

BLACK STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF
CAMPUS CLIMATE AT
A RACIALLY MIXED INSTITUTION

by

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my father, Ronald “Ronnie” Winston Brown.

Acknowledgments

First, I would like to thank the members of dissertation committee: Dr. Tobolowsky, Dr. Davis, Dr. Trache, and Dr. Hardy. I truly appreciate your willingness to serve on my committee. I value your time and the feedback you provided me along the way. To my dissertation chair, Dr. Tobolowsky, thank you for never giving up on me. Regardless of the number of times “life happened” causing me to press pause on my doctoral journey, she was always willing to help me get back on track. I value the level of excellence that she expected and required of me. Thank you for the countless hours of time and energy that you invested in my work.

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Abstract

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Black students are not persisting to degree completion at the same rate as White students. While research about Black students' experiences at predominately White institutions (PWI) and historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) is ample, more research is needed on racially mixed institutions (RMIs), where white students make up less than 40% of the student population. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of campus climate of eight Black students attending one RMI in the Southwestern United States.

Using the Modified Mutual Acculturation theory as a lens, this qualitative phenomenological study revealed the experiences of these students attending a diverse institution. Several themes emerged: 1) formal and informal support systems, 2) conflict through stereotyping and alienation as well as conflict among Black students, and 3) the impact of meaningful cross-racial interactions. The study found that Black students perceived that there were support systems in place for them on campus. The support came overwhelmingly from participating in campus organizations created by and/or for Black students. Most of the participants perceived advisors as one of the strongest sources of administrative support. Perhaps, most surprising, was that even though these students attended a RMI, some of the participants experienced being treated differently by some faculty, staff, and White students

because of the color of their skin. While most of the participants acknowledged the actions of the college administration were appropriate when addressing racial incidents, one participant did not feel enough was done to promote inclusion. However, most of the participants perceived the informal cross-racial interactions in- and out-of-class as the most influential to their being more accepting of people from different racial backgrounds. Recommendations and implications for practice and research are included.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The landscape of postsecondary education is shifting as a consequence of the changing demographics of the American population (Johnson, Wasserman, Yildirim, & Yonai, 2013; Milem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005; Turner et al., 2008). As a result, a growing body of educational research has explored the advantages and challenges of more diverse college campuses. Through that effort, many researchers have identified the benefits of diversity on college campuses (Garces & Cogburn, 2015; Harper & Yeung, 2013; Huisman, Lepori, Seeber, Frølich, & Scordato, 2015). They found that students of color and White students attending universities that are not predominately White have shown a greater commitment to the institution, which leads to a greater likelihood of those students persisting to graduation (Chang, 1999; Johnson, Wasserman, Yildirim, & Yonai, 2013; Milem et al., 2005). Students who complete their degrees have greater opportunities for employment and overall better quality of life (Baum & Payea, 2013).

However, not all studies have reported positive results. For instance, Johnson et al. (2013) found that “for students of color at [this predominantly White university], observations of and encounters with racism on campus increased their academic environment stress and diminished their feelings about the campus environment, affecting commitment to the institution, and ultimately their persistence decisions” (p. 92). Further, data focusing on graduation rates show that not all racial and ethnic groups are succeeding at the same rate (Nichols et al., 2016). For the 2009 entering cohort of students attending four-year institutions, the national four-year graduation rate for White students was 44.2% while the average for Black students was 20.6% – the lowest of all races and ethnicities (Snyder, de Brey, & Dillow, 2016). Yet, it is important to

note that rates have improved across all racial groups. Between 1996 and 2009, graduation rates increased by 7.8 percentage points for Hispanics, 7.2% for Asian/Pacific Islanders, 5.1% for Whites, and 2% for Blacks. While these gains are encouraging, Blacks continue to fall behind in comparison to other racial groups. This lagging behind is perpetuating their limited opportunities which are still lingering from the racial dynamics of American history.

Nichols, Eberle-Sudré, and Welch's (2016) study of 232 public four-year institutions offered a more complete picture of what is happening with Black student graduation rates. Although they reported that almost 20% of the participating institutions saw dramatic increases in the completion rates for Black students (by 9 or more percentage points), 27 institutions reported declining rates. Further, the limited gains by Black students did not reduce the completion gap with White students, which has continued to grow over 10 years (2003-2013). White students have seen a 5.6 percentage point increase in graduation rates while Black students have improved by 4.1 percentage points. Nichols et al. (2016) also found there were dramatic disparities among the institutions. For example, one institution reported a decline by 14.3 percentage points between 2003-2013 for their Black students while another saw an increase of 30% over the same time period. Nichols and colleagues (2016) argue that these statistics illustrate there is a difference in how specific institutions support their Black students, resulting in widely varying rates of persistence. The fact that several universities increased the graduation rates of Blacks at a rate high enough to begin to close the gap between Whites and Blacks (Nichols et al., 2016) shows "that demographics aren't destiny and that what colleges do with and for their students plays a pivotal role in student success" (Nichols et al., 2016, p. 5). Thus, the campus environment can impact the experiences of Black students.

Other studies (e.g., Allen, 1992; Karkouti, 2016; Reeder & Schmidt, 2013) focused on the major role played by institutional type (e.g., Historically Black Colleges and Universities [HBCU], Predominantly White Institutions [PWI]) in regards to student success. For example, a recent study showed that Black students attending HBCUs “experience more positive relationships with their instructors, sustained cross-racial interactions¹, better academic performance, and more support for their welfare than Black students at PWIs” (Karkouti, 2016, p. 65). Black students attending HBCUs also performed better academically and were more satisfied socially than their Black peers at PWIs (Allen, 1992; Fleming, 1984; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Kim & Conrad, 2006; Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Reeder & Schmidt, 2013; Shorette II & Palmer, 2015). Conversely, Black students attending PWIs tended to experience lower levels of satisfaction (Harper, 2015; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Johnson et al., 2013; Karkouti, 2016; Museus, Nichols, & Lambert, 2008) and expressed feeling marginalized (Garces & Cogburn, 2015; Miller & Sujitparapitaya, 2008, 2010; Museus, Ledesma, & Parker, 2015). Students feel marginalized if they experience a) stereotyping (Griffin, Cunningham, & George Mwangi, 2016; Harper, 2015; Iverson & Jagers, 2015; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; Johnston, Pizzolato, & Kanny, 2015; Museus et al., 2015), b) alienation (Griffin et al., 2016; Hobson, 2004; Miller & Sujitparapitaya, 2010; Museus et al., 2015), and/or c) isolation (Griffin et al., 2016; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Nadal, Wong, Griffin, Davidoff, & Sriken, 2014).

These studies focused on either PWIs or HBCUs; however, there are colleges and universities today that have a more diverse student population than those institutional types. One of those newly coined terms is the Racially Mixed Institution (RMI), which has been used to

¹ The terms, cross-racial interaction and othergroup orientation, are used interchangeably in this study. They refer to opportunities for students from different racial or ethical backgrounds to interact in a meaningful way.

distinguish “institutions where no single racial or ethnic group constitutes a majority of the student body” (Miller & Sujiparapitaya, 2010, p. 30). There are only a few studies that use this term in research. Other studies focusing on the racial make-up of a college campus used “diverse campus” (Xu & Webber, 2016), “racially diverse student body” (Chang, 1999), and “structural diversity” (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1999) to describe a similar campus population. For the purpose of this study, RMI will be used to identify universities meeting the criteria set by Miller and Sujiparapitaya (2010).

To date, a limited number of studies has explored student experiences at RMIs. Chang (1999), Johnson et al. (2013), and others (e.g., Milem et al., 2005) reported Black students attending RMIs had a greater commitment to their institutions, which led to higher persistence rates. Chang (1999) also credited the existence of a heterogeneous student body at RMIs as having “a positive impact on...overall college satisfaction, intellectual self-confidence, and social self-confidence among all students” (p. 391). Therefore, research has reported positive outcomes for students attending these diverse institutions.

Other researchers explored why these settings may be contributing positively to student success. For example, Denson and Chang (2015) noted there are greater opportunities at RMIs for students to be exposed to thoughts and opinions different from those in which they were raised. The advantage of cross-racial interactions between students of different races is that it provides a healthy campus environment for students of color (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hurtado et al., 2008). Furthermore, nurturing these relationships throughout college develops a greater acceptance of other ethnic groups in life after graduation (Miller & Sujitparapitaya, 2010).

Psychologists such as Piaget and Erikson theorize that this type of engagement leads to the processing of information in a more thorough way, which enhances students’ cognitive

growth and boosts their learning, especially in undergraduate students (Denson & Chang, 2015). Denson and Chang (2015) suggested that “combining this developmental moment with a racially diverse environment that exposes students to surroundings that are dissimilar or incongruent with their home environments raises the potential for greater learning and developmental change” (p. 5). Having affirmative interactions with members of other racial and ethnic backgrounds increases the likelihood of a positive association with a tolerance for people different than themselves in a diverse environment (Simmons, Wittig, & Grant, 2010). Acceptance of diversity is when a student is able to embrace the differences in people rather than fear them (Simmons, Wittig, & Grant, 2010).

Nevertheless, it is also critical for Black students to enjoy strong same-race friendships (Bowman & Park, 2015). When institutions encourage Black students to engage with each other, it results in them developing and nurturing an appreciation for their own culture (Wittig, 2008). This is doubly valuable because research has found that positive feelings about one’s own racial group contribute to having a more positive attitude and greater acceptance of other ethnic groups (Berry, 1984; Lambert et al., 1996; Phinney, Ferguson, & Tate, 1997). These findings are particularly significant because as the population becomes more racially diverse, these attitudes and beliefs will help all student populations positively impact U.S. society and its economical stance as a global competitor (Amos, 2008).

To date, the research is limited on Black students’ perceptions of campus climate on at RMIs. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the experience of Black students attending a RMI and their willingness to accept students who do not share the same racial and ethnic background as their own. Further, it explored the Black students’ perceptions of how attending a RMI affected their persistence decisions.

Theoretical Framework

This qualitative study utilized Rabinowitz and colleagues' (2005) Modified Mutual Acculturation theory as a lens. *Acculturation* is the ability of an individual to adapt to a new environment (Berry, 1997). However, *mutual acculturation* is bi-directional (Berry, 2001). It requires someone to be able to accept persons of various racial/ethnic make-up without losing one's cultural identity. This process is impacted by two conditions. First, the individual needs to strengthen one's own ethnic identity through same race relationships. Second, individuals must have opportunities to positively connect with one's own group and the "other." As a result, the outcome of these two elements is a person's ability to value relationships with people who have different racial/ethnic backgrounds from themselves. The addition of the outcome, acceptance of diversity, is what defines the Modified Mutual Acculturation (Rabinowitz, 2005).

Specifically, this theory was a helpful lens because the study sought to understand not how Black students change to fit into a campus environment (i.e., acculturation), but how they perceive attending a RMI affected their interactions with other Black students (i.e., the ingroup) and students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds (i.e., the outgroup). The study then explored if the students perceived their ability to accept people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds increased (i.e., acceptance of diversity; modified mutual acculturation) because of their experiences at Southwestern University. Additionally, this study investigated the students' perceptions of how their attendance at this RMI affected their persistence decisions, which are topics previous research has not explored.

Statement of the Problem

Diverse college campuses have been overwhelmingly connected to positive outcomes for all students (Packard, 2013). For example, research supports the claim that students attending

more diverse college campuses are better prepared to successfully engage in an ever-changing society (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Milem et al.; 2005; Turner et al.; 2008). As a result, “institutions of higher education seem increasingly unified in their mission to attract, retain, and support a racially diverse undergraduate student population” (Harper & Yeung, 2013, p. 25).

Not all racial and ethnic groups are succeeding at the same rate despite the fact that campuses are more diverse (Nichols et al., 2016). Black students continue to lag behind. In a study conducted by Ancis, Sedlacek, and Mohr (2000), they found that African-American students consistently reported having more negative experiences related to campus climate than any other racial group. Because of the critical role of campus climate on student success, there is a plethora of research that explores the relationship between the campus environment and persistence decisions by Black students’ attending HBCUs and PWIs, but limited research exists about the Black student experience at RMIs.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study was to better understand the experiences of Black students at one RMI in the Southwestern United States using the lens of the mutual acculturation theory. This study explored upper-division, Black students’ perceptions regarding the role campus climate played in their college experiences and their description of interactions with students from similar and different racial and cultural backgrounds. Though previous quantitative research has identified some benefits associated with Black students attending HBCUs or more diverse campuses, to date, limited work has explored the student experience at a RMI. This qualitative work provides a deeper understanding of how these Black students experience such a diverse campus and how they perceive it affects their interactions with and feelings about other Black students and students from other racial and ethnic groups.

Definitions

This section presents the definition of key terms that will be used throughout this study. *Acculturation*, as defined by Merriam-Webster (2019), is “cultural modification of an individual, group, or people by adapting to or borrowing traits from another culture” (Def.1).

Alienation is “the state or experience of being isolated from a group or activity to which one should belong, or in which one should be involved” (Hobson, 2004, p. 16).

Belonging relates to students’ feelings of connection and identification within their campus community (Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

Black students, in this study, are American-born students. This focus is important because the utilization of the term, *Black*, alone, can describe a student from a myriad of ethnic backgrounds from locations around the world (Griffin et al., 2016). Therefore, this study explored the experiences of students who share the common cultural background of the United States.

Campus climate describes the general racial environment on a college campus, which can be positive or negative (Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009). For example, a positive racial campus climate reflects a university committed to the inclusion of people of color as seen in employment decisions, student support services, admission decisions, etc.

Cross-racial interactions are opportunities for students from different racial or ethnic backgrounds to interact in a meaningful way. These behaviors include “having serious discussions, sharing personal feelings, and/or studying with someone from a different racial/ethnic background” (Bowman & Park, 2014, p. 662).

Diversity pertains only to race because this study is focused on the racial perceptions of campus climate, not those associated with gender, age, sexual preference, or programs of study (Griffin et al., 2016).

Marginalization, as defined by Merriam-Webster (2019), is “to relegate to an unimportant or powerless position within a society or group” (Def. 1).

Racially mixed institutions are campuses “where white students represent less than 40 percent of the student body” (Miller & Sujitparapitaya, 2010, p. 31).

Stereotyping includes “gross generalizations applied to a group of people with some level of shared characteristics” (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013, p. 383). One example offered by Iverson and Jagers (2015) was the perception by others that Black students are not as likely to succeed since they are less interested in education.

Research Questions

Through one-on-one interviews with eight Black, upper-division students, this qualitative research study aimed to answer the following overarching question:

What are the college experiences of upper-division Black students at a Southwestern public RMI?

Specific questions were:

Question 1: How do Black students describe their interactions with persons of *different* races and ethnicities at a Southwestern public research RMI?

Question 2: How do Black students describe their interactions with persons of the *same* race and ethnic backgrounds at a Southwestern public research RMI?

Question 3: Do Black students perceive their interactions with students at a Southwestern public research RMI have affected their perceptions of other races? If so, how?

Question 4: Do Black students perceive the campus culture of their RMI affected their persistence at the institution? If so, how?

Position of the Researcher

There are many reasons I am interested in the topic of Black students' perceptions of campus climate as a result of their experiences at a RMI. My personal experiences include a decade teaching in public elementary education in the Southern United States and, more recently, working in higher education. In addition, I have been greatly affected by the current political landscape.

The school where I spent a decade teaching fifth grade was considered rural and diverse. The majority of students were Black or White with a very small percentage of other races in attendance. I witnessed that all of my students faced various life challenges. Some of these trials included navigating family dilemmas and passing high stakes tests. Nevertheless, I felt the need to inspire my Black students to believe in themselves, because I perceived that they had more challenges to overcome to achieve success. Although the population of students in my district spanned all socioeconomic backgrounds, the majority of my Black students came from a lower socioeconomic status. This meant that they did not always have the basic necessities. These same students often came from broken family structures. They were often living with extended family or relocating, which prevented them from experiencing the stability of having a nuclear family that remained consistently in one place. These are just a few of the experiences my Black students shared with me when having discussions about the reasons they struggled to pay attention in class or to perform satisfactorily on their academic work.

Through unforeseen opportunities, my career transitioned into higher education. The Black students I interacted with on the college campus often spoke of frustrations about not

feeling prepared for college or facing financial burdens due to a lack of knowledge about financial resources available to assist them. These same topics were not part of my conversations with White students. The White students often expressed stresses surrounding the juggling of family life and work in conjunction with their student responsibilities.

Things shifted when I began my doctoral studies in the Southwestern region of the United States because I entered a very different campus environment. The university did not have students that were only Black or White. There were many different racial and ethnic groups, therefore, I no longer saw Black or White. I was elated by this atmosphere.

This excitement turned to concern during the election of Donald Trump, the 45th President of the United States. During the election campaign, I began to fear a negative change in race relations between Black and White students, even on my unique and racially diverse campus. As I listened to students in the freshman seminar course that I taught, I began to discuss current events, I was pleased with the way the students agreed to disagree when talking about how they felt regarding the racial content of the news reports across the country. As I watched racial tensions rise on social media, I hoped these students would continue to talk to and hear one another rather than join in to the contentious dialogue that was escalating across the country regarding racism in America. I hoped by attending a campus without a White majority, Black students would have more positive interactions with their peers and gain a greater acceptance of diversity. However, within the current context, I wondered if this would be true. This perception sparked my interest in this project.

Conclusion

Because of the increasing diversity in the United States and on campuses, this study explored the college experiences of Black students at a racially diverse campus. The goal was to

better understand the perceptions of upper-division Black students regarding the role campus climate played in their experiences at one RMI in the Southwestern United States. With more exploration about Black students' experiences at racially mixed institutions, these issues could be reversed with more research since little exists. This topic is particularly significant at this unique point in our nation's history because racial conflict is on the rise.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Because of the limited research on Black students at RMIs, this literature review begins with studies on the Black students' experiences at HBCUs and PWIs. It then offers a synthesis of the research on marginalization and related concepts, which is followed by the limited research on the experiences of Black students at RMIs. The chapter concludes with an overview of the mutual acculturation theory, which guides this study.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)

Many of the studies about students who attend HBCUs report on the importance of campus climate in student success (Karkouti, 2016). Campus climate refers to students' attitudes and perceptions about their experiences in a particular environment (Glisson & James, 2002; Hart & Fellabaum, 2008; Peterson & Spencer, 1990; Rankin & Reason, 2008). In general, students attending HBCUs have positive perceptions of their institutions. Allen (1992) found that Black students attending HBCUs have positive outcomes both socially and psychologically. Socially, they have an extensive network of friends, relationships that provide needed support, and various social outlets in which to be involved. Psychologically, they have greater amounts of self-confidence and self-esteem. More specifically, Black students at HBCUs demonstrate stronger academic achievement than their Black counterparts attending PWIs (Allen, 1987; Allen & Wallace, 1988; Arroyo & Gasman, 2014; Fleming, 1984; Wenglinsky, 1996). They also report feeling connected, accepted, and part of a community (Allen, 1992; Outcalt & Skews-Cox, 2002).

Shorette II and Palmer (2015) explored the experiences of 67 Black students who received their undergraduate degrees from an HBCU and then enrolled at a Midwestern PWI to

earn graduate degrees. Three themes emerged through in-depth interviews: 1) gaining self-confidence, 2) valuing institutional support, and 3) developing coping skills when confronting racism. The first theme affirmed that the participants perceived that HBCUs allowed the students to advance or increase their self-concept by having positive Black role models and strong peer support. One Black student described the positive impact on his self-esteem from seeing successful Black professors. The second theme was that HBCUs provided robust support from professors, campus programs, and university leadership to their students. Several of the participants in Shorette II and Palmer's (2015) study articulated the extraordinary support they received from their professors. The academic support was critical to the success of the majority of the participants as was the personal support they received. The third theme identified that attending an HBCU taught Black students how to navigate racist experiences (Shorette II & Palmer, 2015). Even though they felt safe at their HBCU, these participants were not sheltered from racist experiences. They found that some spaces off campus were not supportive or inclusive. Yet, through open dialogue with their professors and university leadership, the students developed the skill to manage their feelings about the racism they faced. These discussions were teaching tools that helped the students deal with racism in the world (Shorette II & Palmer, 2015).

McMickens (2012) conducted a study with 80 currently enrolled Black graduate students who obtained their undergraduate degrees from 20 HBCUs in 10 different states. The purpose of this study was to better understand the role HBCUs played in preparing Black students to confront racism as graduate students at PWIs and in the workforce. The research focused on "the preparation of black women and men to navigate and productively negotiate racist persons and racist encounters in predominantly white post undergraduate spaces" (McMickens, 2012, p.

40). McMickens (2012) operationalized the theoretical model, *racism readiness*, from the data. The Racism Readiness model articulated that HBCUs played a critical role in helping students prepare for racist encounters they may experience after they graduate with their baccalaureate degrees. This model had two main elements: 1) precollege socialization, and 2) institutional factors. Precollege socialization referred to the racial teachings and messaging from parents and other family members about racism in America. Institutional factors included “safe space, personal empowerment, learning cross-context while learning etiquette, and socializing exceptionalism” (McMickens, 2012, p. 42). *Safe space* was defined as a place that allows for open discussions of race and racism. *Personal empowerment* was taught through friendly competition and positive messages of self-worth. *Learning cross-context* included the way faculty and staff convey messages about the HBCU as compared to the context at a PWI. The lessons on *etiquette* included how students in these different settings dress, eat, and prepare for employment interviews. Finally, *socializing exceptionalism* referred to the ways HBCUs impart messages to students to give their best efforts and be exceptional people in both their college pursuits and when they enter the workforce.

The recommendations of this study (McMickens, 2012) included encouraging school districts across the country to intentionally hire alumni from HBCUs because they were devoted to racial and social justice. Additionally, the researchers recommended that HBCU curriculum should incorporate conversations both inside and outside of class about race and racism in America. Another recommendation was for HBCUs’ “admissions and marketing departments [to] share stories about how their respective college environments are preparing students for the workplace and graduate school settings” (McMickens, 2012, p. 43). These recommendations

outlined a few of the ways that HBCUs prepare Black students to navigate racism as they begin their professional careers. This was in sharp contrast to Black students' experiences at PWIs.

Winkle-Wagner and McCoy (2016) used a critical multisite case study to compare the experiences of Black students at two public land-grant institutions, one an HBCU and one a PWI. There were three different participant groups: 1) 20 STEM program faculty, 2) 14 graduate students that self-identified as Black/African American or Hispanic/Latino, and 3) 28 undergraduate students that self-identified as Black/African American or Hispanic/Latino. There were multiple data sources, including semi-structured interviews, institutional websites, and other documents.

The participants that were at the HBCU described feeling included and supported by their departments (Winkle-Wagner & McCoy, 2016). Both undergraduate and graduate students described their department as that of a family. Another undergraduate student spoke of the support he felt from the administration. The participants described the university as diverse and supportive of students from various backgrounds. This finding was very different than at the PWI.

The students at the PWI described the administration as not being committed to diversity and inclusiveness (Winkle-Wagner & McCoy, 2016). One undergraduate student described diversity efforts as an idea being thrown around to meet a quota as opposed to a genuine attempt to meet the needs of the students of color in attendance (Solórzano et al., 2000; Winkle-Wagner & McCoy, 2016). As a result, some students spoke of feeling like "aliens" (Winkle-Wagner & McCoy, 2016, p. 603) or isolated at the PWI because they were often the only Black students in their classes. One student spoke of feeling the need to prove to her peers and professors that the stereotypes about Black students were wrong. One male participant stated directly that he

thought his White peers often made negative assumptions about him and his intellectual ability based on his racial identity.

Winkle-Wagner and McCoy (2016) concluded that the context of the institution and its treatment of diversity shaped the participants' view of whether or not the campus climate was welcoming. The participants at the HBCU overwhelmingly spoke of experiencing inclusive and friendly treatment, while the participants at the PWI perceived the campus was not committed to diversity and inclusion. Winkle-Wagner and McCoy (2016) recommended that PWIs begin to identify ways they can learn from HBCUs to provide an environment that feels more like a family for Black students.

Predominately White Institutions (PWIs)

Although the Winkle-Wagner and McCoy (2016) study compared HBCUs to PWIs, much of the research (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999; Griffin et al., 2016; Johnson et al., 2013; Karkouti, 2016) focused exclusively on the experience of Black students attending PWIs. In general, the studies reported Black students experiencing lower academic achievement because of racial hostility, which lead to higher dropout rates (Allen, 1992; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Johnson et al., 2007).

Johnson, Wasserman, Yildirim, and Yonai (2014) administered a survey to 1,491 students at a PWI located in the northern area of the United States. There were 943 White participants, 182 Asian-American/Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders, 148 Multiracial, 110 Hispanic/Latinos, 99 Black/African-Americans, and nine American Indian/Alaskan Natives. The purpose of the survey was to “understand how campus environment perceptions and experiences contributed to the persistence of students of color” (Johnson et al., 2014, p. 79). The findings indicated that campus experiences of students of color affected their stress and their feelings

about the campus environment, which influenced their decision to remain at the institution. More specifically, it showed that stress connected to the academic environment had an indirect negative effect on the persistence decision of students of color. Second, experiences with racism on campus increased academic stress, which had a negative direct effect on their commitment to the institution, ultimately impacting their decision to persist to graduation.

Just as campus climate affected students at the HBCUs, Hotchkins and Dancy (2017) investigated the perceptions of racial climate of 20 Black residential students attending two PWIs. The researchers collected data through the research method of photovoice. This required the use of photographs taken by the participants in order to capture and consider the strengths and concerns of the community in which they lived (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2017).

The researchers reported three primary themes: “1) finding our space(s); 2) absent while present; and 3) perpetual homelessness” (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2017, pp. 46-47). *Finding our spaces* referred to Black students finding locations around campus free of White peers. For example, the use of the Black Student Union allowed these students a reprieve from racial microaggressions they experienced in the residence halls. Being *absent while present* revealed the participants’ perceptions of existing in a White culture void of the influence of their own heritage. For example, there were no Black names on buildings or Black art on the walls in those buildings. Finally, *perpetual homelessness* referred to feeling excluded from the very place the students resided. These Black students were repeatedly asked to show proof of identification to the same students on multiple occasions entering the residence halls where some worked as resident assistants. These themes exemplified students experiencing marginalization. The next section discusses marginalization in greater detail.

Themes of Marginalization

In many of the studies about Black student experiences while attending PWIs, the notion of marginalization surfaced (e.g., Milem et al., 2005). Marginalization was described as feelings of stereotyping, alienation, and a lack of belonging at PWIs, which contributed to their low persistence rates (Johnson et al., 2013; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Yosso et al., 2009). The following sub-sections explore the three themes of marginalization: stereotyping, alienation, and lack of belonging.

Stereotyping. Two decades of literature revealed that Black students perceive the campus climate at PWIs more negatively than their White counterparts (Davis et al., 2004; Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996; Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001, 2002; Harper & Griffin, 2011; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Solórzano et al., 2000). One reason for their negative perceptions is because these students state that they experience stereotyping at these institutions (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Harper, 2015; McGee & Martin, 2011). Johnson-Ahorlu (2013) defined stereotyping as “gross generalizations applied to a group of people with some level of shared characteristics” (p. 383). An example of stereotyping would be the perception of others that Black students do not value education overall. Therefore, they are not expected to be academically successful (Iverson & Jagers, 2015).

Iverson and Jagers (2010) conducted a qualitative study of 23 undergraduate Black males at a Midwestern PWI. Questions were asked of the focus group participants about their experiences in residence halls, social events, classrooms, and interactions with staff, faculty, and other students. The students shared examples when they felt they were victims of institutional racial profiling (Iverson & Jagers, 2010). In general, many of the Black males perceived that

they were more likely to be under surveillance by police and residence life staff than their Caucasian peers. For example, the Black male participants talked about congregating in the common areas of the residence halls then being told to disperse by the White residence hall staff. However, they felt that when groups of Caucasian males behaved in a similar manner, they were perceived as just having fun and were permitted to stay. In another situation, a Black male shared that once when he was playing his music loudly in his room, the resident assistant approached him and asked him to turn his music down. However, two days earlier, a White male did the same thing without repercussions. Another participant described feeling like he often had to prove he was not a stereotypical Black athlete because he felt it was assumed that he was unable to perform well academically (Iverson & Jagers, 2010). These examples capture how these participants felt they had to fight against stereotyping at their PWI.

Solórzano and colleagues (2000) conducted a qualitative study that included 10 focus groups at three elite, predominately White, Research I institutions. There were 34 African American students who participated. After an analysis of the focus group transcripts, field notes, and research memos, the researchers identified that the participants spoke of experiencing racial microaggressions. An example given by one of the participants was when she spoke about feeling like she was simply admitted to fill a quota for the number of Black students enrolled. She described feeling invisible. Another student described having African American experiences either left out or presented stereotypically in the course curriculum. Overall, the study found that the Black students who performed at high levels of accomplishment were not immune to experiencing racial microaggressions. Solórzano and colleagues (2010) argued that Black students had a more difficult academic road to travel, which ultimately revealed an inner strength that the students in this study possessed.

Another study by Harper and Griffin (2010) also found that high-achieving minoritized students were not resistant to stereotyping. Stereotyping can lead to negative assumptions influencing decision making by administrators and professors who believe that Black students lack the ability to succeed within the classroom. Both Johnson-Ahorlu (2013) and Griffin et al. (2016) found that Black students attending PWIs were the only racial group that reported stereotyping on college campuses as the largest barrier to their academic success. Black students experienced *stereotype threat*, which is anxiety caused by the fear that one might fulfill a common stereotype (Steele & Aronson, 1998). The consequence of that anxiety proved to lower academic performance. For example, the participants in Johnson-Ahorlu's (2013) study shared a common perception that both faculty and students viewed them as being less capable academically. This made the participants question whether they belonged on campus or if they had the intellectual capacity to manage the coursework. These same participants shared that they felt like faculty and students alike perceived them as not being deserving of admission into the university. The participants reported feeling anger and sadness as a result of constantly questioning whether or not they belonged on their respective campuses. This type of stereotyping can lead to another form of marginalization called *alienation*.

Alienation. Hurtado et al. (1998) contended that improving institutional diversity was a big part of improving the racial climates of higher education campuses. However, when non-Caucasian students perceived that their institution lacked commitment towards diversity, they reported higher levels of alienation (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Karkouti, 2016; Milem et al., 2005). Alienation was defined as “the state or experience of being isolated from a group or activity to which one should belong, or in which one should be involved” (Hobson, 2004, p. 16). When Black students felt estranged from their university, they were more likely to leave college

than their White counterparts (Astin, 1977; Hausmann, Ye, Schofield, & Woods, 2009; Suen, 1983).

The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center released a report containing data from 2,824,569 students nationwide that entered college in the fall of 2010 (Shapiro et al., 2017). In an article published by *The New York Times*, Tate (2017) pointed out that 54.8 percent of those students completed a degree or certificate within six years. When broken down by race, the following rates were found for students that completed their program of study: a) Asian students – 63.2 percent, b) White students – 62 percent, c) Hispanic students – 45.8 percent, and d) Black students – 38 percent (Tate, 2017). Some suggested that this higher rate of attrition for Blacks was caused by academic (Pentages & Creedon, 1978) or sociopsychological factors like alienation (Suen, 1983).

In 2014, Black students at the University of Michigan voiced frustration over racial tension and discriminatory practices by university personnel (Vega, 2014). The students submitted a list of seven demands that included: (a) equal opportunity to implement change, (b) more affordable housing on campus for low-income students, (c) a new space to congregate in a central location on campus, (d) more education about the history of marginalized populations in coursework, (e) immediate offering of emergency scholarships for Black students, (f) transparency with the University's historical documents regarding race and racism in its past, and (g) increase in Black representation on campus equal to 10 percent (Amron & Bryan, 2014). The institutional response was to simply invest in making improvements to the infrastructure of the existing Trotter Multicultural Center, the physical structure on campus where multicultural programming occurred (Woodhouse, 2014), and increase Black student enrollment (Jaschik, 2014). This was not enough. Therefore, the Black Student Union gave a seven-day deadline to comply,

or they said they would be forced to do more through physical activism. After several months of negotiations, reports of progress were made when one of the seven demands was fully realized with a commitment to a new multicultural center in addition to the renovation of the existing Trotter Multicultural Center. This is only one example where the administration at a PWI took steps to show their commitment to diversity and address the students' feelings of alienation. However, it was only a partial victory, because the institution did not address the other demands (Amron & Bryan, 2014).

Jackson (2012) conducted an ethnographic study with Black male college students who were key members of a group called Uplift and Progress (UP). This organization was a very respected group of Black men who served in leadership roles across their campus. The mission of UP was to eliminate negative stereotypes of Black men. The original study by Jackson (2012) reported three main themes: "a) lacking friends, b) creating brothers, and c) associating with successful Black men" (p. 467). UP members said that while they had friendships with White people in high school, those relationships were superficial. When they arrived at college, they found it more difficult to relate to their White peers. The authors believed this could be due to college being a time of self-exploration and discovery of one's racial identity. As a result, the participants sought close friendships with other Black men on campus. They admitted that they missed the care and support of their families and hoped to build an emotionally and socially supportive network at college. The final theme identified was that the participants hoped to connect with someone they could see themselves becoming – "a successful Black man" (p. 472). This study revealed the need for these Black students to develop mentoring relationships that resembled that of a family network while attending a PWI.

Another study sought to understand how Black immigrant and American-born students perceived campus climate at a PWI where they represented 3.5% of the 1,400-student body (Griffin et al., 2016). Through 43 in-depth interviews, they found that Black students reported feeling a sense of alienation (Griffin et al., 2016). One of the participants described feeling pushed out of a predominantly White campus organization because they did not feel welcomed as a student of color. Both American-born and immigrant participants described feeling excluded from predominantly White groups as well as discomfort when interacting with other students of color unless the students were also Black. However, it was the American-born Black students who perceived the campus climate most negatively and shared more examples of marginalization outside the classroom than the students who were immigrants (Griffin et al., 2016). This perception might be because the students who came from other countries expected to feel alienated. However, the authors could not draw any definite conclusions. Nevertheless, the campus climate had a negative effect on the American-born Black students in this study.

Belonging. When Black students have a negative perception of the campus climate, they may feel isolated (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Yosso et al., 2009) with a decreased sense of belonging and commitment to the university (Hurtado & Carter 1997; Johnson et al., 2007; Nora & Cabrera 1996). Hurtado and Carter (1997) found that for Latina/o students a sense of belonging can be established through involvement with student organizations and other activities on campus. Johnson-Ahorlu (2013) and others documented how important it was for students to develop a sense of belonging in their transition into college, because it can affect student persistence to graduation (e.g., Hurtado & Carter, 1997) regardless of the student's racial make-up (Hausmann et al., 2007; Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, & Salomone, 2003).

Griffin et al. (2016) found that many students avoided opportunities to interact with races outside their own for fear of rejection. This decision resulted in Black students spending the majority of their time with other Black students instead of engaging with students of different racial backgrounds. This was important because limited positive social interaction and involvement can affect student persistence (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; Tinto, 1993). This coupled with the feeling many Black students experienced related to stereotyping threat hurt the way those students viewed themselves, which in turn influenced the level of commitment they had for the university (Nadal et al., 2014). Racial microaggressions affected their self-esteem, academic success, and mental wellbeing, which can delay progress towards degree completion (Fischer, 2010).

Nadal and colleagues (2014) also discussed the role of faculty and staff in Black students' college experiences. They recommended campus personnel become more aware of how their actions could be perceived, directly or indirectly, as acts of discrimination by Black students and ultimately detrimental to their success (Nadal et al., 2014). The authors posited that staff outside of the classroom need to remember that they serve as educators of "the whole student" (p. 469). This meant that the staff provided training and services both inside of and outside of the classroom. Therefore, the researchers believed it was critical for those staff to provide education and interventions to ensure that students of color had equal opportunities for success.

Harper, Smith, and Davis (2016) found that Black students did not feel like they belonged on campus. Through multiple quantitative data sources (e.g., data from the Office of Institutional Research website, U.S. Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System [IPEDS], 4-, 5-, 6-, and 8-year persistence rates) and individual interviews with 23 Black undergraduates and 20 members of the Black Student Success Task

Force, the researchers found that participants felt the only place their cultural heritage was celebrated or affirmed was in the Black Cultural Center because there was a significant shortage of places on campus where their culture was present. The participants also shared that there was very little of their culture represented in the course readings and classroom discussions. One of the participants said, “If you’re Black, you’re at the bottom of the totem pole” (p. 15). As a result, the students felt the administration did not “care about us. They don’t invest in us” (p. 15). When students felt they did not belong, they were more likely to leave the university.

In summary, Black students attending PWIs reported feeling stereotyped, alienated and isolated in connection to campus climate, which contributed to their low persistence rates. Black students were found to have been affected by encounters with racism on campus that negatively impacted their academic performance. These negative experiences, in turn, directly affected their level of commitment to the institution and their persistence decisions.

Racially Mixed institutions (RMIs)

The research on Black students’ perceptions of racially mixed college campuses is limited (Miller & Sujitparapitaya, 2010; Packard, 2013). Miller and Sujitparapitaya (2010) first used the term, “Racially Mixed Institution,” to focus on the racial aspects of a university rather than more traditional characteristics (e.g., public or private, two- or four-year university). The few studies on RMIs have found that students attending racially mixed campuses have a greater commitment to the institution and higher persistence to graduation (Chang, 1999; Johnson et al., 2013; Milem et al., 2005).

Denson and Chang (2015) utilized survey data from the 2003 Freshman Survey and the 2007 College Senior Survey conducted by both the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) and the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA. The participants included

students attending 92 public and private institutions, excluding HBCUs. Findings from the study indicated that the more diverse a campus was the higher the likelihood that Black students interacted with someone from different racial groups. These results reinforced the positive association between the educational benefits connected with increased cross-racial interactions and a campus that is perceived to be attentive and responsive to the needs of students traditionally identified as marginalized (Denson & Chang, 2015).

Research has found that racially diverse colleges encourage an environment of cross-racial engagement resulting in positive student experiences (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). Examples of these positive interactions among different racial groups can include dating, dining, studying, and interacting with people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds in and out of the classroom (Chang, Astin, & Kim, 2004; Saenz, Ngai, & Hurtado, 2007). Harper and Hurtado's (2007) review of the literature that spanned 15 years and included 35 studies asserted that meaningful engagement between racially different groups of students could potentially "interrupt longstanding segregation trends in society" (p. 14); thus, reinforcing the value of interactions between racial groups. This benefit would be true for PWIs and HBCUs as long as these institutions provided intentional spaces and opportunities for students to interact with other racial groups in a meaningful way (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). Other researchers have noted that membership in organizations dedicated to ethnic and racial causes (e.g., fraternity/sorority membership, religious student organization, service-based organization) can also lead to a higher rate of cross-racial interactions (Bowman & Park, 2014).

Although dated, Chang (1999) used 1985 and 1989 CIRP data from four-year universities to learn how a racially diverse student body impacted educational outcomes. The survey asked students (n=18,188) if they used their time socializing with other racial/ethnic groups and

whether discussions about race or ethnic issues had been discussed within the past year. Other questions focused on their educational outcomes (e.g., college satisfaction, academic self-concept, and social self-concept). All of the institutions were classified as PWI, but the study accounted for the various racial make-ups of each institution. Chang (1999) found that more racially diverse environments inspired more socialization across racial groups and increased the chance that students engaged in conversations about racial issues. This study did not identify the types of socialization or racial discussions that were most beneficial for advancing educational benefits. However, other researchers did look more closely at these issues in 2004 and then again in 2015 (Chang et al., 2004; Bowman & Park, 2015).

Chang and colleagues (2004) found that students' interactions with different racial groups positively affected students' civic, social, and intellectual development. Additionally, Bowman and Park (2015) found that Black students that have same-race close friendships cultivated a supportive foundation that encouraged them to become more engaged in the institution. "Higher quality interactions and perceived acceptance of diversity by one's institution strengthens the educational impact of interacting with students of different racial or ethnic backgrounds" (Denson & Chang, 2015, p. 26). Denson and Chang (2015) defined high-quality interactions as positive encounters. The study's findings support a growing body of research that states there are educational benefits associated with a higher amount of racial diversity on campuses.

Stotzer and Hossellman (2012) examined the impact of having a racially diverse campus on the number of reported hate crimes on 418 baccalaureate degree-granting institutions over the span of 10 years. They found that the higher the number of Black and Latino students enrolled in the participating institutions decreased the number of ethnic/race-based hate crimes reported. The researchers suggested that the lower number of events may be because these more diverse

campuses may be more inclusive. However, this was only conjecture on their part. It remains unknown if the campuses were intentional about being more inclusive or if the inclusive nature was an outcome of being more diverse.

A more recent study (Lancaster & Xu, 2017) focused on the barriers and mitigating factors on Black students' levels of commitment to the institution and rates of persistence. In a qualitative case study of 25 African-American students in STEM fields at a racially diverse four-year institution, Lancaster and Xu (2017) identified the following four barriers to graduation. The first three focus on the classroom: (a) inconsistent quality of teaching; (b) weak formal relationships with faculty leaving students unprepared for challenging classes; and (c) large, infrequently offered classes. The fourth barrier centered on difficulties with academic advising. On the other hand, the researchers identified the following as reasons the institution helped these students persist to degree completion: "peer support, student organizations, and mentoring" (p. 176). This study focused exclusively on students in STEM and did not tease out how these issues affected the students' success or if they are unique to this RMI or STEM.

As is evident from previous research on RMIs, the focus has been on large-scale studies. There is limited research that shared students' perceptions of the diverse campus climate to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences. The current study is unique for these reasons.

Modified Mutual Acculturation Theory

The concept of acculturation is rooted in the fields of anthropology and sociology (Park & Burgess, 1921). The premise of Berry's (1991) Acculturation Theory was that of a uni-directional focus when immigrants needed to adapt to a new culture to be successful in it (Rabinowitz, Wittig, Braun, Franke, & Zander-Music, 2005). However, Berry specified that outsiders do not necessarily need to come from another country to acculturate; they only need to

have cultural differences from the majority population (Berry, 1991). In 2001, Berry's Acculturation theory evolved into a more bi-directional focus, which includes building one's ethnic identity as well. Berry described this more interactive perspective as mutual acculturation.

In Berry's (2001) model, acculturation has evolved as a mutual process of change between cultural groups (Rauchelle & Dandy, 2015). This bi-directional focus includes a desire to maintain one's heritage and culture (i.e., *ingroup ethnic identity*) and the degree to which one interacts with other cultural groups (i.e., *othergroup orientation*). Rabinowitz and colleagues (2005) suggested that the success of an immigrant's adaptation to the new environment "depends to a certain extent on how well these two factors – ingroup ethnic [identity] and [othergroup] orientation – are negotiated" (Rabinowitz et al., 2005, p. 528). These are the underlying factors of the Modified Mutual Acculturation Theory.

The *ingroup ethnic identity* refers to the value placed on maintaining one's cultural identity through same race relationships. The *othergroup orientation* focuses on the value placed on relationships with people outside of one's racial/ethnic group. While some social psychological literature states that a strong connection to one's in-group identity can have negative attitudes towards members of the out-group (Masson & Verkuyten, 1993), other studies (e.g., Hinkle & Brown, 1990) have said that strong ethnic group identity "leads to greater confidence in and acceptance of one's own ethnic group, which in turn is associated with greater acceptance of and more positive attitudes towards othergroups" (Wittig, 2008, p. 229). This view also supports the findings of Simmons et al. (2010) that states if experiences with people from other racial groups are positive, they will generally lead to a greater acceptance of diversity.

Wittig and Molina (2000) concluded that universities are excellent settings to help students develop positive attitudes towards members of other racial/ethnic groups from one's own. For example, Bowman and Park (2015) conducted a mixed-methods study where they explored the relationship between cross-racial interactions or having interactions with individuals from different racial groups (i.e., othergroup orientations) and various positive student outcomes (e.g., satisfaction with college). The study examined the 4-year longitudinal dataset of 2,932 undergraduates (n=766 Black students, 757 White students, 736 Asian American students, and 673 Latino/a students) from 28 institutions. The colleges and universities were selected based on diverse characteristics such as institutional type, region, and student demographics. The researchers found that cross-racial interactions were significantly and positively related to almost every student outcome (i.e., ease of getting along with people from other races, belief that people from other races are hardworking, improved emotional well-being, and increased college satisfaction). Mutual acculturation theory explores participants' perceptions of an institution's climate by using two factors: the ingroup ethnic identity and othergroup orientation. Further, the Modified Mutual Acculturation theory adds the outcome of a greater acceptance of diversity if meaningful ingroup and othergroup orientations exist.

Summary and Conclusion

College campuses in America are becoming more diverse than ever. Black students' perceptions of their campus' climate affect their decision to remain at that college. The various types of institutions tend to cultivate different experiences due to the varying racial characteristics of the student body. Considerable research has focused on PWIs, but there has not been much work that explored the Black student experiences at a RMI. Therefore, this study seeks to explore those experiences on such a campus. Further, I used the Modified Mutual

Acculturation theory to better understand the campus climate through the students' descriptions of their encounters with other races and their own identity and how they interact with those two groups.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The goal of this study was to gain a better understanding of the experiences and perceptions of Black students at one RMI in the Southwestern United States. For this reason, I used qualitative methods to achieve this aim. Qualitative research acquires detailed understandings of the participants' perspectives (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008) and provides an in-depth exploration of a phenomenon about which relatively little is known (Hammersley, 1989; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

This research also follows the phenomenological tradition, because it focuses on participants' shared, lived experiences of a phenomenon to reach a common meaning (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). The phenomenon under investigation was the ingroup and outgroup experiences of upper-division, Black students attending a RMI. Using the lens of mutual acculturation theory, the purpose of the study was to better understand the students' perceptions of the campus climate and its effect on their college experience, their persistence decisions, and their attitudes towards their own racial and ethnic group as well as other groups. This chapter discusses the research questions, the selected site, participant selection criteria, data collection, and data analysis approaches. It also includes limitations of the study.

Research Questions

This qualitative research study aimed to answer the following primary research question:
What are the college experiences of upper-division Black students at a Southwestern public research RMI?

Specific questions addressed were:

Question 1: How do Black students describe their interactions with persons of different races and ethnicities at a Southwestern public research RMI?

Question 2: How do Black students describe their interactions with persons of the same race and ethnic backgrounds at a Southwestern public research RMI?

Question 3: Do Black students perceive their interactions with students at a Southwestern public research RMI have affected their perceptions of other races? If so, how?

Question 4: Do Black students perceive the campus culture of their RMI affected their persistence at the institution? If so, how?

Site

This study was conducted at a large, urban, public university with approximately 42,000 students studying on campus. For the purposes of this study, it will be referred to as Southwestern University (SU). Southwestern University meets the requirements to be categorized as a RMI because there is no ethnic or racial group that constitutes the majority of the student population (Miller & Sujitparapitaya, 2010). The demographic breakdown of the student population is 34.9% White, 32.6% Hispanic/Latino, 15.2% Black or African American, 12.5% Asian, and 4.8% International ([Southwestern University] fast facts, 2018). The university is ranked as one of the most diverse institutions among the largest universities in the United States (“America’s Most Diverse Colleges,” 2017). It was selected as the site for this study for two reasons: 1) It is categorized as an RMI, because “white students represent less than 40 percent of the student body” (Miller & Sujitparapitaya, 2010, p. 31), and 2) I had access to potential participants, because I previously worked there.

Participant Selection Criteria

Participants were selected based on several criteria. The students had to identify as Black and classify as a junior or senior with at least 60 semester credit hours completed at Southwestern University. These characteristics were to help ensure the study obtained the experiences and perceptions of campus climate from students who had similar cultural histories and had persisted at this institution.

Because the data were collected during the summer semester, it was more challenging to locate participants. To address this issue, I decided to interview students who had leadership roles on campus, because they would be more likely to be available over the summer and more willing to participate in the study. After receiving Internal Review Board (IRB) approval, two strategies were used to recruit students: convenience and snowball sampling. Initially, an e-mail was sent through the Director of Assessment, Planning, and Student Success and Freshman Experience Program (See Appendix A for IRB approval letter), because she had one-on-one involvement with students holding leadership positions across all departments within the Division. (See Appendix B for the recruitment e-mail.). Four student leaders, who met the criteria, were identified from this approach. In addition, snowball sampling was used so that participants were asked to share the opportunity to participate in this study with friends. Again, the focus was on students who worked on campus and/or had roles in student leadership. Four additional students were selected through this strategy.

Students interested in participating in this study were asked to contact the researcher via e-mail or phone. The interested students were then asked to provide demographic information through the Participant Profile Form (See Appendix E), which was available through a link in a “Thank You for Your Interest” email (See Appendix C). The participant profile was needed to ensure the potential participants met the criteria to participate in the study.

Creswell (2013) suggests a range of 5 to 25 people as appropriate for a phenomenological study. He notes that the specific number of participants depends on when the data are saturated. This means that interviews cease once no new information emerges from the interviews. Based on this recommendation, I conducted eight interviews. To protect participant anonymity, pseudonyms are used in place of their actual names. (See table 3.1 for participant information.)

Table 3.1

Participant Information

Pseudonym	Gender	Classification	Major	Organizations in which participants had Leadership Roles ^a
Ava	Female	Senior	Nursing	BSA, NAACP, Delta Sigma Theta, FOL
Raven	Female	Senior	Sociology	NACWC
Bethany	Female	Senior	Nursing	BSNA, Zeta Mu, NAACP
Travis	Male	Senior	Finance	RA
Lori	Female	Senior	Communication	NACWC, NAACP, Ambassador
James	Male	Senior	History	MultiMav, Black Leadership Institute
Dante	Male	Junior	Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering	Phi Beta Sigma
Chanelle	Female	Senior	Interdisciplinary Studies: Theatrical Performance and Public Relations	SAAC, FOL, Lead RA, Sun-Belt Conference, Ambassador

Note. ^a See appendix G for full names of the organizations listed.

Most of the eight participants were female (n=5) and seniors (n=7). They came from a range of majors including sociology, history, mechanical and aerospace engineering, and nursing. All of the participants held leadership roles. Seven of the participants were involved in at least one organization designed specifically for Black students (see Appendix G for information on the organizations). The mission statement for the Black Student Association

(BSA) captures the common goals of these race-based programs – to be “dedicated to teaching, uniting, and networking with ALL students, while celebrating the African-American culture” (BSA website, n.d.). This objective makes these groups unique among campus organizations.

Data Collection

There were two data sources. The first was the participant profile form, which asked the invitee their gender, race, country of birth, classification, and semester credit hours (SCH) completed at Southwestern University, as well as major, student employment history, organizational memberships, and leadership positions they had held. The second and primary data source was the one-on-one interviews lasting between 30 and 60 minutes. The protocol focused on participants’ perceptions of the campus climate through the lens of mutual acculturation. (See Appendix F for interview protocol.) This theoretical lens aided in the exploration into the participants’ experiences with people of the same race and those of other racial and ethnic backgrounds. More specifically, it explored how these experiences influenced their perceptions of campus climate and their persistence decisions. Sample questions asked of the participants included: 1) How would you describe the relationship between the different racial groups at Southwestern University? 2) Describe your experiences with people of the same race as you while on campus? 3) Describe your experiences with people outside your own race while on campus? 4) Has your experience at Southwestern University changed your perception of people of other races?

All data collection was conducted remotely because the researcher resided out of state. To offer a comfortable, neutral environment, the interviewee was given a choice in how the interview would be conducted, via phone or video-conferencing. While the use of video-conferencing has only spanned a decade, it overcomes the barrier of geography (Deakin &

Wakefield, 2013). The limited research available suggests that the quality of interviews conducted through face-to-face and video-conferencing is much the same (Sedgwick & Spiers, 2009). However, only one of the participants (i.e., Chanelle) opted to conduct the interview via video-conferencing using Skype. The interviews were audio recorded for transcription.

Also, during the analysis stage, it became apparent that additional information would be helpful. As a result, follow-up questions were asked via email. For example, in an interview, Bethany spoke of her professor leaving rude comments on her papers. She articulated that the professor told her she should visit the Writing Center for help constructing sentences. However, during analysis, I wanted more detailed information about why she found the comments rude. In an email response, she clarified that this assignment was intended to use shorthand, not complete sentences, which left her feeling unfairly singled out. Another example is where Lori spoke of her first inter-racial friendship. The initial transcript implied that the friendship was short lived even though she stated that she had made a lifelong friend. When asked to explain this contradiction, Lori clarified that the two became part of different friendship groups. Lori did not get along well with one of the other women in that group, which caused the two women to stop spending time together. However, she still considered her a close friend. In all, five participants were emailed to get further clarification, but only two responded. The findings are the result of the interviews and the additional data collected through follow-up emails.

The Modified Mutual Acculturation theory informed the research questions and the interview protocol for this study. The research questions included a focus on the two components of the theory with an added question to inquire about the participants perception of their ability to accept people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. The interview protocol was designed to elicit the students experiences in building their own ethnic identity and with

interacting with other racial groups. Additionally, there was another set of questions specifically asking the participants to describe if they believed their perceptions had changed about how they felt about people from different backgrounds as a result of their experiences at Southwestern University. The Modified Mutual Acculturation theory then informed the way the data were interpreted.

Data Analysis

The audio files were transcribed by Rev.com, an internet transcription service, immediately after each interview was conducted. When the transcriptions were returned, I checked them for accuracy by comparing them against my original recordings. I printed each transcript and cut each question into its own piece of paper then stacked all eight participants' answers together. I coded each stack separately. Coding provides a label that describes "a segment of data" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 4). As Charmaz (2014) explains, "coding distills data, sorts them, and gives us an analytic handle for making comparisons with other segments of data" (p. 4). I began by chunking the data or coding larger sections of data first using various colored highlighters matching the codes and then went back through the transcript and used line-by-line coding (Creswell, 2013). Examples of the codes that were used included: opportunity, organization, and friendship. *Opportunity* was used to identify roles and services available to students. *Organization* referred to the involvement in groups on campus. Finally, *friendship* categorized the different close relationships the students discussed. After I completed one question stack, I moved on to the next one.

At this point, after chunking and line-by-line coding, I also incorporated the use of constant comparative analysis (Creswell, 2013). The process requires the researcher to go back through previous transcript(s) if any new ideas emerged during the coding of later interviews

(Creswell, 2013). This iterative step was taken until all transcripts had been reviewed and coded multiple times. These codes were then condensed into themes (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014) that shed light on the perceptions that these Black students at Southwestern University had about its campus climate and their decisions to persist. Examples of these themes included: *support systems*, *conflict*, and *marginalization*. The additional comments that were gathered for clarification via email after the interviews were conducted were coded in the same way before placing the content in the appropriate theme. If I did not hear from a student after sending two emails, I continued my analysis without the additional information.

Trustworthiness

This study includes three strategies to help ensure trustworthiness of the collected information as described by Creswell (2013). First, I shared my biases in Chapter 1. This subsection contained the position of the researcher including assumptions that may be held before conducting the study (Merriam, 1988). The tradition of phenomenology requires the researcher to bracket their own experiences to separate any preconceived attitudes from those of the participants (Creswell, 2103). Second, a peer reviewer with methodological expertise was asked to code the transcripts independently before discussing those codes/themes with me. This peer was a colleague who also worked at my current institution. She obtained her Master's degree in College Student Personnel with a strong research background in social justice. There were no points of disagreement found. However, there was one area, in particular, that required clarification. I was not sure if the comments made by the participants about Homecoming events lacking cultural relevance fell under the theme of *alienation*. Through a conversation with this colleague, it was determined that Black students' perception of their culture not being considered in the planning of major events left them feeling excluded or alienated. This strategy verifies

that the findings are the result of consultation with a colleague, which makes the findings more credible (Creswell, 2013). Finally, participants provided member checking by reviewing and correcting, if needed, a summary of the findings for accuracy. This was accomplished by e-mailing the participants with a document that contained the overarching themes with a request to share any feedback within one week. Only one of the participants responded to the request affirming that all findings were in alignment with her responses. Taken together, these strategies helped to promote trustworthy results that captured the perceptions of the participants of the phenomenon under investigation.

Limitations of the Study

There are at least seven limitations to this study. I am a White female studying Black students' perceptions. My race could cause the participants to feel less comfortable sharing their experiences about campus climate as it relates to racial diversity. Second, this study includes a small sample of students from one RMI in the United States. The experiences these students shared might be different from other students at SU as well as other universities around the country. Third, these students held leadership roles at Southwestern University, so their experiences may be different from less active students. Additionally, all of the participants were involved in Black organizations that could have impacted their views of and experiences at the institution, because these organizations may have more Black members and are dedicated to supporting Black culture unlike other campus organizations. Fifth, when I reached out to five of the participants through e-mail seeking more details about something they said, only two responded. This limited my ability to provide a richer description of some of their experiences. Another limitation is in selection bias. Four of the participants were recruited through snowball sampling. This is a limitation because the students may share similar views with the friends who

recruited them for the study. Finally, when I sent the preliminary themes to the participants for their feedback, only one person responded. She agreed that I had captured her experiences at SU. However,

I had to assume the other participants also had no objections, but I cannot be sure this was the case. Nevertheless, in spite of these limitations, the research begins to fill the gap about the Black student experiences at RMIs, which is limited at present.

Summary

This chapter provided information about the methods and methodology employed to explore Black students' perceptions of campus climate and its effect on persistence decisions at a RMI in the Southwest. It included information on the site, participants, data collection and analysis strategies, and efforts to promote trustworthy results.

Chapter 4

Findings

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the college experiences of upper-division Black students at a Southwestern Racially Mixed public research institution (RMI). More specifically, through the lens of the Modified Mutual Acculturation theory, the research explored if the participants' own cultural identity was reinforced at the RMI, and how that affected their feelings about other ethnic and racial groups on campus. The theory contends that as one group strengthens their own cultural identity, it will also lead to more positive feelings about other groups (Rabinowiz et al., 2005). With this as the focus, the chapter is organized into three main sections based on the themes that emerged from the data: (a) support systems, (b) conflict, and (c) meaningful cross-racial interactions.

Support Systems

While the University was described as highly diverse, the participants saw the Black population as small. As a result, they perceived that Black students tended to come together as a smaller faction within the larger community of diverse students at Southwestern University. This connection allowed the students to become a support system for each other. This section includes two primary areas of support: (a) personal (e.g., extra- and co-curricular) and (b) administrative (e.g., faculty and staff).

Personal Support

This section focuses on the social, academic, and professional organizations that supported the students of color through their educational journeys. Some of those organizations helped the participants connect to their racial and ethnic peers. An example of one of the organizations that four of the participants belonged to was the Black Student Association (BSA).

This organization brought Black students together by celebrating African-American culture through orientation to monthly discussion forums, social events, and community service opportunities which supports the first component of the Modified Mutual Acculturation theory (Rabinowitz et al., 2005). Dante, a Junior studying Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering, shared that the outcome of this and other activities were enormous. He explained:

[The BSA] killed the game. So, what I mean by that is that...you should be able to hear the tone change in my voice...because of the kind of unity that we [members of BSA] have as a Black student mindset. That's our way of keeping our people together.

Dante added, "it feels really good to be able to have a place to go with Black folk you know."

The participants felt this type of race-based organization was critical to helping them maintain and/or develop their own cultural identity. Other researchers came to similar conclusions.

Harper and Quaye (2007) found that Black student organizations play a unique role in providing advocacy for and uplifting minority students.

Another organization that served a similar purpose at SU was The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). This organization offered cultural events that catered to Black students' interests. For example, they held fashion shows on campus.

Chanelle, a Senior, particularly enjoyed the event, because she could personally relate as a Black woman to the fashions modeled at the show and thought "it [the fashion show] was cool." This event was just one way to connect the students to each other and to showcase and celebrate their culture and heritage. Hotchkins and Dancy (2017) posited that these occasions allow Black students to "feel connected in meaningful ways" (p. 47). These connections mattered to the students because it "gives you a sense of unity and a sense of feeling like you are accepted because you have people that have similar backgrounds, wants, desires, and needs like you

have,” explained Dante. Thus, this organization helped the students not only connect with each other but reinforce their cultural identity as well.

The students also took advantage of professional organizations, such as the Black Nursing Student Association (BSNA), to connect. This group was particularly important to Bethany, a senior Nursing major, because, as she described, it was not just the information she got about her chosen field, but she could go to meetings and “see people that look like me.” She appreciated that they brought in Black nurse practitioners where Black students could relate to the speakers in a professional nursing role. She said:

Seeing African American women in roles as nurse practitioners and physicians is important because it reminds me that I can do it, too. The stories from these women and what they have overcome to reach their current destination reminds me that I have no valid excuses not to chase my dreams.

She related to and was encouraged by the stories told by successful Black professionals in her field. This increase in self-confidence was gained by spending time with successful people of the same race which aligns with one of the findings of Jackson’s (2012) study.

Not all organizations were university sanctioned. A less official resource, but an equally important one, was a popular application for cell phones called The Black Community GroupMe of [Southwestern University]. It was a place where every Black person that attended SU learned about the many resources available to them on and around campus. Dante described how this app made the start of school easier to navigate. He said:

[GroupMe] is where you can get your books for cheap. Who has what books? Who has what teachers? Where you can go to get your hair done, get your nails done? What do you recommend doing your first week of school?

This group text messaging application made it easier to share campus knowledge with people with whom they had a cultural connection. This, in turn, directed these students to the things they needed to be successful in school and helped them in their day-to-day lives as well.

These organizations helped the participants connect to other Blacks. Whether it was through their participation in official or unofficial options as mentioned above, these eight Black students spoke of how the friends they met through organizations and classes were there to offer encouragement and support when they struggled with personal or academic issues. Lori, a senior who was a Communications major, shared that she learned about the true quality of her friendships while attending Southwestern University. She said, “I will say that I have gained a lifetime support system from just people that I've met at [Southwestern University] alone.” Bethany spoke more specifically about the important role her classmates made in her college experience stating, “I think the biggest support would come from my friends, like my nursing school friends. If I don't understand something, I know I can ask in a group message system.” Ava, a senior studying Nursing, went even further stating that her decision to stay at SU was because of the support she received at the university. She explained that she had been considering transferring, but thought better of it because of:

the friends that I had made. I had been talking to them about what I was thinking about.

I also had been talking to my counselors and stuff about what I was thinking about.

Should I leave and go home and, you know, pursue nursing at a different college or should I stay? And the campus and the friends that I've made, the campus climate, really did have a positive influence on my decision to stay.

For Ava, the campus climate related to the overall attitudes and behaviors of the people on campus. It was the way they supported her that influenced her decision to remain at Southwestern University.

In fact, several of the participants considered transferring while attending Southwestern University. They admitted that they felt the social environment at the universities their friends attended offered more of the traditional college experience (e.g., football games, tailgating) than their urban campus. However, every time they considered attending another university, they would think about the support from organizations and their friendship groups at SU and were happy about their decision to stay. They credited their personal connections as being key to maintaining their own cultural identity and developing connections with other students as well.

Administrative Support

In addition to the personal support from peers on campus, SU was perceived by all participants as caring about student success. Dante said, “whatever you need, [Southwestern University] has.” Chanelle appreciated the way the university advertised opportunities. There were flyers on the bulletin boards in the residence halls that reminded her of where she could go on campus for assistance. She said, “It's the simple things. The signage of ‘There's help here,’ ‘you matter here.’ The departments will help you. ‘We are here. Come talk to us.’” The student participants recognized and appreciated the steps the university had taken to help them navigate their college experience.

A few of the participants singled out their advisors as playing critical roles in their success. James, a junior studying History, talked about a time when the random act of kindness from his advisor helped him to avoid a hurdle at the start of his college career. James remembered:

From the first day I got here, I remember I had to take a test, and I didn't have the money to take it. A lady working in one of the advisor's office paid for it. So...I've had a support system since my very first day on campus.

Bethany also shared the important role her Nursing advisor played in her progress. She talked about the personal relationship she had with her advisor that went beyond getting course selection advice. She shared:

I would meet with [the advisor] frequently. You know, [we'd] talk about my goals and things. Even whenever I found out I was pregnant, I shared it with her. How I still was going to go to nursing school and all this stuff. But I think that she was probably, as far as an advisor or anything, she would probably be the most encouraging and motivating and supportive [person]. Like I said, she really believed in me.

Even though Bethany was determined to achieve, she felt that her advisor's support made a huge difference to her during a stressful time.

Travis, a senior Finance major, also credited his decision to stay enrolled to the support he felt was available on campus. He said, "I like that reassurance knowing that if anything goes wrong, I can go and reach out to these people or those people. I would say that definitely the climate on campus is why I'd love to stay here." Dante also mentioned that he had "thought about transferring before." He said, "When I go visit other schools, I always have that, man, "I really wish I could transfer" [thought], but like I choose *not* to transfer." He admitted that "by getting more in tune with what my campus has to offer, I would say that it makes you want to stay" at Southwestern. These students were encouraged to keep working towards their goal of attaining a degree because of the impact the people within the university and the support they

provided had on them. Nadal and associates (2014) also noted the important role of campus personnel in student persistence decisions.

In conclusion, the Black student participants felt supported by the institution. As Chanelle stated, "I had some real rough times...but I made it through because of the support I have at [Southwestern University]. My advisors, my coaches, my teachers I've met. I don't know about going to any other school." Whether they considered leaving or not, the participants perceived that the campus environment and the level of support that SU provided played a direct role in their decisions to persist to their junior and senior years at the institution.

Conflict

While the students appreciated and recognized the support the university provided for them, they also described times where they went through situations that were challenging because of their race. These negative experiences made attending Southwestern University difficult at times. The next section discusses three related themes: (a) stereotyping, (b) alienation, and (c) same race conflict.

Stereotyping

Stereotyping occurs when negative generalizations are made about a group of people with shared characteristics (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013). Even though the participants believed the university was supportive of them, they shared occasions when they encountered people who treated them differently because of the color of their skin. James said, "I have had other races, people say, talk to me differently because I am black. They might say, 'Yo, wassup?' Opposed to just saying, 'How are you doing?'" James was surprised and upset by their greeting. He had not experienced being spoken to differently before when growing up in Illinois. For him, it was an example of a common negative stereotype about Black men being less academic than White

men (Iverson & Jagers, 2015). This common negative stereotype assumes that Black men are more “street” than “academic.” He doubted these same students would have addressed White peers in the same manner. However, his response was similar to what Iverson and Jagers (2015) discussed in their study, concluding that false assumptions can influence how people interact with others.

Dante also attributed his encounters with stereotyping while on campus. He described a time when he was promoting an organization in a public space. When Caucasian students walked by him, he noticed, “They don't even acknowledge your presence. While I was [standing at the table outside the student union], certain European Americans looked at me as if I was a hoodlum.” He further clarified that his appearance was professional, “clean cut...with no facial scruff.” He felt that no matter how professional his appearance was, White students assumed he was a stereotypical Black male, so he was viewed as a potential threat. These examples of microaggressions can have detrimental effects to self-esteem, academic success, and mental well-being according to Nadal et al. (2014). All of which can delay progress towards degree completion (Fischer, 2010).

These potentially harmful actions can also occur in anonymous spaces like social media sites. Dante shared that he had read racist posts by White students on social media about the Black students at SU. He said, “There are a lot of people that are European Americans that can be very verbal about their distaste for people of color...on Yik Yak,” a social media smartphone application. Students in this study found these statements by other students hurtful.

However, these negative comments were not limited to students. Some participants also experienced racist statements and actions made by faculty and staff. Bethany recalled a time

when she believed she was treated negatively by one of her professors because she was Black. She said:

I was the only Black person in my clinical group. She [the professor] started leaving very, very rude comments on my work. I literally had to sit with her, and I was like, “Well you could have worded it this [way], or you could have worded [it] that way.” I can take constructive criticism, but you can't just criticize me without saying what you want from me or being clear what your expectation are.

Bethany said her professor commented on one of her assignments, “This is not a complete sentence. Maybe you should go to the Writing Center for help constructing sentences.” Bethany believed her professor was being overly critical of her work, because she was Black. One of her White classmates said to her,

“I am so, so, so sorry that you have to go through this.” They were like, “Yeah, at this point I feel like our instructor is bullying you. You did way more work than I did, and she didn't write anything nearly as bad as that.”

This confirmed to Bethany that what she was experiencing was not imagined. While the exchange with the professor was negative, the positive outcome of seeing a classmate of a different race empathize with her was valuable.

Lori encountered stereotyping by a supervisor while working at the university. She explained:

I've had supervisors over me be very negative towards me about my race. Make very, you know, um, offensive comments to me and treat me very nasty. That was something that kind of came as a shock to me because I wasn't raised to see color. I wasn't raised to treat people different no matter where they came from, or who they are, or what they

have, or what they don't have. That's just not how I was raised, and it's not really the type of person that I am.

Sadly, even at a racially mixed institution that supported their success, the students felt that there were times when faculty, staff, and other students treated them negatively because of their race or ethnic background. These stereotypic responses demoralized the participants, which in turn could be perceived as a threat of intellectual inferiority (Friss-Britt & Turner, 2001).

Dante believed these attitudes are unique to the United States. He explained:

As a person of color, it's just, America is different for you. Believe it or not, you catch on to social cues. America has come a far way. However, certain things are still rooted in certain people, and it takes a strong individual to be able to uproot that teaching and uproot that behavior that was passed down to them from their parents. Nobody's born a racist. Nobody's born intolerant. Nobody's born believing that one person is better than the other. Those kind of barriers...are taught.

Although Dante suggested these viewpoints are learned at an early age through family and friends, he also noted that some people are able to change their thinking about other races. He said, "You will naturally learn about other people at [Southwestern University]. It has changed my viewpoint about people." He recognized that while people come to college with preconceived notions about people of different racial backgrounds, those ideas can be changed through interactions. The value of this recognition is supported by Berry's (2001) mutual acculturation theory as well as the research of Harper and Hurtado (2007) who reported that this is one of the primary benefits of cross-cultural interactions. Therefore, the participants were not immune to racist comments even though they attended an RMI, yet the campus environment provided opportunities to learn about "others" and change negative assumptions. This lesson

may not be as easily learned on less diverse campuses if they are not intentional about creating opportunities for inter-racial interactions (Harper & Hurtado, 2007).

Alienation

Although the students did appreciate the range of supports, which helped create a positive racial climate, on the whole, some participants felt that the activities offered by the university did not meet the needs of Black students on campus. For example, Ava said, “I would hear that a lot ...that involvement and inclusion is a big thing at [Southwestern University], [yet]... a lot of Black students aren't involved because they feel like events are not put on for them.” For example, these participants thought that other Black students did not feel homecoming or the New Student Orientation were provided for them as Black students. Bethany mentioned, “The Black community decided that there should be separate homecoming events from the university events because they did not feel that the University's homecoming events were inclusive enough.” Lori explained how Black students as a group responded:

I've seen them create their own...homecoming. They call it like “Black Homecoming.”

I've seen them do their own graduation. Like this past fall, they did a Black Excellence Graduation where they recognized and honored all of the graduating African-American students.

The participants thought Black students on campus offered these other events because they did not feel these larger university-sponsored events were culturally relevant to them. Therefore, institutional type did not eliminate a feeling of exclusion felt by some students at this RMI. However, the sheer number of Black students at SU may have helped them to create and offer events that did meet their needs. Therefore, they came together to create activities with which they identified.

In addition to these larger events, the Black community typically hosted a step show each year during Homecoming as a fund raiser for the Black Greek organizations. Bethany explained, “The university doesn't host specific events for Black alumni, so the African American community takes it upon themselves to do so.” This particular event is hosted on behalf of the Black alumni. It is a tradition within this community. In addition to offering culture-specific activities, it may be that these groups and the community at large served an additional purpose to provide a sort of reprieve from the racial microaggressions that were discussed above by some participants. While Hotchkins and Dancy (2017) found that students of color at PWIs sought out safe spaces around campus that were free of White peers, it may be that Black students at this RMI felt a similar need.

Same Race Conflict

As stated previously, the participants, at times, felt they were victims of racism by individuals who were not Black. However, a few of them also acknowledged that they experienced some conflicts with other Black students on campus. Lori provided an example of an interpersonal issue with other Black women on campus. She said, “I’ve had other Black girls not like me because I'm more fair-skinned than them, and that's something that I never thought was a thing or an issue.” In this instance, negative stereotyping was occurring between the Black students. Breland (1998) explained that lighter-toned Black people are perceived as being more aligned with European Americans, which are considered as more attractive and competent. Lori experienced being treated differently within her own race by other Black women because of this stereotype.

Sometimes the conflicts seemed less focused on differences in race, but in differences between people. Raven, a senior studying Sociology noted, “There was kind of a lot of conflict,

even within the [Black student] organizations. I was noticing just a lot of conflicts and now we weren't able to come and mesh together. So, that made it really difficult." Raven decided to "kind of step back and get involved in other organizations that were not Black." Therefore, she chose to refocus her energies, because of the personalities in some Black-student organizations. In this instance, the clashes led her to separate from other Black students. Therefore, this RMI did not offer a positive racial climate at all times for all the participants. In fact, there were occasions where conflicts led to a separation between individuals of the same race as well as distance from students of other races.

Meaningful Cross-Racial Interactions

Nevertheless, Harper and Hurtado (2007) posited that meaningful cross-racial interactions occur in intentional spaces allowing students to interact with other racial groups, which can lead to breaking down long-held racial stereotypes. These exchanges can occur in a range of settings like studying or dining together (Chang, Astin, & Kim, 2004; Saenz, Ngai, & Hurtado, 2007). This research also supports the theory that guided this study. The Modified Mutual Acculturation theory acknowledges the benefits of meaningful cross-racial interactions (Rabinowitz et al., 2005). The next section explores the formal and informal efforts of Black students at Southwestern University to interact with students of other racial backgrounds.

Formal Efforts

The participants thought Southwestern University demonstrated an institutional commitment to diversity and inclusion in a variety of ways. As Ava stated succinctly, "Diversity and inclusion...it's something that's like ingrained into you as you're entering the school, so people are more tolerant to other cultures." More specifically, one of those ways diversity was celebrated was in SU's approach to orientation. Those participants (i.e., Chanelle, Ava) who

worked in orientation talked about how their training materials incorporated material on diversity and inclusion when training orientation leaders. Ava added, “We had to go through our training for regular orientations and trainings for international orientation. It’s two different things...There’s a lot of culture differences.” So, the leaders were taught about racial and cultural differences to make sure the session was applicable to all incoming students.

Diversity did not stop at providing materials. Chanelle also believed the university valued diversity because of its selection of orientation leaders. She said:

That program [orientation] is really all about being diverse. Because we get a diverse group of students coming in, we want to make sure that every single orientation leader has something different, that when a student can look up there and see us all on stage, and be like, “I identify with that person, let me go with them.”

This orientation training created by SU gave Chanelle the perception that the University was committed to diversity because of the information provided to her about the unique issues linked to the various incoming student populations as well as the leader selection.

There were other locations outside of orientation that provided a space for meaningful interactions as well. One of those places was in organizations that were originally structured to meet the needs of one racial group. For example, the Black Nursing Student Associated (BSNA) was created for Black students that were part of the Nursing school and, as discussed earlier, provided spaces to connect with other Black students and see other Black professionals. Yet, many of the members were not Black. Bethany explained:

All the nursing organizations are divided by race.... So, you have the Black Student Nursing Association [BSNA], Hispanic Student Nursing Association, the Asian Student Nursing Association...but to be honest, in BSNA, we have a good amount of people that

are White and Mexican and Asian. So, it's really not a majority of Black students. They have their own race as an option for a club, but yet they still come with BSNA.

She believed that Nursing students from other racial backgrounds joined this nursing association for a number of reasons, such as, “BSNA is also the only nursing organization that host social events such as game nights. We also have committees for members to join so that they can have some leadership experiences and feel more involved.” She guessed that the opportunity to engage with other students interested in this career and gain valuable experience was more important than maintaining racial separations. However, she admitted that these were only guesses. Ultimately, she felt the organization provided her with same-race mentors and allowed her to expand her professional contacts to others interested in the field without taking race into consideration.

The participants also shared incidences when they interacted with students of different racial backgrounds during activities that intentionally paired different race-based organizations together. Bethany described several situations where her sorority interacted with other Greek organizations. She explained:

We do try to support each other sometimes. Like NPHC (National Pan-Hellenic Counsel) will go to the multi-cultural Greek stroll off. Or even within the council, just go to each other's event. And then, some sororities, like for my sorority, for Alpha Kappa Alpha, we have one person that's an Ambassador². So, that's one person that's in the student government position. Her connections actually help us a lot, too, because then

² Students who participate as Ambassadors act as “hosts/hostesses of [the institution]..The group maintains and promotes new and old campus pride and traditions; increases awareness of [campus] services, programs, and activities to students and the surrounding community; and establishes and strengthens pride and passion ... on and off campus” (Ambassadors, n.d.).

sometimes we're able to partner with different organizations that are different races.

Like we did a...tea with A-Chi-O. That's a predominantly White sorority. So, I think that positive interactions happen. I appreciate that.

These opportunities were important to her because she said that “the Greek community...it's really divided.” Nevertheless, these interracial events were good experiences for Bethany.

In spite of these positive opportunities, a few of the participants complained that only a limited number of Black students were engaged in campus activities and enjoyed their benefits. For example, they voiced frustrations that many Black students, particularly Black males, chose not to be engaged in any student activities. James became an active leader during his second year at Southwestern University. However, he noted

If we have events going on, it's hard to get the black males involved on campus. Like, the women will come out, but it's hard to get [Black males to participate in] even the Black Leadership Institute... I don't know why that is.

The Black Leadership Institute selects participants, like James, to go through a series of workshops geared towards enhancing leadership skills, providing education about African culture, and motivating Black students to succeed both inside and outside of the classroom. However, the lack of Black men in leadership positions left James feeling frustrated.

Bethany also felt that the “Black community does separate itself while saying that they want the university [to be] more inclusive;” yet, they choose not to participate in traditional organizations. She felt that “the way to be more inclusive is to hold positions in student government, hold positions in Ambassador, where they make those decisions. We don't have enough black people in government positions at [Southwestern University].” These student leaders plan and implement university-wide events and help teach other students about the core

values of SU. Taking on these positions would ensure Black students' voices were represented in activity planning and student events. However, it would require more Black students to invest in holding leadership roles. Therefore, it is a vicious circle for the students who feel the campus organizations do not consider their interests, but they do not get engaged in them to try and make the events more inclusive.

This disconnect was mentioned by some of the participants who thought one reason Black students may not be engaged is because of the limited number of Black administrators and faculty who could mentor them. Chanelle said:

I think that there needs to possibly be a little more African-American women and even men in maybe the faculty aspect of everything, I don't think I've ever met an African-American woman professor. What you want to see the most is when you turn on your TV or when you go to meetings or when you do other things, is people who look like you in high positions.

She felt that seeing Black faculty would send a positive message to the students. It would demonstrate that people that looked like them are successful. Then, the institution's position about the value of diversity would be represented by their actions. More specifically, McMickens (2012) recommended hiring faculty who are alumni of HBCUs because they are dedicated to racial and social justice, which would benefit all students of color.

Nevertheless, the participants felt the university and its representatives sent a clear message to the student body about the institution's stance on diversity and inclusion. Whether it came through an email from the university president or a town hall meeting, the student body understood that there was "zero tolerance" for hate or racism on campus. Chanelle recalled "(The President) put out an email... [which said] we do not tolerate [racist actions] here. If you

see this, say something, tell your professors, tell your teacher.” At another point, Ava said, “There was [a racial slur] written in the bathroom, and the President had to make a statement about it.” These were just two examples of how the leadership at SU made it very clear that racism was unacceptable on campus.

Nevertheless, the participants had differing opinions of the University’s responses to individual incidents of racism. Chanelle recalled a time when a fraternity member used a racial slur towards a Black student. The University’s response was to hold a town hall meeting to discuss the incident. Chanelle said:

We had a town hall with [the president of the university], the chief of police, the assistant chief of police, three sociology professors who came and talked to us about race relations...They’re all about education and nipping things in the bud here at [Southwestern University].

Bethany, on the other hand, was not satisfied with the University’s response. She said, “Nothing basically happened, because you had some of the Black people over there, “Oh, we don't want an apology because an apology doesn't really do anything. We want change.” While she recognized that the University held a meeting to openly discuss the event, the communication between the University and the Black students did not leave Bethany with the belief that the situation was resolved adequately. She wanted to see some action taken, but only got an apology.

Thus, though most participants felt the University took an active role whenever there was a racial incident on campus, Bethany felt like the institutional actions were not authentic. For her, the actions were viewed as a way for the administration to meet a requirement or fulfill a task, which was unsatisfying. Bethany explained,

It's almost like sports...to reach targets and stuff most of the time. It's not genuine. For example, if one of the goals for the organization is to interact or build a relationship with other Greek organizations, then they will host an event together but there isn't a continued effort to build a genuine relationship between the two organizations.

As a result, Bethany interpreted the institutional efforts as inadequate. Therefore, like the students in Vega's (2014) study, the campus response was not perceived as sufficient when faced with a racial incident.

In fact, the students in this study described differing perspectives about how the University handled diversity and inclusion on campus. While most of them perceived the administration acted effectively by immediately addressing racist behavior, one student felt the meetings were insufficient, because they did not lead to ongoing interactions and actual change.

Informal Efforts

While these students had formal spaces to interact (Harper & Hurtado, 2007), the truly transformational situations seemed to have come from students interacting with other students informally. It seemed that more often it was in one-on-one interactions with students of other races or ethnicities in private spaces that led the participants to true change. For instance, Lori described her first friendship with a White person who was a roommate of one of her Black high school friends. She said she "actually became very good friends" with this student. Lori explained:

What made the friendship so wonderful for me was that it was my first interracial friendship that was not just surface. We were very close friends and that was something no matter race, gender, or anything that I always wanted was just a true friend.

This new connection with a White student was a first for Lori. She was able to experience friendship with someone culturally different than herself. Perhaps, most important, Lori said this experience made a difference in the way she viewed people from other racial backgrounds.

The participants' past experiences of racism led them to be reticent to reach out to White colleagues; however, sometimes it was these interactions that were the most impactful. Bethany talked about how her Nursing school colleagues provided her a lot of encouragement. She said:

The people that I started nursing school with...I mean, it's been super positive...I don't think anybody's looked down at me because of my race. I feel like most people would look up to me because I'm a mom, and I'm in nursing school, and I work, and I'm still involved in orgs [organizations]. So, if anything, I feel like they look up to me.

Bethany felt that the students in her Nursing program from various racial backgrounds respected her, which made their interactions personally rewarding. Bethany admitted that her classmates gave her some reassurance that her hard work and dedication were characteristics that others admired about her.

Similarly, James drew a connection between the experiences that he had as a Black student with another marginalized group – the Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning (LGBTQ+) population. He said, “I think it's funny, because a lot of the programs with diversity and, LGBTQ+ programs, a lot of them parallels with the struggles of African-Americans in this country, so I mean, that has opened my eyes a lot.” The introduction to other marginalized populations on campus helped him to relate the struggle of Blacks in America to other groups. This understanding of shared struggles between some marginalized groups helped James become more accepting of people that were different from himself. This change was the result of exposure to diversity at Southwestern University.

Other participants also talked about the value of learning about different racial and ethnic groups because it reshaped their understandings of other diverse populations. For example, Raven discussed her experience meeting peers from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds as a Sociology major:

I had a really good experience, and a lot of that mainly came from my study groups or inside my classes. I got a chance to kind of talk to people about their different experience as being someone that's Indian, or Latino, or Caucasian. And because they were also open and really receptive, that relationship, or that study group really kind of meshed in and flowed together. I had really positive outcomes with that.

Raven and some of the other participants acknowledged how their classes created opportunities for meaningful connections with people from different racial and cultural backgrounds. As a result, they became more open towards others, because they saw their peers being more open to them.

In Chanelle's case, she held negative assumptions about Latina/o students until she got to know them at SU. She explained:

I spoke of preconceived notions about the popular stereotypes of Hispanics. I have seen a change in myself over the years. The ones I have encountered and have had the privilege to work with, are intelligent, hardworking students ready to face the 'real world' and take on a job they love. I no longer jump to the stereotypical conclusion but take the time to get to know them individually.

At the time of this interview, there were political events in the United States surrounding illegal immigration and sanctuary cities in relation to the Hispanic community. As a consequence of her upbringing and the information she gleaned from the news, Chanelle admitted she had

inaccurate perceptions about Hispanic people. Those views changed once she had the opportunity to get to know Hispanic students at Southwestern University.

The other participants had similar reactions. Travis said his in-class interactions taught him “a lot more about some cultures that [he’d] never seen before.” Raven, an American Black, echoed these views about the International students she met. She explained:

I didn't know that there were...different types of Africans. Or people, even in the Indian community. So, with that being said, it kind of opened my eyes a little bit more. It definitely opened my eyes because I grew up kind of in a really small town. So, I think it opened my eyes in a positive way.

Exposure to these more diverse populations provided the students with a broader view of the world than they had prior to coming to Southwestern University, which also reduced their prejudices.

Another example was shared by Bethany. She talked about how much she learned by interacting with people from different backgrounds. She spoke specifically about the international students she met. She said, that it “was really cool...to talk with them and learn about their upbringing and try their food and learn their dances.” Getting to know the African students was particularly surprising to her, because their lives seemed so different from her own. She said she noticed that their parents “are paying their books, their housing, their allowance, their car, like everything.” Although she knew that was not true for all these students, it was true for many of them. This was a surprise for her for two reasons. First, “most of the international students, they aren't able to work, because they don't have a visa to work.” So, if they wanted to attend college in the United States, it was necessary for “their parents [to supply] everything for them over here.” The second point was that she had assumed that people

“from back in Africa or whatever” were poor. She admitted that when she became friends with African students, she “thought that it was amazing how not everyone from Africa lived in poverty. That just blew my mind because I never saw successful Africans growing up.” She summed this up:

It just wasn't something I was educated about growing up, but I have some many African friends now, from different parts of Africa, and they're coming to school with their parents paying for everything. I understand it's a third world country, but everybody over there isn't broke.

She reached the same view as the other participants stating, “To be honest, I learned my perception and everything about Africa was so thrown off to what it really is.” Getting to know students from more diverse backgrounds was an important aspect of these students’ college experience because it led to developing a less-biased perspective of others. Harper and Hurtado (2007) reached a similar conclusion that meaningful engagement between racially different groups of students could potentially “interrupt longstanding segregation trends in society” (p. 14). This finding speaks directly to the value of a racially mixed institution that provides many formal and informal locations for these types of interactions.

Summary

In this chapter, my findings represent the views of eight Black students at Southwestern University. The chapter explored the students’ perceptions and experiences with support systems, both formally and informally. Unfortunately, even though they attended a RMI, they were not immune to experiencing various conflicts with students from other racial groups as well as their own. Nevertheless, the students spoke of meaningful cross-racial interactions, which shaped their views of people from different racial backgrounds. This connection supports the

findings of Rabinowitz et al (2005) and Harper and Hurtado (2007) whose research stressed the benefits of attending diverse institutions.

Chapter 5

Conclusions and Implications

This phenomenological study explored the college experiences of upper-division Black students at a Southwestern public research RMI. Using Mutual Acculturation Theory, four research questions framed the study. The theory focused on ingroup ethnic identity and othergroup orientation. This chapter summarizes the findings of those research questions and provides implications for future research and practice.

Summary of Findings

A qualitative methodology was used in this study to learn more about the perceptions of Black student leaders who were in their junior and senior years at a RMI. The main findings are presented in the following four subsections organized by the four research questions that guided the study.

Research Question 1: How do Black students describe their interactions with persons of different races and ethnicities at a Southwestern public research RMI?

Many of the participants recognized the institutional or formal efforts to provide cross-racial interactions. A few participants, specifically, found some formally organized efforts like the Black Student Association (BSA), orientation, and even their Greek letter organizations offered meaningful opportunities to connect with students from other racial and ethnic groups. Nevertheless, one student felt that the university leadership's efforts were disingenuous – only marking off a list of actions to demonstrate a commitment to diversity and inclusion. Other students perceived that Black students on campus, more broadly, were uninterested in participating in the university-sponsored events because they did not feel the activities were tailored to their interests.

The students described both positive and negative experiences when reflecting on their interactions with students from different racial backgrounds. The interactions that were informal or student-initiated were particularly meaningful to the majority of the participants. This perspective supports previous research from Harper and Hurtado (2007) that found that meaningful cross-racial interactions occurred in unplanned spaces allowing students to interact with other racial groups in a worthwhile way. These meaningful interactions can include things like studying or dining together (Chang, Astin, & Kin, 2004; Saenz, Ngai, & Hurtado, 2007). Although the participants did not specifically talk about these types of interactions, they did value the opportunities provided through professional and social organizations and friendship groups that led to positive interactions. Further, they often credited these interactions in developing a revised understanding of students from other countries and different backgrounds.

While the participants described the majority of their cross-racial interactions as positive, some of the students experienced stereotyping from people of other races at Southwestern University. These negative exchanges occurred with other students, faculty, and staff. The students who participated in the study related the negative interactions directly to their race. As a result, there were occasions when they felt alienated and marginalized. Although these students did persist, research has found similar actions can cause students to transfer or drop out of an institution (Griffin et al., 2016). Even though some of these students considered transferring during their time at SU, they all decided to stay because of the support of the staff, the faculty, and their friendship groups.

Research Question 2: How do Black students describe their interactions with persons of the same race and ethnic backgrounds at a Southwestern public research RMI?

Even though Southwestern is a diverse institution, only 15.2% of the students are Black. Therefore, the participants described the community as small, but close-knit. They often spent time together because it made them feel like they were part of a community. There was a strong network of support between them through applications like GroupMe. They were able to get advice and support simply by asking questions of other Black students within the application.

While the majority of experiences were positive, some students described events that were not. There were times when Black students were openly critical of one another. This criticism came in the form of judging other Black students because of the shade of their skin to personality clashes between individuals in Black-focused organizations. This ingroup conflict led the students to separate themselves from these organizations.

Finally, several of the participants expressed frustration with the lack of leadership from within the Black student population, especially Black males. Black students were seen as criticizing campus events for not being designed with their interests in mind, but they were not eager to play a leadership role in planning these activities. The leaders who participated in the study did not know how to motivate other Black students to take on such roles. This view led the participants to express disappointment. They felt strongly that Black students must get involved in leadership positions to represent the wants and needs of the Black student body on campus if they wanted to make real changes and more effectively represent Black student interests in activities.

Research Question 3: Do Black students perceive their interactions with students at a Southwestern public research RMI have affected their perceptions of other races? If so, how?

All participants believed that their experiences at Southwestern University made them more accepting of people from different racial backgrounds. The diverse environment allowed for meaningful interactions with other students from around the world, providing opportunities to talk to and ask questions about their upbringing and cultural practices. These conversations dispelled some incorrect assumptions of other racial and ethnic groups for these participants. These findings are aligned with Miller and Sujitparapitaya's (2010) study that found that nurturing these relationships throughout college developed a greater acceptance of other ethnic groups by the end of their college experience.

Research Question 4: Do Black students perceive the campus culture of their RMI affected their persistence at the institution? Is so, how?

The students had varying experiences with different people on campus. Some spoke in great detail about the support they received from staff, particularly advisors, while attending SU. One participant spoke of an advisor using personal funds to ensure that he would be able to have access to a test that was required for entry into his program of study. According to some of the participants, this support played a significant role in their decision to remain at the college. This finding supports previous research (Chang, 1999; Johnson et al., 2013; Milem et al., 2005) that reported that Black students attending RMIs have a greater commitment to their institutions, which leads to higher persistence rates. The participants believed that their advisors were there to assist them and help them persist and thrive at SU. Most important, these relationships were critical to providing the support the students needed when they faced unexpected difficulties in college.

The students who participated in the study also reported the friendships and support they got through their various programs of study was key to their success. The participants felt they

received a lot of support from other students they took classes with and believed that they could reach out at any time for help. This support was both emotional and academic. Ultimately, many new friendships were made in their majors that were essential to the students' decisions to remain at Southwestern University.

There were a few scenarios when the participants did not feel welcomed by faculty and staff. These students took steps to confront the persons that made them feel that they were being treated differently because of their race. One example was when a student was told to visit the Writing Center for assistance. This same student confronted the faculty member about this perceived mistreatment based on the color of her skin. While no resolution was found in this scenario, the support the student received from other students was critical to her decision to stay.

These findings suggest that this RMI did offer support and opportunities for interracial discussions, which were viewed as valuable by the participants. However, the students who participated in this study were not immune to racist comments within their ingroup and outgroups, leading them to separate themselves from others on occasion. The institution also did not always offer events that the participants felt were designed with their cultural interests in mind. They believed this was why Black students on campus may not be as engaged in campus-sanctioned events as these leaders might wish. Yet, the size of their population did allow them the ability to create and participate in additional events that better served their interests. Also, in spite of some individual instances, notwithstanding, the nature of the RMI allowed them to find staff, faculty, and friendship groups to support their academic and personal goals. These benefits were credited to the institution's articulated position on the value of diversity and the positive climate that view supported.

Recommendations

This study was only a beginning to explore the experience of Black students attending a RMI. The Modified Mutual Acculturation theory served as a valuable tool to explore how the participants strengthened their own cultural identity while valuing the cultural backgrounds of other groups. As such, the findings of this study yielded a number of recommendations for future research and practice. The chapter concludes with a summary of this study's significance.

Implications for Future Research

This study's purpose was to explore the college experiences of upper-division Black students at a Southwestern public research RMI. The findings of this study are not generalizable to other universities with diverse populations. As institutions become more diverse, this line of research could shed light on critical issues affecting the success of Black students on these campuses. Therefore, future researchers might consider both qualitative and quantitative studies of postsecondary institutions that are considered racially mixed to better understand Black students' experiences in the Southwest as well as other regions of the country. The state in which this study was conducted has a large Hispanic population, which may affect the larger context for these students. For this reason, investigating institutions in other states, which have different demographics, may reveal how the larger population may play a critical role in the student experience as well. In addition, it would be beneficial to understand the experiences of other student populations attending RMIs, so future research might explore the college experiences of Whites, Hispanics, Native Americans, and other groups that make up the student body of other RMIs.

Future research might also focus on the relationship between Black students and university faculty and staff. These relationships were mentioned by all of the participants. This indicates that these relationships impact the Black student experience while attending college,

but it is unclear how that relationship may vary at different types of institutions. Future research might also better inform the field of perceived racial microaggressions in the classroom towards students of color (Nadal et al., 2014). Positive experiences with faculty can lessen the level of stress related to the campus environment (Johnson et al., 2014) and may help address achievement gaps.

The final recommendation for future research is in the area of university events/actions that are intended to represent all students on campus. This study found that SU demonstrated a commitment to diversity and inclusion in the initial welcome of new students but for one student this pledge was not sustained throughout the school year. Research might focus on which specific actions taken by the university contributed to Black students' success. The lessons learned from these types of studies could provide valuable guidance to other institutions with diverse student populations.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study are beneficial to college campuses to better meet the needs of Black students. The students indicated several factors that can improve Black students' experiences. First, the university could ensure the faculty and staff are representative of the student body. The participants in this study were clear about the importance of seeing people like themselves in successful roles because it encouraged them to believe that they, too, could be successful in their professional endeavors. University administration should be cognizant of the faculty and staff they choose to hire as these decisions impact the students in multiple ways.

Second, the university could improve their responses to events that caused their students to feel unwelcomed or unsafe on campus. There could be more dialogue between the student body and administration throughout the year, which may improve the campus climate, in general,

and, in specific, show an administration dedicated to creating an inclusive environment for all students. These ongoing efforts will create a more trusting and authentic relationship between leadership and the student body, which may help deter racist actions and/or help administrators react to hostile events if and when they occur. These ongoing conversations would also demonstrate a more genuine commitment to diversity and inclusion if facilitated throughout the year rather than as a reaction to a racial incident. Previous research (McMickens, 2012; Shorette II & Palmer, 2005) talked about the value of racial discussions at HBCUs to teach students the skills to address their feelings about racial incidences. These skills helped the students in their lives after college. Therefore, an intentional and ongoing effort at this RMI might not only help reduce microaggressions and/or racial events, but help teach students, faculty, and staff how to effectively deal with these actions if they occur.

Finally, universities could provide professional development opportunities related to diversity and inclusive practices to enrich the knowledge of new faculty and staff upon entering such racially mixed institutional environments. These personnel may inadvertently hold different students to different standards, which may prove alienating to students of color. This study found that the interactions between some Black students and faculty and staff were problematic and negatively impacted the student experience.

Significance

The study was significant for two main reasons. First, it adds to the limited research on Black student experiences attending a RMI. Previous research focused on their experiences at other institutional types (i.e., PWIs and HBCUs), but not at a more diverse campus like a RMI. As campuses become more diverse, a better understanding of the Black student experience on

these campuses is critical to tease out how the campus climate contributes to or hinders student success.

Second, the study provided greater understanding of how the Modified Mutual Acculturation theory informs the student experience at a RMI. The theory suggests there are benefits from students having positive interactions with students from other racial backgrounds. However, even though this was a diverse campus, the participants of this study had some mixed reactions on this point. Most of the participants had positive experiences when interacting with people from different racial backgrounds while others mentioned isolated negative interactions because of their race.

The theory also asserts that students need opportunities to strengthen their ingroup ethnic identity. The findings from the current study support this point. Black students valued the smaller community composed of Black students which provided a place where they felt they belonged and a sense of family while away at college (Winkle-Wagner & McCoy, 2016). Further, these participants strengthened their ingroup ethnic identities through various organizations developed for and by Black students.

Additionally, the theory notes that the meaningful ingroup and outgroup interactions should lead to a greater acceptance of people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Ultimately, all participants stated that they had a greater acceptance of people from different racial backgrounds because of their experiences at Southwestern University. All of these gains contributed to the students' perception of a supportive campus climate that impacted their decision to remain in school at this Southwestern RMI.

Conclusion

There has been much research on the experiences of Black students at both Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) and Predominately White Institutions (PWI). As the United States becomes a more diverse country so, too, are its universities (Johnson, Wasserman, Yildirim, & Yonai, 2013; Milem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005; Turner et al., 2008). The current study provided some insight into the experiences of Black students at one racially mixed institution (RMI). The experiences of these eight individuals reconfirms that cross-cultural interactions can lead students to revise long-held prejudices while strengthening their own racial identities. This lesson is a hopeful sign in this divisive period in our nation's history.

Appendix A

IRB Approval Letter

May 21, 2018

Melissa Ann Brown
Dr. Barbara Tobolowsky
Educational Leadership & Policy Studies
The University of Texas at Arlington
Box 19575

Protocol Number: 2018-0556

Protocol Title: *BLACK STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF CAMPUS CLIMATE AT A RACIALLY MIXED INSTITUTION*

APPROVAL OF MINIMAL RISK HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH WITHOUT FEDERAL FUNDING

The University of Texas Arlington Institutional Review Board (UTA IRB) or designee has reviewed your protocol and made the determination that this research study involving human subjects is approved in accordance with UT Arlington's [Standard Operating Procedures \(SOPs\)](#) for minimal risk research. You are therefore authorized to begin the research as of **May 21, 2018**.

Note that this project is not covered by UTA's Federalwide Assurance (FWA) and the researcher has indicated it will not receive federal funding. You must inform Regulatory Services immediately if the project may or will receive federal funding in the future, as this will require that the protocol be re-reviewed in accordance with the federal regulations for the protection of human subjects.

As Principal Investigator of this IRB approved study, the following items are your responsibility throughout the life of the study:

UNANTICIPATED ADVERSE EVENTS

Please be advised that as the Principal Investigator, you are required to report local adverse (unanticipated) events to The UT Arlington Office of Research Administration; Regulatory Services within 24 hours of the occurrence or upon acknowledgement of the occurrence.

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

The IRB approved version of the informed consent document (ICD) must be used when prospectively enrolling volunteer participants into the study. Unless otherwise determined by the IRB, all signed consent forms must be securely maintained on the UT Arlington campus for the duration of the study plus a minimum of three years after the completion of all study procedures (including data analysis). The complete study record is subject to inspection and/or audit during this time period by entities including but not limited to the UT Arlington IRB, Regulatory Services staff, OHRP, FDA, and by study sponsors (as applicable).

Appendix B

Recruitment E-mail

Recruitment E-mail

Dear student,

My name is Melissa Brown. I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies department at UT Arlington. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study for my dissertation. I am interested in hearing from Black students who are juniors or seniors at [Southwestern University]. I am interested in learning more about how the campus climate over a minimum of 60 semester credit hours at [Southwestern] has impacted your college experiences.

If you are willing to volunteer to participate in a one-on-one interview via Skype or FaceTime, please contact me either my email (Melissa.abrown@mavs.uta.edu) or phone (817-718-XXXX). You may text my cell phone as well. Thank you for your time and consideration about participating in my dissertation study. I hope to get the chance to hear about your experiences as an undergraduate student at [Southwestern].

Sincerely,

Melissa A. Brown

Appendix C

Thank You Email

Thank You E-mail

Dear student,

Thank you for your interest in participating in my study. Please complete the attached Participant Profile Form. This step will make sure you are eligible to participate in the study. I am seeking Black students who are juniors and seniors at the University. This requires that you have spent a minimum of 60 semester credit hours enrolled at Southwestern's campus. After you have completed the form either scan it or take a picture and send it to my email address (Melissa.abrown@mavs.uta.edu) or phone (817-817-XXX). I will review your Profile Participant Form and let you know by email if you have been selected to participate in the study.

Sincerely,

Melissa A. Brown

Appendix D

UT Arlington Informed Consent

UT Arlington
Informed Consent Document

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Melissa A. Brown
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Doctoral Student
The University of Texas at Arlington
(817) 718-XXXX
Melissa.abrown@mavs.uta.edu

FACULTY ADVISOR

Dr. Barbara Tobolowsky
Associate Professor, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
University of Texas at Arlington
(817) 272-7269
tobolow@uta.edu

TITLE OF PROJECT

Black Students' Perceptions of Campus Climate at a Racially Mixed Institution

INTRODUCTION

You are being asked to participate in a research study about the impact campus climate has had on your college experience. Your participation is voluntary. Refusal to participate or discontinuing your participation at any time will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you have any questions about this research study, please contact the primary investigator, Melissa A. Brown, whose contact information is listed above.

PURPOSE

The specific purpose(s) of this research study is to learn about your experience as a Black undergraduate student at a racially mixed institution.

DURATION

Participation in this study will last approximately 30-60 minutes.

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS

The number of anticipated participants in this research study is a minimum 25.

PROCEDURES

The procedures which will involve you as a research participant include:

1. Contact the researcher declaring interest in participating in the study.
2. Completing the enclosed Participant Profile form.
3. Signing the Informed Consent form for UTA.
4. If you meet the specific criteria for this study, you will participate in a one-on-one interview with researcher that could last between 30-60 minutes. The interview will be audio recorded. After the interview, the recording will be transcribed, which means it will be typed exactly as it was recorded, word-for-word, by the researcher. The recording will be destroyed after transcription. The researcher may contact you after the interview to

clarify something you shared that became inaudible through the recording. The researcher will call to ensure the experiences you shared were accurately interpreted in the process of reviewing of your transcript.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS

While there will be no direct benefit to you, the sharing of your story as an undergraduate student at a racially mixed institution could potentially impact future students and university leadership. The findings may influence how universities structure events, services, and curriculum to meet the needs of all students.

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

There are no perceived risks or discomforts for participating in this research study. Should you experience any discomfort please inform the researcher, you have the right to quit the study at any time at no consequence.

COMPENSATION

There is no compensation associated with this research study.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES

There are no alternative procedures offered for this study. However, you can elect not to participate in the study or quit at any time at no consequence.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Participation in this research study is voluntary. You have the right to decline participation in any or all study procedures or quit at any time at no consequence.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Every attempt will be made to see that your study results are kept confidential. A copy of this signed consent form and all data collected from this study will be stored on the researcher's personal drive within a secure network for at least three (3) years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a participant. Additional research studies could evolve from the information you have provided, but your information will not be linked to you in anyway; it will be anonymous. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, the UTA Institutional Review Board (IRB), and personnel particular to this research have access to the study records. Your records will be kept completely confidential according to current legal requirements. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as noted above. The IRB at UTA has reviewed and approved this study and the information within this consent form. If in the unlikely event it becomes necessary for the Institutional Review Board to review your research records, the University of Texas at Arlington will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law.

No one in connection to you at UTA will ever see your individual responses. At the end of the Participant Profile Form, you will select a pseudonym for the researcher to use when sharing your experiences. The only persons who will know the name you have chosen is the researcher and you.

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS

Questions about this research study may be directed to Melissa A. Brown at Melissa.abrown@mavs.uta.edu or (817) 718-XXXX or Dr. Barbara Tobolowsky, tobolow@uta.edu or (817) 272-7269. Any questions you may have about your rights as a research participant or a research-related injury may be directed to the Office of Research Administration; Regulatory Services at 817-272-2105 or regulatoryservices@uta.edu.

As a representative of this study, I have explained the purpose, the procedures, the benefits, and the risks that are involved in this research study:

Signature and printed name of principal investigator or person obtaining consent Date

CONSENT

By signing below, you confirm that you are 18 years of age or older and have read or had this document read to you. You have been informed about this study's purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks, and you have received a copy of this form. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions before you sign, and you have been told that you can ask other questions at any time.

You voluntarily agree to participate in this study. By signing this form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits, to which you are otherwise entitled.

SIGNATURE OF VOLUNTEER

DATE

Appendix E

Participant Profile Form

Participant Profile Form

Please complete this form and either e-mail it to me at Melissa.abrown@mavs.uta.edu , or you can take a picture of the completed form and text it to me at 817-718-XXXX. All information on this form will be kept confidential and will only be used for this study.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Phone Number: _____ Age: _____

E-mail: _____

Gender: Male _____ Female _____ Other _____

Race: _____ Asian _____ Black _____ Caucasian _____ Hispanic _____ Other _____

Were you born in the United States? _____ yes _____ no

What is your current classification? _____ Freshman _____ Sophomore _____ Junior _____ Senior

Number of Semester Credit Hours (SCH) completed at Southwestern: _____

Student Status: _____ Full-time _____ Part-time

Major: _____

Organizations involved in since attending Southwestern (If any):

Leadership Positions held since attending Southwestern (if any):

Do you currently or have you ever worked at Southwestern? _____ yes _____ no

What office/position? _____

Chosen Pseudonym – Your real name will not be used in this study for any reason. You will be referred to by a pseudonym. Please state the name you would like me to use if you participate in this study. It can be the name you wish you had, your favorite childhood friend, or something completely random.

Chosen Pseudonym (First name only)

Appendix F
Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol (for interviewer use only)

Primary question: What are the college experiences of upper-division Black students at a Southwestern public research RMI?

Question 1: How do Black students describe their interactions with persons of different races and ethnicities at a Southwestern public research RMI?

Question 2: How do Black students describe their interactions with persons of the same race and ethnic backgrounds at a Southwestern public research RMI?

Question 3: Do Black students perceive their interactions with students at a Southwestern public research RMI have affected their perceptions of other races? If so, how?

Question 4: Do Black students perceive the campus culture of their RMI affected their persistence at the institution? If so, how?

- 1) Tell me why you chose to attend UTA?
- 2) What did you expect your experience as a student at UTA would be like? (Socially, academically, etc.)
- 2) Tell me about your experiences related to your involvement on campus?
- 3) UTA is characterized as a diverse campus. What does that mean to you?
 - i) Probe: How do you perceive the racial atmosphere at UTA?
- 4) How would you describe the relationship between the different racial groups at UTA?
 - i) Probe: Witnessed/experienced seeing positive interactions between racial groups?
 - ii) Probe: Witnessed/experienced conflict between racial groups?
- 5) Describe your experiences with people outside your own race while on campus?
 - i) Probe: Do you think your experience is different than it would have been at a less diverse campus? Please explain.
- 6) How would you describe the relationship between Black students at UTA?
 - i) Probe: Witnessed/experienced seeing positive interactions between Blacks?
 - ii) Probe: Witnessed/experienced conflict between Blacks?
- 7) Describe your experiences with people of the same race as you while on campus?
 - i) Probe: Do you think your experience is different than it would have been at a less diverse campus? Please explain.
- 8) Has the campus climate at UTA affected your decision to remain in college/ at UTA? Please explain.
 - i) Probe: Feel like you belong on campus? Explain. Provide an example of an experience that reflects your experience.
 - ii) Feel like you have Support on campus? From whom? Explain. Provide an example of an experience that reflects your experience.
- 9) Has your experience at UTA changed your perception of people of other races? If so, please tell me more. If not, why not?
- 10) Is there anything else you want to share about your college experience at UTA or anything we have not discussed that you would like for me to know?
- 11) May I contact you again if I have other questions?

Appendix G

List of Organizations

List of Organizations

Student Ambassador – “serve as the official student hosts/hostesses of [Southwestern University] under the direction of Mr. and Ms. [Southwestern University]” ([Southwestern University] Student Governance website, n.d.).

Black Leadership Institute – “provides an excellent opportunity to coalition build among the African American community at the [Southwestern University]” ([Southwestern University] Multicultural Affairs website, n.d.).

BSA – “Black Student Association is dedicated to teaching, uniting, and networking with all students, while celebrating the African-American culture” ([Southwestern University] BSA website, n.d.).

BSNA – “Black student Nurses Association is a student nursing organization developed in 1993 that functions as a support and networking group” ([Southwestern University] BSNA website, n.d.).

Delta Sigma Theta – “a Black Greek sorority is comprised of more than 260,000 members and over 900 chapters worldwide, making Delta the largest Black Greek Sorority” (Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. website, n.d.).

Phi Beta Sigma – “Black Greek fraternity committed to brotherhood, scholarship, and service” (Phi Beta Sigma website, n.d.).

FOL – “Freshman Orientation Leaders are the first to welcome new students and parents during the summer orientation program” ([Southwestern University] Freshman Orientation Leader website, n.d.).

MultiMav – Multicultural Mavericks help host campus celebrations for student groups including: Hispanic/Latinx Heritage Month, Asian/Pacific Islander Heritage Month, Black History Month,

Native American History Month, and Women's History Month ([Southwestern University] multicultural affairs website.).

NAACP – National Association for the Advancement for Colored People strives to “empower, promote equality, and positively impact our campus and community through educational events, community service, and political forums” ([Southwestern University] NAACP website, n.d.).

NACWC – National Association of Colored Women’s Club, Inc. is committed to: promote the education of women and children, raise the standards of the home, improve conditions of family living, work for the moral, economic, social and religious welfare of women and children, protect the rights of women and children, secure and enforce civil and political rights for the African American race, and promote interracial understanding so that justice may prevail among all people (NACWC, April 2019).

RA –Resident Assistants are students selected on the basis of leadership, experience, scholarship and the desire to help resident students realize their potential for personal-development through group living ([Southwestern University] RA website, n.d.).

SAAC – “Student-Athlete Advisory Committee provides student-athletes the opportunity to communicate more effectively with [Southwestern University’s] athletic administration, coaches, and staff” ([Southwestern University] SAAC website, n.d.).

Sun-Belt Conference - a collegiate athletic conference

Zeta Mu Sorority – Latin Sorority that provides a sisterhood based on unity, love, and respect, develops strong leaders who will then provide and practice political, social and cultural activities, promote unity through charitable and educational programs, and maintain a higher standard of learning and serve as a voice for all students (Zeta Mu Facebook website, n.d.).

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Biographical Information

Melissa Brown is from Shreveport, Louisiana. She earned her Bachelor's in Sociology (1996) and Master's in Education (1998) from Louisiana Tech University. She has served as a public-school teacher and a college instructor. She is an avid believer in assessment and accreditation and an overall champion of education. Her research interests include topics of social justice, campus climate, as well as, practices in assessment and strategic initiatives. Melissa plans to embrace her upcoming gift of time returned to her upon graduation by going hiking, kayaking, and traveling.