel like is happening now. I don't find that creative. I find it hurting people more than it's helping people, because you're just reiterating." Anwar takes this a step further when she explains her sentiment that dramatizing the social injustices of Black people can also co-opt the stories they intend to shine specific light on:

> …the activism has become very surface level. It's become very, "Let's just throw that out there." Like, the "She's Gotta Have it," Spike Lee Films, Netflix Series. At the end of it, she literally just says, "Black lives matter," and they show it on the screen. Now you're commodifying it. That's not real. If you wanted to say that Black lives matter, show an accurate portrayal of a Black life that is important. That's how you show Black lives

matter.

Representations of Black life and death in media and film are greatly influential in the macrospheres of Black women at BTU and beyond. This includes instances when Blackness is honored or celebrated. When these portrayals are not accurate, they contribute to an increased lack of understanding about Black people and their experiences. For the Black women at BTU, addressing this lack of understanding is done in a number of important ways. Most recently, women included in this study were instrumental in coordinating a month-long celebration of Blackness during Black History Month. Two large-scale programs depict the richness and quality of the month's programming: a panel discussion about the Black student uprisings in the late 1960s that was comprised of activist leaders from that time; and a keynote lecture from Angela Rye, a top political analyst, attorney, and Principal and CEO of IMPACT Strategies, a political advocacy firm in Washington, D.C.

Black women's macrospheres at BTU were inclusive of the local and larger societal issues that impact Black people and other minoritized people. Many of those issues have persisted over time, such as police brutality and increased White supremacist propaganda. The presence of social media has changed the overall make-up of macro-level concerns. Social media has impacted the ways that information is created, how that information is prioritized, and has quickened the dissemination of information. Like social media, television and film media also contribute to the societal issues Black women face. Taken as a whole, the women's descriptions of their micro-, meso-, and macrospheres serves as a basis in understanding the activist experiences of Black women in college. The following sections delve deeply into the four vertical conclusions drawn from the data: (a) Black women's activism aims to positively impact the college experiences of Black women, Black men, and other minoritized identities, (b) Black

women see their activist self as rooted in but separate from their "natural" self, (c) the intersection of race and gender specifically impacts Black women's activist experiences in college, and (d) despite their claims, the institution is not open to student activism. These 4 claims live within the ecology of Black women's experiences. They are directly informed by what occurs in Black women's micro, meso, and macro spheres.

Black women's activism aims to positively impact the college experiences of Black women, men, and other minoritized identities. In this study, I sought to learn about the activist experiences of Black women at BTU, to uncover the purposes of their work, and the roles they played. The initial finding, that Black women's activism aims to positively impact the college experiences of Black women, men, and other minoritized identities, is well substantiated in the data. The participants discussed influential experiences that pushed them toward activism and also who they felt their activism served. Data showed that Black women's activism, though generally focused on Black people, was intended to serve all people directly and indirectly. When asked who her activism serves, Bri responded, "Black women, Black queer folk, Black non-binary folk. I'm trying to service all Black folk and I feel like from there I can start to help everybody else." As an example, the wave of student activism addressing the needs of Black students at the university resulted in the establishment of the Black Cultural Center (BCC). The successful establishment of the BCC serves as an undergirding rationale for the establishment of other cultural centers for Latinx and Asian/Pacific Islander/ Desi (APIDA) communities that opened in the fall 2018 semester at BTU.

Another example of Black women's activism is the TrueBTU movement, which was born from Haven's experience of having been spit on by another resident in her residence hall. The TrueBTU movement culminated in a one-day exhibition at the most prominent museum on

campus and included visual and performance art that displayed the real day-to-day experiences of students of color at the institution. The use of art in activism was a common tool across most participants. Phillips had been tasked to perform at an annual arts event. In response to the incident involving Haven, Phillips adjusted her performance to include three poems she felt would encourage other Black women in the audience. One of her poems shined light on the glory of natural Black hair.

Black women also supported Black men through their activist work. Two participants portrayed times when Black women jumped to the aid of Black men. Bre talked about advocating for a friend of hers. She'd been arguing with people on Facebook in his defense. The friend had been sent death threats and hateful comments on his page in response to a newly released apparel design from his social justice oriented brand. The shirt read, "All White people are racist," and caused discomfort among White students, staff, and faculty following its release. Bre explained:

> I found myself getting on his page on his behalf. You know, snapping back and yelling and saying some stuff I won't say out loud right now. But I found myself doing that and even that part of it was tiring for me. Because I had been doing that all along, and I'm just kind of like, I couldn't even imagine what he was going through in that moment.

Although the apparel line was triggering to White students, staff, and faculty, and was intended to be, Bre found herself protecting the student at her own expense. She grew tired of engaging the online dissent. Still, she continued to give of herself because in that moment, she was more concerned with his safety than her own. Historically, Black women serve as protectors of Black men, women, and children in the Black community (Jones, 2009). Similarly, when a Black male student and prominent campus leader was accused of sexual harassment on campus, several

Black people rallied behind him. Tracy remembered:

> When these accusations broke, it sort of separated people quickly more or less into two camps. There were the people who stood by him no matter who and were so blinded by the fact that this could be true. It was like they didn't stand by him in a healthy way if that makes sense in a way that was like, "No, never. He could never do this." Are you kidding me? It's so ridiculous.

Tracy's example alluded to the idea that Black women are often unable to believe allegations against Black men, particularly when they pertain to sexual violence against White women. White women in the United States have a long history of false accusations against Black men. Most notably, the teen boy Emmett Till was brutally murdered by a woman's husband and friends after she made false claims that Till had made lewd comments to her (History.com Editors, 2019). And recently in 2018, a White woman named Nikki Yovino falsely accused two Black college football players of rape (Fredericks, 2018). She did so flippantly, having no good reason to falsify her claims. Understanding the implications of these experiences, Black women often come to the aid of Black men and their activism generally includes their needs.

Black women's activism also likely serves the next generation of Black college students. Many participants spoke about their younger siblings and the need to address the issues they currently face to ensure that their younger siblings arrive to a campus better than it is today. Dajae explains her worries about the college environment for her younger sister:

> One of my sisters is applying for college right now and I get nervous about that and I think about where she's going to go, if she's going to get in. And I believe in her and I don't think any of it has to do with her, but just thinking about the environment she's going to be in and I think it's much easier for me to accept that I'm here. But I think it's

> going to be a lot harder when she decides, when she goes off to college, she'll really think about what's that going to look like for her. I think I do it for my sisters and I do think I do it for me in a way, too, because I know that half the stuff that I experienced here, I didn't deserve and that I think most of it is knowing that more could be done and it's not being done or it's not being heard by the people who are doing it. So, I just want to help the people who are out here already doing the work and I think that's what drives me to continue activism, even if I feel like the outcomes of it at times aren't what I expected or aren't what I wanted out of it.

For Dajae, ensuring that her sister has a better college experience than she did, one where she feels safe and free to excel, is a primary reason for her activist work.

This same notion does extend to people outside of the family. Kati said, "I do it for those kids in my neighborhood, like the ones whose parents were so focused on work that they couldn't really put a lot of stuff in their education." Kati spoke about the privilege she enjoyed of having both of her parents invested in her dreams and able to spend their energies ensuring Kati's preparedness for college. Similarly, Zhalarina's purpose for activism comes from a direct understanding of the positive impact of activist work. She explained, "If initiative organizations didn't exist in Tampa, me [and other Black women] would be in a very different place. And, I know that at least me and [my close friend] wouldn't be in college." Stephanie also supported a forward thinking approach to activism. She shared her thinking on addressing current issues with resolutions that cause a lasting effect on the experiences of other Black people:

> The analogy I give is always like if you're in a line, if a line of Black people are walking and there's a White guy who's just like spewing slurs at them, some people would say, "Well, I could just like ..." Some people feel like they can't get past the dude, and they're

> just standing there listening to him say these words. Some people are just like, "Okay, I can punch the White guy and knock him out, and then I can walk away. And that's like how I'll handle it." And then other people will be like, "Okay, let's move this White guy out of the way." So because I'm already hearing the slurs, and that's already affected me, and it doesn't matter if I leave here, punch him, or stay, I remember how that experience was, and that's something that's going to affect me, the goal now is to have it not affect the people behind me in the line. And so that's kind of how I would process it.

The women in the study saw activism as a tool to address the issues they face and to contribute to an environment that supports their success and the successes of Black men and women who enroll in the future. To that end, Black women's activism is future oriented and their issues do not start and stop with Black people. Anwar discussed her conceptions of inclusive activism as encompassing not only people, but also the resources people need to survive:

> If your activism doesn't include environment, you're not actually being ... That's not an inclusive activism. If your activism doesn't include animals, because we need them…. Even if only to eat, we need them. We do really need them to be healthy. If your activism doesn't include recycling, you're part of the problem.

Anwar understands that resources are not equitably distributed to the people and that this is especially true in crisis. In crisis, the people with the most access and control become most powerful in determining the outcomes of others. Therefore, she makes a simple claim, that if we consider animals and the environment to be sustainable, then we must care deeply about them in our activist efforts.

Black women's activism does not simply serve Black women. Instead, their contributions meaningfully impact other minoritized communities in the college environment. The successes

of Black student activism support similar gains in other racial communities, as seen in the establishment of cultural centers for the Latinx and APIDA communities. Black women also continue to come to the aid of Black men by protecting and holding them high in their moments of need. Their work is *inclusive* and extends to the environment as well as the animals we consume as nourishment. Altogether, the many purposes for why Black women act and who their work serves spans to encompass the similar issues faced by other minoritized people in the context of college and has a goal of creating lasting changes that might positively impact future generations of Black collegians.

The intersection of race and gender specifically impacts Black women's activist experiences in college. Throughout all of the interviews, with both students and institution insiders, the indication that Black women's experiences lie at the unique intersection of their race and gender was strongly supported. At BTU, Black women persisted in spite of a campus environment that made them feel unwelcomed. When it comes to their activist work, Black women at BTU have specifically impacted both their racial and gender identity groups. Not without challenge, their work has created a better campus community for Black people and women.

Like most identities, Blackness and womanhood exist on a spectrum; no two women experience their racial or gender identities the same. Following this logic, they do not experience issues in one way and do not respond to those issues in any standardized way. This is evident in Phillips' example of colorism at play in the leadership of the TrueBTU movement. Although Phillips felt close to an underlying issue that ignited the movement – her friend Haven had been spit on in an altercation with a resident on her dorm floor – and she was active in planning the culminating event at the campus museum, she felt that as a darker-skinned woman, she was not

taken as seriously as her lighter-skinned peers. In a sense, she felt that Haven, being a dark-skinned woman, was pushed aside in the uprising, and her specific experience of bias was swept up in the movement. She felt that light-skinned Black women were given more clout than dark-skinned Black women, even in working on the same programs together. Colorism exists as just one differentiator in the experience of Black womanhood (Grills, 2013; Hunter, 2007). In addition to skin color, varying factors like socioeconomic status, geographic origin, or family structure influence the way Black women understand the world. The diversity in understandings of Black womanhood can produce division in how issues are perceived and therefore how they are addressed. For example, recall the story about the prominent Black male leader on campus who had been accused of sexual assault against Black women. The accusations against the young leader caused division within the Black community on campus. Tracy remembers:

> There was somebody on the student council who was accused of sexual assault, and myself and two other Black women, the same two Black women I was talking about before decided that it was very necessary that we get him off of the student council because clearly he couldn't represent the student body adequately. That event in general had created a lot of division because this person who was… People were saying, "Oh"... It was me and [the two other Black women]. They were like, "Oh, you are just trying to lynch a Black man." We're like, "What the fuck? Is that really your argument here?" You know, whatever.

Some people within the community felt that their efforts to have the young leader removed amid investigation of the allegations would have a severely negative impact on the young mans life. Conversely, the Black women who advocated for the man's removal feel that prompt actions sends the necessary message that violence against women is not tolerated on campus. The

dissenter's reference to lynching is a central point of contention, as it places the women's racial and gender identities in contention with one another. This is echoed in the macro-level experiences I will describe later. Due to the tendency towards the negative stereotyping of Black men, Black women fear contributing to negative narratives about Black men, effectively silencing issues at the core of their experience (Crenshaw, 1991).

The stereotyping of Black men and women as hypersexual produces a playing field where Black men can be falsely accused of sexual assault, as in the recent case of Nikki Yovino who lied about being raped by two Black men (Judge, 2018), and Black women can be disbelieved even when sexual violence against them is reported ("Black Women & Sexual Violence", n.d.). This is also the playing field where race and gender can contend for Black women. If they fight for women's safety against sexual assault, then they are not fighting for the rights of a fellow Black man. Too often, race wins over gender and contributes to Black women's oppression at the intersection of the two identities (Crenshaw, 1991).

Black women's unique realities can sharpen one's view of what is at stake in Black womanhood. Their experiences inform an understanding that Black womanhood is distinctly different than womanhood at any other racial intersection, especially Whiteness. Though there are some commonalities among experiences of womanhood, the combined effect of Black womanhood can make Black women feel isolated, even when they become "leaders" in the campus community. Tracy spoke about being alone as student body president:

> I felt extremely alone actually was when I was president of the student government because first of all there was nobody else there with you, and there was a whole different dynamic between the leadership of student government and the president. Beyond that inter-organizational dynamic there was also ... It was hard just to be in that position as a

> Black woman, and the type of things I experienced from other students or the administration, even my advisors within student government. So it was very lonely because I felt like nobody knew what I was going through or how difficult it was for me to be in that position. No matter who I talked to, they just couldn't quite get it. Like they didn't understand why X was a problem or why Y made me feel a certain way.

Tracy's status as a campus leader did not alleviate her feelings of isolation at BTU. She portrayed how racial microaggressions, though seemingly unconscious, made her status as a prominent student government leader feel lonely. She was frustrated by people's inability to understand what she was going through and felt her identities as a Black woman were a primary reason for the lack of understanding. This lack of understanding about Black women's experiences is an undergirding issue in combating women's issues as a whole. At the same time that Black women's experiences go unknown and uncared for, Black women are painfully aware of the centering of White women in feminist work at the local and national scale. Keisha explained her position on the Campus Women's Center as most concerned with the needs of White women:

> There's this access to womanhood that I think Black women don't necessarily have, because I don't know, I've been thinking like how does this affect our relationship to sexuality, gender, and yeah. So, I guess that's why I don't really, I don't structurally like agree with the Campus Women's Center because it mostly supports White woman, like the structure here.

She remarked on the center having good programming and that there is a Black collective of women contributors to the center, but was disappointed that only White women visit the women's center and participate in their programming. She continued, "but then I realized that

when you say the word woman, Black women are not necessarily like [this is for me], it's mostly White women [who feel welcomed].” Since Black women do not see their Blackness as distinct from their identity as women, participation in women’s events might be limited, especially when Black womanhood is not explicitly included.

Another example of this is when Black women choose not to participate in activism. Their rationale for not participating almost always links the women’s racial and gender identities. Dajae spoke about her decision *not* to participate in the worldwide Women’s Marches that took place on January 21, 2017, the day after the presidential inauguration of Donald Trump (Cautericci, 2017), she explained:

> Most recently with the women’s march when people were marching on campus [to the state capitol building]. I remember getting to class a couple days after that and a lot of my classes, if they’re gender and women’s studies, like a lot of White women would be in them, and I remember someone shaming people who didn’t go to the march.

Getting deeper into why she hadn’t attended the nationwide protests, Dajae added that she felt her White peers, even those enrolled in her gender and women’s studies courses, did not understand that the variation in how White and Black women experience womanhood makes their lived experiences distinct from one another in as many ways as it is similar. Dajae’s White classmate had recently posted an info-graphic on her Instagram page (social media) that depicted the pay wage gap by gender; the post said that women earned 75 cent to every dollar a man makes. Dajae recalled conversation with the student on this topic:

> I asked her about her picture and I was like, “Who makes $0.75?” She was like, “No, it’s women...” and like explaining it to me as if I was like, “You should know this,” and I’m like, “I do know this, but it’s White women.” We talked about that, which is why I didn’t

> show up to the march because I didn't feel like that march was for me to show up for. It was like, "That was *your* time to show up."

Nationally, the gender-based wage gap advances White men most. Even White women, who earn approximately 75 cents to every dollar White men make, still earn more than Black women at approximately 61 cents, and most other women of color, except Asian women (Vagins, n.d.). Dajae made clear that the issue of the pay gap is not simply gendered, but it is also a racial issue and failure to fully examine the issue from a more inclusive standpoint further marginalizes women of color. Her absence from the women's march is purposefully symbolic and is seen as analogous to Black women's absence from feminist concerns of White women. Alicia, a recent alumna, also remembers choosing not to participate in the national Women's March. She spoke about a classroom experience where she and other Black women discussed the dearth of Black women in the women's marches:

> I was taking a Black Women In America class at the time. It was a gender/women's studies course. Just statistically, there were only a few Black women in the class, but more so than any other class typically. I remember we would all sit in the front, myself, including my sister, and a couple of other ladies, and we would talk about the Women's March and how it wasn't inclusive. It didn't feel inclusive to us, and Black and Brown women struggled and trans women struggled.

To be able to speak about the needs of Black women at a time when women's issues were receiving national attention in her class about Black women in America was meaningful to Alicia and her peers. Their experience showed that the active choice not to participate in activism is sometimes a form of self-care and that care for self is activism, too. However, they understood that the perspectives shared in class, that Black women's needs were absent from the national

conversation, were not reverberated at the national level.

Some women held other identities that they felt mitigated some of the experiences they know Black women generally face. Anwar discussed being a masculine presenting Black woman and how that influences her experiences at BTU:

> I don't get a lot of the sexual harassment that Black women experience in life... because of my masculinity, I'm often, especially when my hair was shorter, when I first shaved my hair, I was often mistaken as sir.

Anwar explains that because she is often mistaken as male, she has developed an understanding of what differences she experiences in Blackness and in womanhood versus other Black women, especially feminine presenting Black women. Anwar explained shifts in how White men treated her when she was perceived as male and when she was perceived as woman.

> They will look me in my eyes, give me handshakes more people will hold the door open for me. But now as my hair has gotten longer and I'm more identifiably woman, I definitely get not seen more so people stop acknowledging me, stop moving out of the way for me.

Research has shown that gender performance plays a role in how people see their gendered world (West & Zimmerman, 2009). Anwar's privilege of being treated like a man is not a common experience among participants. Her version of Black womanhood is accepted because she does not adhere to traditional ideas about the performance of her assigned gender. It is also likely that Anwar experiences other forms of gendered discrimination, especially if/when others realize that Anwar's performance of gender is outside of the traditional gender binary, i.e., male/female. As a masculine presenting woman, it is clear that problematizing gender and gender expression, or how people show they're gender, is necessary in understanding how Black

women are treated and how they respond.

The intersection of race and gender directly informs Black women's activist experiences at BTU. The women felt isolated in the campus community, even when they obtained status as a student leader. The issues they faced sometimes caused dissonance between their racial and gender identities, making it difficult to adequately address those concerns. They are sensitive to instances when their identities are in contention with one another and, as a result, they sometimes choose not to participate in activism that should serve them. As we consider Black women's activism at the intersection of race and gender, it is clear that they seek a viewpoint that encompasses the compounded effect of their combined identities.

Black women see their activist self as rooted in but separate from their "natural" self. Activism is generally rooted in the lived experiences and concerns of everyday people. Though Black women contribute deeply to activism, they do not see activism as a part of their "natural" identity – who they are at their core. Rather, activism is a mechanism used to ensure that their most natural self is free to be. The whole person is always present when it comes to activism. Activists bring all of themselves, including the conditions that govern their day-to-day life. Anwar shared:

> I am not really a marcher. I am not someone who has … that stuff drains me, like having to be in spaces that are constantly talking about Black Death, and constantly talking. That stuff doesn't help me. It fuels my depression, it fuels my sadness. For me, my activism is really about how to personally impact people without needing these negative reinforcements. How can I become the best person that I can be? The best understanding person, that for me was through art.

Anwar describes herself as "biologically depressed," meaning there is not always some inductive

rationale for her battles with depression when they arise. Though she might describe herself as depressed at times, Anwar does not describe her activist work in the same ways. Instead, she sees her depression as a natural feature of her being and her activism is about honoring and celebrating that. Bridging her natural self into her activist work, Anwar began a video series that gave space for people to talk about what it means to "*Blank* for Yourself," (e.g., Care, Lust, Dream, Speak, etc.). She shared:

> And for me that's activism too, because now you have people, Black people, it was for Black people [locally]. Now you have these people telling you how to do what you might need to do: how to care for yourself, how to persevere for yourself, how to fight for yourself, create for yourself. It became just a very inspirational series, but for me my activism means not interfering with what is someone else's experience. I like to just document the full thing. Document everything that person said. Don't skip, and edit, and cut up what they're saying, in order to rearrange what they're trying to say. But to give people spaces where they can be authentically themselves without judgment, and also without the need to be politically correct, too. Sometimes people just gotta say shit. A lot of my activism goes around just people expressing themselves.

Anwar's activism video series was well received and noted by institutional insiders at BTU.

Daisy, an insider at BTU for over 20 years, commented on the docuseries in her individual interview, specifically the topic of needing to justify one's existence on campus, or, to prove that one is worthy. This idea of worthiness or the need to justify one's existence is also clear in Stephanie's experience as a Black woman from an immigrant family from Africa. I performed a words exercise with the study participants to explore the ways they define who they are as a person and who they are as an activist (See table 5.3 below). Each interviewee was asked

to choose three words to define themselves and another three to portray their activist self. Table 5.1 is an alphabetical listing of all of the words women chose to portray themselves as. The bolded words show when descriptors overlapped in both the "natural" self and the "activist" self. The information garnered from these questions is helpful in understanding Black women's self-definitions of themselves – how they choose to be, often in spite of a social worldview that paints them differently.

Table 5.1.

Black Women's Descriptors Of Their Natural And Activist Self

How do Black women describe themselves?		**How do Black women describe their activist self?**	
Analytical	Kind	Angry	**Open**
Anxious	Laid-Back	Articulate	Optimistic
Aspirational	Learning	**Black Woman**	Organizer
Black Woman	**Loving**	Bold	**Passionate**
Christian	Nigerian	Boss	People-pleasing
Confident	Nuanced	Builder	**Powerful**
Contradicting	**Open**	**Christian**	Purposeful
Creative	Outgoing	Collaborator	Reflective
Critical	**Passionate**	**Critical**	**Relentless**
Curious	**Powerful**	**Driven**	Reserved
Dramatic	Reflective	**Empathetic**	Revealing
Driven	**Relentless**	Encompassing	**Revolutionary**
Eclectic	Responsible	**Energetic**	Safe
Empathetic	**Revolutionary**	Fierce	Selfless
Energetic	Searching	Firm	Silent
Fighter	"Simpy"	**Futuristic**	Steady
Funny	Social	**Humorous**	**Storyteller**
Futuristic	**Storyteller**	**Impactful**	Strategist
Goofy	**Strong**	Intentional	**Strong**
Grounded	**Supportive**	Leader	**Supportive**
Hilarious	**Tender**	Listener	**Tender**
Humorous	**Thoughtful**	Loud	**Thoughtful**
Idealistic	Tired	**Loving**	**Unafraid**
Impactful	**Unafraid**	Minimal	Unconventional
Introverted	Weird	Motivated	Understanding
Intuitive	**Willing**	Nitty-Gritty	**Willing**

Few participants saw both their natural and activist selves the same way. Half of the women in this study used different language to describe both beings. When asked to describe

herself in three words, Stephanie described herself as Christian, Nigerian, and a storyteller. Using the same activity, she described her activist self as Christian, Black, and a storyteller. Stephanie spoke about her rootedness in Blackness and in Nigerian culture:

> I learned activism in Blackness…because I was so engrossed in - involved in Black culture. And then I was like, "But I'm not Black," because I felt there was a separation. I was like, "I'm Nigerian. That's how I was raised." When I walk into my house, I was in Nigeria. That's how I would describe it, even though I lived in America and stuff like that. And so that was my intent for a very long time.

Stephanie saw a separation between her Nigerian and Black identities and expressed some discomfort around how she performs those different identities in different contexts. As a first generation Nigerian-American, Stephanie is closely steeped in Nigerian culture. At the same time, growing up in the United States made her privy to the lived experiences and issues pertaining to American Black people.

Stephanie's dual footing in both Nigerian-ness and Blackness made Stephanie skilled at maneuvering in both spaces, but also produced personal conflict:

> I don't know the issues of Nigeria; I know the issues of Black people in America. I know the issues of People of Color in America. I know America. I don't know Nigeria like my parents do. And even my parents know a lot in America because they've been here for 20 years. So it's like culture and understanding that is really based off of living and being part of it. And so that's kind of why that shift is, because that's, I'm a Nigerian because that's my understanding, that's my love, that's my family, and that's a big part of my foundation. But as an activist, my foundation is in what being Black in America, what being a woman in America, like what those aspects are in America.

Unlike Stephanie, many Black Americans have not been able to trace their African heritages to specific countries or cultures in Africa – and many times when they're able to pinpoint their ethnic ancestry in Africa, Black people are not always able to make cultural connections to their African heritages (Harris, 2014). At the same time that Stephanie feels deeply rooted in Nigerian culture, she knows little about issues pertaining to Nigerian people, and she felt that Nigerian-born people see her as an American. Though she has experienced Blackness first hand in the United States, and she attributes her activist work to her understanding of the experiences of Black people in America, Stephanie understood her Blackness to be contextual. Stephanie knew that if she was not here in America, she might be less inundated by the realities of Blackness; she might be seen as Nigerian instead.

Duality existed among several participants' descriptors of themselves. They might use character-based words like "goofy," "weird," or "kind" when asked about their natural self, and shift to action-oriented language when speaking about their activist self, like "strategist," "collaborator," and "listener." For example, Phillips chose the words "eclectic," "aspirational," and "searching" to define who she is. Her words are forward focused and free. They depict someone who is enjoying the journey of growing and learning who they are or will be. Phillips chose the words "steady," "articulate," and "understanding" for her activist self. Digging deeper, Phillips related these words to an experience in the school of journalism, where she quickly learned that she would need to advocate for herself in order to be successful in the program:

> Being a woman of color in the program and already feeling like a token to the department made it difficult for me. I didn't get the "inside scoop" that other [non-Black] students had. I had to figure things out on my own and become an expert on being successful in my program. That's why I choose to publish in the City Lines Newspaper instead of The

Red Bird or The Proclaimer. I know that my voice is heard.

Phillips steadied her otherwise eclectic approach to establish an understanding of what it takes to be successful in her program and to articulate a path forward. She explained, "Of course I am all of those other things, too, but being aspirational isn't going to get me anywhere, isn't gonna cause change." It is true that the natural self is not dissociated from the activist self. However, it is clear that the performance of activism sometimes requires women to pull from different parts of themselves in enacting change. Their role identities (those they pick up) may contend or blend with their core identities (their innate identities), effecting Black women's overall performance of their activist and natural selves. The women's identifiers might evolve or devolve if needed or they may change altogether. The shifting of identifiers could shed light on the sustainability of Black women's activist selves and perhaps their need to protect their identities by pulling them in and out of view in certain situations. Though she might call her activism encompassing, one cannot be encompassing all of the time.

Four participants saw both their activist self and their "natural" self the same – Jasmine K., Elaine, Tracy, and Bre. These women selected words like "relentless," "unintentional," and "futuristic" to illustrate their natural self and their activist self. Elaine explained her choice of "unintentional" by stating that she "would have done [the activist work] anyway." She felt that being a part of activism is a natural part of life; that advocating for what she believes in is innate for her. Speaking to the word "futuristic," Bre felt her activism is meant to impact the future generations of Black students at BTU, or that the work she puts in today is specifically meant to better the campus experiences of younger Black students that enroll at BTU. Congruence between their natural and activist selves could be indicative of these Black women's deep sense of purpose and need to act. These women likely see activism as a part of who they are at their

core. Alternatively, it may also be the case that when there is dissonance between the activist and "natural" self, that activism is simply an act of service rather than an identity.

The Black women included in this study described their activist self as rooted in but different than their natural self, or who they are at their core. Though they bring their entire being with them into their activism, their activism does not make them who they are. Their activist efforts are directly rooted in the experiences of Black women at large, as well as their individual understandings of the world. The women in this study can evolve and devolve their activism – they can suppress or submit to characteristics at their core to ensure activism meets the goal of combatting Black women's isolation in the campus community. As Black women's activism has been productive by leading to meaningful changes in the campus community, it is important to consider the inverse of action: reception. The next section unpacks how the institution and its actors receive their work and when institutions view activism as a positive contributor in the molding of a more just college environment.

Despite their claims, the institution is not open to activist work. All but one of the women included in this study felt that BTU is not open to student uprisings, despite their espoused commitments to the student voice and student advocacy. The students and insiders both harkened on the historical significance of activism at BTU. They knew that the campus environment functions as it does today as a result of the rich history of activism at the site. In spite of BTU's recognition as one of the most notable sites of student unrest, students felt that campus administrators directly and indirectly discourage participation in activism at the institutional and systemic levels. They were subject to a policy they felt disproportionately impacts People of Color, they feared institutional retaliation or loss of student status, and they were encouraged to participate in "neat" activism that is predictable and controllable at the

institutional level.

In the absence of support for student activism at the institutional and systemic levels, students who choose to participate in college activism endure additional risks to their matriculation through college. For example, those students of color who have earned scholarships to attend BTU fight imposter syndrome, meaning they feel as though their presence is imposing or unwelcome in the community, and feel targeted by their status. In addition to messages about their belonging at the institution, Black women received a message that their student status could be in jeopardy, given any participation in activism at BTU. Bre, a senior at BTU, explained:

> I've got to be willing to sacrifice, even if that means losing my scholarship. But at the same time, there are people that died for me to have a scholarship. There are people that died and sacrificed for me to even have an education so I'm possibly torn between that and, "Well sometimes I gotta sacrifice." It's just like ... Why is it always I who am sacrificing? There are people who get up and come to this place every day and have not sacrificed anything.

This fear of losing funding at the institution was echoed by several study participants who felt that their contributions to activism put them at unnecessary risk of losing their status as a student. Angel, a recent alumna of BTU, discussed impending changes to the scholarship organization that brought her to BTU. She first enrolled as a scholarship recipient from an organization whose espoused principles included activism as a primary tenet. In the aftermath of an increase in student activism conducted by scholarship recipients, the organization has paused acceptance of new scholars and has initiated an organizational restructure, including reimagining the purpose of activism in the scholarly pursuits of future recipients. Relatedly, the study participants

experienced campus and its policies as unfavorable for Black women and men, and some experienced direct discouragement from BTU administrators in their attempts to create change. For example, Dajae, a coordinator of one of campus' recent activist movements, described a phone call, to her personal cell phone, from a top-level BTU administrator:

> I remember being in class one day and getting a phone call from [a top-level administrator], and I don't know how she got my number, but getting a phone call from [her] and being told, "You need to stop what you're doing because People of Color from the Madison community are upset with you." I remember things like that happening and being so stressed out and feeling like…so many people were upset. And it wasn't even that... It was stressful just to have that [discouragement from action] constantly.

In the face of student activism, particularly activism created by Black students around issues of race and racism found in at least two prominent student risings in recent history, the TrueBTU campaign and museum exhibition, and student organizations such as BTU Lights Out and Blackbird News who held several protests, marches, and demonstrations in the 2015-2016 academic year (Zhong, 2016), it appears that campus' initial response was to try to control the situation rather than address the concerns surfacing in student uprisings. To that end, the direct discouragement of Dajae's activism from a high-ranking campus administrator may be seen as a threat that the institution would penalize her. Illustrative of the institution's efforts to control students instead of addressing concerns, Catherine, an institutional insider at BTU, remembered being trained about student activism:

> I received maybe one or two trainings about the new rules around protesting and activism. It was very much an overview, I would say of "This is protesting, this is civil disobedience, these are things they can't do, these are things they maybe can, but we

> don't know, we might still punish them."

Catherine was essentially trained to advise students on how the institution would prefer activism be performed so as to not disrupt the campus environment. Representative of structural and hegemonic power, the institution's interactions with students and staff on campus are seen as controlling and self-serving. Tracy explained:

> The administration is very resistant to activism and usually won't do anything or won't act on activist's demands until it's backed into a corner and it would look worse for the university to not do something. It takes a lot to get big changes on this campus.

She believes that the institution is only willing to act on behalf of students or acquiesce to their needs if their inaction puts the institutional reputation at risk. Furthermore, she felt that there was little risk for the institution regarding Black student experiences due to the small population size. It was not until Black students made their voices heard not only at BTU, but also across the country through their use of hashtag activism online in conjunction with several in-person events, that the institution started to listen to the needs of Black students at BTU. Dajae recalled a recent instance at a BTU football game where a noose was worn around the necks of people dressed as former President of the United States, Barack Obama, and 2016 election candidate, Hillary Clinton. Dajae did not think that the students were held accountable for their actions swiftly enough. The institution did not act until students of color started demanding action and the story was headline news across the United States. She said:

> It shouldn't have taken three days for the chancellor to write a response letter. That should have been immediate. They should have been kicked out of the football stadium. They shouldn't have been allowed to watch the rest of the game.

Participants believed that it was in the moments when there was glory to be had, when the

institution would be celebrated for their actions, or when their actions would quiet impending noise about the status of the institution, that the institution supports student activism. Generally, they see that the institution is able to come to some reasonable common ground with students and address the concerns they raise, if and only if it benefits the institution to be so. Speaking about recent changes at BTU that included the re-opening of the university's Black Cultural Center, which had initially been closed decades before, Anwar claimed that, "institutions of higher education are getting to the point where having inclusivity sells, so now they want these spaces for people." Essentially, they want to be celebrated for providing Black students the baseline resources they need for success.

Activism was severely impacted by the introduction of a new protest policy at BTU that mandated suspension or expulsion from all BTU system schools for "disrupting the free expression of others." The policy was installed amid growing tensions and an increase in student activism over the previous year and is directly credited for a quick reduction in student activism. Bre confirmed, "I've seen that same passion in a lot of people that I'm actually close to now, kind of die in a sense, or it doesn't burn as bright, or with as much intensity as it used to."

The desire to control the ways students perform activism is not new, as will be illustrated in the following chapter. BTU's protest policy and all materials used to enact the policy work to control how students express their concerns about their BTU experiences. Anwar explained her understanding of the institution's need for control:

> This school really wants a neat activism, right? They don't want on the spur activism. They want tell us ahead of time activism, right? That way we can avoid the area…
> So the school wants like a neat package, but not understanding that nothing that gets changed is neat. Nothing that gets changed is easily compartmentalized. It's gonna be

messy. It's gonna be messy because people are messy.

Neat activism is created through controlling the situation. In conversation with a staff member at BTU, I learned that when the institution knows a protest or other activist event will occur, university staff will attempt to communicate with event leaders beforehand (personal communication, 2018). They talk about purposes and plans for the event and they might review two print materials that are generally passed out to participants at all large-scale activist events on campus that might become "disruptive." Students are given "Guidelines and Expectations for Protest Attendance and Participation," which attempts to define what it means to be disruptive in protesting. Students might also be given a postcard stating, "This Assembly Has Been Declared Unlawful" that lists nine forms of disruption and threatens arrest or disciplinary action as a result.

As if the protest policy is not enough on its own, the meetings and materials used to control student activism are seemingly designed to deliver a message that activism is not tolerated on campus. Bre remarked on the message she received. She wished administrators would say, "I or we as people, or we as representatives of this institution, or we who are running this institution, we didn't do right by y'all. And we know that now," making clear to students that the institution understands and accepts their role in controlling campus climate. Instead, she received a message that implied, "I think you all are trying to give us a bad name. I think you all are trying to do this. I think you are all are trying to do everything to sabotage" and it's like, "No, you're not hearing me. You're hearing everything outside of what I'm saying to you."

This chapter provides a vertical perspective of Black women's activism at a PWI. Through in-depth explanation of the women's spheres of influence (micro-, meso-, and macro-), this study showed that Black women are a main priority in their activism. Although some micro-

level influences leave Black women feeling isolated in the campus community, their microspheres were purposefully constructed to be inclusive of influences that supported their success. At the meso-level, the women's activism worked to combat their sense of isolation. Study participants outlined campus issues they face. The women's instructors did not advocate for them in the classroom, their peers alienated them, and the institution did not make them feel heard. The larger societal concerns of Black women were expressed at the macro-level. In the presence of White supremacist propaganda and misrepresentations of Blackness in the media, Black women's activism sought to bring Blackness and Black people to the center of resolutions. In analyzing the data I made four conclusions: (a) Black women's activism aims to positively impact the college experiences of Black women, Black men, and other minoritized identities, (b) Black women see their activist self as rooted in but separate from their "natural" self, (c) the intersection of race and gender specifically impacts Black women's activist experiences in college, and (d) despite their claims, the institution is not open to student activism. In addition to the vertical realities of Black women activists, the transversal perspective is also important in clarifying Black women's activism at BTU. The next chapter uses a transversal approach to understand the ways Black women's activism has evolved over time.

Chapter VI: Transversal Findings

The transversal analysis of Black women's activist experiences at BTU sought to uncover the ways in which Black women at the institution have contributed to and shaped the legacy for future activism at the site. In CCS, the transversal analysis "historically situates the processes or relations under consideration" (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2016, p. 3). Illustrating the transversal analysis of this study, I examined the ways Black women's activism in college has been remembered and changed over time, including Black women's motivations and impacts on curricular and non-curricular developments at the site. Interviews with both students and insiders, campus media from the university archives, and observations support the claims in the transversal view.

Living In and For the Legacy of Black Activism: A Transversal Perspective

This study provides data about Black women's knowledge of and contributions to activism at BTU. Although most participants were well-informed regarding the history of Black activism at the institution, few women in this study knew much about Black women's particular roles in the activism at BTU. Some of the participants could see the legacy of Black women all around them: they noted buildings bearing Black women's names, theories authored by Black women from BTU, and Black women staff and faculty within the campus community. The transversal analysis showed that the experiences of Black women at BTU haven't changed much since the late 1960s. They remain isolated from the campus community and they feel their needs are not taken seriously. Black women's activist contributions are ever evolving. Women have influenced major changes at the institution. Notably, they were successful in shifting the tone of their action from "disruption" to celebration. Still, the erasure of Black women's contributions continues at BTU. The work Black women contribute to campus is not properly credited or

documented. As Black women's activism continues, it is important to understand how the work of today's students functions in relationship to the legacy of change at the institution and to uncover issues that interrupt truthful narratives of Black women's activism. There were a few emergent claims relative to a transversal analysis that take into account how historical and current trends pave a path toward what may happen in the future. Upon analyzing the transversal data, three primary findings arise to make clear the realities of Black women activists at the institution: (a) the legacy of Black activism directly informs current activism at the site, (b) the experiences of Black women at BTU have not changed much over time, (c) Black women's contributions have increased, and (d) the erasure of Black women's contributions continues.

The legacy of Black activism directly informs current activism at BTU. Black students have played a major role in shaping the BTU campus as it exists today. The first Black man graduated in 1875 and the first woman graduated in 1918. Since that time, Black students have worked hard to be successful collegians and have used their voices as tools in accomplishing that goal. Activism has also been a longstanding feature of the BTU college experience. The first recorded protest occurred in 1910. Other major events happened every few decades that triggered recorded protests: anti-World War II in the 1930s, racial equity and the Vietnam War in the 1960s, racism on campus in the 1980s, and access issues in higher education in the 2010s.

Beginning in the early 1960s, Black student protests took off with the first lunch counter sit-ins (Flowers, 2005). Later that decade, Black students at BTU started to enroll in larger numbers as a part of a recruitment program. Marie, an institutional insider with over 50 years of experience at BTU, recalled her arrival through this program. Having not been advised on BTU as an option for college, Marie had to advocate for herself to even be considered:

> I couldn't understand why no one ever talked to me about BTU. I was really upset about it. I went back to my counselors and asked why I wasn't introduced to the BTU campus, why wasn't I told about that opportunity and can I get in now? It was late. It was spring of my senior year. My counselor, I remember saying, "It's probably too late." I said, "Can we try? Can you call somebody?"

Although Marie and other Black students were able to enroll at BTU, the campus environment was not open to their needs. As the number of Black students increased, it became clear that the institution lacked the resources necessary for their success.

Emboldened by the burgeoning Black Power Movement and the aftermath of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Black students at BTU started to organize their activist efforts beginning in 1966. In 1969, Black students organized one of the largest protests in the campus' history and included thousands of White allies. The strike was dubbed the Black Student Uprising and forever changed the face of BTU. Leaders of the Black uprising put forth 12 demands. Their primary demand was the establishment of an autonomous department of African-American studies. After a nearly two week demonstration of coordinated activism across the BTU campus, administrators and strike leaders sat down to draw out a resolution. Although the institution did not meet all 12 demands, lasting change did occur. Notably, a Black Studies department was established. The strike reverberated across the state, supporting student activism at other campuses. As a result, state legislators drafted several bills aimed at changing the landscape of activism on college campuses. The formation of BTU's campus police may be an indirect consequence of the strike.

Nearly 50 years later, Black students built a new movement from the legacy of the Black student uprising. They drafted a new set of demands fitting their timely concerns, which was

submitted to the university chancellor with a letter urging action before the events of 1969 repeat themselves; a threat of widespread protest. Among the 14 demands, Black students sought a zero tolerance policy for racism enacted, reimplementation of the Black Cultural Center, and restructuring of the BTU campus police. At the same time, tensions were rising in the aftermath of Haven's bias incident in the residence hall, as well as other events of racism in the BTU community. The success of the True BTU movement, which blended hashtag activism and advocating at the campus level, also reinforced the new demands drafted by Black students. It put the issues of students of color and other minoritized students into the national conversation about college experiences of non-White students. The Black Culture Center was subsequently reestablished under the advisement and supervision of Black people at the institution. It is not a coincidence that the work of today's students mirrors that of the late '60's with the Black student uprising. Black women regularly referred to the history of Black activism as an inspirational part of the campus legacy, particularly of Black people. Anwar reflected on being inspired:

> I find inspiration in what I know, but I also find inspiration and what I think because although a lot of the activism that has been done already by Black women was very impactful during that time period, we're at a whole different time period of life. So, a lot of things that they were saying, we can't necessarily always say it anymore or we can't necessarily think that way anymore. It's not that simple or it is that simple and it's about kind of unraveling. It's like they gave us a gift and now it's our turn to repackage it and continue.

Though the times have changed and so have the issues that impact peoples lives, activism today is rooted in the activism of those first students who risked their college experience so that today's students might have a better experience than they did. Activism at BTU today has been

repackaged in response to stimuli at the micro, meso, and macro levels. At the micro level, people themselves are different; they live in a different world with different resources than before. Therefore, their interactions are distinctive in the mesosphere. Although both conscious and unconscious forms of racism (and other –isms) might look similar, the tools used in their enacting are evolved. For instance, the success of hashtag activism occurred in correlation to the expansion of the Internet, and also in response to a rise in the use of online platforms to cause harm to people and communities. At the macro level, the larger social concerns regarding women are also repackaged to include decades of progress made by women, particularly Black women and other women of color. For example, Black women and other women of color have forever changed the landscape of politics by installing the most diverse freshman congressional class in 2018. The class was made of 111 freshmen – including 42 women, 13 of who were women of color (Edmondson & Lee, 2019).

The experiences of Black women at BTU haven't changed much. When thinking about the ways Black women experience campus, there has not been substantial change. As mentioned before, the low numbers of Black students enrolled at BTU is a critical issue at BTU. Black students make up just 2% of the student population. Tracy spoke about the importance of representation on campus:

> There's not enough representation of Black and Brown students, not only in the administration or in the faculty, but also just among student leaders as well. It can be very tough to feel like you belong in an organization or on this campus when you don't see anyone who looks like you not only in classes but also in the student org that you want to join or in your dorm. It can be a very isolating feeling.

Studies have shown that students of color have different engagement in classes taught by people

of their own race (Egalite, Kisida, &Winters, 2015) and that universities make better decisions when the students they serve are represented in the decision-making process (Luescher-Mamashela, 2013). Tracy, having served in several leadership capacities at BTU, understood that the low enrollment of Black students likely meant that Black students' needs were not adequately represented when it mattered. Still, she saw a silver lining regarding the low enrollment:

> Something else that inspires me is that the percentage or the number of Black students on this campus has essentially remained unchanged since the 1960s. It has steadily stayed at 2%. Yet, Black students have been able to accomplish so much on this campus despite our small presence.

Student leaders from the Black student uprising echoed this sentiment during a recent panel event coordinated and led by Black undergraduate women at BTU. The movement leaders remarked on their disappointment that the population of Black students at BTU had not increased since the late 60's (observation, February 2019). The fact that both sets of demands authored by students in the late 1960s and those authored in 2014 stress increasing enrollment of Black students is illustrative of the lack of growth over time.

Utilizing the university archives in exploring Black women's campus experiences further provided insights into how Black women experienced campus in the late 1960s. At the time, campus was seen as unwelcoming to Black women who needed to mold themselves to ascribe to campus's social and academic norms. Now, nearly 50 years later, Black women continue to experience campus as unwelcoming and sometimes unsafe. Black women live in a time where they must continue to thrive, even as the first of their kind. We know that one important element contributing to success in college is the support and encouragement of those who came before: that representation matters in creating a sense of space and place to allow students to be steadfast

in the face of struggle (Egalite et al., 2015). Like those who became firsts before her, Elaine became the first to graduate with a Bachelor of Science in Astrological Physics at BTU in the spring of 2018, approximately 100 years from the first enrollment of a Black woman at the institution. She reflected on why it was important for her to graduate from her program:

> I could think that the reason why, me being the first to graduate with this degree is so important isn't because of the field itself. Like so many people get degrees in astronomy, physics or astrophysics all the time, but it's that it took until 2018…Like that's why that's impactful because it should have never gotten that far.

Elaine's point is that simply graduating from a program isn't special; rather, her achievement bears weight because it took 100 years to do, and perhaps it shouldn't have. But in 2019, Black women still become the first to reach a wide variety of goals. They still achieve their goals in environments that do not value their contributions or acknowledge their needs.

Black women are neither protected in the national landscape nor the campus environment. In 1962, Malcolm X, a prominent activist, claimed, "The most disrespected person in America is the Black woman. The most unprotected person in America is the Black woman. The most neglected person in America is the Black woman." At the national level today, Donald Trump regularly berates Black women calling them "dogs" or "stupid" (Kwong, 2018). Kimberlé Crenshaw, professor of law, rebutted Trump's treatment of Black women, stating, "Trump is more vulnerable to them because Black women are the political constituency that is the least persuaded by anything he has to say," (Milloy, 2018). The inclination to challenge Black women has not changed, even when they bring forth valid information and rational solutions. Bre explained:

> I don't think people are ready. I don't. I feel like ... the many voices that are speaking

> through Black women at once, are coming from so many different places that a lot of people are like, "I don't even understand." I know you don't. I know. But it doesn't mean you don't have to listen. It doesn't mean that it's not valuable, what's being said. It doesn't mean that this is not a teaching moment or a learning moment. But I think people cast that off as like, "Oh she's crazy." Or, you know, "They crazy. They just yelling, they just loud. They just fussing. Nobody know what they talking about."

Bre's example is just one of many that show that Black women feel that they are not listened to. She is aggravated that Black women are written off as "crazy" or "loud" when they attempt to simply be heard. The constant battle to be heard is exhausting. Most of the study participants noted they felt tired and drained by the continuous battle to make their experiences known. Ny, a junior at BTU, compared her energy levels freshman year to junior year: "I was so excited. I had energy. Now I am just thinking about all the work we did and if it is even worth it to be so tired." Insiders Kecia and Elizabeth also expressed concern about the sustainability of students. They are pulled in several directions on campus, both academic and non-academic, and their work is impactful in each domain, but "they sometimes get caught burning the candle at both ends," expending energy as a student and as an activist.

Still, activism persists because there is an ever present need to support the well-being of minoritized people. In college, the onus of continuing activist efforts does not lie only with leaders of the movement, since they must graduate or may become burdened by their work. It is important that the momentum is not lost once they have graduated. One of the leaders who sat on the panel discussion about the Black student uprising remembered her departure from BTU. She left in the aftermath of the strike feeling unsafe and unwelcomed in the campus community:

> There wasn't any way for us, as students who were leaving or graduating, to see those

> kinds of things through, which is always the problem with campus movements. (Other students) have to keep on pushing, keep on making a loud noise and keep on doing stuff that would push the envelope further.

As students approach the horizon of their college experience and must transition into their next steps, it is imperative that they reflect on the experiences college offered them, what they did, and how future students can maintain, if not extend, that work.

Black women's contributions to BTU continue to grow. Black women have been contributors to BTU since they were first allowed to enroll. In accordance with social norms at that time, what it meant to contribute was holistically distinct from what students experience today. A common narrative about Black women activists is that they did a lot of the "behind the scenes" work within movements: they supported men and nourished the community. For example, half of the editors for the first issues of Blackbird News, a publication written by and for Black students at BTU, were women. Yet, few stories in the copies that I had access to specifically addressed the condition of Black women. When they did, Black women exclusively wrote those pieces. Today, the same publication is heavily staffed with Black women. Both of its co-chairs are Black women.

Another narrative, although less common, describes the many ways that Black women were situated at the front lines of activism. From Sojourner Truth, who escaped slavery and spent her life advocating for equal rights, to Tarana Burke, who founded the hashtag #Metoo Movement that catapulted the activism against sexual assault, Black women have made considerable impact on the social world through their activism. This is true of Black women at BTU as well. Institutional insider, Marie, noted that in her over 40 years at BTU, she only knew of one Black woman leading the Black Student Union, and she served as co-president to a male

student:

> Interestingly enough and this is based on your topic, over the years, the Black Student Union was mostly led by men and there was one female student, back in the ‘80s, who was a very strong, articulate, powerful young lady, who was working within WBSU. I helped her to get the organization to see her worth, kind of took her to my office and had conversations with her and really encouraged her to take a leadership role. She ultimately became the co-president of the BSU.

Now, several Black women leaders are active on campus in various capacities. Dajae, a senior and leader of the TrueBTU movement, is President of the Black Student Union and works in the campus public service office. Angel, a recent alumna and doctoral student, teaches a course that bridges Blackness, feminism, and performance in the study of Latinx people in reggaeton and hip-hop. Recent alumna, Zhalarina, is the founder of the VNJ project, an organization that serves the local community. Their work is impactful on campus. Through her role as student body president, Tracy laid the foundation for OurBTU, a mandated diversity and inclusion training for all incoming freshmen. She recalled:

> For my campaign, I chose to ask the administration to instate mandatory diversity training, and that training had been accepted by the university. They funded it, and it’s morphed into what is now OurBTU. It was through that experience that I realized ... First of all I realized that nothing can happen when you’re by yourself. It takes a village to get something done especially on this campus. If it wasn’t for all of the momentum that Black and Brown students were causing on campus about the disparities that we were experiencing, then there’s no way in hell the administration would have ever considered an inclusion program like OurBTU.

Along with two other Black women elected to the student government, Tracy also piloted a program that made complimentary menstrual products available:

> Myself and a couple of other people in the student government had decided that we really need complimentary menstrual products on campus, and so we talked to a couple other Big 10 universities who have rolled out such programs and proposed it to the administration, and they agreed to do a pilot with three campus buildings.

To prepare for this program proposal, they conducted research, benchmarked BTU to similar institutions, and drafted a budget. Menstrual products are now available in almost all buildings across campus. Bre, in her capacity as chair of the Black History Month planning committee, solidified a regular Black History Month keynote address series that brings accomplished Black women, like world renowned poet and activist, Nikki Giovanni (http://www.nikki-giovanni.com/bio%20), as well as Issa Rae (http://www.issarae.com/about-me/) and Lena Waithe (Woodson, 2018), both of whom are television writers, producers, and actresses. Bre has created an environment where Black students at BTU have been able to engage with successful Black people over the past three years. She has normalized this type of experience for students today, who will never have experienced a BTU campus without a Black Cultural Center or without investment in honoring Black history in the month of February. Bre's work has influenced a culture of celebrating Blackness that will never be forgotten. Kecia, an institutional insider, remarked about the strength of programming that focuses on Black people and their experiences:

> I am proud of all of the good work the young ladies are doing these days. When I was here, they were really active still but it feels different in so many ways. These young ladies are really pushing the envelope, daring to be happy, and that's really humbling.

Black women at BTU are also expanding dialogue about race and racism into areas of the university that have otherwise been ignored. Tracy described her experience of facilitating conversations in athletics following the noose incident during a campus football game:

> Myself, two other Black women from the student government, and other Black leaders throughout the community actually came together with the director of BTU athletics and other people from athletics to talk about what we should do to ensure that something like that never happens again…We knew that our voices were being heard, and that the student perspective was critical to their decision-making about what should happen moving forward and how they should change the policy moving forward. That was like a really empowering experience because we realized that even though so often on this campus we feel like we're invisible or made to feel worthless, that our voice and our opinion does matter and it can matter on levels as high as BTU athletics and, of course, beyond that as well.

At BTU, Black women's leadership has produced lasting change relevant to the entire campus community. Their activism has influenced campus policies around diversity training and menstrual healthcare, and has instilled a culture of celebrating Blackness that likely will "bear fruit" for future Black students that enroll at BTU.

The erasure of Black women's contributions continues. The erasure of Black women from narratives of leadership and progress is a long-standing tradition in American history. At BTU, the work of Black women is also erased consciously and unconsciously. Black women's activism is often unattributed to them or co-opted by others. In my review of photos from the university archives, I noted that Black women are often nameless in the photo descriptions. The captions on photos of them generally describe what is happening in the photo, e.g., "Woman

dances in Luther Hall," unless it was a photo of a famous Black person who had attended BTU. I recall a photo of a Black woman performing a scientific experiment. She was looking intently at an Erlenmeyer flask using a dropper to add a liquid. I found myself wondering who she was, who she became, and what she contributed to science in her years after BTU. Like me, most of the women I interviewed admittedly knew little about Black women's legacy at BTU in particular. Anwar explained how poor preservation could act as a form of erasure. She said, "We have a very poor preservation process, so it's that's included in that, too. So it's really about discovering and rediscovering people who have been forgotten and so…people get forgotten very easily. So it's a lot of work."

When the contributions of Black women are not preserved and have not been accurately documented and attributed, it is easier to forget elements or the entirety of their legacies. To illustrate this exact point, I made four visits to the archives to seek materials that might shed light on Black women's contributions at BTU, particularly their activist contributions. In my first visit, when I was being trained on accessing the archives, I noticed a pile of images from the TrueBTU event stacked in an empty conference room. I was excited to see that the images were at the archives, since I thought I could view them as a part of this research. In my second visit, when I asked to see the images I noticed in my first visit, I was told that the images were lost (personal communication, 2019). The TrueBTU movement was arguably a major moment in BTU history. It received national news coverage and garnered support from students of other minoritized groups on campus. I was shocked that images from such an important moment were simply lost. They were, thereby, erased from the historical archive of the institution. Knowledge of the movement will fade with time in the memories of those who were on campus to experience it. (The images were resubmitted, to be archived with permission from movement

leadership.) In thinking about the institutional memories of Black women, Anwar said:

> And I think the most hurtful thing of it all is like, they're going to be ... if not right now, there are students on campus that don't even know that. And nobody is going to tell them, or if they do it's going to be too late and at that point your brain is going to be like, "Nope that's what I remember so that's all I'm going to remember." Or, "Hey, I gotta do some serious work to unlearn that."

The fickle nature of the brain reinforces the need to accurately document Black women's contributions to activism in spaces of education.

Black women are not appropriately credited for their contributions, even when they are adopted or adapted by the university. Tracy is not credited for establishing the OurBTU program on any program materials available online. The program's "About" section could easily honor that it was born from a pilot program created by Tracy, a Black woman who was student body president. The absence of good documentation about the history of the program also prevents an understanding that Tracy's program was partly successful because of the momentum created by other campus movements like TrueBTU. The university had been critiqued for failing to implement mandatory diversity training for many years, but the success of OurBTU is impacted by the accumulation of pressure on the institution through student activism. Similarly, Dajae and other Black women are not recognized for their work in the TrueBTU movement. Black male students became the faces of the movement early on and as a result, Black men were seen as the movement leadership. Bre explained how she felt:

> Honestly to know that the TrueBTU, a lot of it was based off of Black women on campus, and that credit does not go back to them, I'm just like, "Are y'all good? Y'all realize it wouldn't have been a movement without them right? Okay. Okay."… To see

> how Black women are constantly the catalyst for a lot of these movements, or being able to provide space for other people to then come in and open themselves up. I think it's unfair. Not even just unfair, but it's downright ... it's foolish. You have to give Black women the credit for that, you have to. And I feel like any moment you don't, you do a disservice to yourself and you do a disservice to the work that you're trying to do to be liberated. You have to include all of those moving parts and you have to include all of those moving people because they're essential to creating that space in the first place.

Bre was offended that the Black women whose experiences gave the movement power and the Black women who successfully brought to fruition an art exhibition honoring those experiences were not respected as foundational to the movement's success. She was concerned that in the telling and re-telling of stories about their work, Black women were being forgotten.

An institution interested in "neat activism" has much at stake in how people perceive the campus. Erasure is a tool used by those in power to control how the institution is remembered. Participants found it nonsensical that the institution be closed to student activism, which has shaped the way campus functions today. They felt that institutional erasure of student activism also nullified the opportunities available for administrators to address students concerns and reshape their experiences of campus. Bre perfectly articulated what is at risk in the erasure of Black women's activism at a PWI:

> I honestly think it's a form of erasure. We won't sit here and act like the foundation of this campus is not built off of student activism. We can't do that. We do a disservice to so many people. We do a disservice to our own ability to grow. I can't sit here and X out the parts of my life that were bad because, "Oh I don't want nobody to know that." I have to accept the fact that, a) I didn't do good. I didn't do right by nobody in this moment, but

moving from that moment, I know not to do it again. And I feel like *the university misses an opportunity to be redeemed.*

Insofar, this chapter sought an understanding of Black women's activism from the transversal perspective, historically situating their activism. The participant's found themselves living in and for the legacy of activism. Although their experiences of campus haven't changed dramatically, Black women's contributions to activism have grown. The women serve in leadership capacities across campus and leverage their leadership opportunities to enhance the conditions of Black people at BTU, especially Black women. Through their activism, Black women have shifted approaches from disruption to celebration. Rather than a traditional protest, recall that Bre helped to organize the campus-wide programming for Black History Month. The month ended with two keynote speakers who celebrated Blackness and encouraged the Black students at the site. Across the transversal plane, Black women's contributions are sometimes erased. The activist work they did was misattributed or unattributed in campus media and the archives. Moving forward, it is critical to layer the vertical and transversal analyses. This layering provides a new plane on which inferences can be made about the axial relationships at play in the activist experiences of Black women in college.

Where the Vertical and Transversal Collide

The axial relationships of this study are not mutually exclusive; they also interact with one another, overlapping or blurring based on various sociopolitical factors. For example, university policies are influenced by and influence the sociopolitical landscape, i.e., higher education as "big business". Those same university policies are structured to address student behaviors and also inspire student action, e.g., mandatory fees imposed on students, student protests. Simultaneously, the same sociopolitical landscape can shape student's daily lives on

campus and student activism can in turn, put necessary pressure on the sociopolitical landscape (i.e., #MeToo; students demanding that rape culture in college be addressed). Under these conditions, campuses become an environment where the oppressed have to explain their oppression to their oppressors. Tracy explains:

> When I was initially proposing the idea of a mandatory diversity training, and I was talking with the Dean of Students, I wouldn't necessarily say she was resistant to the idea because she ended up being a very big proponent of it. I felt as if she needed more information. She wasn't sure if the situation required such a drastic move. In that conversation, I felt like it was really important to lay out my experience on this campus and also my experience before I got to this campus.

An institutional environment where Black women must explain or provide more context than is generally needed about their experiences in the college setting is akin to and perhaps inspired by the misunderstandings about Black womanhood that exist across scales (micro-, meso, and macro-) and over time (transversally). For example, the idea that Black women should "tame" their natural hair by straightening it or relaxing it (a chemical-based method of straightening kinky and coily hair) has long been a part of narratives about Black womanhood and Black women's hair politics (Dirshe, 2018). But for societal standards around the acceptable appearance of Black women, Madame C.J. Walker might not have popularized the pressing comb (a heated comb-like tool used to straighten kinky hair), becoming the first Black woman to become a self-made millionaire (Bundles, 2001).

Today, some Black college women still feel the weight of straight hair politics on their college experience. Kati spoke about attending an internship fair at the BTU Business School:

> I just wanted my hair to be straighter, I did not want to walk in there with this big ol' puff

> and I had a full business suit. I had the black two inch heels, I had the buttoned up shirt but I just did not I don't know. I just didn't want to wear my natural hair.

Kati was made to feel that in order to successfully earn an internship, she needed to ascribe to appearance standards imposed by the dominant group. In America, beauty standards for women are structured such that European characteristics, specifically, straight hair and fair skin, are valued over Black or African ones, as shown in Sekayi's (2003) study of Eurocentric beauty standards and their impact on Black college women. Kati's experience is common and has occurred in personal, academic, and professional spaces. It should be noted, though, that there has been a resurgence of Black women's pride in their natural textures. Some women choose not to straighten their hair or style it in "appropriate" ways as a form of activism. This form of resistance can be seen as activism in that, for Black women, all measures to maintain the self are sound activist tactics. This includes: choosing not to conform to dominant expectations about race and gender performance, e.g., wearing natural hair texture at work; choosing not to share their stories, especially when they are used as exemplars of Blackness; or promoting the empowerment of Black women through their work in student organizations.

The tokenization of Black women and interest convergence are particularly clear when Black women's vertical and transversal contexts are layered. For racial and ethnic minorities, tokenism is a situation where boundaries between groups are not entirely closed, making room for the raising up of select individuals based on group membership (Wright, 2001). Consider the few Black women in campus-wide leadership positions, like Tracy, who served as student body president. Tracy explains how she felt administrators ranked her opinions:

> I do know that the administration particularly valued my opinion [about the Black student experience] higher than they would value the opinion of someone else in the student

> government. Not necessarily that they would value my opinion over other students, but they sought out my opinion if that makes sense. It definitely became tokenizing where they would only look to me for an explanation.

Being seen as an "exemplary" Black woman on campus, who has seemingly bought into the BTU leadership structure, Tracy felt that her opinion was sought after and valued more than her peers. Not only did this cause undue stress on Tracy in having to articulate the concerns of all Black students at BTU, the tokenization of Tracy is limiting to other Black students whose experiences might not be represented in Tracy's; there is greater risk of building solutions around a single story (Adichie, 2009).

The tokenization of Black women within the institution may also serve as a form of interest convergence, where solutions that meet the needs of Black students must also positively impact White students. In her reflection of her leadership experiences at BTU, Tracy continued:

> I felt like I had to show her that this would impact more than the 2% of Black students, which I think was the initial mindset. Why would we do this for just these students? I don't understand. But it was like, no, this is going to impact the entire school.

Interest convergence is a notion where minoritized people's opportunities only improve when their interests converge with those of Whites (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2016). As an example of interest convergence, Tracy was put in the position to rationalize changes that would impact the campus experience of Black women and men as relevant not just to them, but to all students, particularly the White majority. Interest convergence in higher education is particularly clear when looking at diversity initiatives. Although the common narrative is that diversity initiatives only serve minoritized students (Fleming, 1978), Crenshaw (2006) showed that White women are the main beneficiaries of affirmative action. Additionally, universities have more to lose than

prestige when it comes to the fair treatment of Black women and other minoritized people. Institutions that are seen as unwelcoming or hostile to students of color risk reduction in enrollment, particularly of international students of color, who contribute greatly to the institution's financial well-being.

Black Feminism in the Activist Experiences of Black Women

This study focuses on three overarching themes with specific interest in Black women activists as articulated in Black Feminist Thought (BFT). The first theme, *self-definition and self-valuation*, involves resisting the superficially defined, stereotypical images of Black women and replacing those with accurate understandings of Blackness and Black womanhood. In this study, Nicole, a Biracial Black woman recalled feeling empowered in learning Blackness. Her activism is rooted in discovery of self. She explained:

> I feel like since being on campus I felt prouder to be a Black woman, 'cause I guess I grew up without many Black woman present in my life. So, to be on campus surrounded by so many amazing Black woman and, whether in my classes or different buildings I just lived in or different orgs, just seeing so many bright and brilliant Black woman just confident in themselves really helped me feel confident in myself and actually become proud. I don't think before coming here I would've identified as a Black woman. I don't know how I identified honestly looking back, but now I confidently say that I'm a Biracial Black woman. I say that with confidence now, no matter where and that was like something I always struggled with, but I feel like since being here I found that confidence and pride.

As a Biracial Black woman who did not have many Black female influences before coming to campus, Nicole developed definitions and valuations of her Blackness through her collegiate

experiences. Her experience pinpoints college as a site of engagement around what it means to be Black. More research on Biracial Black women's definitions and valuations of Blackness would further illuminate what is gained in participating in Blackness, particularly as it relates to individual's understandings of their own Blackness, despite the narratives that have been implanted within them.

The second theme examined the *interlocking nature of oppression*: that Black women's experiences live at the intersection of their race and gender. In this study, race and gender come together to produce experiences that cause contention between Black women's race and gender. Black women's other identity characteristics also intersect in their activist experiences. When asked about their sexual orientations, almost half of the women included in this study identified as queer, bisexual, or some other "fluid" non-heterosexual identity. One woman identified herself as "painfully Christian," signaling that her race and gender intersect not only with her sexuality, but also her religion.

The final theme, understanding the *importance of Black women's culture*, involves redefining and clarifying Black women's cultural importance. Knowledge about and celebration of Black women's culture may be especially critical in Black women's self-definitions and self-valuations. When asked about when they feel most valuable, few participants felt valuable for their activism. Instead, many of the women expressed that they felt the most valuable in the presence of other Black women. When asked about when she felt most valuable as a Black woman on campus, Alicia responded:

> I love being around Black people in general, period, but I think there were moments on campus...For example, when I spoke to you about the class that I took, we were all Black women and we sat in the front. Even in informal gatherings where I was just with all

> Black women and I was braiding somebody's hair and we were chatting it up. We wrote down prayers together or we thought about what kind of love we wanted from the world and what kind of love we wanted from ourselves, for ourselves. Those were the moments I think I felt the most valuable. It felt like my presence was really, truly appreciated and I felt truly appreciative of those Black women in particular who were surrounding me in those moments.

Alicia shared a quintessential truth for all of the participants in this study: she felt most valued in the presence of Black people doing Blackness. Scholars suggest that Black women may form relationships with other Black women because they do not have to explain their identities (Croom et al., 2017; Porter & Dean, 2015). They also note that Black women's meaningful friendships are familial and necessary to their success on campus (Winkle-Wagner et al., 2019). These friendships highlighted the importance of sharing knowledge and practicing trust within friend groups. They were lasting because they were built from genuine engagement about shared identities, backgrounds, and experiences.

The women in this study viewed their self-care routines, in-class behaviors, style of dress and hair, their presence and absence, as well as their choice to be silent or loud as non-traditional forms of activism. BFT also embraces the idea that nontraditional forms of activism are still activism and that the possibilities for activism exist within multiple structures of domination (Collins, 1986). In BFT, power exists in four domains: structural, disciplinary, interpersonal, and hegemonic. The structural domain is interested in understanding how social institutions are organized to reify Black women subordination over time. Examinations of Black women's classroom participation, experiences with their peers, and/or what role instructors play in how Black women are treated in the classroom is essential in understanding the status of Black

women in college. The disciplinary domain is interested in management of power relationships and overall control. This study has shown how institutions can introduce disciplinary risk that disproportionately impacts Black women and other minoritized groups, as seen in the enacting of the system-wide protest policy at the local campus level. The interpersonal domain of power involves seducing people to replace their individual and cultural ways of knowing with the dominant ways of knowing. Since college is a location of identity development and self-definition, Tracy shared her personal growth as it related to her racial identities; growth she might not have achieved outside of her college experiences of Black culture:

> Growing up I was very unaware of my Black identity in any real way. I knew I was Black, but I tried to ignore it as much as possible and really tried my absolute hardest to assimilate and be literally as White as possible. I didn't know or understand fully who I was or what the Black experience was like in America. Then coming to BTU, it hit me like a brick in the face. I quickly became aware of what my identity meant in regard to the experiences that I would have. I also realized that this wasn't anything new, and there were things I have been experiencing my entire life but just didn't have the language or the words to understand it.

Admittedly, Tracy felt that she needed to assimilate into White culture in order to be accepted, indicative of interpersonal power where Whiteness was the dominant culture. When she arrived on campus and started to engage with Black people from all over the country, she started to make valuations about Blackness and started to see Blackness shining through her own self. For Tracy, getting out from underneath interpersonal power was a self-defining and self-valuing process.

Finally, the hegemonic domain deals with ideology, culture, and consciousness with an aim to justify practices linking oppression across domains. As an example, the pitting of

scholarship recipients against those who pay their tuition produces a narrative that scholarship recipients do not deserve to be at BTU, and therefore lack the right to challenge what happens therein. Positioning these student populations as payers and non-payers falsely substantiates a reality where those who do pay their tuition "out-of-pocket" have greater stake at the institution and that their needs should matter more than non-paying students.

Chapter VII: Conclusions, Implications, and Suggestions for Future Research

This study offers evidence that Black women remain integral in encouraging transformative change at predominantly White institutions through their activism. I adapted Bartlett & Vavrus's (2016) critical case study methodology to view Black women's activist experiences from a vertical and transversal perspective. The vertical axis examines the interactions of influences across scales (micro-, meso-, and macro-) where boundaries are permeable. The transversal axis takes into account the historical events and processes that develop over time (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2016). This data showed that despite the issues they face at the institution, tempered as they are by the local and national social scene, Black women were intentional about how their contributions to the campus community were crafted, experienced, and remembered. Black women's microspheres, or their innermost scalar level, were purposefully constructed. The people, both known and unknown to them, places they visited, and spaces they felt safest made up their microspheres. Their micro-level experiences contributed to a sense of isolation within the campus community. In the mesosphere, which included all of the interactions between micro-level influences, Black women's various forms of activism worked to combat their sense of isolation. They articulated the issues they faced and crafted meaningful ways to address those concerns through activism.

At PWIs, the demographic ratios of Black women remain an issue. As an example, the low enrollment of Black students at PWIs is often misconstrued so that the few Black students on campus are viewed as "scholarship kids," or beneficiaries of affirmative action (Commodore et al., 2017). In their telling of their activist experiences, study participants depicted how their academic achievements were not respected. In light of new system-wide policy threatening suspension or, in extreme cases, expulsion for participating in "disruptive" protests at BTU,

Black women who participated in activism have shifted their approach to activism due to fear of reprimand by the university. By leveraging their identities as scholarship recipients, students felt that the institution introduced disciplinary risk through the adoption of campus protest policy. The policy reified Black women's subordination in the college setting in separating those students who could and could not "risk it all" – as scholarship recipients cannot simply attend another, more fit, institution (all of the participants did, in fact, earn scholarships). The labeling of Black women as "scholarship kids" combined with the definition of their activism as "disruptive" to produce hegemonic variance between who is seen as having earned a right to the institution and thereby, the right to challenge or disrupt the status quo. Black women's experiences live at the intersection of at least their race and gender identities, as does their oppression (Beale & Cade, 1970; Collins, 2000; Commodore et al., 2017; Harris-Perry, 2011; hooks, 1981; Lewis, 1977; Lorde, 1984). Black women felt devalued in their academic settings, unheard by university leadership, and unseen in the social fabric of the campus community. Still, Black women's activism directly impacted Black people and other minoritized communities. They served in leadership capacities, created curricular and structural change, and produced meaningful programs for the campus community.

The data also illustrated, quite blatantly, the tools institutions use to smother activism: attempting to manage protests by *inviting* protest leaders to speak with campus leaders about their upcoming plans, producing and distributing guidelines for protest participation and other print materials threatening reprimand, and by calling protest leaders directly to discourage continuance of their activism. Although college campuses like BTU exist as they do today in major part due to the activist contributions of its students (Jason, 2018), institutions are often wary of admitting student activists. This is particularly true for those who have shown their skills

at inciting incendiary dialogue around the issues students face within the college campus and beyond its walls. A recent study suggested that White-controlled institutions or PWIs were more interested in admitting Black students who were deemed palatable and politically neutral (Thornhill, 2018). As a result, White male college admission counselors unjustly penalized Black student activists in admissions: they were 37% less likely to respond to Black students when they expressed interest in racial justice, and 50% less likely if that Black student was also female (Thornhill, 2018). At the institutional level, the suppression of activism can begin well before students arrive to campus during their admission and enrollment processes, and can become compounded by institutional culture, rules, and expectations.

Black women were deeply influenced by the legacies of other Black women; they found solace in learning about Black women's historical significance (Domingue, 2015). The women in this study were knowledgeable about their rights within the university structure and generally understood the legacy of Black activism at BTU. Many chose to focus on Blackness and Black people by studying in the African American studies department. In understanding the legacy of Black women, the current study found that Black women's experiences at the institution have not changed much since the late '60's. During this time, activism became a mainstay in the college experience, especially for Black students (Altbach, 1989). This study highlights that although the ways in which current activism is enacted may differ from the '60's, in 2019, many of their purposes and experiences of activism remain the same. The similarities were confirmed by institutional insiders in their interviews, as well as in the panelist remarks of four leaders from a prominent activist movement at BTU in the late '60's.

Still, Black women's contributions to activism at the site appear to have increased due to their establishment as leaders of prominent student organizations on campus. Initially, Black

women's leadership was limited to their work in Black Greek-lettered organizations (Kimbrough, 2003). The women in this study who serve in leadership capacities at BTU have used their position to shift the approach of their activism from protesting the experiences of Black and other minoritized students at BTU to celebrating the excellence of Black people at BTU and beyond. They have sought leadership opportunities that had long-since appeared closed to them, i.e., student body president, Black student union president, research fellowships, etc. In so doing, they have produced powerful opportunities for all students to engage with the realities of Black people on and off campus, honoring the immense contributions they've made to the campus community, and to participate in the active unlearning of misrepresentations of Black college goers.

Finally, this study showed that even as their contributions to BTU flourish in size and scope, Black women's activist contributions continue to be erased from the university narrative and legacy of Black activism at BTU. Erasure is not new to Black women. In fact, combatting Black women's erasure is a primary goal of Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 1986). From the establishment of mandated academic programming about diversity and inclusion to the coordination of a large-scale activist art exhibition depicting the true experiences of Black and Brown students, this study provided multiple examples of erasure in the activist experiences of Black college women at PWIs. The current study illustrated how institutions can be active participants in the erasure of Black women's experiences through their archive practices (e.g., difficult submission processes/lost materials/unclear labeling), adoption/adaptation of programmatic and curricular ideas, and misrepresentation of activist contributions in campus media. Examining the activist experiences of Black women at BTU across the vertical and

transversal axes unveiled both the issues Black women face in the college setting as well as their activist approaches to meet their needs.

Cumulatively, it is clear that Black women's activist experiences at PWIs are complex. As Black women continue to participate in activism in college, the critical examination of their scalar realities is necessary in understanding their activist contributions within the sociopolitical landscape of and beyond their campuses.

Contributions of the Study

This study contributes to research and theory in several critical ways. The specific focus in this study on Black women has expanded what is known about college student activism by putting the unique issues they face at the intersection of race and gender in direct conversation with the solutions they create. At the same time, the scalar examination of their experiences called into question the university's role in Black women's activism, the institution's responses to activism, as well as the larger societal trends that influence the work Black women do and how that work is received.

This study also enhances what is known about the isolation of Black women in the college environment. Researchers have already shown that Black women's sense of belonging is shaped by their experiences of isolation on campus (McCabe, 2009; Watt, 2003; Winkle-Wagner, 2009). By interrogating Black women's experiences at various ecological levels, this study showed that their sense of isolation is impacted by the individual people they engage with in the microsphere, is understood by the interactions in their mesospheres, and is compounded by Black women's social realities in the macrosphere. For example, recall that Black women portrayed their in-class peers and their faculty/instructors as micro-level influences. When Black women are alienated in the classroom, as Hiesha was when her peers did not want to sit by her or

work with her, and their instructors do not protect them or advocate for them, then Black women may experience college as isolating. Additionally, when macro-level issues like misrepresenting Blackness and Black women in the media occur, Black women must do the work of centering Blackness in their activist resolutions.

Extending what is known about institutional responses to activism beyond the reality that students of color remain who are burdened with the work of educating their peers about their experiences (Commodore et al., 2017; Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016) and institutions' establishment of Black Cultural Centers and the like (Patton, 2006), this study brought into view students perceptions of policies that were enacted to quell activism at the institution or suppress the student voice. Ultimately, this study contributes to the historical importance of activism in college. By looking at past and contemporary activism together from both the vertical and transversal viewpoints, this study invokes the circumstances of activism, the individual influences and issues that impact Black women's activism, and the larger societal conditions that shape the lives of Black college women then and now.

This study takes a holistic approach to understanding Black women's activist experiences. One way this is done in the augmentation of or countering of traditional notions about intersectionality which tends to see people as oppressed and as inactive participants in resistance. This study shows Black women who confront their oppression and transform themselves and their environments to overcome and resist. From a Black feminist perspective, this study made clear that Black women have power that the rest of us ignore to our own detriment. On college campuses, Black women experience isolation, self-doubt, and alienation. Yet they do not succumb to these heavy weights. Indeed they react and are proactive in not only carving out a space for themselves in a hostile world, but move that world closer to what we all

should expect in a real democracy: having all our voices heard, respected and magnified. Black women are not victims, but active participants in their lives, and people who see the world for what it is; and chose not to accept or bear it. Instead I have shown that black women endeavor to change and transform a world into something better. And, in the end, we are all better for it.

Theoretical Implications

I utilized Black Feminist Thought (BFT) to clarify Black women's activist experiences in college. Focusing on the three overarching themes of BFT, this study sheds specific light on how Black women experience activism in the college setting, why they participate (or don't), and how they are impacted by their participation. The women in this study established self-definitions and self-valuations in alignment with BFT. Like Tracy, who was one of few Black women to be elected to student government, these women broke barriers. They shaped narratives about Blackness and Black womanhood through their programming and celebration about the Black experience. Also, Black women established understandings of themselves and of Blackness in their lived experiences in spite of any narratives of how they ought to be. For example, recall Tracy's experience in community with other Black women. Though she had spent much of her life attempting to ascribe to White culture, her experiences with Black women at BTU shaped her valuations of and definitions of her own Blackness. More research can be done to address the unlearning of dominant ideologies and learning of Blackness, particularly for multiracial Black women. Finally, Black women valued Blackness and Black womanhood above all, as seen in their activist contributions and in the ways they constructed spheres of influence.

BFT is also rooted in an understanding that Black women's experiences are intersectional. Recall the student who, when asked about her sexual orientation, identified herself as "painfully Christian." When examining the intersectional complexities of our identities, some

parts of us are not yet fully formed in college, and perhaps can never be. At the same time, heterosexual Black communities have historically struggled with sexuality, and they remain more likely than Whites to oppose marriage equality for gay and lesbian people (Roehr, 2008). Bias against non-heteronormative identities could be due, in part, to the need to assert one's Blackness as a principal identity and dismiss other forms of Black experiences. This leaves communities of Black people out. Research that brings these alienated communities into view is essential to understanding the full complexity and intersectional nature of Blackness.

Utilizing Black feminism, this study assumes that White supremacy is at play in all Black women's educational experiences, particularly at a PWI. At the same time, BFT places the voices of Black women as most suitable to describe, analyze, and address Black women's concerns. I make all attempts to position Black women's voices about their experiences in this way. In doing so, White dominance was not especially analyzed in this study but for the few moments when interviewees discussed it (e.g. Hiesha). Although my study actively shelved the discussion of Whiteness in favor of Black women's own conceptions, future research about the ways Black college women understand Whiteness can be crucial in understanding their activism.

Implications for Research

Future research on Black women's activist experiences in college could dig deeper into Black women's intersectional identities and how those identities temper or strengthen their activism. It would be especially compelling to consider sexual orientation and religious affiliation, as these appeared to cause the most contention in Black women's conceptions of their Blackness and womanhood. Given the intense focus on sexual assault on and off college campuses, researchers could investigate Black women's specific responses to sexual violence in the college setting and what role Black men play in the experiences of Black women.

The intersectional relationship of Black women to their class should also be extrapolated. The majority of women in this study identified as lower, lower-middle, or working class. In a world where people most commonly do activist work from these social classes, it is important to rationalize whether their class plays a role in how Black women actualize and operationalize their activist identities. Many of the study participants did not see themselves as activists in a traditional sense. Further research might shine a light on the ingratiated nature of activism and resistance in these communities. Perhaps Black women do not see themselves as activists because resistance is seemingly apart of their everyday existence.

Longitudinal focus on a few women might be beneficial in understanding the activist experiences of Black women. How do the women themselves change from and through their activism? Do their interests and needs evolve or transform? Researchers can problematize institutional responses to activism and examine the impacts of activism on Black women's academic and social sustainability in college. What does it cost, personally and academically, for Black women to carry the burden of educating their peers about Black womanhood? What is at risk in their commitment to creating change on campus? Researchers can also interrogate Black women's beliefs about their campuses and activist experiences using different forms of data. Not without their limitations, many university archive offices contain a wide variety of materials for review, such as oral histories and other historical documents such as letters, news articles, and print materials. Examining these materials can add depth to the transversal analyses of future comparative case studies and can also serve as a launching pad for historical inquiries about the status of Black women at the institution. Finally, intentional study about what revolutionary change means to Black women in the college setting is long overdue. Beyond the normative

evolution of the institution that maintain social trends and state mandates, revolutionary change should transform the day-to-day realities of Black college women.

Methodologically, this study adapted the comparative case study (CCS) and found that the vertical, horizontal, and transversal approaches emerged differently than previously espoused. This adaptation might be useful in examining the experiences of Black women and other minoritized groups. Traditionally, comparative case study includes the vertical and transversal axes, as utilized throughout this study. Additionally, CCS also involves the horizontal axis that is meant to allow comparison between distinct sites of study around the same phenomenon or experience (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2016). This study opens opportunity to view the horizontal within or through the transversal. For instance, two primary points in time arose as relevant to the study: the late 1960s, when the Black student uprisings took place, and the 2010s, when the students represented in this study participated in activism. There is a 50-year span between the two points in time. Given the range of data used in this study, including interviews with Black women currently enrolled as well as institutional insiders who have direct experience with Black women at BTU in their role(s) as staff and faculty on campus, archive materials (i.e., oral histories, images, handbooks, etc.), and panel observations of 1960s activists, it is possible to view both moments in time as distinct horizontal cases. Comparing these two time periods allows for a way to see what has and has not changed over time. Specifically, since the purposes for activism and conditions surrounding activism are similar, each moment in time may be comparable across the vertical axis and in relationship to the transversal axis, as separate cases on the horizontal axis.

Implications For Practice

From a practical perspective, institutions should view Black women's race and gender as valuable in the context of college. By listening to Black women when they explain their needs, thinking critically about them, and taking the time needed to respond appropriately, institutions can make clear a commitment to the success of the Black women they enroll. Simply stated, institutions must understand that Black women need Black women to succeed; the mere presence of other Black women is encouraging. *Institutions must understand that demographic stagnation at their institutions is a form of structural oppression where Black women and other communities of color lose.* If institutions lean into notions about Black women's roles in supporting one another, particularly at PWIs, campus administrators might assign greater significance to the contributions of Black women through activism – including their traditional and non-traditional approaches. Simply increasing the number of Black women is not a sufficient solution. *The institution must also substantiate their commitment to Black women by shifting away from understanding Black women's experiences from a numerical perspective to deep understanding of their contributions to each other and the campus community.* This shift in thinking about Black women would also facilitate stronger approaches to campus media and archival retention strategies. *Practitioners must do the work necessary to accurately represent the contributions and experiences of Black women, paying close attention to the verbiage used to describe them.* Given the disparity between archived histories of White students and Black students, institutions should make a concerted effort to document the experiences of Black students rather than wait for donations from them. When donations are the primary method of archiving, institutions can make the processes for donating materials less strenuous, moving the labor from the students themselves to the institution. *Institutions and practitioners must end the practice of delegating*

race work to their students of color. In doing so, they must also recognize that White students campus experiences lack that same responsibility and interrogate the need to offset race work on campus.

The introduction of policies like the protest policy described in this study can be particularly damaging for students of color and other minoritized people. *Campus administrators must insist that Black women be a part of changes at the systemic and campus level.* Students should be included in the creation and implementation of new policy. Taking advantage of students like Tracy, whose passion for activism lives in policy design, institutions must maintain a seat at the table for Black women and other minoritized communities. In so doing, institutions must also question: what would our campus look like in the absence of student activists who experience great risk in their attempts to transform the campus community? Where would we be? If institutions understand the significance of student activism and activists, and push their conceptions from disruption to transformation, the process of change might leave fewer students, especially Black women, worn and weary at the end of their academic pursuits.

Conclusion

Black women have been critical actors in activist movements on college campuses for decades. Their contributions have produced lasting change at BTU, despite the presence of barriers and the misrepresentation of their work. When institutions fail to address the needs of the students they enroll, and impose policy meant to stifle students' rising voices, they create an environment where students have, *"nothing to lose but their chains."* When the resolutions put forth by institutions are shortsighted and misguided, lacking input from the communities necessitating change, *"the university misses an opportunity to be redeemed."* In the absence of

institutional redemption, Black women's activism remains a vital tool in transforming the campus environment for all.

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