Abstract

Black women in academia encounter unique societal struggles as they navigate spaces of education that, historically, did not always allow them the right to exist there. While both women and the Black community have separately struggled for the right of access to proper education and for the right to achieve higher statuses within educational institutions, those who meet at the juncture of those two communities, Black women, have a heightened struggle and a steeper battle for acceptance in this realm. Racism and misogynoir against Black women in academia lead to them being made invisible in their disciplines, which leads to feelings of inferiority, weariness, exhaustion, isolation, frustration, and anger, just to name a few. These internalized feelings lead to a decline in the quality of mental wellness within Black women and result in a higher number of them leaving academia (Williams, 2022). This research explores this phenomenon and its societal and psychological implications. The methodology for this qualitative study uses the sister circle methodology, which is a focus group that serves the dual purpose of analyzing the lived experiences of Black women while providing the participants encouragement, support, and empathy for their journeys as Black women (Johnson, 2015). Through this research, I seek to understand how the experiences of Black women in academia affect their overall morale and wellness of the mind and explore potential approaches to social and occupational support that may be able to help offset some of the long-term negative effects that misogynoir and racism have on them.

Key Words: Misogynoir, Intersectionality, Academia, Micro-aggression, Racism, Impostor Syndrome, Mental Wellness, Schema

THEY CAN'T SEE ME CRY: EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF BLACK WOMEN IN ACADEMIA AND THE CONNECTIONS TO THEIR QUALITY OF MENTAL WELLNESS

by

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

In July of 2021, Nicole Hannah Jones, an American investigative journalist, known for her work in covering racial injustice for The New York Times Magazine and creating the landmark 1619 Project, turned down a faculty position at the University of North Carolina (UNC) for a teaching position at Howard University, one of the most prestigious Historically Black Universities in the United States. This decision came after she and UNC had been going back and forth in an extremely tense conflict that was centered on race. Because of her work with the 1619 Project, which aimed to reframe the history of the U.S. by centering slavery and its consequences, along with the contributions of Black Americans at the center of the nation's narrative, Hannah-Jones was initially denied tenure at the university, so when Howard offered her a position, she jumped at the chance to take it. (Hannah-Jones et al., 2021). Her decision made waves in the world of Black women in Academia, and shed light on the fact that many women like Hannah-Jones faced the same racism and vitriol at their own institutions of higher learning. It also exposed the weariness they face at having to be the faces of diversity. According to research from Gonzales et al., Black female faculty, women of color, and men of color, too, tend to be overburdened with service work (2012). They are coerced into taking on a lot of culturally responsive or educational responsibilities and are asked to do things like head up diversity and inclusion committees and task forces or be mentors to people who are not even in their disciplines because they *are* the diversity. Too often, they are looked at as diversity experts, even though that's not necessarily what their disciplines are.

This matters because as Black women are simultaneously facing racism and sexism along with the added responsibility of "diversity work", they are left feeling unseen, unsupported, and

burnt out. The joy of higher learning is stripped from them because of their plight, and their journey through the academy becomes more about other people than it is about themselves.

A. Statement of Problem

Black Women are continuing to pursue positions in higher education. They are increasingly participating in academia, whether it be as students, educators, staff members, administrators, or combinations of many of these roles, and are quite frankly dominating their fields. Still, they are encountering difficulties due to racism, misogynoir, and flat-out disregard for them as actual people and not just bodies that show diversity or hands that do work. Some of the most brilliant minds in Academia are getting burnt out at an alarmingly high rate, and there isn't much being done to stop this (Fox Tree & Vaid, 2022). While Black women are still forging paths for themselves and for those who will follow after them to participate in postsecondary learning that, historically, we were kept out of, there are still many hierarchical and societal challenges that we face. There still isn't enough inclusivity, representation, and a sense of belonging on their campuses. Yes, Black Women are taking up and creating their own spaces to navigate higher education, but because of racism and sexism, they are forced to traverse the world of academia with little to no representation within their courses of study (Leath et al., 2021). Along with navigating their disciplines, they are often left with the work of advocating for themselves and others like them, with little to no accommodation or acknowledgment on the administrative level (Fox Tree & Vaid, 2022).

The lack of support that Black women experience in Academia has been a long-running problem that has been majorly disregarded in educational spaces and has been developed almost only by Black women in educational literature (Curtner, 2021). This means that while learning

institutions may be moving forward in building inclusive spaces for people of color or for people who are in marginalized communities, there is still a great disparity between how they support their white, cisgender, heterosexual women versus their women who are persons of color and a part of the LGBTQ+ community (Bowleg, 2008). This lack of literature that is culturally congruent with the experiences of Black women means that there is an overall need for guidelines on not only how to support our women, but also how to see our women. The failure to properly contextualize the sociopolitical realities of Black women students, educators, and administration limit the effectiveness of "inclusivity training" or "allyship training" that academies of learning toss at their communities as a way of putting a bandaid over a gaping gash (Tillman, 2002).

B. Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to better understand how the experiences of Black women in academia affect their overall morale and wellness of the mind. With the social and emotional burdens that are put on them by their colleagues, students, and administration, and with the lack of support they receive from their institutions, the tolls taken on Black women can’t be taken lightly.

This study also serves the purpose of exploring potential approaches to social and occupational support for academic Black women that may be able to help offset some of the long-term negative effects that misogynoir and racism within their fields have on them. It's not enough just to know what their experiences are; something should be done to create better support systems for them.

Lastly, this study serves as my ode to Black women. It was important to me as a Black woman to use this opportunity to pay homage to the Black women who are navigating higher

education alongside me and ahead of me. As a Black student on a campus whose Black population is only 6% of the entire student body, the support and encouragement from my Black woman peers, professors, and mentors have made my journey at a collegiate institution much more meaningful and worthwhile. This research operates as a way for me to let Black women know that they are seen and acknowledged for their hearts and exceptional minds.

C. Research Question

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are Black women's experiences with racism, misogynoir, and invisibility in Academic settings?
2. How do these experiences affect their quality of mental wellness?
3. What is the difference in the quality of mental health in Black women who have adequate representation and support in academic spaces, and those who do not?

D. Significance of Study

The significance of this study is that though many studies explore Black women's experiences in education, whether it's K-12 or post-secondary, there is still little research directly investigating Black women's mental wellness connected to these experiences (Willis et al., 2021). The literature that does exist is produced by a network of Black women, which means most of it stays within the community of Black women (Turner & Allen, 2022). If the goal is to gather support from "allies" and people who do not identify as Black women, then literature should support this endeavor as well as be implemented into the building blocks of true diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice initiatives within higher education.

E. Definition of Terms and Concepts

The following is a discussion of the key terms or concepts used in this study. All concepts are defined according to their application in the study:

1. Academia: the environment or community concerned with the pursuit of research, education, and scholarship.
2. Impostor Syndrome: a collection of feelings of inadequacy that persist despite evident success.
3. Intersectionality: an analytical framework for understanding how aspects of a person's social and political identities combine to create different modes of discrimination and privilege. Intersectionality identifies multiple factors of advantages and disadvantages.
4. Invisibility: the state of being ignored or not taken into consideration
5. Mental Wellness: A state of well-being in which the individual realizes their own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community
6. Microaggressions: Brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults toward people in marginalized groups.
7. Misogynoir: misogyny directed towards black women where race and gender both play roles in bias.
8. Racism: the process by which systems, policies, actions, and attitudes create inequitable opportunities and outcomes for people based on race.
9. Sexism: prejudice or discrimination based on one's sex or gender.

10. Sister: an in-group term used mainly among Black women to refer to the solidarity and connection we feel toward each other. In this context, it often does not refer to a biological relationship (Dorsey, 2001, p.71)
11. Sister language: the combination of Mainstream American English (MAE) vernacular, African-American Vernacular English (AAVE), and body language, which creates a unique language that is unique to and instinctively understood by Black women.
12. Strong Black Woman Schema: an archetype of how the ideal Black woman should act. This has been characterized by three components: emotional restraint, independence, and caretaking.

CHAPTER II.

Literature Review (Theoretical Framework)

This study grounds itself in four theoretical perspectives, taken respectively from the fields of Black Feminist Theory, Critical Race Theory, Social Identity Theory, and the Competence Enhancement Model. This interdisciplinary combination provides a solid framework from which to understand the multidimensionality of the lives of Black women in academia. Because there are many complex levels to the existence and oppression of the Black woman, it seems wise to pursue an understanding of this experience from multiple viewpoints. Furthermore, this theoretical approach highlights the overall interconnectedness of areas of study within the social and behavioral sciences. Though used integratively, an individual explanation of each theoretical standpoint and its supporting literature follows. After each theoretical standpoint and literary analysis has been explained, I will point out gaps that exist in the literature that could be expanded upon in future research.

A. Black Feminist Thought

Black Feminist Thought (BFT) is shaped and produced by the experiences that Black women have encountered in their lives, as well as the intersecting experiences among Black women (Collins, 2020). BFT was developed within the Black Feminist movement because Black women realized the need to organize an in-group that was distinct from white women and Black males. Neither group understood what it meant to exist in the intersection of Blackness and womanhood, nor did they consider the specific needs of Black women. Therefore, Black feminists organized their own group whose purpose was to combat the prevailing negative images and confront the cruel racist and sexist abuse of Black women, while constructing new images and providing empowerment for the group (Johnson, 2015). Existing in that

intersectionality yields understanding among Black women, and this understanding is the basis for a connected knowing (Clemons, 2019; Lorde, 2003). Through the four dimensions of Black Feminist Thought– lived experience as a criterion of meaning, the use of dialogue to assess knowledge claims, the ethic of caring, and the ethic of personal accountability– a space is created where Black women can share their experiences and contributions as educators and activists (Clemons, 2019). When researchers utilize BFT, their work illuminates how Black women activists are theorists and producers of knowledge.

B. Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is an intellectual and social movement, as well as an organized framework of legal analysis, that was developed by scholars of color, and is grounded on the basis that the concept of race is a socially constructed categorization that is used to dehumanize, exploit, and oppress people of color (Carbado & Roithmayr, 2014). Critical race theorists uphold the idea that racism is an intrinsic property of the law and the legal institutions of the United States to the extent that they function to create and maintain socioeconomic and political inequalities between white people and nonwhite people, especially Black Americans (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). The goal of the CRT framework's existence is to apply the understanding of the structural nature of racism to the goal of abolishing all unjust hierarchies, including ones based on race.

CRT strives toward the abolition of racist institutions through tactics such as unveiling the fact that racism is acutely endemic to American culture, and that those in power design laws and policies that are "intended" to be race-neutral, but still inherently perpetuate racial and ethnic inequality (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). It also fervently disputes the lack of and persists in an unvarying analysis of institutional policies at every level, and anchors its skepticism towards

claims of color-blindness, neutrality, and objectivity in that analysis. In the same context of analysis, one of CRT's most principal contrivances is the emphasis on recognizing and acknowledging the experiential knowledge of people of color and their communities of origin in the examination of society (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). This is done through the use of counterstories, told primarily through encounters with people of color in the form of personal testimonies, archives, and discussions, and it is effective because it acknowledges that, by virtue of their marginalized status, by virtue of their marginalized status, marginalized groups tell stories that have never been heard or have been previously omitted or altered, based on their actual experiences that challenge the discourse and beliefs of the dominant group (Delgado and Stefancic, 2017). The tenets and use of Critical Race Theory all work together toward eradicating racial subjugation, which is a part of the more extensive objective of ending all forms of injustice.

C. Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory, developed by Tajfel and Turner, states that people find much pride and self-esteem from the groups to which they belong (1979). Our social groups give us a sense of belonging to the social world, and help us feel seen, recognized, and understood. These groups can be anything ranging from sports teams to occupations, religions to political affiliations, sexual orientation to gender, nationalities to ethnic groups, or whether or not one is a Beyoncé stan.

Them vs. Us: Social identity theory addresses the ways that social identities affect people's attitudes and behaviors regarding their ingroup and the outgroup. The ingroup is "us", while the othered-group, the out group is "them". Identities become more influential when individuals consider their membership in a particular group to be central to their self-concept and

when they feel strong emotional ties to the group. Affiliation with a group, positive or negative, confers self-esteem, which helps to sustain the social identity; positive affiliations yield higher self-esteem, while negative affiliations yield lower self-esteem. Lower self-esteem is linked to experiences of anxiety, depression, lack of motivation, and feelings of inadequacy, which yields an overall lower quality of mental wellness (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Social Identity Theory also explains the biases that groups hold toward one another, because ingroups prejudge outgroups and outgroups experience the effects of that prejudice (Abrams, 2001). When looking at this facet of social grouping through the scope of an inherently racist society, an imbalance happens between groups when there is a hierarchical structure in place that basically permits and reinforces attitudes of prejudice that lead to discriminatory and racist language, actions, and culture within institutions, including those of higher learning. As it concerns Black women, though we exist in our own ingroup, systemically and socially we are the outgroup– those who exist in the margin. We find belonging with each other, even as we exist in a perpetual outgroup, but we don't always feel that same sense of belonging when we interact with those who are a part of the hierarchical ingroup (Collins & Lightsey, 2001). Social Identity Theory, Black Feminist Thought, and academia intersect specifically to suggest that marginal positions within academia have long been inhabited by Black women for an extended period of time. The existence in this margin is regarded as the "outsider within" status, and it describes how Black women are often invited into spaces where the dominant group has already assembled, so they remain outsiders because they are still invisible to the dominant group and have no voice when dialogue concerning their institutions, disciplines, expertise, or experiences begins (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Subsequently, this disregard indicates that a sense of

belonging cannot exist because there is a lack of personal or cultural commonality between the experiences of Black women and those of the dominant group (Collins, 2020; hooks, 1989).

On the topic of intersectionality, it is necessary to note that the overlapping of identities can also create in- and outgroups within a group. Examples for Black women are Black women as students versus Black women as staff and faculty members; wealthy Black women versus socioeconomically disadvantaged Black women; Black women as superiors versus Black women as subordinates; or straight cisgender Black women versus queer Black women; the list could go on forever, but the picture that is drawn is that while intersectionality highlights the unique ways in which Black women exist within society, it also accounts for some of the encounters with isolation and invisibility they may have even amongst their own (Bowleg, 2008; Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Rosenthal, 2016; Simons, 2001)

D. Competence Enhancement Model

When discussing mental health and wellness, the discussions, especially for Black women, are often more centered on reducing the effects of mental disorder than they are enhancing positive mental health. Mental health and wellness is not just the absence of disorder, but also the presence of consistent regulation, connectedness to self, and clear vision of goals. This is the paradigm for the Competence Enhancement Model, which shifts the focus from an individual-centered, disorder-focused approach to one that embraces psychological strengths and resilience (Barry, 2001). Thus, mental wellness is reconceptualised in a more positive and achievable light. This enhancement model also aligns itself with the perspective that achieving and maintaining a steadily better quality of mental wellness stems from building strengths and growing in competency, which grows self-efficacy in varied areas of life (Barry, 2001; Hughes,

1989). Ultimately, this model takes on the assumption that, as an individual becomes more capable and competent, their psychological well-being improves.

Black women hold a unique position within academia, where they are expected to not only bear their own personal crosses, but also the crosses of the other Black people at their institutions, of women, of nurturers, of mentors, of diversity and equity spokespersons, and more. We juggle so much, and essentially become packing mules for our academies, and because we want to prove to ourselves and to others that there is nothing we can't do, and we believe that if we show even one sign of weakness or weariness, everything we've worked for would be stripped away– so we keep our mouths shut. We don't let others see us cry, lest it be our tears that expose us, while our white counterparts have the privilege of vulnerability and "softness". This schema of the "strong black woman" limits the construction of black femininity and it rewards our women for a stoicism that, ironically, distracts from the inequalities they face on their campuses and in the larger society (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2005; Evans et al., 2017). Overtime, that pressure leaves Black women with internal imbalances that take longer to repair than they did to form. The weight of all they carry leaves women with anxiety that is nearly insurmountable, depression, low self-value, and more, and when they seek help they are only given tools that help fix the symptoms of their unwellness and not the root causes (Tahmassian & Jalali, 2011). The Competence Enhancement Model comes into use because giving Black women the tools to regulate their emotions, to seek out spaces that help them maintain an emotionally-healthy osmosis, and help them redefine their goals for themselves outside of the expectations placed on them is what I am proposing will enhance the quality of Back women who inhabit institutions of higher learning.

E. Black Women Navigating Education

When exploring the history of Black women in academia, many questions arose. At different points in history, what vocational choices were available to Black women? If they chose education, what was the representation like on the teaching and administrative levels? What is the extent of the effects that racism and sexism have had on Black women's employment and advancement in education? What are the differences in the historical experiences of Black women as students and educators compared to Black men and white women? Who were the Black women who distinguished themselves as founders, administrators, and educators, and what was their journey? Have Black female educators developed a philosophy of education distinct from Black males, white females, and white males? What impact did their personal and cultural philosophies have on their achievements, aspirations, and goals? This list of questions is by no means exhaustive. Our history is long and complicated. However, the literature used for this study suggests that there are certain questions that must be addressed prior to developing any type of comprehensive scholarly work on this topic.

For this study, it is important that the literature used establishes a historical context for understanding the very basic struggle in which Black women have been engaged to acquire an education and to utilize that education as a professional. Most areas of American life are inherently racist and sexist, and education is no exception. Black Americans started in this country as enslaved people, stolen from their land and kept in bondage by white slave owners. Black people were kept from learning how to read for many reasons, including the use of religion and the Christian Bible to justify slavery (Bembry, 2020). During slavery, enslaved people who were caught learning how to read or write were punished by bodily mutation (Bembry, 2020). During the Reconstruction Era, after slavery had ended and the Confederacy

had lost the Civil War, Black Americans were “free” to pursue their occupational and vocational interests, and education was one of them. In 1799, John Chavis was the first known African American to receive a Bachelor’s degree from Washington and Lee University. In 1840, Catherine Brewer, a white woman, became the first woman to earn a bachelor's degree, graduating from Wesleyan College in Macon, Georgia. In 1862, Mary Jane Patterson was the first African-American woman to receive a Bachelor of Arts Degree from Oberlin College. For the Black woman, she broke the glass ceiling for Black women 63 years after the first Black man, and 22 years after the first woman (Collier-Thomas, 1982).

Black women have historically shared with Black men the deprivation and discrimination that delineates their exodus from slavery to freedom. With white women, they shared some legal prohibitions, which limited their access to public institutions. Still, despite the problems they had in common with their adjacent groups, Black women's historical and societal experiences differed from that of Black men and white women in very specific ways. From 1865 to 1900, Black people who had an interest in a career in education had several options. They could teach in developing Black schools, colleges, institutes, or industrial training schools. They could also set up their own schools or teach in the rural South. Unfortunately, as hopeful and diverse as these options appear, racism and sexism were factors in the determination of where Black males, and especially Black females, could work (Collier-Thomas, 1982; Madyun et. al., 2013). Through the late 1880s, because Black public schools only employed white teachers, Black educators found it extremely difficult to gain teaching positions within their own communities. When the white teachers were removed, schools moved to replace them with Black male instructors. In the higher learning sector of education, many Black universities and colleges had white presidents, too high a proportion of white male and female faculty members, some

Black male professors and very few Black women (Peters & Miles Nash, 2021). If Black women were fortunate enough to acquire teaching positions, they were usually found teaching in rural schools and were paid less than white teachers (male or female) and Black males.

There were some Black women who obtained a high level of education prior to 1900. In the antebellum period, parents who could afford it sent their daughters to institutions such as the Oberlin College in Ohio, where Mary Jane Patterson graduated from. The development of these institutions, and the integration of certain predominantly white colleges, provided greater opportunities for both Black men and women. By 1920, there were over 100 black institutions of higher learning to which women were admitted, and at least three of these were known as being exclusively for Black women: Scotia Academy, Spelman, and Bennett (Collier-Thomas, 1982). Though having colleges specifically committed to the advancement of Black women was a huge milestone in the quest for education for Black women, their curriculum lacked where that of their white female counterparts thrived. The majority of courses at Black institutions were designed to meet the practical needs of the Black community rather than provide a classical, well-rounded education. Black young ladies were trained as teachers and homemakers.

The history of Black women in academia offers many valuable insights into the larger role played by women and Black people in the struggle for racial and sexual equality. Over the last century, the teaching profession has been consistently expanded to include Black women. Today, they predominate in Black elementary and secondary schools as teachers. At the primary education level, they hold most of the administrative positions. At the college and university level, there is a remarkable decline in the numbers of Black women in the tenure ranks as professors and in administrative positions as departmental and divisional chairpersons. At the top levels of academic administration, they are nearly non-existent. The near non-existence of Black

women in the uppermost levels of higher education administration reflects the amount of progression left for Black women to accomplish within academia, and also points to the lack of literature that accurately accounts for their experiences within the educational realm.

F. Gaps in Literature

Academia's racism and sexism problem has been extensively analyzed and reported on, yet there is a shortage of literature on the intersection of race and gender in academia. The reality is that racism and sexism have a double-edged sword effect for Black women at institutions of higher learning. Studies on these social ills have focused broadly on race *or* gender. Therefore the measures enacted to tackle racism and sexism disproportionately favor Black men and White women, which leaves Black women forgotten altogether (Bocher et.al, 2020).

Education holds the place of one of the most consistent themes in the protest, struggle, triumph, thought, and struggle of Black Americans. In the community, it is beheld as a major avenue for acquiring first class citizenship. Though the body of research that accounts for the educational experiences of Black people is large, most of it is negative and focuses on the victimization of Black people. It emphasizes deficiencies (social, economical, etc.) and paints Black people as aberrations among the academic community, especially in comparison to white people (Collier-Thomas, 1982). There are not many scholarly works that accurately and comprehensively trace the history of Black education in America from the Colonial period to the present. For Black women there aren't general history journals, publications, or even comprehensive timelines that would provide a historically accurate context for analyzing and understanding the overall experiences and accomplishments of Black women in and outside of the realm of academia. Apart from the biographical sketches of a few major black female educators and several monographs that survey black female graduates, there are few scholarly

articles, essays, and book chapters about Black women being matriculants in higher education (Collier-Thomas, 1982).

This is due to the greatly disproportionate amount of attention that has been put on the education of Black males. In general, in research and discussions about the journey of education for Black folks, Black males receive the attention, the efforts, and the campaigns for their access to education, while Black women go unnoticed. Invisibility– it's the song of the Black woman. Between 1991-2012, a 22-year span, only 48 articles were published on the experiences of Black college women in higher education related, psychology and behavioral sciences publications. In contrast, since 2001, over 62 publications have been written that are geared toward the collegiate experiences of Black undergraduate men alone (Harper, 2012). Over the last 20 years most of the literature on Black girls presents a mythologized discourse, which suggests they are "okay" because they fare better than Black boys (Collier-Thomas, 1982).

Black women remain marginalized, misnamed, maligned, and made invisible in the academy, though they have made huge leaps of upward progression within academia (Walkington, 2017). Therefore, it is left up to Black women to tell their own stories of their arrival at and navigation of academia. There could no longer be a sole reliance on statistical comparisons to Black men, because it does nothing more than feed a rife discourse of invisibility based upon what we think we already know about collegiate Black women. Therefore, For this research much of the literature used was written by Black women for Black women.

CHAPTER III.

Methodology

A. Research Design

Sister Circle Methodology

When I embarked on my journey of navigating the experiences of Black women in higher education and what their support, or lack thereof, would look like, I knew that my goal wouldn't be to pull information from the stories of Black women without creating a space for these women to be poured into the same way they pour out to those around them. As I have stated in the beginning of this report, my goal with this research was to see and acknowledge our women, and to have them know that they are not alone as they traverse the labyrinth of higher education as students, faculty, and instructors.

Like Beyoncé did in the prepping stages of Beychella, I envisioned what the project for this research would look like long before I put in place a plan to do it. I dreamt of the Black women of my college campus, all two-and-a-half of us, seated around a great table with a lavish spread of hors d'oeuvres and delicacies passing plates around as we shared laughter and wisdom. At the end of my dream, we all gathered in a great hug and called each other "sister". A few months after my imagination, a friend sent me a Youtube video of R&B singer Mary J. Blige, who had created her own circle of celebrity sisters. In the 47 minute video, Black women of different identities, goals, and passions sat around beautifully crafted tables and ate gourmet chef-prepared food while discussing their Black womanhood. What I had seen in that video was a reflection of the image I had for this thesis project. It was at that moment that I knew that my methodology would consist of Black women who were like me and who weren't like me, sitting

around a table, eating snacks, and articulating what we've never shared before about our existence in the world of academia.

It wasn't until months later that I came across a methodology that perfectly encapsulated my vision for what I was calling my "round table forum". Dr. Latoya S. Johnson was the woman, the Black woman, to create the methodology that would be rooted in the gathering of Black women to share their stories, and it would be called the "Sista Circle Methodology" (2015). The Sister Circle Methodology (SCM) is defined as "a qualitative research methodology and support group for examining the lived experiences of Black women. It moves beyond traditional methodology to include research practices that draw on the wisdom and social relations of Black women transnationally" (Johnson, 2015). Gatherings of women sharing secrets, stories, and meals have long been a part of Black feminine culture for many generations and have always been a source of support for Black women to cope with familial, societal, and racial woes and anxieties. However, Dr. Johnson reintroduced it as a form of collecting data for research. This methodology feeds two birds with one piece of bread – it gathers relevant, first-hand information from Black women (see Critical Race Theory), and provides space for release and support for them, as they are not always afforded the privilege of taking off their armor and being vulnerable.

There are three central components of SCM that make it unique to sociological and psychological research. First is the communication dynamic. Communication is more than oral among Black women. There is a cosmic and ancestral connection that can be perceived through the nodding of the head, a hum, nuanced pause, a raised eyebrow, or a simple "I know that's right!". There is also the combination of Mainstream American English (MAE) vernacular that Black women use interchangeably with African-American Vernacular English (AAVE), which

creates a unique combination of what I call “sister language” (Dorsey, 2000; Edwards et al., 2014; Ilbury, 2020). The use of sister language may oftentimes be met with undue “correction” or confusion from the nonblack counterparts of Black women, but within the sister circle, this language is instinctively understood and naturally expanded upon in interactions between “sisters”. There is no need for explanation or pressure to “speak correctly”. Black women inherently communicate with their whole beings in a multi-dimensional way, and SCM honors and protects this connection, providing the space for it to thrive and be strengthened by stripping away the limitations of traditional (read: oppressive) research methodologies (Lacy, 2017).

The next component is the centrality of empowerment, which upholds the notion that our lived experiences are knowledge; we have come to know because we have lived (K. Collins, 2020). Being able to fellowship with other Black women helps Black women add meaning to their experiences, which grows their knowledge. SCM promotes the dialogue that transforms life into scholarship and endorses sharing so that all can learn from other ways of knowing or existing (Lacy, 2017). More sharing improves understanding, which yields heightened confidence in identity (Collins & Lightsey, 2001; hooks, 2014).

The final component of SCM is the researcher as a participant. This component eliminates the power dynamic that typically exists between the researcher and participants. All share experiences, give support and encouragement, and take vital pieces of knowledge from the research process. Because the form of SCM is dialogical, anyone can shift or steer the discussion. Participants can ask each other questions and jump in when they see fit. The researcher also shares her life experiences with the participants, so as to lessen the gap between her and her "sisters". It is true reciprocity in research.

B. Data Collection Methods

In an effort to capture authenticity in this data, I utilized two methods of collecting data throughout this research project: discussion and journal prompts. Through the subsequent sections, I will explain the sister scholar recruitment and selection process in addition to each data collection method. From this point, I will interchangeably refer to the members of my sister circle as "sisters," "we," and "us" to indicate my participation in the study.

Participant Recruitment and Selection

I created a list of Black female students, faculty, and staff on my campus with whom I had some form of connection already through classes, organization memberships, leadership teams, or friendships. As a Black woman on a campus such as mine, where Black students make up 6% of the total student body population, it is not difficult to spot another Black woman across the lawn or at the other end of the classroom. As a student in the class of a Black woman, you may find yourself sitting at the front of the classroom, trying to catch your professor's eye when certain political or social subjects arise in class discussion. When you are a student leader on campus being called into leadership meetings with various faculty and staff members, department chairs, and administrators, you scan the room to count how many "sisters" are present in these meetings, where, before long, one of you will be called on to be the voice for the campus' Black community. When one of you is inevitably selected to be the savior of your people, you dart your eyes across the room, and with the raise of your brow, you say to your sister, "Here we go again." When you finally have a class in your discipline with one of the only Black female professors at your institution, you might go out of your way to connect with her through taking as many classes of hers as possible, dropping by her office hours, or picking her to be your mentor for the duration of your time at your school. In other words, finding Black

women on my campus was one of the easiest parts of conducting this research, since I had sought their presence long before I had begun my thesis. Once I created my list, I drafted an email (Appendix A) that included a link to a Google Form sign-up that explained the study and the consent process (Appendix B). Through the Google Form, sisters consented to participate and be audio and video recorded. They also indicated identifying information such as role in academia, level of education, and discipline (see Table 1).

Sisters were given a month to sign up, and were also encouraged to send the Google Form link to other Black women they were connected to on campus, so that I could maximize the attendance and diversity of the Black women in the room. I also passed on the Google Form link to my thesis advisor, who was connected to even more faculty members who identified as Black women. Once the sign-up period ended, sisters were contacted with reminder emails and Google Calendar notifications that included information about the circle, namely the location and expectations of the event. In total, fifteen women signed up, and of those fifteen, seven actually attended the circle and participated.

Sister Circle Overview

The sister circle was the main source of data collection for this project. Restating the purpose of this study, I wanted to gather information from the women in my circle, and also provide a support system for these Black women whose shared experiences, marked by the offering of advice and wisdom, would enable the conversations that would be had (Johnson, 2015).

My intention in the circle was to engage with the women in such a way that we would be able to establish an understanding of the meaning of self as woman and self as Black (Bassey, 2007; Simons, 2001). Sisters had the opportunity to engage in one sister circle that lasted

approximately 90-120 minutes and was audio recorded for transcription. I gave the participants a disclaimer, ensuring that I would only require their attendance for two hours. If we went over that time, they would be free to leave the circle. Similarly, those who wanted to extend the conversation beyond the two allotted hours were free to do so. The circle was video-recorded. However, at the end of the two hours, even though the conversation was still going on heartily, video recording was discontinued to allow free discussion. The circle took place within an experimental room in the social and behavioral science classroom building on campus. This room was chosen to allow ease of access for participants, since it was already on campus, and students, faculty, and staff had permission to inhabit this building after operating hours due to enrollment or employment at the university. Because many sisters came to the circle directly from classes, work, or meetings, I provided their favorite snacks and beverages, which I asked them to indicate on the sign-up form.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Role in Academia	Level of Education	Discipline
Delta	Associate Professor	Doctorate	Communication, Performance Studies, Metacognitive Listening Strategies in L1, Department of Communication
Cape Town	Student, Student Leader	College Senior	Major- Sociology Minor- Criminal Justice Pre-Law
Sasha Fierce	Staff Member	Master's	Major- Communication w/ focus in Interpersonal and Organizational Communication

			Minor- Psychology Currently in Master of Science Organizational Leadership Program.
Coach	Student, Student Leader, Student Athlete	College Sophomore	Major- Communication Minor- Digital Marketing
Mitochondria	Adjunct Professor	Doctorate	Biology- Molecular Biology, Microbiology
Archer	Student	College Senior	Kinesiology (Pre-Physical Therapy)
Targaryen	Student, Student Leader, Student Athlete	College Senior	Major- Criminal Justice Minor- Accounting

After everyone arrived at the experimental room, I had them find and sit by name cards with their actual names, along with their assigned pseudonyms. For my personal pleasure, and since I had a relationship with each of the women, I created each pseudonym for each lady, and I hid the made-up names from them until their arrival. Not only did it bring me joy to watch their eyes light up at the aliases I assigned them, but this doubled as an ice breaker for the group as I explained why I gave each sister their specific sobriquet.

I gave sisters thirty minutes to eat their snacks and commune. I wanted to give them time to eat, because once I started recording, I didn't want any crunches, munches, or crinkling of packages to disrupt the audio of the recordings. As the women ate and conversed, I made my way around the room, greeting each of them and checking on any needs they may have had, while passing out materials necessary for the participation in the circle. At the end of the thirty

minutes, after everyone's conversations had concluded, and after snack bags were empty, I commenced our circle.

The circle started with me introducing myself as researcher and sister, then detailing the purpose of which we were meeting. I set the expectations of the circle, which were bravery, honesty, companionship, respect, and vulnerability. After answering subsequent questions, I turned on the cameras set up to record the circle and began our discussion. I followed a script I had written prior to the circle, and led the sisters in a discussion about belonging, surviving, and thriving in academia (Appendix E).

Journal Prompts

The sister circle began and ended with journal prompts. I distributed worksheets to each sister that had space for them to answer the following prompts:

Journal Prompt 1:

- Why did you choose to pursue higher education and/or a career in academia?
- What are some current challenges that stick out to you when you think of the experiences of Black women in higher education? What are your own challenges?
- What makes you feel seen/heard as a Black woman in spaces where you are the minority?
- Is there anything that you are nervous about as we start our sister circle?

Journal Prompt 2:

- How would you describe the experience of participating in this sister circle?
- After having some time to reflect, are there any thoughts or reactions that you want to share from anything discussed in the circle?

The first prompt is what sisters answered at the beginning of the sister circle session. The purpose of this prompt was to influence the ladies to think critically about their positions as Black women in academic spaces. These questions set the tone for the circle, and prepared them

to engage in deeper conversations concerning misogynoir, invisibility, and representation on campus. It also served as a way for me to ensure that I heard from everyone in the room, as there were varying personalities present, and some sisters were more inclined to listen than to speak. The second prompt is what they answered at the end of the session. These questions were for me to gauge the effectiveness of sister circles in providing a space of support and fellowship for Black women at institutions of advanced learning.

C. Data Analysis

I approached the data analysis stage of research through a three step process of data reduction, data synthesis, and drawing and verifying conclusions.

Data Reduction

Data reduction is the process of simplifying various pieces of data and information to their most basic or foundational forms. It is accomplished through summarizations, identifying common themes or patterns, and focusing on the most important pieces of data relevant to the topic at hand (Mayer, 2015). During this stage of analysis, I devised three meta-categories based on my three research questions: (a) experiences in academia (b) quality of mental wellness (c) level of support. These categories served to help me reduce the data from the sister circle and journal prompts to motifs and themes that were pertinent to the research questions. Each pre- and post-circle journal prompt, as well as the recording of the sister circle, was scrubbed and analyzed for relevant quotes, which were then extracted and placed with its appropriate meta-category. Recurring themes, words, or phrases were given tally marks, as to indicate their prominence within the study.

Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is reviewing language shared via dialogue or writing through a social, cultural, political, and historical lens in order to understand any implicit or underlying meanings or messages (Willig, 2003). For the purpose of this study, discourse analysis was the device that was employed to decode the conversations from the sister circle in a way that made their used language more accessible for those who do not identify as Black women, and therefore, cannot fully understand what they are saying when they speak of their experiences with racism and invisibility in academia. Since one of the goals of this research is to explore potential remedies or support mechanisms for Black women in academia, reviewing language through the aforementioned lenses and increasing out-group understanding of this language aids in laying the foundation for social change in learning institutions, as well as guides institutions in setting tangible and achievable goals in creating respectful, inclusive, and safe communities for their Black women.

In this stage of analysis, I returned to the meta-categories mentioned in the previous section. Each section at a time, I translated the quotes from “sister language” to a very common language that could be understood by most people. I then placed these translations back into the met-categories parallel to their original forms.

Drawing and Verifying Conclusions

Drawing conclusions and evaluating the validity of those conclusions was the final stage of my data analysis. My interpretations were based on the displayed analyses of the data, and verified through two criteria: rich data and respondent validation. These strategies are discussed below.

Issues of Validity

Validity is the veracity or credibility of an interpretation (Maxwell et al., 2009). According to Maxwell et al., validity should be included in the research design, and consists of strategies used to identify and quash inaccuracy (2009). Of the numerous strategies there are to increase validity within research, I draw on two of them in this study: rich data and respondent validation.

Rich data in qualitative research is in-depth and elaborate. It often includes quotes, personal stories, and other information that offers a deeper cognizance of people's lives and experiences, and is collected through interviews, focus groups, and observations (Maxwell et al., 2009). The use of rich data allows for a clearer revelation of the truths of one's or a group's existence. To derive rich data from the participants, I asked them to provide details about specific events or occurrences that were mentioned. I also asked additional questions that were not included in the journal prompts or sister circle script to receive clarification or more information on things that were shared.

Respondent validation is, very simply, seeking feedback about data and findings from the participants (Maxwell et al., 2009). During this process of seeking validation from the participants, I summarized my comprehension of something they shared in their journal responses or in the sister circle, and then asked them to confirm my accuracy. I allowed them to submit edits or explanations for their data if needed, and appended their feedback to my analyses of the data.

Boundaries of Study

Rather than labeling this study as "having limitations", which I believe would devalue the truths, knowledge, contributions, and strength of my sisters, I will instead say that this study was

administered within particular boundaries. This study took place at a small, private, Hispanic-Serving Institution within a city whose Black population is only 7.7% of the total 964,177 people who inhabit it, according to the 2021 U.S. Census. The sister circle participants all identified as cisgender Black women, and only one participant identified themselves as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community. Only two of the women present had obtained their doctoral degrees, while only one worked on her Master's degree. The rest of the sisters, including myself, were still at the undergraduate level. Additionally, all the sisters had at least one social or academic interaction with at least one other person in the room prior to participating in the sister circle. This information is listed as a means to offer a glimpse of the dynamic between the women. It also attempts to point out certain variables that, if they had been present, would have potentially altered the data of this study. For example, how different would the data have been if the topic of queerness in Black women had been brought up in this study? This example and more will be explored as further potential research for this topic in the next section.

CHAPTER IV

Findings, Discussion, Future Research

I'm telling these tears, "Go and fall away, fall away," oh

May the last one burn into flames

Freedom! Freedom! I can't move

Freedom, cut me loose! Yeah

Freedom! Freedom! Where are you?

'Cause I need freedom, too!

I break chains all by myself

Won't let my freedom rot in hell

Hey! I'ma keep running

'Cause a winner don't quit on themselves

(Benjamin, Coffer, Duckworth, A. Lomax, J. Lomax, Tirado, Williams, & Beyoncé, 2016, 0:52).

This chapter presents the findings for the research questions that drive this study. The findings include the following topical areas: (1) what it is like being a Black woman participating in academia (2) how these experiences conglomerate to supplement or reduce their quality of mental wellness . The findings are reported using narrations from the sister circle in hopes to capture the sacredness of the circle, while enabling readers to understand the experiences of the sisters and honor the methodology that was used to conduct this study. Please note that from this point, I will refer to each sister as their given pseudonym (Table 1).

Setting the Scene

I did not share this with my group of sisters, but my sister circle was my personal act of defiance of the marginalization of Black women at my institution, as well as Black women at all institutions of postsecondary learning. Though small in size, the circle alongside this research project was the grand stage on which I would center the "Other". I worked with the intention to ensure that the women who went unseen daily, despite their many contributions to the excellence and progression of my university, and of knowledge overall, would be met with recognition, appreciation, and a promise of support from their sisters and from the greater campus community.

During the sister circle, there were "charged" moments where emotions, ranging from excitement, to anger, to hopefulness, to annoyance, were extremely visible. Being a Black woman who regularly engages in conversations with other Black women, I knew what topics and buzz words would elicit certain responses. I could see the moments of uncontrollable laughter coming, and I also could sense when a topic would induce tears or an "I feel you, girl." The flow of the circle happened in a way that one sister would begin to talk about something that had happened to her in a meeting with administration, or with her family, or in her classroom. Immediately, everyone would want to share something, whether it was an experience of their own or a word of encouragement to the sister who currently had the floor. There were eyebrows raising, heads nodding, and a "Chile…" being uttered under the breath every few minutes. We told our sisters "Thank you for sharing," but it wasn't in the mundane, automatized fashion of which we were used to hearing the phrase. Instead, there were tones of warmth, appreciation, and recognition in our voices. We validated one another and felt solidarity within the interactions.

Though the experiences we shared were not generally good ones, the connections we made while sharing our stories produced moments of joy.

Academic Aspiration

As discussed in the Literature Review chapter of this thesis, Black Women have historically been kept from being able to navigate educational spaces, and we were one of the last groups of people to achieve schooling in higher education (Patton et al., 2016). Despite the difficulty we face in navigating academia, we are now classified as one of the most educated groups in America through the post-secondary level. As the researcher, I felt it was important to understand the "why" behind Black women's insistence upon navigating higher education. Therefore, the first question I posed to my sisters was "Why did you choose to pursue higher education and/or a career in academia?" Since our circle was smaller, this gave me the opportunity to give my sisters ample time to go as in-depth with this question as we wanted. The answers varied in many ways, as I am about to share. Cape Town's reason for pursuing higher education was because she simply loves to learn. About her value of education she says:

> Education is one of the most valuable things we can obtain, because it's the one thing no one can ever take from you once you get it. Knowledge opens a lot of doors and pathways for us as people and especially as Black women, so there was no doubt in my mind that I would be going to college. Plus, I love learning. I thrive in learning environments and I love the structure of school. In high school I felt myself yearning to go deeper into the subjects that I was interested in, so higher education was my chance to do so.

This resonated with many of the sisters, especially Sasha Fierce. She jumps in with an, "Exactly, Cape Town," and begins to give her reason for pursuing higher education saying:

> Honestly, I don't think I've ever considered life without the possibility of going to college and returning for an advanced degree. My entire family values education. My family was a part of the first students to be bused to desegregated schools in Maryland after [Brown

> v. Board] was passed. Like we're a part of history, so there was no question about me going to college and continuing that legacy of education in my family. From me, though, there was no friction or resistance. Higher education was the place I wanted to be.

She continues by sharing with us a story of how her grandmother gave up a college basketball scholarship to become a stay at home wife, and because of that, her family has encouraged her and her siblings to go after their education and to take it seriously. Sasha Fierce's family history fueled her aspiration to go as far as she could in higher education. She obtained her undergraduate degree from our university, and has returned to get her Master's degree. Coach notes a similarity in her and Sasha Fierce's family dynamic that influenced both of their "non-negotiable" viewpoints of attending college, and she shared that she felt it was her duty to pursue a degree because,

> My parents have worked so hard to give me the gift of free education, which is something they weren't able to pursue until much later in life. It took them a long, long time to get to where they are today, so it's the least I can do. I want to prove to them and to myself that their sacrifices were worth it.

As she spoke, many heads, including mine, bobbed up and down in agreement. Children, especially those of lower socioeconomic status, of color, and whose parents are immigrants, feel compelled to achieve success in education because of the sacrifices they've observed their parents make for their families (Rocha, 2021). Though there are many unconsidered factors that question this claim's accuracy, many families, especially of color, believe that academic success yields occupational or vocational success, which in turn leads to financial security (Borjas et al., 2020). Post-collegiate success does not often happen in the linear manner that college students and their families perceive. Still, the motivation to redeem their parents' time and hard work yields an aspiration to achieve within academia.

The conversation continued on the subject of family, but took a sharp turn with Targaryen, college senior, captain of the Women's Volleyball team, checking in to speak. Her voice cracking with emotion, she prefaces her input by saying, "Mine's a bit more personal. Sorry, I'm probably gonna cry." As she speaks, every sister's body leans toward Targaryen, and we give her our undivided attention. We had no clue what she was about to say, but there was a silent understanding that, at that moment, our only response would be care and comfort. After taking a few deep breaths. Targaryen begins to share her story:

> My junior year of high school, my family and I struggled a lot trying to figure out the whole collegiate athlete world. We didn't have a lot of help in figuring out how to get offers and scholarships, and one night as I was upstairs in my room, I overheard my Dad walk in the house, ranting about how unsuccessful I would be if I didn't get it together. He said that I would end up at a community college, and he was just tearing me down with his words, and had no idea that I was listening. That moment played a big role in how I am today. I'm very independent, and I don't ask my parents for anything, unless it's for tuition. I go and get it and do things for myself. Today our relationship is much better now, and though I enjoy what I do and I like being as involved on campus and in the community as I am, I know that somewhere inside me is still the drive to impress him or get his approval.

As Targaryen spoke, heads shook, eyes closed, and hums were given at the recognition of this specific dynamic within the Black family unit: children constantly chasing the approval of their parents, especially their fathers, and their self-esteem being crushed; Black children overachieving to prove their fathers wrong and to hear them say, "I'm proud of you." Many of us recognized Targaryen's pain because we had, or still were, navigating similar situations. Coach, who is teammates with Targaryen, interjected at this moment to offer love to Targaryen:

> Coming from someone who looks up to you, hearing this made me love you even more. You have no idea the impact you've had on my life. I've always admired your strength and determination. Whenever I'm feeling overwhelmed with volleyball, and school, and people, I look at you and I see how determined you are and that helps me get myself together. You're such an amazing person.

At the end of the sister circle, off the record, sisters approached Targaryen saying, “I felt you, sis. I know what that’s like.” These moments stood out to me because while Targaryen shared her story, she spoke about how she couldn’t confide in her sister, who she was and still is very close to, about her struggles with their father because her sister had a better relationship with him than she did. Our sister circle provided her with the sisterhood that she sought from her own sister, and we were able to truly see her and acknowledge this part of herself that she carried for years.

Delta chimed in with a story of her own about wanting to please her parents. Her mother was an English professor and her father was a mechanical engineer. The expectation for Delta and her brother was that they would either be doctors or lawyers. “I chose Doctor,” she states matter-of-factly. Archer chimes in, commenting on how admirable she thought it was that when given the option to either be a doctor or a lawyer, Delta chose to be a doctor, but not in the medical way that was intended with her parents' urges. The sisters nod our heads in agreement and in awe. It was consistent with Delta’s character to defy expectations and choose her own path, because we’ve seen her do so in our classrooms and organization meetings. I asked her why she chose her discipline and her response was that she was born into a family full of lawyers who argued all the time and she hated it. She could never “keep up” with the back-and-forth that took place within her household, and felt silenced in her own family. Now she is a Doctor of Communication who teaches classes on active listening and effective communication.

Something to Prove Black women’s pursuit of academia is an intentional act that is rooted in family history, self-motivation, and the awareness that the change they seek to make within their own communities requires a pedagogical undergirding. Accounts from these women revealed, firstly, that taking up space in higher education is not the passive occurrence for Black

women that it may be for others. There is historical and familial significance for them that drives their aspirations to participate in andragogy as teachers and learners. Cape Town and Sasha Fierce's purpose for attending an institution of higher learning reflect this notion. They each had personal comprehension of the historical implications of Black people and Black women receiving education, which gave them the motivation to continue the ancestral and familial legacy of obtaining education. This is reflective of a larger number of Black women in the realm of academia and their individual and collective conceptualizations of the importance of education based on their racial history.

Secondly,. For many of the sisters, their journeys of traversing higher education began with the influence of their family dynamics. Whether it was pressure to succeed, the urge to escape, the desire to make their parents proud, or any combination of those things, what drove these women was the need to prove something. This is reflective of the experiences of Black women in and out of the educational field, because a Black woman's first sources of pressure come from her family. The constant messages of "Look at what I sacrificed for you," "Be better," "Do better," "We're counting on you," "" "You should be doing this," "Make me proud," or "You can't do this because no one else [in our family] has done it before,". These voices are then entwined into young Black girls' internal monologues and become "I can't let anyone down," "I owe my family," "I have to prove them wrong," "I want to escape my current reality," "I don't want to continue this cycle," "I have to be the example," and "I'm only as good as my performance." These themes bombard young Black girls as they begin to explore their passions or interests, and they form their identities and lives around these messages (Stokes et al., 2020). Their passions are fueled by these voices, and become threaded throughout their studies and vocational work.

I am not implying that every message a Black woman receives about her future or her goals surrounding education is negative. However, from the results of this study, it appears that external pressures yield an internal drive to compete and achieve for reasons that may not solely be "because I wanted to." I do acknowledge that a person can have more than one reason for pursuing anything, and when it comes to academia, a Black person's passion must extend beyond external influences because it is not an undemanding field that one can simply "get by" in (read: Black people have to work twice as hard to get half as far.) Still, extraneous voices do insert themselves into a Black woman's internal monologue and affect her sense of efficacy and esteem. Her worth becomes attached to her success or failure in meeting or defying encouraging or harmful expectations of those around her. The effects of this are performance-based anxiety, lack of self-regulatory practices, and imminent burn-out from pushing herself past her limits. There is also a hypervigilance surrounding the way in which Black women attain their academic aspirations which may consume her. The lines between work and rest are blurred, and they find themselves sacrificing necessary recharging time – time spent rebuilding one's capacity to work and participate in their lives and in the lives of others – to reach their goals and meet or defy the expectations of their families and of those around them.

I'm The Only One

As it has been continuously mentioned throughout this study, Black women often find themselves being the "only one" in academic spaces. In their classes, department meetings, offices, and disciplines, they look around and see that they are the only one at the table being representatives without having the proper representation. This means that they are pulled to be the voice of their communities, but they are often overlooked, ignored, or shoved into the

background because their presence represents diversity. They don't have anyone else in the space who identifies with them, that can understand and validate their experiences which are the sources from which they draw their input. Sasha Fierce spoke about being the only Black person in classrooms and meetings as both an undergrad student and later as an employee on our campus and her realization that being the only Black woman in educational spaces means being acutely aware of the privileged bubble in which her nonblack counterparts dwelled in:

> Being the only one in the room opened my eyes to the level of removal that non-people of color have from [Black people's] struggles. To them, our plight was years and years ago, but that's just not true. Back [in undergrad] and even now I sit in these spaces and hear how they truly exist in an alternate reality and I'm just filled with rage.

I admired Sasha Fierce's use of the word rage. It is an emotion that Black women encounter – a lot. However, to avoid being labeled as an "Angry Black Woman" – a harmful and pejorative stereotype that scorns Black women for expressing negative emotions and characterizes them as overly-aggressive, illogical, hostile, ill-tempered, overbearing, and ignorant without provocation – they shy away from openly emoting their anger (Ashley, 2014). However, they have a lot to be angry about. The aftermath of slavery and the subsequent social, economic, and political effects have positioned Black women at the bottom of a racist and misogynistic society that capitalizes off their pain, misfortune, and labor. Therefore, when sitting in a room, hearing nonblack people fling inherently and ignorantly racist ideas and microaggressions around, I feel that rage is an absolutely appropriate response.

Furthermore, in the discussion of the social positioning of Black women at the bottom of the metaphorical food chain, being the only does them more harm than good. Historically, Black women's social progression happened in groups. Therefore, when we've made it to a place in time where we can freely pursue ranks in academia, being there alone feels unnatural. It feels

like we are missing out on the social component of our success and forward mobility. Not only that, but being the only one creates this immense pressure to have it all together all the time. As will be discussed in the next section about representation, being the only one, ironically, means being everything to everyone in educational institutions. When their reality becomes being the campus' mule, academic Black women learn to become experts at compartmentalizing or intellectualizing their emotions. Then they find it hard to reach a place of mental and emotional wellness because there had been no regulation or even accountability for regulation because of being one of a kind in her field or at her institution.

Representation Plus Support

The next most consistent theme that arose from my data analysis was representation. For the purposes of this study, the working definition of representation is the idea that creating an environment where people can see themselves reflected in their fieldwork, coursework, peers, and supervisors yields a higher likeliness of them being able to feel a sense of belonging, which yields retention, involvement, and productivity within their environments. For Black women in academia, we encounter the unique experience of needing, but heavily lacking representation within our disciplines and institutions, while simultaneously seeking to be that representation for those with whom we share cultural likeness. We seek to be seen whilst we look after our communities. Whether it be through social interactions or work within our disciplines, finding other Black women who are where we want to be or are in the same spaces as us offers a broadened sense of belonging and empowerment.

Archer, a senior Kinesiology major, sets the tone for the discussion on representation. For most of the circle's duration, Archer is the quietest in the room, soaking in the presence of the Black women around her and offering a silent, but engaged and steady presence to the dynamic

of the circle. However, she is the first to engage in the discussion of representation and belonging amongst the group. She shares her reason for not only pursuing higher education, but also for choosing her discipline:

> I knew I wanted to be in the medical field from a really young age, but I didn't quite know which path I wanted to take. Then when I was in high school, my mom needed physical therapy, and I met her physical therapist and she was Black, and I *loved* her so much! She was just great. I remember emailing her like 'Tell me everything' and she gave me her whole life story and it was great, and now I'm here because of her. I felt my love for [physical therapy] grow, but it was very much initially because of the experiences that I had with her.

Archer's response encapsulates both the glee and importance of having representation from and among professional Black women. Many Black women, especially at the undergraduate level experience misdirection because they don't have anyone of their likeness that can share their knowledge and experiences to guide them through finding their purpose. Archer's encounter with her mother's physical therapist played a pivotal role in her exploration of herself and her passion. In a discipline such as Kinesiology, which grounds itself in the natural sciences – a field in which Black people are severely underrepresented – finding someone that has had the same cultural and social experiences as they have had is empowering (Funk & Parker, 2019). It motivates them to achieve their goals and have the support they need to do so.

Delta offers the perspective of the woman who is looked upon as the representation for the Black women on our campus. She is known on campus as "Sista Docta". Assistant Professor of Communication, she is widely respected by the student body, including myself. In fact, the undergraduate sisters who were present for the circle had all had her as a professor at least once during their time on campus. She uses her classes, lectures, campus events, and campus involvement to speak up for Black students and illuminate Black culture. She is bold and says what is on her mind, and she doesn't shy away from being a disruptor of the bubbles of feigned

inclusion and harmony on our campus. Since I was a freshman, I admired how she held her tongue for no one. As I maneuvered my way through college and began to be more involved on campus as a student leader, I had the opportunity to work alongside Delta, and saw an even more vigorous and direct version of her. It wasn't until this sister circle that I saw the mask come off and see that she, like the rest of us, struggled to feel seen and supported on campus. She spoke about being the one that many people (not just Black students or faculty) rely on to be their mentor or advisor, but at the end of being so many things for so many people, she's left not only feeling drained, but unsupported in her position.

> I can't tell you how many times I've been in my office right before a class, crying and trying to pull myself together. People look to me for advice or mentorship, but I've never been allowed to share what I'm feeling. That's why I'm grateful for a space such as this where I can speak freely without fear of my words being used against me. Outside of this space, I can't say what's really on my mind or in my heart because I don't know who to trust.

With this confession from Delta, the room came to a standstill as we took a moment to understand the weight of what she had shared. Delta, who we saw as a strong and fearless leader, had admitted that she didn't always feel that way. She had moments of weariness and of feeling unseen and overused as the representation and advocate for others. She also shared a perspective of representation that, before the circle, I had not considered. She spoke about the *relief* she felt when she got her rosters for her classes at the beginning of each semester and saw a student of color or Black student listed on the roll. "Whenever I see a student of color in my classroom I just think, 'Thank God I'm not by myself.' Seeing someone else in the room who can identify with me gives me strength to continue." This revelation represents another dimension of representation that people who are not educators may not consider. Looking to one's pupils or students for support, though they are the one who is "in charge", is a reality that many educators

of color could be experiencing. Instructors need to feel seen too. As a Black female academician, being the one who does the majority of the "seeing" becomes an emotional and mental burden. Striving to make others feel a sense of belonging while simultaneously occupying a space of invisibility is a constant reality for Black women, especially in spaces where one or more of her identities represents a minority group. This kind of invisibility can lead to feelings of loneliness and despair, as well as a lowered self-esteem. Delta mentioned feeling like an impostor in her own classroom, in part because she had been disconnected from a part of herself due to becoming everything to everyone and almost nothing to herself. Professors like Delta who carry their students, colleagues, and departments on their backs in the progression towards equity and justice on their campuses stand in need of recognition not only for their contributions to their academic institutions, but for who they are as sentient beings in need of support and encouragement.

Though I will discuss suggestions for future research on the topic of the experiences of Black women in academia at the end of this chapter, I would like to note here that during the analysis part of this study, questions arose for me about what feelings and emotions arise for Black professors, professors of color, and professors who identify as women when students in their class raise views that are harmful to and/or directly oppose their existence within their identities. In situations like those, what effect does having a student who identifies like them present in the classroom have on the way they internalize the happening or emotionally respond to it? Outside the scope of their responsibility to maintain a safe space within their classrooms, how do they respond? These questions are possible bases upon which further research could be built.

Continuing the discussion of representation, Mitochondria, Associate Professor of Biology, offers her own story as her reasoning for how greatly she values representation for Black women in academic spaces, and especially in STEM:

> See, I had a mom who [suffered from an addiction to cocaine] and I had a dad who was in prison, and I had a family who was not supportive of education. I had cousins telling me that I needed to have babies because that's how we would get money. There was abuse and other things, and school was the one place where I felt safe and where I felt in control. I wanted to see myself and be in places that were different from my situation. When I decided to go to college, my mom actually told me that she was disappointed in me because she thought I felt like I was better than everybody else. I told her that I didn't think that I was better than anyone, but I just wanted something different–I wanted something more. I wanted to be the change that I wanted to see, and in school where I could read the books and understand the biology and get in between it, I found power there.

Mitochondria's traumatic reality drove her to pursue a career where she could have stability and use her knowledge to help others, especially those who looked like her. For the Black woman, there is an inherent duty to reach back and pull others up, to care for others who are in her vicinity. Especially in instances where there is triumph in escaping traumatic situations, they strive to ensure that others don't have to experience the same hardships that they have faced, and if that is the case, they work to let them know that they will have enough support to overcome their challenges. Black women bear the burden of caring for those around them – Black and other – though they may view this responsibility as a privilege or a right of passage. Cape Town spoke about feeling unseen as a young Black woman coming to this campus as a freshman, and how she made it her mission to become the representation for other Black students who needed to feel seen and heard. She says, "I came in looking for and needing support from the Black community here, and once I got into positions where my influence mattered, I was determined to become that same support and representation for incoming Black students." As

student leaders, Cape Town, Targaryen, Coach, and I work to seek out the outliers on our campus, those who wish they were somewhere else because of how invisible being the minority on a campus like ours and in a city like Austin makes them feel. We do this because we finally made it to a place where we could claim spaces on campus as our own, but for those who can't or haven't reached that stage yet, we help them because we know what it's like to be ostracized and isolated because of our Blackness. Even Sasha Fierce shared that her return to our campus as a Master's student and employee was influenced by her drive to bring to pass the movements for equity and inclusivity that she was a part of in her time as an undergraduate student.

Conclusion

The data that surrounds representation shows how multi-dimensional representation truly is. Archer represents the positive emotional and academic effects of seeing the self in someone with whom you share a cultural and racial identity. Delta represents the burden that *being* the representation can have on emotional and mental wellness, because being characterized as the "Strong Black Woman" also means having your emotions and insecurities muffled or silenced. It also means erecting such an impenetrable guard that inevitable disconnection from the self occurs. Mitochondria, Sasha Fierce, Cape Town, Targaryen, Coach, and I symbolize the push we feel to reach back and pull up those who come behind us because we don't want them to experience the isolation or trouble that we've faced in our younger years. Black female academicians' lives reflect each dimension of representation, sometimes singularly and other times simultaneously.

The data also reflects that representation is not enough. Representation is not equivalent to, nor does it automatically yield support. It's not just about who is in the room, but what's happening in the room matters just as much. Support is taking into consideration Black women

who are students, educators, and staff members when important institutional decisions are being made. It is listening to them and hearing them when they speak. It's taking the time to appreciate them for who they are and not just what they do or represent for the institution. It is seeing them as beings who need safe spaces to speak freely about their experiences as Black women on their campuses. It's also sharing the responsibility of support with the non-black, non-woman people in the room. It's those who have the privilege of not having their actions and tone policed and voices silenced speaking up for Black women when it is needed. It's the load of the diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice work (education, mentorship, retention, counseling, etc.) being divided equally amongst all campus stakeholders (which should be everyone).

The regulation of the mental wellness of Black female academicians begins with institutions taking the steps to make their spaces more accommodating for their social progression and visibility. Pulling from Black Feminist Theory and Critical Race Theory, the stories and experiences of Black people and Black women hold knowledge that can be applied to the policies and foundational principles of the institutions (Carbado & Roithmayr, 2014; Evans et. al., 2017; Clemons, 2019). In order to prevent burnout, isolation, invisibility, and the high rates in which Black women are leaving education and academia, steps can be taken to implement strategies of shared responsibility and accountability for all members of the institution (Thomas & Miles, 1995; Stanley, 2021). It is also the Black woman's responsibility to set her boundaries with her institution and practice regulation throughout her days. Waiting until reaching a point of being fed up or burnt out does no good. Sasha Fierce shared a story in which she contracted an acid reflux disorder in undergrad and had to be hospitalized because she was trying to be and do everything, and had been stressed to the max. "Stress kills," she implores. "Please take care of yourselves. The work will always be there. There will always be a change

that we're trying to make, but you have to take care of yourself in order to be present in the ways we've all expressed that we want to be."

Recommendations for Future Research

The scope of this study did not allow for the stories of additional identities to be centered within the research. The knowledge of other intersecting identities, such as being a member of the LGBTQIA+ community, and the connection with academic culture would provide more nuance and further detail to the understanding of Black women's experiences in academia. It would also be helpful to look into what it looks like for Black women in educational spaces to not find support amongst each other, and how that plays a role in identity formation or dissolvement as well as overall mental and social wellness. Even further down the road, to progress the evolution of this research, it might be useful for educational institutions to take the findings of studies like this that are centered on equitable and inclusive experiences for marginalized groups, including Black women, and apply them to implementing steady, consistent, and strong structures of support for their many communities. Test the findings by putting them to use to see what works and is sustainable, and what is not.

Afterthought

I consider the sister circle methodology to be an extremely valuable and successful research method for examining the professional and academic experiences of the participants in the study. I was able to draw a great deal of data from the circle, and I have gotten an overwhelming amount of feedback from participants that the sister circle was very therapeutic for them. However, there were some issues I faced during and after the sister circle that made me ponder on how I might, or suggest someone else, do things differently.

I regret only having one sister circle. My initial thought was that I did not want to impose on the time of the women I had participated to be a part of my study, especially since I knew we were all extremely busy with other responsibilities and obligations. I felt that asking for 2 or more circles from my participants would have been asking too much, but in hindsight, I realize that having multiple sessions would have allowed for a more diverse pool of data, and would have allowed the same or different women to participate in these sessions and get all they could from it.

Another thing that I would change is the way I moved the progression of the sister circle along. Except for small follow-up questions, I only actually asked two of the questions I had prepared in my script. The conversations flowed in a way that one person would share their input, and other women would want to share based on what the previous person said. Thus we got stuck in a bit of a loop about the same topics. I didn't want to interrupt the discussions being had because I valued the fact that I had the opportunity to offer Black women a safe space to be transparent and vulnerable. However, I felt like there was potentially missed data because of all we did not get to in the agenda. In the future, I would be more vigilant about getting the conversations back on track so that our time in the circle could be as productive and as supportive as possible. Nevertheless, the data was still rich and as I mentioned, the sisters found solitude with each other and were fortified by our gathering.

Lastly, I saw the need for more sister circles to take place on my campus, even outside of the barriers of "research". Black women on a campus such as mine where we are the minority hold a lot of experiences to themselves because they don't have the proper venues to vent and be supported. My sisters who were in my circle vocally and repetitively expressed their need and appreciation for the sacred and communal time we shared in fellowship. Even women who were

not a part of the circle, but had heard about it from someone who had been, approached me in the days and weeks after the Thursday night we gathered and asked if I would consider making the circles a more consistent occurrence. I conducted this circle during my last semester, meaning that it would no longer be in my hands or within my means to host such a space past December 2022, but I expressed to the organizations and people I knew shared my passion and vision for Black women to have a safe and protected space to be seen and heard that this was something our people needed. Hopefully, those who remain on campus once I have graduated would continue to create sister circles, formally and informally, so that our sisters can connect with each other and speak with the security that their vulnerability will be honored.

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Appendix A: Thesis Forum Invite Email

Good Afternoon,

Happy Tuesday! I hope my email is finding you well. My name is Courtney Reed, and I am a Psychology major and a graduating Senior (Fall 2022) currently working on my Honors Thesis research project. The title of my research is They Can't See Me Cry: Exploring the Experiences of Black Women in Academia and the Connections to Their Quality of Mental Wellness. Through this research, I seek to understand how the experiences of Black women in academia affect their overall morale and wellness of the mind. I also aim to explore potential approaches to social and occupational support that may be able to help offset some of the long-term negative effects that misogynoir and racism have on Black Women.

As part of my total thesis research, I am required to do a project that supplements the written component of my study. For my project, I have chosen to do a forum, called a Sister Circle, and I am inviting Black women who participate in academia here on campus to be a part of it. The sister circle methodology, created by Dr. Latoya S. Johnson of the University of Georgia, is "a qualitative research methodology and support group for examining the lived experiences of Black women". I chose this as a medium for my project because I aim to have my thesis be more than just research. My goal is for it to be an experience that provides a safe, communal space for the Black women here on our college campus to both share their experiences in educational settings while offering support to each other through communication, encouragement, and words of wisdom. It is important to me that as I conduct research that represents the summation of my time here on the Hilltop, I hold due space for the people who have gone and are going through similar journeys of making room for themselves in a realm such as collegiate and professional andragogy.

With this being said, I am reaching out to invite you to be a part of this forum on November 3, 2022, from 5-7:30 PM. This will be a one-time occasion, and you will have the opportunity to share your experiences as Black women on this campus. You can find more information about this forum and the sign-up for it by clicking this link: https://forms.gle/rcq5JQcrNKCmPoPK8.

If you are interested in participating, please sign up through the link by October 27, 2022. Also, if you are aware of any other people who are a part of the SEU community, who identify as Black women, and who would be happy to participate in this round table discussion, feel free to send them the link as well.

Thank you for your time, and I hope to see you at my Honors Thesis Sister Circle.

With respect,
Courtney Reed

Appendix B: Sister Circle Sign-Up Form

Honors Thesis Sister Circle
Event Timing: November 3, 2022, 5-7:30 PM
Location: TBD
Contact: Courtney Reed at creed4@stedwards.edu
Honors Thesis Advisor: Jeannetta Williams jeannetw@stedwards.edu

What is Sister Circle Methodology?

The methodology for this qualitative study uses the Sister Circle Methodology, which is a focus group that serves the dual purpose of analyzing the lived experiences of Black women while providing the participants encouragement, support, and empathy for their journeys as Black women (Johnson, 2015).

How will it work?

I will ask the group a series of questions that they will have a chance to discuss amongst

themselves. Upon agreement to participate in this study, I will send out the questions I will be asking at the forum so that participants will be able to review them beforehand. As the discussion takes place, I will be recording participants' answers using pseudonyms to identify each participant.

Purpose of this Forum

The purpose of this forum is to better understand Black women's experiences in academic settings and to explore how those experiences affect Black women's overall sense of self and mental wellness. My hope is that the results of this study will shed further light on the ways in which racism, misogynoir, and invisibility in academia lead to recurring themes of anxiety, depression, low-self esteem, Impostorism, and more within Black women. My hope is also that the participants will be able to find comfort and community in one another's shared experiences. You are being asked to participate because you are a Black woman who participates in Academia.

Risks

All information obtained within this forum will be confidential and any subsequent documentation of the discussion will use pseudonyms. Therefore, there are no foreseeable risks as a result of your participation in this study. You may choose not to answer any questions asked during the group talks that you are uncomfortable

addressing. Additionally, you may withdraw from the forum at any time.

Benefits

Possible personal benefits include the opportunity to share and learn from fellow Black women in academia.

Incentives

There are no monetary or non-monetary incentives for being in this study.

Audio/Video Recording

The researcher will audio-record the interviews and video-record the group talks for the purposes of later transcription and use in documenting the results of the forum. All recorded and written data will be password protected on my computer. Upon completion of the research, the data will be coded to avoid any individually identifiable information. Please click this link to fill out this Photo/Video Release Consent Form.

Participant Information

1. Name *

2. Email *

3. What is the highest level of school you have completed? (If currently in undergrad, select your current classification)
   - ☐ Doctorate Degree
   - ☐ Master's Degree
   - ☐ Bachelor's Degree
   - ☐ Associate's Degree
   - ☐ College Freshman
   - ☐ College Sophomore
   - ☐ College Junior
   - ☐ College Senior

4. What is/are your area(s) of discipline? (degree, specialization, major, minor, profession, department, etc.)

5. I understand that I will have the option to withdraw from the forum at any time during its occurrence
   - ☐ Yes

6. What is your favorite snack and drink?

Thank You!!

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this forum. Your input will not only be valuable to my Thesis, but I hope as we discuss our experiences as Black Women in Academia, we will be able to find solace and strength in each other.

Courtney Reed (Psychology Major, Fall 2022 Graduate)

Cited Sources

Johnson, L. S. (2015). Using sista circles to examine the professional experience of contemporary Black women teachers in schools: A collective story about school culture and support (Doctoral dissertation, University of Georgia).

Appendix C: Journal Prompt 1:

- Name (Pseudonym)
- Why did you choose to pursue higher education and/or a career in academia?
- What are some current challenges that stick out to you when you think of the experiences of Black women in higher education? What are your own challenges?
- What makes you feel seen/heard as a Black woman in spaces where you are the minority?
- Is there anything that you are nervous about as we start our sister circle?

Appendix D: Journal Prompt 2

- Name (Pseudonym)
- How would you describe the experience of participating in this sister circle?
- After having some time to reflect, are there any thoughts or reactions that you want to share from anything discussed in the circle?

Appendix E: Honors Thesis Sister Circle Script

Step 1: Welcome

Welcome everyone and engage in conversation until start time. This is used to build rapport and to create a comfortable and informal environment. Snacks will also be provided.

Step 2: Consent

The following script will be utilized at the start of each interview:

> Hello!
>
> Thank you for taking the time to participate in today's sister circle. I will honor your time by trying to complete today's session within a 2-hour timeframe, however, there is a possibility that we may take more time. If you must leave due to time constraints, please feel free to do so.
>
> I would like for each of you to note that I will be audio and video recording today's session. The purpose of recording is simply to ensure that my notes and observations remain accurate. I may use this footage in my Symposium presentation, and I will let you know if I do.
>
> I am a senior psychology student studying the experiences of Black Women in academia and the effects of those experiences on mental wellness. My study is qualitative. This means that I will be collecting data that is inclusive of your perspectives, viewpoints, and overall experiences.
>
> All the information that I collect will remain confidential. For instance, any direct quotes that are published in the final product will be logged under your given pseudonym. It is my hope that these guidelines will aid you in openly sharing your thoughts.
>
> Finally, please recognize that this is intended to be a brave and community-conscious space. If at any time you do not feel comfortable answering a question, please do not feel pressured to do so. I am sensitive to any requests you may have in concealing the particulars of your personal experience.
>
> What concerns, if any, do you have involving this study?
>
> [Be certain that the sister scholars have completed the consent forms.]
>
> One final note: Please remember to state your pseudonym prior to starting a conversation or asking a question. This will help me to keep your responses organized.

Step Three: Begin recordings

Step Four: Start Sister Circle

Introductions: Name and given pseudonym, department/major/profession, why are you interested in participating in this study?

- Complete Journal Prompt #1
    - Name (First or Pseudonym)
    - How would you describe the experience of participating in this sista circle?
    - After having some time to reflect, are there any thoughts or reactions that you want to share from anything discussed in the circle?
    - Is there anything else that you would like to share?

- Play the two Youtube Videos Below

An Open Letter to My Oppressors in Academia | Elisse Howard | TEDxBinghamtonUniversity
Mental Health is declining and Black women are hit the hardest | Keita Joy | TEDxBeaconStreet

- Questions
    - What are your reactions to these videos?
    - Do you see yourself reflected in any way in these videos? If so, how?
    - What does it mean to see yourself represented within academia/ your professions/departments/areas of expertise?
    - What are your experiences with invisibility within your professions/disciplines/jobs?
    - What is your experience operating in spaces where there are not many who look like you? How does that influence your view of yourself?
    - How does your view of yourself impact your mental wellness?
    - How does the way others view you impact your mental wellness?

Step Five: Conclude Circle

Stop recorders. Thank everyone for coming. Answer any questions.

- Complete Journal Prompt 2
    - Name (Pseudonym)
    - How would you describe the experience of participating in this sista circle?
    - After having some time to reflect, are there any thoughts or reactions that you want to share from anything discussed in the circle?

Sister Circle Glossary

Academia:

- the environment or community concerned with the pursuit of research, education, and scholarship.

Impostor Syndrome:

- a collection of feelings of inadequacy that persist despite evident success.

Intersectionality:

- the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.
- an analytical framework for understanding how aspects of a person's social and political identities combine to create different modes of discrimination and privilege. Intersectionality identifies multiple factors of advantages and disadvantages.

Invisibility:

- the state of being ignored or not taken into consideration

Mental Wellness:

- A state of well-being in which the individual realizes their own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community

Microaggression:

- Brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults toward people in marginalized groups.

Misogynoir:

- misogyny directed towards black women where race and gender both play roles in bias.

Racism:

- the process by which systems, policies, actions, and attitudes create inequitable opportunities and outcomes for people based on race.

Sexism:

- prejudice or discrimination based on one's sex or gender.

Strong Black Woman:

- an archetype of how the ideal Black woman should act. This has been characterized by three components: emotional restraint, independence, and caretaking