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WE'RE HERE: THE "OUTSIDER WITHIN "THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF BLACK WOMEN COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS AT AN HISPANIC SERVING INSTITUTION

Sharaf Williams

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A Dissertation

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State University,

San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

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by

Sharaf Renee Williams

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research study sought to explore the lived experiences of Black women community college students as they pursued higher education at Hispanic-serving institutions. Students who were enrolled at a community college in the Inland Empire region of Southern California were interviewed in focus groups and one-on-one interviews. A hermeneutic phenomenology was used as the tool for analysis, and digital storytelling was used to provide a visual representation of the lived experiences of the students. These data points can be shared beyond the pages of this study. With limited research on understanding the unique needs of Black women students in community college, this study shed light on this subject in an effort to implement change. The key themes that came out of this study included (a) the need for support, (b) community care, and (c) racialized and genderized assumptions. These themes further reinforced the lack of support that surrounds Black women community college students and the critical role the institution plays in implementing these changes. The academy would be greatly served by gathering additional research about Black women community college students, creating culturally competent leadership and campuses and gaining a greater understanding of the impact Black women have in their communities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As I set out on this journey, I was not sure what to expect because I knew very few people who have pursued a doctorate, but I was blessed to have Dr. Angela Clark-Louque as my chair. Thank you, Dr. Clark-Louque, for your unwavering support, honest feedback, and steady hand through this process. You are truly an inspiration to me and other women of color on this path. Your support and guidance have kept me motivated and looking forward to future endeavors. Thank you for pouring into me and sharing your wisdom. This is something that I will carry on and share with other Black women who are coming after me.

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My colleagues and friends, Freddy, Rutina, Dr. Dani, and Keynasia, I thank you for understanding my research and providing support to me each in

your own way. I would like to thank the Black women who participated in my study. I was honored that you agreed to share space with me and share your stories. Each one of you changed my perspective about how our Black women students feel on our campuses and what more I can do from wherever I am to support us. I will carry your honesty, strength, and warmth forward in all of the work I do. You are all incredible women who are already doing amazing things, and I know that you will continue to shine bright!

DEDICATION

To all of the beautiful women in my life, present and past, who have supported me over my lifetime, this study is dedicated to you. My life is richer because you been in it. I also want to thank God, because he was with me on this long walk, and I could not have done it without him.

To my mom, who is my forever cheerleader and is always in my corner, thank you for your love and support regardless of the path I chose. I love you. To my favorite sister, Liz (and my nieces' pieces), I could never have picked a better sister for me or a better aunt for my kids. I have always been so lucky to have you in my life. You are always there, showing up and showing so much love. I love you Total!

To my auntie team, Aunt T, Cuppie, Aunt Dee Dee, Aunt Dollie, Dee Dee, and Aunt Adrienne, I want to thank you all for always being in my corner and encouraging me. I can feel your love all around me no matter where you are! You are all amazing, beautiful Black women who never fail to share your love and support! I love you all!

To my Gran, I don't have the words to express how much I love you and how special you are to me. You are just the best Gran, and we all agree! Love, love.

To my Grandpa, I miss you so much. You always believed that I could change the world and supported my long educational journey. I hope that I made you proud.

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To my two beautiful angels from God, Kevin and Simone, I am always here loving you and rooting for your happiness. Kevin, you are brilliant, strong, and loving. I am so proud of the man that you have grown into and the caring father that you are. Simone, your kindness and compassion are felt by everyone.

You are courageous and strong, and you inspire me to step out there and take risks, because I see you! Love you more!

To my grandson, Kairee, you have only been here for a year, and you are just pure joy! I am so excited to watch your life unfold! Always know that your Lolli loves you!

To my favorite husband, Jiri! I know that we met later in life, but you are my person! You have shown me more love and support than I even knew was possible. During this process, you kept pushing me even when I wanted to quit, because you could see in me what I could not. I am so blessed to have you in my life. I love you, and we finally did it!

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

The California Community College (CCC) system is one of the largest in the United States, and it is home to 116 campuses and almost 2 million students. From the 2010 Census to the 2020 Census, there was in an increase in the Latinx population across the country by 11.6 million people. This growth has also been reflected in institutions of higher education, resulting in the creation of the designation of Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs; Malcom-Piqueux et al., 2012). At the time of this study, in the CCC system, 76 colleges were designated as HSIs, which accounted for 65% of all CCCs (Malcom-Piqueux et al., 2012). The 2022 U.S. Census data showed Hispanic/Latino people made up 40.3% of California's population and Black/African American people were 6.5% (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). These data were on par with the demographics at CCCs, where the students were 46% Hispanic/Latino and 6% Black/African American at the time of the study (California Community Colleges, 2021).

Black women comprised 55% of all Black students who attended CCCs in 2019 (California Community Colleges, 2023); however, much of the research that has been done around Black students at CCCs has focused on Black male students (Patton et al., 2016). Although this research was very much needed, it relegates Black women's experiences to the sidelines. Because Black women have been have better overall graduation rates than Black men, scholars have

believed there is little need for research on Black women in higher education (Patton et al., 2016). Oftentimes, Black and Brown students are referred to singularly, and this is especially true in California where many historically Black neighborhoods have witnessed an influx of Latino/a residents (Literte, 2011). Viewing both Black and Brown students as one group can be problematic because Black and Latino/a communities often view each other through the colonized lens of white supremacy ideologies and treat one another the way the majority group has treated them (Literte, 2011). Because of this history, there has been little to no support for one another in higher education, even though both groups face similar barriers when they transition to higher education (Literte, 2011) and attend similar institutions of higher learning.

Studies on Black women in higher education, specifically those who attend community colleges, have been very limited. Understanding the lived experiences of Black women CCC students who attend HSIs may provide a look into their experiences, add to the research on Black women in education, and address the social justice and educational inequities they have faced (Patton et al., 2016). Historically, assumptions about Black women have been rooted in stereotypes of the angry Black woman, the mammie caricature, and the welfare mother (Savage, 2022). Furthermore, the white feminist movement completely erased the Black woman experience from its theoretical frameworks (Collins, 1989). Given the history of racism and gender discrimination in the United States, my assumption is that some, if not all, Black women have experienced

marginalization in a multitude of ways prior to their college journey. The understanding of their experiences was further complicated by my use of hermeneutic phenomenology in this study because I could not assume each participant's personal story was reflective of the general Black woman population; no group is a monolith. I assumed students would share their honest experiences about being Black and women at an HSI where they found a sense of belonging and support.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological research was to elevate the voices of Black women CCC students who attended HSIs. The participants were not just Black and not just women and they experienced college through the lens of both identities, while subsequently being minoritized further as an unrepresented group at an HIS (California Community Colleges, 2021; Literte, 2011). Using Black feminist thought (BFT) and hermeneutic phenomenology to guide this study allowed for a greater understanding of the sense of belonging and the lived experiences of the Black women community college students at HSIs. Throughout the research study, I use the terms "I," "we," and "our" because I am acknowledging the participants and I are from a shared community of Black women.

Research Questions

This study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of Black women CCC students at HSIs?
    a. What does it mean to be both Black and a woman community college student at an HSI?
    b. What connects Black women community college students to the college?

Significance of the Study

Black women have looked to education as a means of economic and social mobility for many decades (Weis, 1985), and using this research as a tool to further support Black women students in pursuit of higher education is truly needed now (Patton et al., 2016). Although a lot of research and data have been collected regarding Black men in higher education to implement policies that would assist in increased enrollment and completion, the same has not been done in regard to Black women (Patton et al., 2016; Wood & Turner, 2010). The focus on Black men students further diminishes the visibility of Black women students attending CCCs, given the majority of research done on Black women in higher education has focused on those who attend predominantly white institutions or historically Black colleges and universities (Corbin et al., 2018; Winkle-Wagner et al., 2020). To amplify the voices of Black women community college students, I used digital storytelling to create a visual perspective, allowing for them to share their lived experience and providing them with visibility (Rossiter & Garcia, 2010).

Although Black women comprised 55% of all Black students who attended the CCC system in 2018-2019 (California Community College Chancellors Office, 2021), much of the research and CCC Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) equity goals have been focused on Black and Latino male students. In *Vision 2030: A Roadmap for California Community Colleges*, the CCCCO (2023) wrote:

> Consistent with Vision 2030's keeping equity as the main focus of our work, all goals and outcomes of Vision 2030 will be disaggregated for each and every outcome below for underrepresented students of color (particularly underrepresented men of color), low-income students and students with disabilities. (p. 6)

Although the Vision 2030 equity goals and outcomes are admirable, it relegates Black women's experience to the margins. Vision 2030 vows a commitment to "transformational change to ensure institutions truly work for all students across race, ethnicity, religion, class and gender who are harmed by persistent systemic barriers linked to their racial and ethnic identities" (CCCCO, 2023, p. 6). However, the CCC system has yet to do much in the way of improving the Black women student experience through data-informed decision making. Additionally, the CCC system has failed to center the voices of Black women on CCC campuses. I make this statement while fully acknowledging the systemic racism and prison industrial complex that absorbs Black men because of fictionalized stereotypes about their perceived criminality, whereas Black

women have been stereotyped as the angry Black woman, the mammie caricature, and the welfare mother (Savage, 2022).

Understanding how the students in this study related as Black women on campus at an HSI was valuable because it provided an opportunity for policy changes. Providing visibility to a historically invisible community can create space for change (Patton et al., 2016; Rossiter & Garcia, 2010). This research can be used to provide insight regarding the inequities of the support needed by Black women and can begin the conversation about how to create a more equitable campus.

Theoretical Framework

BFT was used as the theoretical framework to guide this study because it provided a lens that was created by Black women and recognized that Black women navigate spaces in which they remain invisible (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). The use of BFT combined with digital storytelling provides Black women with the medium to share their experiences from their perspective, free from the narrative that has been placed upon them (Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Rossiter & Garcia, 2010).

As Howard-Hamilton (2003) stated, “A sense of belonging can never exist because there is no personal or cultural fit between the experiences of African American women and the dominant group” (p. 23). The foundation of BFT’s approach derives from the assumptions that Black women lack humanism and are unable to have a valid perspective of their own oppression (Collins, 1989).

This idea is also true when discussing the experiences of Black women at school. They continue to be invisible and thought to be doing fine in contrast to their male student counterparts (Patton et al., 2016). Collins (1989) stated:

> Black feminist thought's potential significance goes far beyond demonstrating that Black women can produce independent, specialized knowledge. Such thought can encourage collective identity by offering Black women a different view of themselves and their world than that offered by the established social order. This different view encourages African-American women to value their own subjective knowledge base. (p. 750)

Collins (1989) further supported BFT as the most suitable framework for this study and allowed Black women to share their lived experiences at HSIs and how they experienced the campus being both Black and women. BFT allows Black women to give voice to their stories through their own lens and not through the lens of white men, as it has been viewed historically (Collins, 1989).

Assumptions and Delimitations

For this study, I assumed that Black women are marginalized prior to entering community college and have been marginalized in schools and in the community. The challenge with hermeneutic phenomenology is the data points are personal stories and not reflective of the general population. The assumption I made for this study was that participants shared their honest experiences about where they found support and their experiences being both Black and women at

an HSI. The participants were selected from one campus in the Inland Empire area of Southern California and the study was conducted with a small focus group comfortable with being video or voice recorded. This criterion excluded any student who did not want to be identified or who may have feel uncomfortable with sharing in front of others.

This study had several delimitations. This study took place at one individual public CCC in the Inland Empire, which uses the pseudonym of Sunrise College. This study had six participants. Lastly, the participants were selected from certain programs and groups on campus that served Black women students.

Definitions of Key Terms

This paper uses the following key terms and their definitions:

- Black/African American: I chose to use the word Black in this study because it has a historical connection meaning strength and power (Smith, 1992). Because some research has used the term African American, these terms are interchangeable.
- Black feminist thought (BFT): BFT describes the way Black women observe, create ideas, and interpret the lived experiences of Black women by being both Black and a woman (Collins, 1986).
- Digital storytelling: Digital storytelling is a way to tell and collect stories via audio, images, and video directly from participants (Rossiter & Garcia, 2010).

- Hermeneutic phenomenology: Hermeneutic phenomenology looks at the world through the lived experiences of human beings and the small details of human life (Laverty, 2003).
- Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs): HSIs are postsecondary institutions, both public and private, and both 2- and 4-year colleges that have at least 25% of their full-time undergraduate students self-identify as Latino/a (Laden, 2004).
- Women/woman/female: I chose to use either woman or women when referring to the participants. Because some research has used the term female, these terms are interchangeable.

Summary

Black women face a unique set of problems in U.S. society living as Black and living as women. This study sought to understand the lived experiences of Black women community college students who were attending an HSI in Southern California. This chapter introduced the context of the study, including (a) the problem statement, (b) the research questions, (c) the theoretical framework, and (d) the significance of the study. Using hermeneutic phenomenology and digital storytelling, this study amplified the voices of Black women CCC students who reflected on their lived experiences.

Chapter 2 consists of a literature review that includes (a) the history of community college, (b) Black women's student experience in higher education and at HSIs, (c) BFT, and (d) creating spaces for Black women's voices. Chapter

3 consists of the research design, data collection, and the participants and procedure for data analysis. The use of hermeneutic phenomenology, BFT, and digital storytelling are examined further in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 provides the detailed results of the study, the significance of the results, a discussion on the study, its significance, and an analysis of the research questions. Finally, Chapter 5 discusses the findings and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Black women community college students who attend Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs) and their lived experience has not been a well-researched topic. Black women live in a sometimes-polarized reality, living both at the edges of society and in the established systems, which is also true of their experiences in higher education. Collins (1986) coined the term *outsider within*, which speaks to how Black women have been marginalized and have created their own ways of seeing reality (hooks, 1982). This chapter delves into the research about the history of community colleges in the United States, how Black women college students experience higher education, and discusses HSIs and Black feminist thought (BFT).

Problem Statement

The California Community College (CCC) system is one of the largest in the United States, and it is home to 116 campuses and almost 2 million students. From the 2010 Census to the 2020 Census there was in an increase in the Latinx across the country by 11.6 million people. This growth has also been reflected in institutions of higher education, resulting in the creation of the designation of Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs; Malcom-Piqueux et al., 2012). At the time of this study, in the CCC system, 76 colleges were designated as HSIs, which accounted for 65% of all CCCs (Malcom-Piqueux et al., 2012). The 2022 U.S.

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Studies on Black women in higher education, specifically those who attend community college, have been limited. Understanding the lived experiences of Black women CCC students who attend HSIs provides a look into their

experience, adds to the research on Black women in education, and addresses the social justice and educational inequities they have faced (Patton et al., 2016).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological research was to elevate the voices of Black women CCC students who attended HSIs. The participants were not just Black and not just women (Crenshaw, 1991), and they experienced college through the lens of both, while subsequently being minoritized further as an underrepresented group in an HSI (California Community Colleges, n.d.; Literte, 2011). Using BFT, hermeneutic phenomenology, and digital storytelling to guide this study allowed for a greater understanding of the sense of belonging and the lived experiences of Black women community college students at HSIs.

History of Community College

In researching the lived experiences of Black women students and their connection to the campus, it is important to understand the history of community college and the changes they have made over the years. Community colleges—or junior colleges, as they were originally named—were created to provide access for students who were unable to attend a 4-year university, who were traditionally aged, white, male students (Bragg, 2001). Under President Truman, a President's Commission on Higher Education was formed in 1946. The commission created local colleges and received state assistance to fund them

(Borglum & Kubala, 2000). Community colleges were created as open-access spaces for students from all walks of life to experience each other, including students of different ages and racial and ethnic backgrounds. Regardless of race, age, or ethnicity, community college students represent 28% of the poorest quarter of the population (Baum et al., 2013). Community colleges have the most diverse student populations; therefore, the courses and programs offered at these institutions are more diverse (Bragg, 2001). Booker (2016) found Black women students who have connections on campuses persist.

According to Bragg (2001), Black and Latinx students make up over half of all community colleges students who enroll after they graduate from high school, with Latinx students being overrepresented at community colleges as a whole. A college's support should reflect the needs of the students they serve; therefore, it is helpful to understand the current makeup of the community college (Bragg, 2001).

Black Women's Student Experience

Understanding the Black women's student experience would be key in providing them with the supports that they need. Strayhorn and Johnson (2014) determined the impact of background traits, expectations, engagement, and academic performance were indicators of satisfaction for Black women at community colleges. The Community College Student Experiences Questionnaire, which had been previously administered to 18,000 students who attended 56 community colleges, has been used to guide research in

determining factors that link the success of students to their connection to the college, inside and outside of the classroom. Understanding the needs of Black women students from research such as Strayhorn and Johnson (2014) can inform how educators can better serve Black women and identify their needs.

In Strayhorn and Johnson's (2014) study, 315 Black female students were identified as being currently enrolled in an associate of science or an associate of arts degree program at an accredited institution. The data collected were based on the overall satisfaction of the college, the level of social engagement with their community college peers, their academic performance, and a range of statistical controls. Data analysis included three stages: (a) descriptive analysis, (b) correlation analysis, and (c) hierarchical linear regression tests. Strayhorn and Johnson found a relationship between Black women's background, level of engagement with the college, academic performance, and overall satisfaction with the community college. Academic performance also affected the level of satisfaction the Black women had at the community college. Strayhorn and Johnson's (2014) research study did not look at age specifically; therefore, it may be beneficial to gather this information for educators to make informed decisions.

James (1991) studied the impact of minority attrition rates, retention, and the impact that retention rates had on retention rates at Prince George's Community College in Largo, Maryland. From 1970 to 1988, the minority student population rose from 9% to 47%, causing concerns about the success of these students (James, 1991). To provide support to first-time, full-time Black men and

women, they created the Black and minority student retention programs. The programs' primary focus was on mentorship. Each of these programs were run concurrently. Both began in Spring 1988 with 34 Black students, which increased to 346 students by Fall 1989. Additionally, in Spring 1988, the program started with 11 mentors and grew to 86 by Fall 1989 (James, 1991). Abrica et al. (2019) studied Black male students at a public 2-year college in Southern California, that was also an HSI. Black male students reported that although they possessed the intellectual capacity to complete the coursework as reflected in their grades, their peers and instructors questioned their abilities. Other students who treated Black male students in a transactional way (Abrica et al., 2019) further perpetuated anti-Blackness in the classroom. Abrica et al. included a small sample of Black male students who were invited to participate in the focus groups and two follow-up interviews. They started with 15 students initially, six of whom returned for the second interview, and three of whom returned for the final interview. Because this study had a small pool of students, it was crucial for the current study to be intentional about gaining information from Black and Brown students firsthand.

Semistructured interviews with an entire focus group and with individuals (Barbatis, 2010) is an effective way to get rich data. Barbatis (2010) conducted a focus group that consisted of 22 students. Of the participants, 17 were women and five were men. The data were tracked year to year and compared by collecting grade point average, race, gender, ethnicity, and first-generation status against the interviews previously done (Barbatis, 2010). The researchers used

the constant-comparative method (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) to look at themes and the relationships between the data collected, the interviews, and the outcomes.

Hispanic-Serving Institutions in California

Understanding what HSIs are and what their purpose is at the community college level provides context for this research. HSIs were created in the1980s to address the number of enrolled Hispanic/Latino students in college because many institutions were not created to support these students (Abrica et al., 2019). Although HSIs would not be recognized and funded at the federal level until 1992, many leaders from institutions in New Mexico and Texas created the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities in 1986 (Ballysingh et al., 2018; Santiago, 2006). The members of Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities understood there was a need to support students at colleges that enrolled a large number of Hispanic students but did not have the same federal support that historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) received (Santiago, 2006). The members convened their first Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities conference in 1986, and they created the name HSIs. They determined they would consider any 2- or 4-year college or university an HSI if the institution's full-time enrollment was 25% or greater Hispanic (Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Santiago, 2006).

After legal battles in Texas and a bill proposed initially in 1983 by Senator Claiborne Pell, the Higher Education Act moved to recognize HSIs and tied federal grant funding to support and grow HSIs in 1992 (Ballysingh et al., 2018;

Santiago, 2006). In 1995, the first round of federal funds came out in the amount of $12 million. In 1998, Congressman Ruben Hinojosa introduced changes in an effort to differentiate HSIs from HBCUs and Tribal institutions and to remove some information that was challenging for the institutions to collect (Santiago, 2006). These changes resulted in additional institutions gaining the HSI designation; from 1998–2006, 185 HSIs received more than $550 million dollars in federal funding.

In California, census data in 2022 reflected over 40% of the residents identified as Hispanic or Latino (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.), which was a direct reflection on the number of Latinx students who attended college in the state. California has the highest percentage of HSIs in the country, with 174 institutions of higher learning having that distinction. This number includes 21 of the 23 California State Universities, 5 of the 10 University of California campuses (Excelencia in Education, 2021; Tagami & Reagan, 2022), 95 of the 116 CCCs (Excelencia in Education, 2021), and the remaining 53 are private institutions (Excelencia in Education, 2021). There is a distinction between HSIs and HBCUs. HBCUs were created in places with large Black populations, with the majority opening in the mid- to late-1800s and early 1900s with the purpose of educating Black people (Evans et al., 2002). However, the white majority used the opening of HBCUs as an opportunity to exclude Black students from their institutions in an effort to reinforce the racial divide in education further (Evans et al., 2002). Almost all of colleges and universities with the designation of HSI were

built as predominantly white institutions, meaning they were not created to serve Latinx students the way HBCUs were created to serve Black students (Evans et al., 2002; Excelencia in Education, 2021).

With the expected increase in the Latinx population, it is estimated that by 2025, a quarter of all students at all educational levels nationwide will be Latinx (Laden, 2004). Understanding these changes are on the horizon, HSIs will continue to grow in number and the funding that is tied to that growth will increase as well (Ballysingh et al., 2018; Excelencia in Education, n.d.-a, n.d.-b). These demographic changes across the state call for an understanding of the inevitable shifts to the community college landscape in California.

Black Feminist Thought

Black women in the United States have lived in a space that is unique because they are both Black and women, and both are marginalized and oppressed groups (Collins, 1989). Although they are a part of the minoritized group, Black women have consistently pushed forward, not participating in the oppression forced upon them by the dominant group (Collins, 1989). BFT is birthed from the place of Black women existing in the margins, being the outsider within. For example, Black women have participated in academia and have not been seen or heard, but have been in the room (Collins, 1989; Howard-Hamilton, 2003). There are six foundational distinguishing features of BFT (Collins,1989). The first distinguishing feature is to resist oppression and support social justice. The first feature is not only the oppression and social justice issues impacting

Black women, but also in support of all oppressed groups. The second distinguishing feature is that Black women are diverse in age, religion, sexual orientation, social class, and religion; however, despite those differences, they face the same societal challenges. The third distinguishing feature is the connection between Black women's knowledge, experiences, and activism. The fourth distinguishing feature is the absolute essential contribution Black women intellectuals bring inside and outside of the academy and their impact. The fifth distinguishing feature is that BFT cannot be static. As social conditions change, BFT must also change with it. The final distinguishing feature is the relationship of BFT and other social justice issues that do not directly impact Black women. The final feature reflects the humanism that is deeply ingrained in Black feminism and the support Black women have historically provided and currently provide to all oppressed groups (Collins, 1989).

Particia Hill Collins expanded on Crenshaw's work and theorized how different aspects of "Black women's lives operate as sites of intersectionality" (Collins et al., 2021, p. 699). The trajectory of Collins's work has focused on reclaiming Black women's voices and the power to tell their own stories (Collins et al., 2021). Collins's work was revolutionary for its time because the voices and theoretical knowledge of Black working-class women had not been centered in mainstream feminism in the United States. The foundation of BFT derived from the assumptions that Black women lacked humanism and were unable to have a valid perspective of their own oppression (Collins, 1989). There is also lack of

humanism when discussing the experiences of Black female community college students at HSIs because they continue to be invisible and assumed to be doing well in contrast to their male counterparts (Patton et al., 2016). Collins (1989) stated:

> Black feminist thought's potential significance goes far beyond demonstrating that Black women can produce independent, specialized knowledge. Such thought can encourage collective identity by offering Black women a different view of themselves and their world than that offered by the established social order. This different view encourages African-American women to value their own subjective knowledge base. (p. 750)

Collins (1989) identified three key themes in BFT that act as working definitions. The first definition is of great importance when it comes to the self-definition and self-valuation of Black women. Black women have the ability to define themselves and not be defined by the stereotypes held by the dominant group. Stereotypes regarding Black women are problematic and have negatively impacted the daily lives of Black women (Collins, 1986).

The second theme is the commitment Black women have to the interlocking nature of oppression, and understanding the work that is done by Black feminists impacts all oppressed communities (Collins, 1986; hooks, 1982). The last theme is focused on understanding the culture of Black women. This theme includes how Black women mother, the relationships they have with other

Black women, the way they interface with oppressive social structures, and their creative expression (Collins, 1986; Howard-Hamilton, 2003). This theme also lends itself to the way Black women othermother. Othermothering refers to the way Black women take on the responsibility of a community of other Black people, who may or may not be related to them, but are responsible for them anyway (Collins, 1986). These themes focus on the lived experiences of Black women, how oppression has created a consciousness and activism in their community and has influenced the political and economic choices that Black women have, changing how they experience oppression.

Black Women in College–Overarching

A lot of research has been conducted on Black men in college under the assumption that Black women graduate college at significantly higher rates than their male counterparts (Strayhorn & Johnson, 2014; Weis, 1985). Researchers have shown that since the 1980s, Black women have also had many obstacles as they experience college, resulting in much lower graduation rates than their white counterparts (Strayhorn & Johnson, 2014; Weis, 1985; Winkle-Wagner, 2015). Previous research regarding Black women has been from a deficit lens and viewed Black women as a monolithic static group, and as a result, research has not addressed the institutional gaps that impact Black women in higher education (Winkle-Wagner, 2015). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2021), Black students made up over 2 million of the 19

million college students in the United States in 2021, or 12% of all college students at either 2- or 4-year, public or private institutions.

Looking at Black women in college, research has suggested many factors affect them in college, such as racism, sexism, classism, poverty, and parenting (Matthews-Armstead, 2002; Porter et al., 2020; Weis, 1985). These factors impact the enrollment and completion of Black women students across the country, and the factors have affected the type of colleges from which Black women attend and graduate (Ballysingh et al., 2018; Strayhorn & Johnson, 2014; Zamani, 2003). The intersectionality of Black women and the institutional challenges they face dealing with racism and sexism have been contributing factors to their lived experiences in college (Crenshaw, 1991; Patton et al., 2016; Porter et al., 2020). Viewing Black women holistically on college campuses and not as either just Black or just a women, but together, illuminates these overlooked students (Patton et al., 2016).

Black Women at Community Colleges

There is limited research on Black women college students and even less about Black women enrolled in community colleges. Weis (1985) conducted some of the earliest research on Black women in community colleges in the 1980s. Weis did a study at a community college that was 70% Black in an urban area where she focused on Black women students and their lived experiences. Weis found that Black women attended college for reasons that were different from their male counterparts. Specifically, the women attended college to create

the opportunity for social mobility, a way out of poverty, and a better life for their children. The CCC system received 72% of all Black high school graduates in 2019 (Community College Equity Assessment lab, n.d.), with the majority of them living beneath the poverty level, and with a completion rate of 37% within 6 years. This graduation rate included the completion of a certificate, an associate's degree, or an associate's degree for transfer (Community College Equity Assessment Lab, n.d.). Historically, community colleges were created to provide white male students an opportunity to learn a trade or to complete an associate degree to transfer; however, in today's community colleges, the majority of students are women, ethnic and racially diverse, and nontraditional-aged students (Bragg, 2001). As Black women experience HSIs in California, they face institutional challenges that are anti-Black and reinforce a colonial settlers foundation upon which most institutions of higher learning are based in the United States (Abrica et al., 2019).

Summary

There is a lot of research on the experiences of Black male students in higher education and their experiences, the challenges they face, and the support they need to be successful (Hackett & Sheridan, 2013; Wood & Turner, 2010). Although this research is needed, it has left out the experiences of Black women because the narrative is they have been doing better in school and Black male students are in greater need of support. In this chapter, I discussed the experiences of Black women students, gaps in the research, the definition and

history of HSIs, BFT, and Black women's experiences in community college. The gaps in research regarding Black women community college students is reflective of the invisibility of Black women in society as a whole (Collins, 1986). Several studies have looked at Black students as a whole and have treated them as a monolithic group, but there are significant differences between the way men and women are viewed and treated, which need to be addressed. In Chapter 3, I outline the methodology that I used, how and where the participants were selected, and how the data were collected and analyzed.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Hermeneutic phenomenology was used in this qualitative research study, looking at the human experience and how people move and live in the world (Laverty, 2003). Digital storytelling was the secondary methodology used as a vehicle to provide a visual piece to provide richness to this study. This research focused on the lived experiences of Black women, which provided participants the opportunity to share their experiences from a lens that was unique to them.

The history behind hermeneutic phenomenology is full of tensions and contradictions. According to Kakkori (2009), “Phenomenology is concerned with the essence of things, whereas hermeneutics sees that everything has its being in language and interpretation” (p. 20). Husserl founded phenomenology, and it was considered to be a revolutionary philosophical approach (Kafle, 2013; Kakkori, 2009; Laverty, 2003). Heidegger, a student of Husserl, clarified the philosophy of phenomenology, and he believed the core question of philosophy was one of being (Sloan & Bowe, 2015). Heidegger moved away from Husserl and embarked on gaining a greater understanding and essence of people and their backgrounds (Laverty, 2003). Heidegger went further and focused on the experience of the individual and looked at the world through these lived experiences (Kafle, 2013; Laverty, 2003). Using this method allowed me to

gather the experiences from participants and interpret the phenomenon (Sloan & Bowe, 2015).

Hermeneutic phenomenology was the appropriate research design because it allowed for me to learn more about the lived experiences of Black women students at Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs). As Grbich (2007) defined phenomenology, I understood the hidden meanings and the essence of their lived experiences. Using BFT with hermeneutic phenomenology allowed for the empowerment of Black women. It also allowed for the ability to voice their own stories free from the majority voicing it for them, which has historically been the way that Black women's stories were shared. Their voices were omitted completely (Collins, 1986; Kafle, 2013).

Having one research question and two subquestions allowed for participants to share their lived experiences at Sunrise College and to explore how they felt inside and outside of the classroom as Black women. It provided them the space to share about their personal experiences. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the lived experiences of Black women CCC students at HSIs?
    a. What does it mean to be both Black and a woman community college student at an HSI?
    b. What connects Black women community college students to the college?

Using these guiding questions provided participants with the opportunity to share how they experienced the community college and delved into how the supports or the lack thereof on campus impacted them.

Research Setting

The study was conducted in person and the participants were recruited from Sunrise College in the Inland Empire, which was designated as an HSI (Excelencia in Education, 2021). I used a purposeful sampling strategy to recruit students who were more likely to meet the criteria needed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This research setting was chosen for several reasons. There has been limited research on Black women community college students in this region. The institution is an HSI, which served 67% (10,474) Hispanic students and 11% (1,745) Black students at the time of the study (State of California, n.d.). The in-person focus groups allowed participants to hear the perspectives of others who had similar experiences. The one-on-one interviews allowed participants to share in a more private setting. This research was completed in Spring 2024.

Research Sample

The research participants were selected via convenience sampling. I reached out to Sunrise College, specifically to their Umoja program, and I asked them to send out the email I crafted that was approved by the Institutional Review Board at California State University, San Bernardino. Participants met the following criteria: (a) women who identified as Black or African American, (b)

Black women students who were enrolled in Sunrise College at the time of the study, and (c) Black women students who were over 18 years old. The recruitment began by identifying Sunrise College because they had an HSI designation, an Umoja program, and at least 5% of the students identified as Black or African American. This selection allowed for a large enough pool of students to contact. Umoja Community agreed to contact the students via email once I provided them with Institutional Review Board approval and approval from Sunrise College. Umoja Community provided potential participants with a letter from me, which included my contact information; informed consent; confidentiality; the link regarding their demographic information; the location, time, and modality of the interviews; and information regarding the $50 Amazon gift card they would receive upon completion for their participation.

Some students reached out to confirm they would be in attendance, and some of them did not confirm but just showed up on the days of the focus groups and one-on-one interviews. The link included had them complete the following demographic information: (a) race or ethnicity, (b) gender, (c) age, (d) major, (e) number of units completed, and (f) number of years in college. During the interviews, participants were made aware of all the information that would be collected if they chose to participate in the study. I also shared with them that digital storytelling would be used in the submission of the study. I also explained the sessions would be recorded with their permission, their responses would be

transcribed, and responses would be used in the written study. Additionally, a 2–4-minute video would be recorded and used to amplify their collective voices.

Black women college students have not historically had the support required to be successful in higher education (Weis, 1985; Winkle-Wagner, 2015), and a goal of this research was to amplify the voices of their lived experiences. Upon completion of this research study, colleges across the state can use these data when looking at the needs of Black women students and how the education systems can foster supportive environments for them to grow.

Research Data

Using qualitative research allows researchers to gather descriptive data from participants to share their experiences (Bonner et al., 2015). Creswell and Poth (2018) explained qualitative researchers study their surroundings by interviewing, observing, and looking at artifacts. In this study, I used hermeneutic phenomenology and digital storytelling to provide participants space to share their lived experiences and the medium for me to use these impactful data in spaces where decisions are being made.

Hermeneutic phenomenology creates a space for researchers to listen, process, and reflect on the themes presented by participants and interpret those experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This methodology allowed me to take in the lived experiences the participants shared, followed the interpretive process, and served as a space for guided exploration (Laverty, 2003). The stories participants shared were the essence of their experiences (Sloan & Bowe, 2015).

Digital storytelling, a newer methodology in qualitative research, lends itself to a more artistic way of collecting research. It is a powerful way to support participants as they are vulnerable (de Jager et al., 2017), and there are many benefits to using this method in marginalized communities, especially with Black women. These benefits include (a) preservation of cultural heritage, (b) having Black women students share their experiences in education and how their culture has been woven into their educational experience, and (c) being able to see and hear other women share (de Jager et al., 2017). Another benefit is for education, training, and professional development, using what has been collected digitally and sharing that out with administrators, faculty, and staff to hear how Black women students feel at community colleges in the Inland Empire (de Jager et al., 2017). Lastly, it can be used as a tool for community development. Other Black women students may be able to see and hear these data, and it may strengthen the collective community of Black women students (de Jager et al., 2017).

Data Collection

When collecting data, I used the lens of BFT looking at the three key themes: (a) this framework was created to allow for Black women to share their experiences from their perspective; (b) Black women are not a monolithic group, but there are several places where Black women's stories intersect; and (c) Black women come from varied backgrounds, creating multiple perspectives and layers to their stories (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Collins's (1990) interpretations of BFT views Black women as individuals. Collins (1990) stated, "[Black women are]

self-defined, self-reliant individuals confronting race, gender and class oppression, Afrocentric feminist thought speaks to the importance that knowledge plays in the in empowering oppressed people" (p. 221). This study served as a space to further that perspective of Black women and for them to have the platform to engage in powerful conversations.

The collected data included the screening questionnaire where the participants shared information about themselves, the semistructured questions provided to the focus group, the one-on-one interviews, and the transcription of the responses from participants.

The initial group of participants agreed to participate in a focus group that was held in person, and the second group of interviews developed into one-on-one interviews. Using the digital storytelling model allowed me to record their voices and provided me with the ability to review and transcribe the interviews. Using hermeneutic phenomenology as my methodology allowed for a focus on the small group of three participants who all experienced the same phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Due to the time constraints for participants, there was one focus group for over 1-hour, one-on-one interviews, and all other communication was done via email.

In the focus group, participants felt safe and supported by one another and the questions created a dialogue between them. I asked the questions and limited my comments to allow the space for them to speak with one another. I

also prompted and provided additional clarification when needed, and I began with the overarching questions in this study:

1. What does it mean to be both Black and a woman community college student at an HSI?
2. What connects Black women community college students to the college?

These two questions focused on what participants experienced as Black women students at the college and how those experiences affected their educational path. As a part of hermeneutic phenomenology, to gain a richer understanding of their experiences, I asked additional open-ended questions that tied their experiences together as Black women at Sunrise College (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I asked the following questions in the focus group portion of this study:

- What does it mean to be both Black/African American and a woman?
- How do you feel being a Black/African American woman student on this campus, during this time?
- What have been your experiences inside and outside of the classroom at Sunrise College?
- Do you feel that because you are a Black/African American woman, that made a difference in how you experienced the college?
- Do you feel support as a Black/African American woman student on campus?

- Do you feel supported by other Black women?
- Do you feel supported by others?
- What thoughts or ideas do you have about the changes your campus can make to ensure that Black women students receive the support that is needed for them to be successful?

When I met with the second group of students in February 2024 in the one-on-one interviews, I asked them the following questions:

- Please tell me a little bit about yourself, how long you have been a student, and what your educational goals are?
- How do you feel on campus versus how you feel in your own community?
- Have you ever faced discrimination based on your race and/or based on your sex? If so, please describe the situation?
- What do role models look like to you? Describe any role models that you have had in your personal life?
- Have you had any role models that were Black women at any times during your educational journey? How did that impact you?
- Do you feel as if you are a role model? If you do why? If you don't, why not?
- What do you feel Black women need as community college students?
- Do you feel seen and heard at your college? Please describe.
- Is there anything else that you would like to share?

In the final contact with the students, they were provided with the video that was a reflection of what they shared, and they were provided the opportunity to share feedback. There were no responses to the last email.

Data Analysis

Using hermeneutic phenomenology with digital storytelling, I used Fraenkel et al.'s (2012) steps to begin qualitative analysis:

- I conducted data reduction by synthesizing field reports and highlighting the main points relevant to the focus of the research.
- I systematically arranged the data as per specific categories and classifications.
- I presented the data in tables or figures to further clarify the relationship between the data.
- I conducted a cross-site analysis through in-depth data comparison and analysis.
- I presented findings, drew conclusions covering trends and the implications of their application, and made recommendations for further development.

During this process, I transcribed the data from the recordings. Creswell (2014) noted reviewing the data more than once allows for researchers to catch any mistakes during the transcription process. With this advice in mind, I listened to the recordings several times and reviewed the transcription multiple times.

Once the transcription was complete, I hand coded the data, identified themes and subthemes, and arranged the data based on those themes. I looked for commonalities among participant responses and organized the data accordingly. As I created the video, I wanted to be sure to highlight the prominent themes that reflected the voices of the participants and aligned with the research questions.

Validity and Trustworthiness

In a hermeneutic study, there may be concerns when it comes to validity and truthfulness due to the participants, the researcher, and the way data are collected (Nigar, 2019). These concerns arise in much qualitative research, which is why validation is meant to discuss the process as opposed to verification. Creswell and Poth (2018) indicated triangulation is a strategy used to establish trustworthiness and validity. Using several of Brink's (1993) strategies, I produced valid and trustworthy findings. Triangulation is the use of two or more data sources or methods to remove personal bias. I triangulated the data by using hermeneutic phenomenology and digital storytelling. The second triangulation method I used was touching base with participants on more than one occasion and at different times. I had more than one touchpoint with participants. The third triangulation method I used was member checking. As I met with participants, I shared the video with them and asked for their feedback. The fourth triangulation method I used was searching for disconfirming evidence, which was done by purposeful sampling. The fifth method of triangulation I used was checking for representativeness. I did this step by coding the data, analyzing

them, and presenting the data in their entirety. The final step was providing auditability, meaning anyone reading the research would be able to logically follow it from beginning to end (Brink, 1993).

To honor the voices of the Black women who participated in the research study, I checked the transcript and coding more than once to ensure it was error free. I wanted to ensure it was clear and their lived experiences were shared in the way they intended it to be heard and not filtered through my lens (Collins, 1986).

Positionality of the Researcher

I was born in the 1970s in St. Louis, Missouri to a Black mother and a white father during a time in the United States when these unions were not welcomed. This experience shaped my outlook on the world from a young age. In the 1970s, St. Louis was primarily Black and white, and there were no prominent Latinx, Asian, or African communities established at that time. The clear segregation that made up St. Louis meant the feeling of hate and racism was all too familiar, and it was clear to me at a very young age that I was a Black little girl. My father shared with me when I was 4 years old that everyone outside of our family would see me as Black and treat me that way. He was aware of where we lived, and that awareness set the tone of how I viewed myself. I was never ashamed of my father, but I was very aware the treatment and privilege he received would never trickle down to me. He knew that, too. However, I acknowledge that my light skin and fine hair have afforded me privilege and

access that many of my sisters with darker brown skin have not had. There is almost a level of comfort that white people feel around me, and if I share that my father is white, it almost instantaneously changes the conversation.

As I have gotten older and had the good fortune of having my grandparents for most of my life, I have gained an even better perspective of who I am. My paternal grandmother was an immigrant from France who moved to the United States via Ellis Island in the 1930s. She came as a child of an affluent Catholic family. My great-grandfather was a great architect who actually held the patent on reinforced concrete and designed several Catholic churches in the United States and France. My paternal grandfather was from a working-class family in St. Louis and was a pilot in World War II. He worked as a carpenter once he came back from the war, but he remained a man of few words and never spoke with us much. My maternal grandmother grew up in segregated St. Louis from the 1930s–1960s, when she wanted a change and moved to what is now known as Mid-City Los Angeles. She worked for PacBell and AT&T until she retired, and she is now in her same home in Los Angeles getting tired of the gentrification. My maternal grandfather was born, raised, and never left St. Louis. He was on the first integrated assembly lines at General Motors in the 1950s. He worked his way up to manager and retired after 40 years. Being in the presence of my grandparents, I was able to see the stark differences in how society sees race, what generational wealth looks like and what it does not, and how much

work it takes for Black people to just maintain a basic standard of living no matter how hard we may work.

In addition to all of what was listed above I was raised in the Baha'i Faith, so I was not a participant in the Catholic church or in the Black churches in our community. Although I am not a practicing Baha'i, and neither are any of my family members, I was exposed to world religions. I was taught that there is one God, that there is no wrong religion or faith, and that everyone on this planet is valuable and has the right to live in peace. As a child, being a part of the Baha'i Faith taught me to have respect for others no matter their beliefs or sexual orientation and because Baha'is were being persecuted for their beliefs in Iran, I was taught it was my responsibility to stand up for the oppressed. Being empathetic and respecting those that come from cultural, ethnic, educational, religious, and racial groups that differ from mine has enriched my life and has created a space for me to understand my blind spots.

As a Black woman, I have had the lived experience of what it means to be invisible at work, at school, and in the world. I have seen this invisibility with my mother, sister, aunts, cousins, friends, and my very own beautiful daughter. What I have also experienced is a beautiful community of Black women who wrap their arms around one another, cheer each other on, and are just there if you need to share. I can feel their prayers and love while just simply thinking of them. Black women are important. Our stories deserve not only to be heard, but we also deserve to be seen and acknowledged in spaces in higher education. After

beginning my research and seeing that Black women students in higher education have been underrepresented in research and undertheorized (Porter & Byrd, 2021), I knew this topic would be the focus of my research.

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the use of hermeneutic phenomenology and digital storytelling as the methodology for this study. I also shared an in-depth description of the research design, research setting, research sample, research data, data collection, data analysis, validity, trustworthiness, and my positionality. Chapter 4 includes the demographic information of the participants, the data collected based on the research questions, and data coding and analysis.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Using both hermeneutic phenomenology and digital storytelling in this qualitative research study provided the space for Black women to share their voices and to be captured in a digital form to amplify them in other spaces beyond the written word (Kakkori, 2009; Rossiter & Garcia, 2010). The research question (i.e., What are the lived experiences of Black women community college students at HSIs?) was created to capture the true voices of Black women students at Sunrise College. Black women are not monolith, and the women who participated in this research were not representative of all Black women community college students. They represented their individual experiences from their personal perspective and from where they were in their educational journey (Strayhorn & Johnson, 2014).

The purpose of this study was to elevate the voices of these women, understanding Black women's stories are rarely told in academic spaces (Patton et al., 2016), specifically those who are community college students. Most Black women who are in college in California attend community colleges (Community College Equity Assessment Lab, n.d.) and their experiences need to be honored beyond the numbers in their own words. I accomplished this goal by learning about the experiences of Black women students who attended Sunrise College through the theoretical framework of Black feminist thought (BFT).

In this study, I identified three overarching themes and four subthemes. These themes directly addressed the research questions in this study and provided insight into the sense of belonging and structural elements that must be improved to enhance their experiences and sense of belonging at Sunrise College. The three themes were (a) need for support, (b) community care, and (c) racialized and genderized assumptions. The four subthemes were (a) tutoring, (b) Umoja Community, (c) role modeling, and (d) cultural capital.

Sample Demographics

Using convenience sampling, six students agreed to participate in this study. They were all from Sunrise College. The criteria to participate was the following: (a) identify as Black or African American, (b) identify as a woman, (c) be a current community college student, and (d) be 18 years old or older.

Overview of Participants

The six participants varied in age from 18–24 to 46–65, with 66% of participants receiving the Pell grant. Their majors varied from kinesiology, mathematics, art, social and behavioral sciences, and nursing. Table1 shows all participants identified as women, four participants identified as Black, and two identified as African American. Although the participants were not representative of all Black women community college students at Sunrise College, they represented a diverse group of students based on age.

Table 1

Participant Information

Participant	Interview method	Other salient identities shared
Mia	Focus group	First generation
Kayla	Focus group	Student with a disability
Keisha	One-on-one	Student athlete
Amina	One-on-one	Parent
Zora	Focus group	Parent, student with a disability
Jamie	One-on-one	Experienced the foster care system

Overview of Data Collection

The data were collected using semistructured interview questions that I created for focus groups and one-on-one interviews with the guidance of seasoned practitioners. The students received an email from a counselor at Sunrise College, which provided a link to complete if they were interested in participating in this voluntary research study. The email included a link to collect demographic information and the informed consent, which detailed the interview process. The interviews were in person, on campus, and in a group setting with other students. As the students came in, I greeted them and had them sign in with their names and preferred email contact information. Then, I provided them with a hard copy of the informed consent. I had them review the informed consent; shared the purpose of the study; and reiterated their names, faces, or voices would not be used. They also received a pseudonym. This pseudonym was important because digital storytelling was a component of this study, and I wanted it to be clear that no identifying information would be used in this study. I

opened the floor to answer any questions from participants. Based on student availability, there was a need to schedule another date because some students were unable to make it. We scheduled a Zoom option; however, the students opted for an in-person option. The second round of interviews were completed in a one-on-one format; due to participant availability, the same format was followed. I had students sign in with their names and email so that I could follow up with them to provide a status of the study, and I went over the informed consent with them. Once the students signed their informed consent and completed the interviews, I met with them to give them a physical $50 gift card to Amazon.

During the interviews, I did minimal speaking because I wanted to be sure participants were not influenced by my comments, and they felt safe to share honestly about their lived experiences. If students needed clarification regarding the questions, I provided additional context. Once all interviews were completed, I transcribed them and identified themes and subthemes. Using the themes, I then translated them into a 4-minute video using four people to represent all of the participants and having some of their quotes come across the screen. Digital storytelling can be used in spaces where the entire study may not be available (Rossiter & Garcia, 2010).

Overview of Themes and Subthemes

Need for Support

The idea of support was a theme that came up repeatedly by each participant. Figure 1 represents the clear overlap in the way participants received support on campus and in their respective communities. Each participant was in a different phase of their educational journey, but the need for support as a Black woman on campus was evident at Sunrise College. Support included (a) academic support, such as educational tutoring; (b) social support provided through Umoja Community; and (c) role models, either being one or having one. These supports seemed to stand alone, but as the participants shared, these themes overlapped. The ways Black women felt supported on campus ranged from feeling they could only count on themselves for support to them feeling supported by others, but they all echoed the same sentiment of the importance of supporting one another.

Figure 1

Need for Support

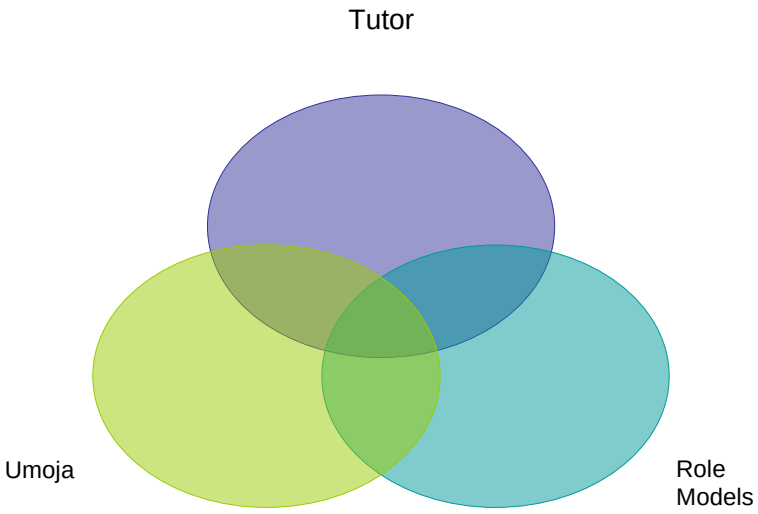


Table 2 shows the three students who participated in the focus groups and how they responded to the question, “Do you feel supported as a Black/African American woman on campus?”

Table 2

Need for Support – Focus Group Question

Participant	Do you feel supported as a Black/African American woman on campus?
Kayla	"Yes. You felt a lot of support, and the energy matters. . . . They ask you, 'Oh, do you need anything? Do you need help with this and that?' Advice to how to approach something."
Mia	"You feel me? I was my own support; no, I didn't get support. Yeah, you can lead me where to go, but I didn't get support, I had to do it on my own, so I have relief to be in the program."
Zora	"I would say, honestly, the only support that I feel like on campus, being a Black American woman is Umoja, or if they have a BSU. Because there's still a lot of a little bit of prejudice there."

Next, Table 3 shows the three students who participated in the one-on-one interviews and their responses to the question, "What do you feel Black women need as community college students?"

Table 3

Need for Support – One-on-One Interviews Question

Participant	What do you feel Black women need as community college students?
Keisha	"What I feel is like we need more open space areas where it's just like, just young, Black, educated women should just go to and talk about their problems, because we have a lot of problems going on. And a lot of situations that we face that we can't just open up to a man about."
Amina	"More support. More support, and especially, I would say, from women who have a higher degree to actually be that support and that mentor. I feel like Black women that's in college shouldn't have to join a sorority or something to have a sense of sisterhood."

In Table 3, Amina discussed the lack of support from professional Black women, which could be attributed to the decreased number of Black women faculty. Due to the challenges and lack of support that Black faculty members receive at public and private institutions of higher education, specifically in spaces outside of HBCUs, it may leave a visible gap in the access students may have to Black faculty (Thompson & Louque, 2023). In Tables 2 and 3, participant quotes indicated they understood the need for spaces and community to be built for Black women at Sunrise College, but as Collins (1990) pointed out, Black women do not have time to think about theoretical communities. They just begin creating their own communities that work for them. Data in Tables 2 and 3 supported the BFT lens that is reflective of how these Black women were of different ages and different places in their educational journey, but their

responses reflected where many of their experiences intersected (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). There was much discussion surrounding the concept of support, what that meant to them as individuals, and how they felt it impacted the group as a collective. Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth is reflective of how the students saw support, specifically as it related to social capital and how drawing upon that capital elevated their experiences.

Tutoring. Tutoring as an educational support was a recurring subtheme in the interviews with some participants. Zora shared:

> Excellent tutors, without the help of them, I would have never made it. I was coming to tutor 6 days a week from eight in the morning to four every day, because I didn't know that accounting class is going to be that bad. And I took accounting 1A and 1B. Then, I turned around with my crazy self and took bookkeeping. Without those tutors, I wouldn't have pass the class. I know it would have been worse than what it was, so there was a lot of support there.

Zora was not alone in this experience. Mia also had strong opinions about tutoring, and how she used it meet her goals. Zora said:

> I don't like math either. I'm here in this tutor. I'm sleeping in this tutor. I'm sitting in this tutor. I don't like no math, but I got to do what I got to do, and I'm going to stay here every day and get this tutor, get this support so we can pass this class.

Mia understood the value of tutoring; however, she also was concerned the tutoring services were not being offered equitably across the campus. The higher-level mathematics tutoring had Saturday hours and those in the lower-level mathematics classes or students without a science, technology, engineering, and mathematics focus were unable to access these tutoring services. The tutoring experience left Mia feeling a sense of responsibility for her fellow students. Kayla agreed and shared that being a tutor for other students would be helpful. As both Mia and Zora shared, the amount of support Black women need at community college in terms of tutoring or even support from professors was missing. Zora went on to share that if she saw other Black women in the tutoring center, she made it a point to connect with them, understanding her navigational capital could be leveraged to uplift other students at the institution, specifically in spaces that she became familiar with, such as the tutoring center (Yosso, 2005).

All the participants interviewed understood the value of staying on the path to meet their academic goals, but Mia and Zora shared the most about it. They were active participants in the tutoring centers and could see the real-time results of their work with tutors. Zora shared there was targeted tutoring for Umoja students, and she was unclear as to why tutoring specifically for Umoja students was of any consequence. Zora shared:

> I was in the tutoring center, and I had a couple of people approach me and felt like it wasn't fair that they have tutoring just for Umoja students,

> meaning Black, or they had tutoring just for Hispanic people. I'm like, that's not really right, because anybody can join Umoja, no matter what color you are. So, the tutoring is for anybody that's in Umoja and that's perfectly incorrect. . . . They have all of these tutorings that they have for brown skinned people and I don't hear no one complaining about whatever. Why is it always the Black people that you guys have a problem with when they have something extra for us to do better? That's not right and that's not fair. Why do you guys pinpoint us? We're not the only ones that have tutoring for Black people. But you feel like that. I don't understand why you feel like that. And you work here on this campus? And I don't understand that . . . I don't understand that at all.

Zora recognized that people employed by the college may not understand the value in building community among Black students, which is not preferential treatment. This recognition suggested the behavior of the people who were a part of the institution reflected that they were unable to recognize the value of the Black community. Although the community connection was in the tutoring center and not in the classroom, the participants were still looking for a place to belong, to be seen, and to be valued on the campus (Booker, 2016).

Umoja Community. Another form of support was participating in Umoja Community, which was a student support program created in 2006 by CCC faculty and administrators. The goal of Umoja Community is to promote academic success through curriculum that is culturally responsive and geared

toward Black students; however, it is open to all students (Umoja, 2024). This community served as social and educational support. All the participants in this study were affiliated with Umoja. They were connected to the community to varying degrees, and that connection was reflected in their experiences with the college. Keisha shared the following about her experience with Umoja:

> I do feel seen and heard. I'm a student that likes to get the attention, so yes, actually, with Umoja, a historical Black group on campus, I feel very seen in heard. Like before my first semester at Sunrise, I was just, like, passing periods, I'm in my car, okay, time to go to class next, okay, I'm going home. But now, passing periods, I'm walking on campus and I'm going to Umoja.

Keisha's quote spoke to the importance of having a space where people feel welcomed, seen, and heard by people from their own community. This connection may not always be the case in other spaces on campus or in the community, as Strayhorn and Johnson (2014) noted.

The significance of a space was important, specifically to Black women. Kayla was very introverted prior to engaging with the Umoja program, and in high school, she was generally the only Black student. Kayla shared, "I just say, just stay on track of your goals, know your goals, get active in school, but I didn't get active until I found out about Umoja." Kayla saw the correlation between being active on campus and success in school, and she was able to find a space in which she felt comfortable being active.

Umoja Community was open to all students, but because the focus was the success of African American students, it provided a refuge for Black students that was too often unavailable in other spaces and programs on campus. Although some students like Jamie were a part of the Umoja community, she shared that sometimes the Umoja activities conflicted with her class schedule. She knew when events were happening. In Kayla's experience, Umoja Community grew to all corners of the campus, so she was able to connect with them even as she was just walking by. Collins (1990) referred to the community as a coalition, or a space where Black women could support each other; although Umoja was not exclusively for Black women students, many of them found each other there.

Role Modeling. Role models can have an impact on Black women's lives, and this subtheme came up with several of the participants, indicating this concept resonated with many of the participants. Several of the women viewed themselves as role models to other family members, to the community, and to other students. Keisha shared she believed she was a role model to her sister. Keisha shared:

> And I remember I was coaching her one day, and I almost cried because she was in middle school and watching her win and teaching her, knowing that I taught her those moves. I'm like, "I taught you that, give me the credit!" But she's a person that makes me feel like a role model. And

> anybody that's an older sister or their brother should feel like a role model to their younger sibling.

Keisha felt a sense of responsibility as the older sibling and shared all older siblings had that same responsibility to their younger siblings. Keisha's mother attained a doctoral degree, which was indicative of Keisha's mother's use of her inner resources and ability to navigate the academy successfully and share that experience with her daughters (Yosso, 2005).

The sense of shared responsibility reverberated through many of the Black women's stories. Zora shared about her experience in the tutoring center and her interaction with other Black women. She would intentionally connect with other Black women and share information with them about scholarship opportunities, discuss financial aid, and engage with them about their classes. As a more mature student, she thought it was her responsibility to extend a hand to other Black women students, especially the younger students. Zora understood and recognized outwardly aggressive behavior and microaggressions exhibited by instructional faculty in the classroom, and she was sure to speak up when she saw this occur. This othermothering as Collins (1990) explained is a way that Black women have been able to use their spheres of influence to create safe spaces for other Black people, which was evident in Zora's actions.

Providing encouragement to other Black women was also something many participants felt they may not have received but felt compelled to provide to other Black women students. Because they had not experienced role modeling

themselves, they felt strongly about the need to be role models to their family members, friends, and the community. Amina shared:

> Yeah, I feel like I'm a role model for people in my community that thought that education was out of reach. Especially like, if, like I said, I try not to speak about the negative things that I go through, I try to speak the positive because I want them to experience, because I feel like their experiences might be different. So, I feel like I'm a role model in that sense because I've gotten more people from my community to take classes and be part of it, because they were scared. So, I do feel like I am because I help them break some of those barriers, because I was giving them the real in a sense.

Amina understood she was responsible for taking her educational experiences back to the community and to provide them with guidance to get into higher education. Once they were accepted, she assisted them with navigating the institutional barriers of which she was aware. Black women have historically reached back while climbing, meaning as they are on their own journey, they will bring others along.

Amina and Zora consistently modeled how to be a student, understanding the impact they had on others. Although Jamie shared she did not have the experience of role models, because she experienced the foster care system, she shared, "I do feel like I'm a role model because everything I'm doing. I'm doing to

better myself and better my life." Jamie used her journey as an example for other students to follow.

Community Care

Understanding that it takes a community to care for and support one another, this theme came to be a result of the participants' responses. Amina shared she was looking for more support by the way of other Black women in leadership roles. She shared:

> More support, and especially, I would say, from women who have a higher degree to actually be that support and that mentor. I feel like black women that's in college shouldn't have to join a sorority or something to have a sense of sisterhood. Why can't I just be here and just have that mentor? Someone to tell me what I need to do, that looks like me that might know some of the struggles, even if you haven't went through, you might know somebody that went through those struggles, but you could basically be able to, connect.

Black women have historically been in supporting roles, as those who support Black men, the community, the Black church, and their families. In education, Black women look for programs, people, and spaces that provide them with holistic supports needed for them to not only reach their educational goals, but also to live lives that allow them to uplift their families and have some modicum of success. This idea has been seen many times as the strong Black women, responsible for supporting their families and communities, even if they

do not necessarily subscribe to those narratives (Nelson et al., 2016). However, Jamie experienced the foster care system, so she had not received that type of support growing up. Now, she viewed herself as a role model. Howard-Hamilton (2003) discussed role modeling in the third lens of BFT. Although Jamie was a Black woman from the same community, her experience was much different because she experienced the foster care system and created an additional layer to her story.

Cultural Capital. There was much discussion around the support needed, but out of that, the conversation changed to the sense of responsibility that many of the participants had to their families, their community, and to other students on campus. Although they were looking for support from the institution and from other leaders, they embodied for others what they needed. Yosso's (2005) theory of cultural capital explains the need to leverage the community resources that may not be valued by the majority. For people of color, their cultural capital is their superpower and a definitive way to uplift their entire community.

Understanding what she brought to the community was reflected in Kayla's statement. She said, "It could also be like tutoring others." As we were discussing the supports needed, Kayla shared not only a way she could be supported, but also how she could support others. This simple statement reflected that Black woman, especially those with the privilege of attending college, have the expectation to be responsible for those around them. Porter et al. (2020) found that Black women students, regardless of the institution they

attended, were looking to connect with one another in spaces where they could just be themselves. The participants at Sunrise College were no different because they too were looking for spaces and connection with other Black women on campus.

Another way Black women feel responsible for other Black women in the community was shared by Weis (1985), where she found Black women were the primary caregivers for their children, making it challenging to attend college. Many of them used other women in their lives to care for their children while they attended school. Zora recognized this idea as well, and shared that a way that they could support one another was to care for each other's children as they needed. There was no mention of compensation, because it was viewed as a responsibility for them to take care of each other in a shared community. Zora shared:

> It makes a big difference, it really makes a big difference and a lot of people, us with Black women, we may have problem for childcare. "Okay? I don't work tonight; I'll take babysit your kids for you." And I ain't got to worry about paying childcare. I don't worry about my kids like they're not safe. And if you go somewhere, you need me to babysit for you, we're working together, we're mentoring each other and teaching each other how we can do things to be successful, less stressed. We're helping each other.

Taking care of one another's children is an act that can be traced back to slavery (Collins, 1986), where enslaved Black women would care for one another's children. This act created a sisterhood and sense of community that would extend to those in their extended families, their church families, and all children of the community (Collins, 1986). This idea further reinforced the longstanding sense of community that has been a mainstay among Black women.

Mia also discussed having a sense of responsibility for oneself and what was needed to create that space. She shared her experience and what she needed to do to move forward in her life and her education. Mia shared:

> For my experience, I had to let go of some people that I love. They were my close friends and I laugh I had so much fun, family I had to let it go. I had to block out my distraction with social media, with people just to focus. I got to focus. I got to block everybody out so I can focus I got to reach where I need to go. I got to do it.

Amina shared a similar experience, understanding that some people in her community may not have understood her educational journey and would not have the capacity to provide her the support that she needed. She explained:

> Yeah, because the community outside of my education don't know anything about the education world. So, when I'm having struggles or stressed out about school, they're like, "Just don't do it." I'm like, "No, this is due at 11:59, I have to get this done!" No, I'm bringing my laptop with

me at family events and stuff, and they're not understanding. I'm like, "Okay, I can talk to you, but I have something to have get done or I have to leave early because I have stuff I have to get done." And just like, it kind of clashes in a sense, and it's like, you got to prioritize between the two.

Black women have been the ones in the community to pray for their families, friends, and neighbors. They provided uplifting words and created opportunities for education, as demonstrated in some of the most prominent historic and current Black women, such as Mary McLeod Bethune, Ruby Bridges, and Shirley Chisolm and more recently, Oprah Winfrey, bell hooks, and Dr. Gholnecsar Muhammad. Although the participants may not have been as well known, they expressed their support and had encouraging words for other Black women students, but there was limited support for them. The participants were Black women who may not have been entering college on an academic scholarship. They may have just been a regular student not receiving the same level of support. Amina shared:

> But what about the woman that's in the middle of education. Maybe I don't have, like, I didn't have a high GPA and get all these scholarships and stuff. What about the one that's in the middle that wants that education? Where's the support for her versus the guy who came in through a sports scholarship and a girl who came in through education scholarship. What about the one that barely made it in? Where's the support? So, I think that they need more they definitely need more support in that middle sector

> because I feel like that's where I fit it, in the middle. I don't fit here; I definitely don't fit there. And then, they have other categories that they added, but it's like, what about just the woman, that's a regular black woman that just wants education, wants a nice career, wants a nice house. Maybe I'm not the person that wants to be vice president and go excel up in politics. What about just the basic woman that just wants to have a regular life? Where's the support?

Amina's statement reflected the experience that she had and spoke to many Black women who are in community college, who may not be the highest achievers, or who may be returning students. Weis (1985) found the Black women who were attending community college were looking for the same things that Amina shared: a better life, generally for their children. Although it has been almost 40 years since Weis did her research, Black women are still focused on educational attainment as a means of upward mobility. However, Black women remain marginalized, especially in higher education. Ultimately, this marginalization impacts the ability for Black women to continue to face economic inequities that have resonated through our communities (Patton et al., 2016).

Table 4 contains quotes that answered the question, "Do you feel supported by others on campus?" Participants were able to point out more general community support, such as the overall campus community, financial aid, and a current book program that had been providing all textbooks to students for free. Community colleges were created to be an educational resource for all

students, and that had been the experience of the students who participated in the focus group. Using their cultural capital, they were able to find social and navigational supports to meet their educational needs (Yosso, 2005).

Table 4

Cultural Capital – Focus Group Question

Participant	Do you feel supported by others on campus?
Kayla	"We can all come together to support because we were at school at the end of the day, we got to help each other out."
Mia	"Like I said, I got support through financial aid."
Zora	"But the help with the book grants that they give on campus, that's a big help. Because like I said, my major is business, and a lot of my books are, like, $200, $150, $300 for the books and stuff like that, so it's very helpful that they were giving us free books."

Racialized and Genderized Assumptions

The final theme focused on the experiences the participants had on or off campus where they were treated a particular way because of their race or gender. Regardless of their age, most of the participants had discriminatory experiences based on their race or gender. Table 5 shows racialized and genderized assumptions.

Table 5

Racialized and Genderized Assumptions – One-on-One Interviews Question

Participant	Have you ever faced discrimination based on your race and/or based on your sex? If so, please describe the situation.
Keisha	"Well, actually this might sound crazy, but I work with kids. And yesterday, a student came up to me and another teacher, and she was like, he said, "Oh, ladies can't play basketball." And I was like, I was like, "What?" And I was literally playing basketball with the kids. I was like, "That's not true. Girls play basketball, I played basketball my whole life. My little sister is literally a basketball star."
Amina	"In the education sector, I didn't have an issue with myself, like gender being an issue. But more so with my race. Yeah, I feel like it's more about race, it's not about gender, I feel like school is like, segregated in that way where you fall in, not really, in your gender. Those are my experiences."

In Table 5, Keisha shared her surprise that although women have been playing sports for years, and she was actually playing basketball with a little kid, he still made an assumption based on her gender. She went on to share an experience where she had applied for a job at McDonalds, as a student athlete, in a community that appeared diverse, and she was not offered the job and not provided a reason. She and her mother visited the restaurant a short time after this, and her mother observed there were no Black people working there. Perhaps that was why she was not hired.

Amina pointed out (see Table 5) she thought her gender was not a factor when it came to education, but her race was definitely a factor. She also shared:

How, as a woman of color, when I walk into certain stores in certain areas I get a certain look, and especially if I have kids with me, they already give me the looks, they‘re already following me around, so I would say out within the community I’ve been discriminated against both.

Table 6 shows the focus group responses to being asked about whether or not they felt being a Black woman impacted their college experience.

Table 6

Racialized and Genderized Assumptions – Focus Group Question

Participant	Do you feel that because you are a Black/African American woman, that made a difference in how you experienced the college?
Kayla	“Like, in 2020, you see the Black Lives Matter movement, you see the true colors shows through the news and the schools and that’s when everything was online, because all the classes were online and they didn’t care about your race, they just want you to finish the work and that is one less thing to worry about.”
Zora	“I’m a first-generation student and so, it made a big difference to me because my parents never went to college or anything, so there were seven of us, and they never told us how important education was. It was it was just go to high school, but I guess in my generation, the kids then you automatically know what you’re supposed to do, and we just did it.”

Most participants in the focus group and the one-on-one interviews did not appear to be overly negatively impacted by being Black women on the campus. Many of them had experiences off campus where they had been treated unfairly

due to race, gender, or both. Zora shared about an experience she had in the classroom where she felt profiled by the professor based on her race and her gender. Zora explained:

> And I have five kids, and I tried to get them to reflect a lot of things that's going on with me. Because I was in a class with a couple of my kids and the teacher, he was laughing like, "Why are your kids in the class? You made them come to school?" I'm like, "Why would you think I made my kids come to class", be in the same class when they come to school. One of them asked me, "Why is your name different than your kids?" I'm like, "Because I added my husband's name . . . and that is not nice for you to ask me that and in front of the class." You think I don't care because I'm Black, and you think you can talk to me any kind of way you want to, no you can't. So there is a lot of problems with certain teachers who still have that little thing about you're Black stay in your place.

The behavior by this instructor was historically how Black women have been treated in all spaces. Black women's daily resistance, as Collins (1989) pointed out, is dismissed because they have been viewed as less than human and lacking the abilities to have a viewpoint.

Although all participants experienced discrimination in different spaces in one form or another, it did not deter them from moving forward and working toward their educational goals. However, many students may be deterred based

on their experiences and Booker (2016) found there is an impact on Black student's persistence based on their treatment in the classroom.

Summary

This chapter went over the three themes: (a) need for support, (b) community care, and (c) racialized and genderized assumptions. This chapter also covered four subthemes: (a) tutoring, (b) Umoja Community, (c) role modeling, and (d) cultural capital that came out of the research. I used hermeneutic phenomenology to guide the conversations to provide the space for participants to address the overarching research question: What are the lived experiences of Black women community college students at HSIs? The subquestions included (a) What does it mean to be both Black and a woman community college student at an HSI? and (b) What connects Black women community college students to the college?

Participants shared their lived experiences through narratives, and I identified themes. I used some of the most impactful quotes and created a 4-minute video that reflected all the student's voices using digital storytelling. This methodology allowed for the students' experiences to live outside of the traditional research paper. The video can be shared with campus communities to hear the voices of the Black women who participated in this study and to use their voices to make impactful change in the community college system that will benefit Black women community college students. The video is found at the

following link:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gSyb3qHly5I&t=7s&authuser=0.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of Black women community college students attending a Hispanic-serving institution (HSI). There has been limited literature and research focusing specifically on Black women in higher education overall (Patton et al., 2016) and much of the research on Black students in community college has focused on the experiences of Black men (Hackett & Sheridan, 2013; Winkle-Wagner et al., 2020; Wood & Turner, 2010). With a gap in the research regarding Black women in higher education, this created a space for this study to address the unique experiences of Black women community college students (Strayhorn & Johnson, 2014). I ensured the focus of this research was specifically on Black women's experience and did not conflate that with the overall Black student experience, which includes Black men. On a broader level, this dissertation brought another layer of understanding to the important work already being done by Nandi, a professional organization that focuses on the experiences of Black women students, faculty, staff, and administrators at the California Community College (CCC) system (Nandi, 2022), as they have been committed to understanding the importance of turning quantitative and qualitative data into meaningful action. Through action research, Nandi conducts research to capture the challenges, barriers, and overall lived experiences of Black female students, faculty, staff,

and administrators (Savage, 2022). Nandi engages colleges in the efficient use of data to build and sustain institutional capacity to support Black female students through culturally responsive workshops, webinars, learning institutes, and conferences (Savage, 2022). These efforts are meant to inspire and impact Black female CCC students on a personal, academic, and professional level. Understanding those needs, the following questions guided this study:

1. What are the lived experiences of Black women community college students at HSIs?
    a. What does it mean to be both Black and a woman community college student?
    b. What connects Black women community college students to the college?

Overview

The use of hermeneutic phenomenology creates an environment that allows for participants' lived experience to be elevated and researchers to attempt to capture the essence of their experiences (Van der Zalm & Bergum, 2000). This methodology was ideal for capturing the participants' lived experiences at the community college (Kafle, 2013). Digital storytelling is a community based participatory research method (Gubrium, 2009), which is a newer methodology. It was also used to provide a medium that allowed for the participants' lived experiences to be shared in more spaces (McLellan, 2007). By combining both methodologies, I was able to observe and collect their lived

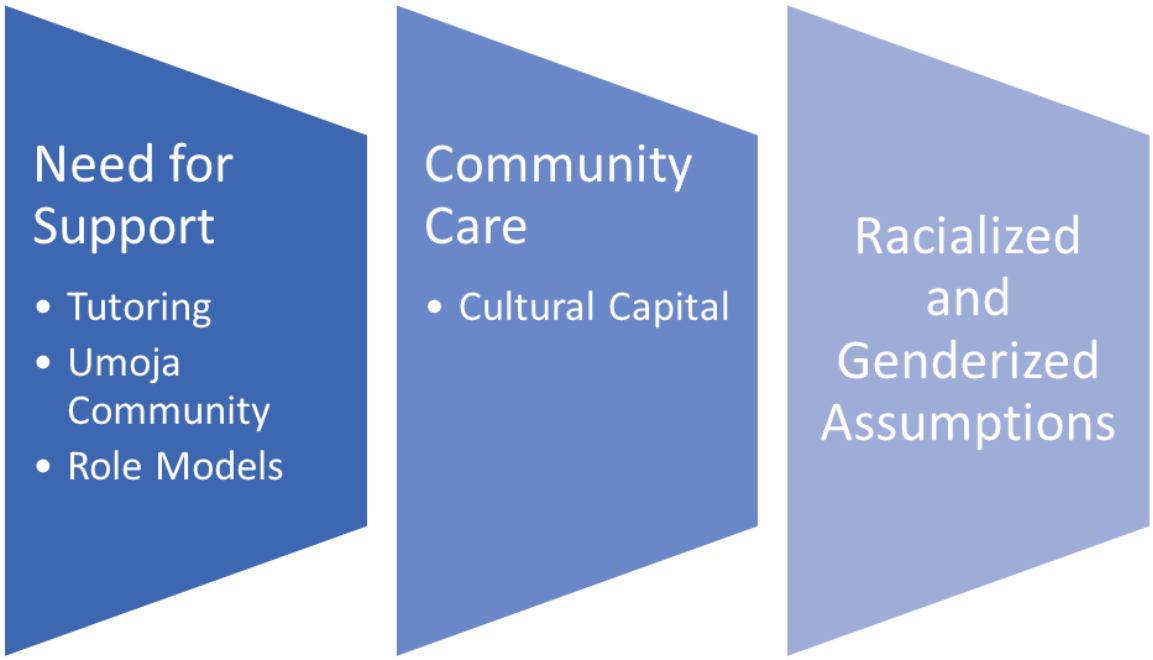
experiences and take a small piece of their interviews and create a visual representation in the form of a 4-minute video (Rossiter & Garcia, 2010).

I focused on six Black women between the ages of 18–65 who were currently enrolled in an Inland Empire community college at the time of the study, and I gained insight into how they experienced the institution. The participants were able to share some of their experiences that highlighted how they felt on the campus and about the support the campus offered. Overall, they shared the value of tutoring, both by being tutored and providing tutoring; the connection they had to Umoja and how that community provided them a space to connect and to be supported and to provide support to others; and the impact of role models on their educational journeys. Their collective voices echoed the importance of providing a sense of belonging, spaces where they were honored and respected for being Black women, and the importance of having their voices heard and acknowledged.

After analyzing the data, I identified three overarching themes and four subthemes. These themes were reflective of the lived experiences of the Black women students who attended Sunrise College. It is of note that no themes arose as it is related to them attending an HSI. Although this campus status was thought to have been a possible factor for the participants prior to the study, it was determined to have no effect on the participants' experiences at Sunrise College. In Figure 2, a visual example is provided to reflect the themes and subthemes as they are reflected by the data collected.

Figure 2

Themes and Subthemes



Need for Support

Although the students themselves needed additional support, they exemplified strong navigational capital in alignment with Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth framework. They created the community they desired and leaned into teaching other students with shared identities how to navigate the campus environment. These efforts may have been born from resistant capital, which suggests people of culture can learn from challenges associated with inequities experienced in their own communities. Black women are viewed

as the outsiders within on college campuses, resisting oppression, and supporting social justice. The experiences that Black women have add an additional layer that lends itself to the educational experiences that the Black women in the study had (Collins, 1989, 1990)

Participants expressed the importance of having support specifically outside of the classroom, whether in community with one another or the tutoring centers on campus. The overarching theme was support and the subthemes discussed were tutoring, the Umoja community, and role modeling. Winkle-Wagner et al. (2020) identified support as not only the family's responsibility, but also an institutional responsibility, by providing it as early as the onboarding process. Strayhorn and Johnson (2014) determined many Black women community college students shouldered the family responsibilities impacting their ability to complete college successfully, and some of the students at Sunrise College were no different. Family responsibilities caused them to place their educational goals on pause until their children were older.

Umoja Community

The Umoja Community is a state-funded program and this program touches the other subthemes, as tutoring and role models are built into the program (Umoja, 2022). All participants in the study were a part of the Umoja Community, and the Umoja Community faculty and staff had historically been Black, meaning they had a different definition of being student centered. Guiffrida's (2005) othermothering theory has been present at Sunrise College

with the older Umoja students assuming the role as they interacted with other Black students. Identifying a community where they were able to see other Black students and having a space where they felt welcome impacted all Black students. Even those who were high achieving benefited from the sense of community (Strayhorn, 2009).

Black women students who were not connected on campus felt like they were alone. Keisha, Kayla, Mia, and Zora agreed they did not feel a part of anything until they were with Umoja. This experience was not unique to Sunrise College. Research on Black women college students have shown that being connected with Black organizations on campus has increased their sense of visibility on campuses where they felt invisible (Bonner et al., 2015).

In other research, students felt as if they were outsiders at HSIs (Abrica et al., 2019; Bonner et al., 2015), but this study did not support that hypothesis. The students who participated in this study had a strengths-based perspective, where they were focused on the cultural capital they possessed (Yosso, 2005), as opposed to what they might have been lacking.

Community Care

Weis (1985) identified the community care in the early research about Black women in community college, as Black women have a sense of responsibility when it comes to their children, families, and friends. In the current study almost 40 years later, some participants carried this same sense of responsibility for themselves, family, friends, and the community as they

embarked on their educational journeys. Knowing that Black women students carry many of the familial responsibilities (Bonner et al., 2015; Collins, 1989; Strayhorn & Johnson, 2014; Weis, 1985), this study reinforced what previous research had discovered. Not only do Black women students care for their own family members, but they also assume the role of othermothering (Guiffrida, 2005). They also provide support for other Black women, specifically in their communities to support them with their children, education, or with encouraging words. With all the responsibilities the Black women in this study had, it is not surprising Black women have challenges with persistence. The expectation is that Black women will have themselves to rely on (Winkle-Wagner, 2015). In Table 2, Mia explained she was completely on her own until she connected with Umoja by happenstance. Without that support and sense of belonging, Mia, along with other students, would miss out on this community of care.

As they found themselves in spaces where they may have been one of only a few Black women, like Kayla, they would intentionally connect with other Black women to just check in to be a support to them in any way possible. As I observed them sharing about this, it was as if it was a normal response for them. They would check in with another student in the class because they had not seen them in a while or just being sure to say hi across campus. It was almost as if it was an innate response as they unknowingly shared their social capital with one another.

Coalitions

The lack of institutional support for Black women students on college campuses created a space for Black women to create their own coalitions to support one another. In Collins's (1990) work, she discussed the importance of Black women building coalitions with diversity that would focus on the social justice, being principled, and the need for one another. Black women who have had the experience of being the outsider within, specifically in higher education, can now work with other Black women to create their own versions of the truth (Collins, 1986, 1990). Coalition building reinforces the findings in this study where the students established a need for Black women to create their own supportive community from their perspective. Many of the participants carried a sense of responsibility for their fellow Black women students outside of the classroom, as Weis (1985) and Winkle-Wagner et al. (2020) found. A sense of responsibility tended to be a reoccurring theme in their research on Black women college students. In 2024, in the Inland Empire region of California, I have found the participants in this study to carry on the tradition of Black women before them being responsible for others in their community.

Recommendations for Educational Leaders

This study can be used as a starting point to inform community college faculty, staff, and leadership about the needs Black women students have on their campuses. This study involved a small sample of Black women students at one institution in the Inland Empire; therefore, it cannot be reflective of the

42,519 California Community College students who identified as Black women in Fall 2022 (State of California, n.d.). However, these findings can be used to begin conversations around what the needs of Black women students are to have a sense of belonging at the institutions across the state. Although the findings of this study are not intended to be generalizable, these findings can be transferred to similar contexts, and future studies may expand the reach, which I discuss as recommendations for future research.

Vision 2030 through the California Community College Chancellor's Office (CCCCO, 2023) identified Black students as a population of students who have experienced a large equity gap, especially when it comes to persistence, completion, and transfer to public 4-year universities. Due to the unique set of challenges Black women community college students experience, it is important for the institution to implement a plan that would allow for the support for Black women students as they enter the institution until they complete their degree. I provide a list of strategies that can be implemented at the institutional level and by leadership. The recommendations for the institution are as follows: (a) safe space designated for Black women, (b) mentoring, (c) culturally competent training for faculty and staff, and (d) sister circles. The recommendations for the leadership team are as follows: (a) listening tours specifically for Black women students and (b) designated financial support.

Safe Space for Black Women

From the lens of BFT, it is essential for Black women to share their experience from their perspective (Howard-Hamilton, 2003) by creating a space on campus where Black women can build community with one another, which would allow for sharing to be continuous. This space would begin to change the narrative regarding the outsider within because it would allow the students to embrace their identity, which they carry with them in almost all spaces (Collins, 1986). This space can be used for a number of different activities that may positively impact the experiences of Black women and allow them “the freedom both to be different and part of the solidarity of humanity” (Collins, 1986, p. S30). Winkle-Wagner (2015) found having intentional spaces designated for Black students were vital to Black students having a sense of belonging on campus. As the participants in this study expressed, it is necessary for school to create this space, understanding the need for physical space to create community, create trust, and strengthen relationships with one another.

Mentoring

There has been much research on the benefits of mentorship (Winkle-Wagner et al., 2020), specifically with Black students, and the students in this study were no different. Participants mentioned they could benefit from a mentor or someone who could support or guide them. High-touch engagement through mentoring has been reported to be impactful to Black students, particularly at predominantly white institutions (Winkle-Wagner et al., 2020). This approach can

be taken at Sunrise College as well. It will connect the students to engage faculty and staff who may create a sense of community. Rose et al. (2014) also looked at how to incorporate mentoring to support Black women students.

Culturally Competent Training for Faculty and Staff

Clark-Louque and Latunde (2019) indicated having a leadership team who are culturally proficient can help to assess and evaluate their biases and beliefs to allow them to serve students better. Therefore, having leaders receive equity-based training as it applies the needs of Black women students at the college is a crucial piece of providing support. Connecting with organizations such as Nandi (2022), leaders can create a training that addresses the areas specific to Black women students who attend community college. Administrators can create a campus culture that is open and supportive of students who have been previously marginalized by learning and understanding the needs of these marginalized students and taking steps towards meeting their needs. Collins (1990) understood the impact and benefit of Black women sharing information in their sphere of influence and said, “By making the community stronger, African American women become empowered, and the same community can serve as a source of support when Black women encounter race, gender and class oppression” (p. 222).

Leaders at community college should create a space for an outside expert to train faculty and staff about BFT and how it applies to Black women on campus because BFT is not specific to students. Leaders must understand the

specific intersections Black women face at institutions of higher education because faculty and staff play a role in reinforcing the outsider within. There must be a concerted effort to recognize and rectify this problem.

Sister Circles

Through either the Umoja Community, other equity programming, or student health services, school leaders could create a workshop series that brings Black women students together to a safe space where they can connect for support from one another. Having these types of institutionalized services offered to Black women students would allow for them to be seen and heard on the campus. These services could also be highlighted to share with the local community to share there is a supportive space on campus for Black women. This space would not be tied to any class, so it would be voluntary and act as a place to build community with one another where students can share their challenges and resources. Creating these sister circles that can be led by a trusted member of the campus community can allow the Black women students to then uplift one another.

Listening Tours

The leadership can be intentional and go to students to meet with them to get feedback on how they are feeling on the campus and learn about their needs. Many times, leaders send out surveys, which provide some information; however, when leadership members go directly to the students and have face-to-face or Zoom listening sessions, they can receive real-time information from

students they can discuss with other campus leaders, faculty, and staff. They can also discuss how they can move forward to best support Black women on campus. Scheduling these sessions at particular times throughout the year may also provide consistency when collecting these qualitative data.

Designated Financial Support

Leadership members can begin with understanding the commitment from the CCCCO and Vision 2030 to create equity in programs, services, and funding to address the disproportionately impacted students, which include Black students (CCCCO, 2023). This study may support Vision 2030 and allow leaders to look for more specific funding to support Black women because 55% of Black students who attended a CCC in 2018-2019 were women, and 52% of Black women who attended were over 25 (Community College Equity Assessment Lab, n.d.). This study supports Vision 2030 and how Black students, specifically Black women students, would benefit from the financial supports to help them to graduate and secure more than a living wage. Using studies such as this may allow for the CCCCO to hear the student voices. By using the digital storytelling method, their voices can be heard in spaces where the participants may not have had access to but where the decisions are being made. Too often, the CCCCO looks at Black students as Black men, and the responsibilities Black women carry reflect the additional holistic supports needed for them to be successful. By committing funds for Black women students, it would reflect the institution's commitment to serving this population on an ongoing basis.

Next Steps for Educational Reform

Based on the findings, there should be intentional changes at the district level of each institution that incorporates the presidents or chief executive officers of each college, the vice presidents of student services, and the vice presidents of instruction to create a sustainable plan that would highlight the need to support Black women community college students and to institutionalize supports and services at each institution. The next steps for supporting Black women community college students on a substantial scale would be to do the following:

1. Intentionally recruit and retain Black women professionals as faculty, classified professionals, or management who have the demonstrated understanding of the needs of Black women students. Having Black women professionals working with students through mentoring, working in Umoja-type programs, or other involvement reflects their understanding of the supports Black women students need.
2. Provide additional support to programs such as Umoja that have historically supported Black students holistically and ensure there is financial support along with consistent staffing to be sure students engaging in the program can receive consistent support.
3. Student affairs is a place that interfaces with all students and having staff and managers with the cultural understanding of the needs of Black women students would help. West (2019) shared the importance of African American women in student affairs. West (2019) said:

> An intentionally designed, culturally affirming professional development experience that directly contributes to the personal wellbeing and professional success of individuals from underrepresented cultural groups; by virtue of their purpose, professional counterspaces should be conceived of and facilitated by and for members of the groups they intend to support. Inherent in this definition is the subtle, yet critically important distinction that professional counterspaces for African American women should attend to and enhance the personal and professional lives of these women, which are inextricably interdependent. (p. 162)

The implications of beginning to make these changes would be impactful in the Black community in California knowing there has been strategic and intentional support at the community college level to create a more welcoming environment for Black women. Knowing that Black women are welcome and wanted on the campus may be reflected in increases in enrollment, persistence, retention, and graduation rates. Recognizing that creating intentionality around recruitment of students and faculty, classified professionals, and management reflects the investment the CCCCO has in Black women students.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study occurred at one community in the Inland Empire region of California, reflecting a very specific experience that students at Sunrise College had. Based on what was found in this study and the minimal research that

currently exists regarding Black women community college students, the following are my recommendations for future research. The use of the digital storytelling allowed for the students' voices to be heard in spaces that they cannot be in physically, allowing their needs to be considered. In this study, the most appropriate sample was used in exploratory qualitative research that would provide a deeper understanding of the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of Black women community college students at HSIs?
    a. What does it mean to be both Black and a women community college student at an HSI?
    b. What connects Black women community college students to the college?

The goal of this study was not to produce generalizable data, but to engage with the students in a space that would allow them to share their experiences in a way that can bring attention to their voices. Future studies should use a larger representative sample of Black women community college students from across the state. This sample would provide for a more comprehensive study that would allow for a greater understanding about the needs of Black women community college students across the state and regionally. Using both the quantitative data from the CCCCO and either surveys or interviews would provide a more complete picture surrounding the needs of the Black women students. A mixed methods approach would create a more

comprehensive picture regarding how the community colleges address serving Black women students.

Limitations of Study

This study had two main limitations: (a) the small sample size and (b) the use of just one community college. With just six participants from a single community college, it provided a perspective that was only reflective of the Inland Empire. It did not lend itself to the larger Southern California area.

Conclusion

This chapter included the recommendations for educational leaders, next steps for educational reforms, recommendations for future research, and the limitations of the study. Participants who attended Sunrise College voiced that academic, social, and mentoring support was needed for them and other Black women students. Some shared the challenges they faced as Black women college students and their thoughts on what can be done to create a space that would be more supportive of not only them, but also of other Black women students in college. Being sure to have their voices at the forefront of conversations was imperative, as Jamie shared, “Yeah, I’m a quiet person, I don’t like to be seen or heard, I mean, I do like to be heard only when it’s beneficial to me and my work.”

Black woman can be part of the solution and they can each work to create a supportive community. Kayla shared the following with other Black women

students: “I would say don’t lose track of your goals. The point is it’s easy to get distracted.” Participating with programs on the campus allowed for Keisha’s voice to be amplified. She shared, “I do feel seen and heard. I’m a student that likes to get the attention, so yes, actually, with Umoja, a historical black group on campus.” When the institution understands programs such as Umoja and the impact it has on individual students, they can learn how to create a campus commitment to Black women.

As I interviewed the Black women for this study, they left a lasting impression on me. I provide some quotes they shared for other Black women students. Kayla shared, “I would say don’t lose track of your goals. The point is it’s easy to get distracted.” Amina said:

> So that’s why I feel like I am a role model in a sense, because, I will be that person that tells, this is the walk that I went through. So, you won’t walk through these shoes. Or I could tell you how to navigate it, if you’re walking through the same shoes I did.

Zora said she would share the following statement:

> You don’t want to make you self-doubt yourself. Like I said, I self-doubt myself a lot of times. You want to be around positive people, you don’t want to be around negative people, that’s telling you negative stuff because it makes you, a lot of times, self-doubt yourself. So, you want to be around that positive people. Keep pushing.

Mia said that no matter what, Black women students need to stay on their path. She shared:

> So, I need that motivation like, no, you can do it. Negative gonna come through your mind, negative gonna come through your head like, no, don't do it no. You gonna fail, no, forget them negative thoughts. Keep it pushin' go, cry, you cry if you have to doing that homework cry, keep going, keep cry and do that work and go to tutor. Come on, let's go!

Black women occupy all spaces as being both Black and women, and they face challenges others may never have to think about. The women who participated in the study understood that reality, knowing they not only needed to support themselves but would also always be looking for other Black women who they could support in a way that would get them to reach their educational goals and to let them know that they were a part of a larger community of Black women who want them to be successful.

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT

CSUSB
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James R. Watson & Judy Rodriguez Watson
College of Education
Educational Leadership and Technology

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN BERNARDINO
5500 University Parkway, San Bernardino, CA 92407
909.537.7404

Title of Research Study: The Lived Experiences of Black Women Community College Students Attending an HSI

Researcher(s): Sharaf Williams

Principal investigator name (faculty advisor): Dr. Angela Clark-Louque

Description: We would like your support for a study about Black women community college students attending Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) at a California Community College. Dr. Angela Louque is the principal investigator of this study and the Institutional Review Board at California State University, San Bernardino, has approved this study. An HSI is a federally-designated institution that enrolls at least 25% Latinx students. The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of Black/African American females as they attend a majority-Latinx institution. Please read the information below and feel free to ask any questions that you may have before deciding to participate or not in the study.

You have been selected as a possible participant for this study because you shared the following information (1) identify as a woman/female, (2) identify as Black and/or African-American, (3) currently enrolled in a community college in the Inland Empire that is an HSI, (4) you are 18 years old or older. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and involves three separate in-person focus groups, and the possibility of having a one-on-one interview with the researcher to share more detailed and specific stories of your experiences.

Procedures: The study requires that you attend three in-person focus groups, the first being 2-hours, the second and third being no more than one hour each. The focus groups will be in person in a space that is easily accessible to all participants. The individual interview will be in a zoom session and is voluntary. This will allow participants the opportunity to share more detailed information about their experiences with the researcher. Because this is a focus group you will have the opportunity to answer each question. However, you may only answer those that you are comfortable answering. This process is completely confidential and pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity and that of the institution that you attend. After the first focus group, you will be given a zoom link to participate in the one-on-one, 60-minute interview.

Understand that this process is NOT 100% confidential as you will be sharing in a group setting and the other participants will be listening and learning about your stories and the experiences that you are sharing. Meaning that strict confidentiality will not exist and there will be possibilities that there will be a breach of confidentiality. The researcher will ask that all members of the focus group keep the information that is shared confidential, and respect everyone's privacy, as people are sharing their personal stories.

Possible Risks: Although the risks are very minimal with participation in this study there are some potential risks. Some risks may include that you or others in the focus group may experience emotional responses to some of the questions being posed. There may be sensitive discussions around race/racism and sex/sexism that may cause some discomfort. If at any time you have any feelings of discomfort you are welcome to not only abstain from answering the questions, but excuse yourself from the focus group at any time. Again, this process is completely confidential and there will be pseudonyms used to protect your identity and that of the institution that you attend.

Understand that this process is NOT 100% confidential as you will be sharing in a group setting and the other participants will be listening and learning about your stories and the experiences that you are sharing. Meaning that strict confidentiality will not exist and there will be possibilities that there will be a breach of confidentiality.The researcher will ask that all members of the focus group keep the information that is shared confidential, and respect everyone's privacy, as people are sharing their personal stories.

Audio Recordings: All of the identifying data (demographics, participant email addresses, etc.) including audio recordings collected in this research study will be stored on the computer of the researcher(s) with secured passwords and encoded to maintain confidentiality. However, the data may be published in journals, and/or presented elsewhere without giving your name or disclosing your personal identity.

Compensation: Upon completion of all three sessions each member of the focus group will receive a fifty-dollar ($50) Amazon gift card. Participants who withdraw from the study prior to its completion will not be eligible for the gift card.

Questions: If you have any questions for me regarding the study or participation, please feel free to reach out to Dr. Angela Louque at [redacted]or Sharaf Williams at [redacted]csusb.edu or[redacted]

CONFIRMATION STATEMENT: I understand that I must be 18 years of age or older to participate in your study, have read and understand the consent document and agree to participate in your study.

SIGNATURE:

Name (Print): _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX B

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

Date: 2-19-2024

IRB #: IRB-FY2024-132
Title: We're Here: The "Outsider Within" - The Lived Experiences of Black Women Community College Students at Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs)
Creation Date: 11-17-2023
End Date:
Status: Approved
Principal Investigator: Angela Louque
Review Board: CSUSB Main IRB
Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type Initial	Review Type Expedited	Decision Approved

Key Study Contacts

Member Angela Louque	Role Principal Investigator	Contact [redacted]
Member Angela Louque	Role Primary Contact	Contact [redacted]
Member Sharaf Williams	Role Co-Principal Investigator	Contact [redacted]

APPENDIX C

ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

One-on-One Interview Questions:

Part I – Personal Background

1. Please tell me a little bit about yourself, how long you have been a student and what your educational goals are?

2. How do you feel on campus versus how you feel in your own community?

3. Have you ever faced discrimination based on your race and/or based on your sex? If so, please describe the situation?

Part II – Role Models

4. What do role models look like to you? Describe any role models that you have had in your personal life?

5. Have you had any role models that were Black women at any times during your educational journey? How did that impact you?

6. Do you feel as if you are a role model? If you do why? If you don't, why not?

Part III – Visibility and Needs of Black Women Community College Students

7. What do you feel Black women need as community college students?

8. Do you feel seen and heard at your college? Please describe.

9. Is there anything else that you would like to share?

APPENDIX D

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Focus Group Questions:

Part I – Race and Gender Experiences

1. What does it mean to be both Black/African-American and a woman?
2. How do you feel being a Black/African-American woman student on this campus, during this time?
3. Do you feel that because you are a Black/African-American woman, that made a difference in how you experienced the college?

Part II – Supports In and Out of the Classroom

4. What have been your experiences inside and outside of the classroom at Sunrise College?
5. Do you feel support as a Black/African-American woman student on campus?
6. Do you feel supported by other Black women on your campus?
7. Do you feel supported by others on your campus?

Part III – Thoughts and Advice

8. What thoughts or ideas do you have about the changes your campus can make to ensure that Black women students receive the support that is needed for them to be successful?
9. Do you have any advice to share with other Black women as they enter community college? Or advice that you would have benefited from?

Is there anything else that you would like to share?

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