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The Color of Conduct: A S.I.S.T.A.'S Tale of Race, Housing,
and Higher Education

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A Dissertation Submitted to The Graduate School at the University of Missouri-St.
Louis
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Doctor of Education in Educational Practice

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Abstract

S.I.S.T.A., suffering in silence to be acknowledged, is an acronym that symbolizes the hidden voices of Black women in higher education and abroad. This study examined the experiences of a graduate student woman of color impacted by university housing policies and practices as a judicial student conduct officer at a historically white institution. Using autoethnography as a methodology, grounded in critical race theory (CRT) as a theoretical framework, this qualitative study aims to highlight the ways Black women can and have been harmed in predominant white spaces and processes within higher education. The application of the aforementioned frameworks found the major themes: (a) power vs. resistance, (b) shifting in the Black body, (c) humanizing Black students and staff, and (d) I AM MORE than melanin to be critical in uncovering Black women voices and moving the field of higher education forward.

INDEX WORDS: student conduct, university housing, conduct sanction, Black, Black woman, African American, critical race theory, autoethnography, higher education, historically white institution

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to the Black women who work tirelessly behind the scenes at higher education institutions and receive little to no credit for their brilliance

S.I.S.T.A. , I SEE you

I dedicate this dissertation to the Black women who have welcomed Black students into their hearts and have created a safe place for them to call home

S.I.S.T.A. , I HONOR you

I dedicate this dissertation to the Black women who dreamed of going to college but were not able to. Don't allow your dream to die with you.

S.I.S.T.A. , I ENCOURAGE you

I dedicate this dissertation to the Black women in my village who have supported, uplifted, and comforted me in my darkest moments

S.I.S.T.A. , I LOVE you

I dedicate this dissertation to my grandparents: Jackie Etier, Ernest Etier, Flossie Winston, and Shelby Winston. You all have guided me along the journey from childhood until now. Thank you for the outpour of LOVE given over the years. For those passed on, may you continue to have eternal peace. It has been my greatest honor to make you proud and live out your wildest dream.

With Love, Tosh

“A family is like a forest, when you are outside it is dense when you are inside you see that each tree has its place”- African Proverb

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"The greatness of a community is most accurately measured by the compassionate actions of its members." – Coretta Scott King

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father I needed when I had to vent, discuss ideas, or make tough life decisions. Your calm presence and willingness to hear to me out is invaluable.

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To Myself- Black WOMAN YOU DID IT!!! This journey wasn't easy. You have overcome so many obstacles that tried to silence your voice and withhold the greatness that lies within you. From a pandemic that took the lives of many to the loss of a job and the loss of loved ones, advisors, friendships, etc. Losing is not always about failure or resilience. Losing can signal a time when the body and mind need restoration. During quarantine, you found someone who has been missing and met someone new... YOU!!

Continue to hold space, give back, LOVE FREELY, and choose yourself first. Be PROUD of the work you have done for it is life changing.

Lastly, to the host of friends, mentors, Sorors of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., my sister circles, and anyone I may have forgotten please note that I appreciate you all. To be here at this point, in the words of Grandpa Ernest, is simply AMAZING!!! I am nothing without community. Over the last four years, I have learned and grown so much and it is because of my village who continuously show and tell me daily that I am WORTHY. Thank you is an understatement but know each text, call, words of encouragement, and random tokens of love along the way were greatly appreciated and well received. I am Dr. because of all of you!

Ase and Amen

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

In the Black community, Black women are often referred to as *sista* as a term of endearment and symbolizing a form of kinship (Hughes, 2019). While the term is expressed as a form of love, Black women have been *Suffering in Silence to be Acknowledged (S.I.S.T.A.)* in plain sight (Carter-Sowell & Zimmerman, 2015). I created this acronym to give a heartbeat to the vulnerability of Black women who are often revered for their strength but are not allowed to remove their capes—additionally, S.I.S.T.A. was created to humanize Black women's essence and send a clear message that we matter, and I see you in a white society that tells us our existence is dispensable (Coles & Pasek, 2020).

S.I.S.T.A.'s are seen as antagonists toward a white female colleague, used as a prop to attract prospective students of color, and deemed suitable enough to serve as interim for a management role. However, S.I.S.T.A.s are not qualified to fulfill the duties full time, have their passion mistaken for anger, expertise discredited. In contrast, an inexperienced younger white male colleague is praised or has to shift from one's authentic persona to one that is palatable to society. S.I.S.T.A.'s come up against adversity daily (Nelson et al., 2016; Woods-Giscombé, 2010; Bell & Nkomo, 2003) yet continue not to have a place where they are entirely accepted.

While Black women lead the world as the most educated demographic population (Katz, 2020; National Center for Education Statistics 2020), the color of one's skin does not read the list of accolades a S.I.S.T.A. has achieved. To date, I have earned a Bachelor's in Administrative Management. For four years, I have worked in higher

education as a recruiter for prospective underrepresented students, students identified as low-income or first-generation, at predominately white institutions. I earned a Master's in Public Administration and worked in higher education for more than a decade. I offer this contextual information to highlight the spaces and processes in which S.I.S.T.A.'s can experience harm.

My Journey

Following graduation in 2010, I accepted a position at my alma mater working as an Admission Counselor for Diversity Outreach and Recruitment (ACDOR). This position was the first of its kind at the institution and was created to increase diversity among the majority white student population. As one of two recruiters in this new role, I was given the state's eastern region, inclusive of Saint Louis, Missouri, and selected locations within Illinois. My responsibilities in the ACDOR role involved meeting with underrepresented students in the Saint Louis city and county areas through visits to high schools, tabling at college/career fairs, and scheduling one-on-one appointments. From August to February, I was a road warrior, a young professional, or a recent college graduate living a nomad lifestyle traveling to multiple cities and towns to meet with prospective students. After two years of working for my alma mater, I decided I was ready for a change. The college town vibe and lifestyle no longer suited my professional or personal desires.

While recruiting can be a tedious job, it is a role that is essential at the majority of institutions; thus, it is easy to apply for and get hired. With this in mind, a colleague encouraged me to apply for a recruitment opening at their institution. I was drawn to the position for several reasons, such as no significant adjustments to my current recruitment territory or student population, tuition reimbursement for graduate school, I was able to

go home each night, and living nearby a metropolitan area with greater access to experience an array of cultures, food, and events. In October 2013, I formally accepted the offer as an Admissions Counselor and made the transition mid-travel season. With no time for a break, I left my alma mater on a Friday and began work in my new recruitment role on the following Monday. Excited to be in a new city and a unique position, I was eager to work. The students were confused about my first high school visits because I had visited them a week prior as a recruiter for my former institution.

My supervisor and a regional admission counselor left to work at another institution within my first month on the job. The office underwent a renovation, causing the staff to move to an alternate location. The colleague who encouraged me to apply for my new position was named interim while the immediate search for an Associate Director was in progress.

Amid the chaos and frequent changes, I remained committed to making the right decision. As part of the office's holiday tradition, newly hired employees are responsible for planning the year's holiday party. Ending the year on a high note, I began to feel everything fall into place. The Director of Admissions informed the Admission Counselors the search for a new Associate Director was complete. Sadly, this meant my friend and colleague, a Black woman who has worked in the office for more than seven years and worked as an interim, was not selected. The new Associate Director, a white female from the northern part of Illinois with experience working at the community college and a close friend of the Director of Admissions, was hired. The Associate Director, Janice, would be the direct supervisor for the Admission Counselors and oversee the recruitment process of prospective students.

A learning curve is expected when transitioning from one institution to another, from learning processes to systems to people. As Janice began to feel her way through her new role, I noticed an uneasiness when she would address the Admission Counselors. Initially, I passed the awkwardness presented in team meetings off as growing pains until I was approached by Janice in my office one day questioning why I sought the advice of the senior counselor on staff Kendra as opposed to her. Completely caught off guard, I responded with, "It is not that I don't come to you, Janice, with my questions; however, the questions I ask are minor (i.e., which screen in Banner can I find the degree information?) and more territory-specific to which is directly related to Kendra's responsibilities." Not receptive to my response, Janice ended the brief and somewhat intense interaction by stating her door is always open as she reiterated her title of a supervisor before she left. In Hollis' (2018) discussion on bullying, she says the organizational power and ranking inherited by the dominant culture is not extended to employees from marginalized groups.

From that day forward, I began feeling targeted by Janice. Janice confirmed my assumptions in the following ways: a passive-aggressive tone used when meeting one-on-one, the silencing of my opinions and ideas when discussing recruitment strategies, the questioning of my whereabouts when gone from the office for an extended period, the blatant disregard of feedback on the recruitment of underrepresented students, and the non-existent ethic of care and compassion shown during the death of my grandfather. Over a year, the message became apparent, and the writing was on the wall that Janice did not care enough to get to know me as a person or my background. Unfortunately, I had to devise an exit plan before my intended departure of three to five years. Hollis (2018), in her analysis, states the "marginalized endure compromised self-determination

and often make choices that align with the need for safety instead of the goal of advancing" (p. 76). The adage that people do not leave jobs; they leave bosses was happening in real-time, returning me to a place of survival mode.

Since moving to the area for the recruiter position a year prior, I had not fully replenished the expenses paid to move from out of state, and I recently enrolled in graduate school; therefore, I was not in a position financially to move again. Nevertheless, Janice's unprofessional behavior, the constant negative shift in power dynamics, and the growing target pushed me to begin my job search with limited options. Page (2018) posits that women of color enter organizations with excitement; however, the realization of "white dominant space" becomes clear once settled. Women of color begin to experience microaggressions and structural obstacles that force them to leave the organization. After careful thought and consideration, I decided to pursue graduate school full-time. To offset costs, I searched for a graduate assistantship, a part-time position offered to students working in a department on-campus or organization (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, n.d.).

Ultimately, I decided to apply for an assistantship with university housing, any residence hall or housing facility located on- or off-campus that is owned, controlled, and used by an institution in direct support of or in a manner related to the institution's educational purposes (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, 2019) because the amenities were a perfect fit. The extras included: 1) housing provided, 2) a pre-paid meal card, and 3) program fees paid with a monthly stipend. Also, I partnered with university housing staff in my admissions role for programs and remained in contact with most staff members. Aware of hiring processes at historically white institutions (H.W.I.), characteristics of hiring committees to look for potential employees, and having a few

years of professional work experience, I figured my chance of getting a call back was good. I received a call the week before my birthday with a formal offer. Though the graduate assistantship would be a step backward due to having entered the workforce and the likelihood of me being the eldest graduate assistant was high, it was still better than staying where I wasn't acknowledged.

Before applying for the graduate assistantship, working in university housing was not my career plan. Nonetheless, as I became settled in my position as an assistant community director (ACD) the more, I realized a duality of my role exists. My role as staff/administrator consisted of making decisions on hiring student staff, scheduling student shifts, facilitating orientation, onboarding, etc. Furthermore, other responsibilities included assigning low-level policy violations, a sanction imposed on students for violating university housing to residents (i.e., escort, visitation, forgotten students' identification cards, noise complaints, etc.), and making decisions using a guided sanctioning chart for every policy violation.

In my role as a student, I was expected to fulfill the 20-hour workweek requirement, meet department and graduate school program expectations, and be an effective student leader for residents. Though the roles are intertwined, there is value in occupying both roles. On the one hand, as an administrator, I have access to information and people within the department and across the institution that students do not have. Next, my established relationships with students and campus partners allow me to advocate for students on their behalf, thereby granting power to make and influence decisions in support rather than to students' detriment. On the other hand, as a student, I could continue my engagement with the campus community without the expectation of a full-time employee where boundaries are more stringent.

Furthermore, as a student, I connected, established trust, and spoke directly with students about their concerns regarding university housing separate from the student conduct process. Essentially, I served as a liaison for students internal and external to the student conduct process and operated within a unique space. Yet, I was in a position of power and the oppressed.

Intersectionality of a S.I.S.T.A.

Crenshaw (1989) introduced the term intersectionality as a set of experiences that often does not accurately reflect the interaction of race and gender (p.3). Crenshaw argues that discrimination towards Black women should not be limited to either race or gender, and doing so seeks to erase the experiences Black women encounter. In university housing, I find my identities as a graduate student, Black woman, staff member, supervisor, and student conduct adjudicator intersect as I experience the treatment of students and as a S.I.S.T.A. on staff. Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2009) describes intersectionality as the detachment from a “static and generic notion of femininity to the recognition of femininities, and the distinct prescriptions and privileges that women are accorded given their combined race, class, and sexuality statuses” (p.23). Weekly, I was subjected to sitting in meetings listening to my white colleagues discuss and associate Black residents with drug policy violations.

While my identities establish a line of demarcation of my stature concerning housing residents and undergraduate student staff, none of my identities exempt me from reprimand in the student conduct process because I am a student despite being held to a higher standard. Bell & Nkomo (2003) posits that “African American women felt they were held to a higher standard because they were always fighting the stereotype of being incompetent” (p.12).

The title of this dissertation originated from my desire to retain Black students in university housing through alternative student conduct sanctioning practices. The student conduct process aims to set boundaries and aid in student development; nonetheless, the conduct process may cause more harm than good for students of color, particularly Black students (Starcke & Porter, 2019; Iverson & Jagers, 2015, 2012). This realization became apparent in my position as a student conduct adjudicator, a housing staff member who hears student cases and renders a sanction based on student testimony or behavior. I made my presence visible and available to put students' (and some of their parents') concerns at ease.

I can empathize with students because I work within a predominately white space among a small group of Black women. Being from an underrepresented group and working in an organization can bring on the instant feeling of being the representative for the Black collective (Sekaquatewa, Waldman, & Thompson, 2007; Pollak & Niemann, 1998). Although I express a deep concern for Black residents and attempt to use their lived experiences to impact policy change at the department level, there is one Black resident's story I cannot ignore...mine.

Autoethnography

Autoethnography is the process of (1) looking outward at the cultural and social aspects of an individual's personal experiences then (2) exposing one's vulnerable self by looking inward as a person identifies, moves through, too, and resist cultural interpretations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Ellis & Bochner (2000). For this dissertation, I will utilize autoethnography as a methodology that can use my voice and experiences to examine racism within university housing practices. Chang (2008) describes autoethnography as "the storytelling feature with ... of self-narrative but transcends mere

narration of self to engage in cultural analysis and interpretation" (p.43).

Autoethnography provides a space for S.I.S.T.A.'s stories about higher education to exist.

Boylorn and Orbe (2014) add that "successful autoethnography offers a critical cultural analysis that can...help us approach differences with open eyes and open hearts" (p.236).

In chapter four, I will discuss further how my experiences in university housing impacted my ability to show up as a Black woman in higher education

Critical Race Theory

Derived from critical legal studies (C.L.S.)-a legal movement that examines cultural norms related to policy; and radical feminism, critical race theory (C.R.T.) emphasizes the marginalization of people of color (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017). C.R.T. comprises five basic tenets. However, for this dissertation, I will focus on the tenet of counter-storytelling to illuminate my experiences as a S.I.S.T.A. and discuss how the intersection of being a Black woman and a judicial student conduct officer often left me in a compromising position. To expose how racism is deeply rooted in American democracy, critical race theory seeks to counter the narrative that racism exists as an "unrelated, isolated, individual act" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2017, p.18). My intention for this dissertation is to use my voice as the first step to eradicating racism as a social construct, be the example of lifting as we climb, and demonstrate the power of healing when S.I.S.T.A.'s speak their truth. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) state as "we attempt to make linkages between critical race theory and education, we contend that the voice of people of color is required for a complete analysis of the educational system" (p.21).

Definition of Key Terms

The following terms have been defined for the purposes of this study:

Assistant Community Director- A graduate assistant in university housing serving in a co-residential director role.

Autoethnography- A qualitative research approach that analyzes the personal experience of the researcher to understand better the cultural context they identify (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011)

Black or African-American- According to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (2019), Black or African American refers to a person having origins in any Black racial group in Africa. Though Black and African-American are used interchangeably, the term Black will be used to identify non-White students for this study.

Conduct sanction- A violation imposed on students for violating university housing terms and conditions or living guidelines

Duty Rotation- a response to campus-wide issues or unforeseen circumstances by live-in professional staff

First-time freshman- A student who has no prior postsecondary experience attending any institution for the first time at the undergraduate level (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019)

Mid-size institution- University with total student enrollment between 5,000 to 15,000 students (College Data, 2020)

University Housing or Campus Housing- Any residence hall or housing facility located on or off-campus owned, controlled, and used by an institution in direct support of or related to the institution's educational purposes (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). University housing and campus housing are used interchangeably; however,

university housing will be used throughout the study to identify on-campus students in a residence hall.

Summary

As detailed, Black women have been suffering in silence to be acknowledged facing multiple challenges in pursuing their growth both personally and professionally. Ranking as the most educated group, Black women strive to set goals and provide a service to their students and colleagues in higher education. Because of their strength, Black women have garnered the title of Strong Black Woman. This woman can overcome adversity and move forward, not affected by the pressures of life.

On the surface, Black women will appear fine yet are often left with no space to be vulnerable with themselves or others. The lack of space provided to be vulnerable has challenged me to consider how I have been harmed in spaces and processes within higher education. Furthermore, Watson and Hunter (2016), Davis (2015), Abrams et al. (2014), Woods-Giscombé (2010), and Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2009) examined the impact of the Strong Black Woman (S.B.W.) phenomena. Yet, limited research has been conducted that explicitly examines Black women experiencing harm in higher education told from a first-hand perspective.

My role as a judicial student conduct officer within a university housing environment set at a historically white institution is examined for this study. Morris (2019) posits it is not until words are spoken that people can begin to infer the obstacles Black women endure. By emphasizing my lived experiences, I intend to discuss the spaces and processes that can impact a Black woman's ability to show up authentically and fully as herself. Lastly, for this dissertation, I will attempt to bring forth the humanity of Black women leaving behind the persona of the Strong Black Woman through research and

sharing of my personal experiences of race and housing while working in higher education.

Chapter Two

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Students engaging in experiences such as joining a student organization, attending campus events, and living on campus are key factors that often determine how well a student will persist throughout their college career (Tinto, 2012). This study examines the experiences of a Black woman graduate student impacted by university housing policies and practices as a judicial student conduct officer at a historically white institution. This chapter will address research on critical race theory (CRT) as the theoretical framework. Additionally, this literature review will examine both historical and current practices that contribute to Black students' persistence in higher education. Relevant literature related to academic success, the parallels between the criminal justice system and student conduct process, and the Black student experience are examined. The topics addressed in this chapter set the stage for a foundation, understanding, and motivation for the present study.

Intersectionality

Crenshaw (1989) introduced the term intersectionality as the crossroad where gender meets race to provide a visual of the marginalization between Black women and dominant culture. Crenshaw asserts that viewing Black women's identity through one categorial lens (i.e., Black or female) reduces their lived experience to a single inquiry. The discrimination Black women experience is diminished rather than encompassing all the ways Black women can experience harm (i.e., race + sex). Collins (1986) agrees, adding the conceptual ideologies of race and sex have the commonality of oppressing dominating groups and lack seeing an individual's full humanity.

Furthermore, Crenshaw (1991) describes how intersectionality splintered from being isolated, focusing on the systemic impact of Black women evolving to include other people of color, identities (i.e., LGBTQ+), and marginalized groups. Crenshaw (1991) "ignoring the difference within groups contributes to tension among groups" (p. 1242). The realization and appreciation indicate intersectionality is not focused on identities but how the systems that make the identities the consequence and the means for vulnerability.

Critical Race Theory

Initially beginning as a movement of law, critical race theory (CRT) is a movement whose origins started in critical legal studies (CLS) and radical feminism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Theories and strategies were needed to combat the subtle forms of racism. Critical race theory questions the foundations of the liberal order, equality theory, legal reasoning, and neutral principles of constitutional law (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Solorzano & Yosso (2002) describe critical race theory as more than a Black-White paradigm but a commitment to social justice for students as a transformative response to racial, gender, and class oppression.

Several principles ground critical race theory. First, Bell (1980) observes that racism is ordinary, not aberrational, and is synonymous with the permanence of racism. Delgado and Stefancic (2017) describe racism experienced by the majority of people of color as the usual way of doing business or "normal science" (p.8). Second, Bell (1980) describes interest convergence as the "interest of blacks achieving racial equality will be accommodated when it converges with the interest of whites" (p.523). An example of interest convergence is the *Brown v. Board of Education Topeka*, which sought to desegregate schools stating that African-American students were denied equal protection

per the Fourteenth Amendment despite having similar facilities to white students. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) state, “Although African Americans represent 12 percent of the national population, they are the majority in 21 of the 22 largest (urban) school districts. Instead of providing more and better educational opportunities, school desegregation has meant increased white flight and a loss of African-American administrative positions” (p.19).

Thirdly, the race is socially constructed. Delgado and Stefancic (2017) describe the race as not being “objective, inherent, or fixed” (p.9) but instead made up of character traits with no biological relevance according to what is palatable for society and is frequent to change at will.

As critical race theory explores the depths of race and racism, the fourth tenet of critical race theory is intersectionality. Crenshaw (1991) discussed how an individual’s racial identity could intersect with other lesser identities (i.e., class and religion) and “forms of oppression such as sexual orientation” (McCoy and Rodricks (2015).

Lastly, counter-storytelling is a resistance that exposes and analyzes the master narratives (Hubain, Allen, Harris & Linder, 2016). In this instance, spaces that Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) inhabit are not always congruent with the same opportunities and access to pathways of success as whites (Hubain et al., 2016). Legislation such as The No Child Left Behind Act, an education reform that holds states accountable for the achievement of underrepresented student groups (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2005), and the school-to-prison pipeline are harmful to Black students. The legislation mentioned above-created policies like Zero-tolerance policies and mandated punishments for students who violate school district policies or specific offenses

(National Center for Education Statistics, 2000). The war on drugs led to mass incarceration rates of Black men and women refute (Jordan-Zachary, 2008; Reynolds, 2008; Nunn, 2002; Ritchie, 2002). People of color build counter-narratives to uncover the inequities rooted in racism and the legal system and reveal their humanity (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Criminal Justice in the United States

Historically, the student conduct process at higher education institutions is rooted in criminal justice framing and values (Fishner, 2006). Much like the U.S. criminal justice system, the student conduct process at the higher education level shares the ideology that a person can only make so many mistakes before they are dismissed, thus having the potential to shape an individual's perception of the process of an institution (King, 2012). Therefore, it is necessary to find connections between history and the criminal justice system to understand the policies created moving forward.

Laws and benchmarks have been established to remind African Americans of their place in society (Alexander, 2010). Laws such as the Black Codes were the first to be set during slavery (Alexander, 2010). Despite being abolished in the 1870s, modern-day Black Codes arose in the form of Jim Crow, laws enacted at the state and federal levels supporting racial segregation in southern states in the 1960s and early 1970s. With each surpassing decade, a new set of rules are drafted for African Americans to adhere to (Alexander, 2010) despite the freedoms that exist. The War on Drugs (WOD) proved no different. The Nixon administration initiated the War on Drugs in the U.S. during the 1970s. It extended it into the 1980s with a fixated agenda targeting the Black community and hippies with the influx of heroin and marijuana spreading throughout the country (Lockie, 2019; LoBianco, 2016). Alexander (2010) describes the war on drugs as

ongoing with no possible end. Compared to prisoners in 1980, the number of prisoners incarcerated for drug-related offenses, most of which are nonviolent drug offenses, has more than tripled to more than two million people in 2000 (Alexander, 2010; Loury 2008, Wacquant 2000). Between the varying phases of the penal system, prison; parole; and probation, Alexander (2010) states there are more than seven million people total in the system. However, African Americans make up 13 percent of monthly drug users yet represent more than 74 percent of people sentenced for drug possession (p.77).

The War on Drugs era proved to be the catalyst for many policies to follow suit (Alexander, 2010). Of the contingent forty-eight states, 40 states had introduced truth-in-sentence laws, requiring offenders to serve a "substantial portion of their sentence and reducing the discrepancy between the sentence imposed and actual time served in prison" (Ditton & Wilson, 1999, p.1). Additionally, 33 states abolished limited parole, followed by 24 conditions introducing three-strikes policies and mandatory prison terms for repeat offenders. Offenders often found on the receiving end of prison terms at the state level generally reside within black and brown communities and have completed up to or less than a high school diploma (Loury, 2008). The Children's Defense Fund (1975) research shows that Black students have been suspended and incarcerated at higher rates than their white peers for 30 years (Children's Defense Fund, 1975; Wu et al., 1982). Enacted during the War on Drugs era, Congress revised the laws and policies amid the changing administrations affecting Black adolescents in the K-12 public education system. As a result, zero-tolerance policies and the school-to-prison pipeline were implemented as another measure to maintain order within urban school environments (Smith, 2015; Heitzeg, 2009), yet they had an adverse effect.

Criminalization of Blackness in K-12 Education

As K-12 institutions begin to inquire about alternatives to violent offenses committed at school, zero-tolerance policies (ZTP), school disciplinary policies with mandated reprimands should students be found in violation gained momentum (Bell, 2015). The Gun-Free Schools Act (1994), implemented by the Clinton Administration, requires a one-year expulsion for students caught in possession of a gun, thereby creating a pipeline between the Department of Corrections and K-12 institutions (Cramer, Gonzalez, Pellegrini-Lafont, 2014). In a report conducted by the U.S. Department of Justice (2013), from 1997 to 2007, violence with school security guards tripled in high schools (Kang-Brown et al., 2013). The policies implemented to keep students safe began to incite fear tactics, thus turning a place of learning into an institution of punishment (Bell, 2015). Initially created to be an effective method to deter violence and gun possession in schools, zero-tolerance policies were developed. Instead, only five percent of expulsions nationally resulted from weapon possession, while 43 percent were subjective (a reflection of one's personal feelings or opinions) offenses such as insubordination (Bell, 2015). Students were not suspended under the mandates under which the policy was created. Skiba (2014) found that removing students from school is touted as an effective method to promote school safety while concluding there are no studies that support the use of school suspension and expulsion to reduce disruption in the school setting.

The American Psychological Association (2014) developed a task force to investigate zero-tolerance practices. The APA concluded that zero-tolerance policies as implemented have failed to achieve the goals of an effective school discipline system. It has not been resolved and may have exacerbated minority over-representation in school punishments. As a result, zero-tolerance policies create unintended consequences for students, families, and communities (American Psychological Association, 2014).

Despite the research to support the ineffectiveness of zero-tolerance policies, many K-12 schools are reluctant to abandon these policies and continue to implement policies that adversely impact Black students (Bell, 2015). Furthermore, the use of zero-tolerance mandates was implemented as a "deterrent for all offenders" (Bell, 2015, p. 16); however, the mandatory minimum punishments for designated offenses adversely affected Black and Hispanic male students (Bell, 2015).

Current literature and policies on school discipline tell narratives and outcomes of black boys while excluding other black student populations such as girls (Morris, 2016). Other excluded people included disabled students, preschoolers, etc., who experience disparate treatment at the same rate as black boys or more (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2014). For black girls, in particular, the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (2014) released data for the 2011-2012 school year, which showed that 12 percent of black girls were suspended compared to 7 percent of American Indians and 2 percent for white girls. Morris (2016) argues that labels such as loud, ghetto, and other characteristics not relating to "white middle-class definition of femininity-they [black girls] are frequently labeled as nonconforming and thereby subjected to criminalizing responses" (p.10).

In the report, *Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced, and Underprotected*, Ocen et al. (2015) state, "the particular disparities facing Black girls are largely unrecognized in mainstream discourse about punitive policies in public education" (p.18). For example, in 2017, Jasmine Darwin, a student at Rolesville High School, was body-slammed by law enforcement officer Reuben de Los Santos. While attempting to break up a fight between her sister and another female student, Jasmine weighing 100 pounds, was hoisted in the air and slammed to the ground suffering a concussion (Andone 2017).

The officer was not indicted on any charges. Rather his swift action and decision-making abilities, despite the emotional and physical injury to the student, were unaddressed (Andone, 2017). Following the officer's resignation, the media said nothing more about the incident or to the student (Andone, 2017). Hines-Datiri and Carter Andrews (2020) observe "when schools fail to see black girls as students and not convicts, then teachers and administrators will continue to institute measures that encourage their removal from school" (pg. 1427). The experiences black students have during K-12 aid in shaping the perceptions students develop of themselves as they move into institutions of higher learning (St. Amour, 2020).

Higher Education

As Black students transitioned from secondary to higher education institutions, institutions were ill-equipped for their admission, thus increasing the challenges Black students faced (Mills, 2020). Initially, beginning as an attempt to monitor students' social behavior strictly, Smith (1999) states, "discipline in the early colleges as paternalistic and rigorous"(p.78). Students endured physical consequences such as flogging or cuffing by administration or staff if found engaging in disruptive behavior (Smith, 1999). In an attempt to move from a conservative to a liberal approach to conduct, campuses nationwide continue to experience a "struggle between student freedom and control" (p.82). During times of civil unrest in the 1960s and 1970s, campuses began to see an influx of protests ranging from the Vietnam War to women's rights and apartheid (Biondi, 2012). For Black students, the Black Power Movement was gaining steam in which Biondi (2012) agrees the surge of student-led protests was the catalyst for "negotiation and reform that profoundly changed college life" (p.1). Without an

accountability system in place, students were free to exercise their first amendment rights (Biondi, 2012).

While student development theories and student experiences guide how institutions utilize and frame student conduct, student conduct within higher education often resembles and upholds standards in the same manner as the U.S. criminal justice system (Gehring, 2001, as cited in Clark, 2014). The idea that students have done something wrong and now the institution is going to put them through a process can be triggering for student populations of color when considering their lived experiences outside of the higher education environment (King, 2012). As black students enroll in colleges and universities, particularly at historically white institutions (HWI's), some students find the treatment and level of fairness compared to their white peers varies. Hotchkins and Dancy (2017) discuss how campus climate shapes the lived experiences of students of color at HWIs. Hotchkins and Dancy (2017), in their analysis, identified three common trends: 1) finding our space, 2) being absent while present, and 3) perpetual homelessness. Compared to student perceptions, Starcke and Porter (2019) state, "student experiences with college discipline processes are lacking, although a small number of studies explore student perceptions of fairness and value in the disciplinary process" (p.769).

Interestingly, Suarez-Balcazar et al. (2003) concluded that most Black students don't experience differential treatment in social environments. However do experience differential treatment from university administrative staff, their peers in student leadership roles such as resident assistants (RA's), and other students in general campus settings (Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2003). This feeling of isolation and hypervisibility hurts how black students see themselves in the college setting. Students who feel they have to

follow a different set of rules find no sense of belonging and thus perceive outsiders (Harwood, Browne, and Mendenhall, 2010). Understanding how the law is inherently oppressive to black people in the country (Heitzeg, 2009), it is not a stretch to say the way the black students experience conduct is very different from the ways non-students of color experience conduct in the higher education setting (Heitzeg, 2009). Starcke and Porter (2019) posit “research of racism in college generally confirms students of color face hostile campus climate and regularly experience acts of prejudice and racism at the hands of other students, faculty, and staff” (p.770). While most campuses have integrated a legal disciplinary process into their code of conduct, students' misbehavior persists (Clark, 2014), thereby warranting a new approach.

The Black Student Experience in Higher Education

Transitioning to college for Black students may cause feelings of uneasiness based on their experiences in K-12, which have implanted that Black students are more apt to have disciplinary issues. Therefore, they should be surveilled (Howard, 2016; Browne, 2015). That is not true. This perception is supported through policies at the federal and state levels (Cramer et al., 2014). Within the decade 1997 to 2007, violence with school security guards tripled in high schools (Kang-Brown et al., 2013). Guiffrida and Douthit (2010) explain Black students face challenges beyond academic preparation, affecting their ability to be successful in their collegiate endeavors. While most educators can agree there is a deficit in the education that Black students receive, such narratives often focus on the experiences of Black boys (Harper, Davis, Jones, McGowan, Ingram, & Platt, 2011). Excluding the criminalization of Black girls who are more inclined to experience discipline at higher degrees than any race of girls and Black boys combined (Morris, 2016).

In 2021, Lolade Siyonbola, a graduate student at Yale University, a highly competitive elite ivy-league institution (Bridgestock, 2021), was found asleep in the common area during finals. A white female student, Sarah Braasch, told Lolade she was not allowed to sleep in the common area and called the police. When the police arrived, they "repeatedly asked her [Lolade] to hand over her student identification, to which Lolade replied, "I'm not going to justify my existence here." (Wootson, 2018). In a Facebook live video posted by Lolade Syionbola (2018), four officers are shown present questioning Lolade who was left to defend herself as Sarah Braasch was allowed to retreat to her apartment quietly without question or reprimand.

In 2018, 10 Black male students were accused of dining and dashing at IHOP in Saint Louis, MO (McMunn, 2018). The students were incoming freshmen attending a summer program at Washington University, a private institution with a cost of attendance totaling \$80,00 (Washington University in Saint Louis, 2021). The male students were stopped by police and asked to show their receipts for payment rendered. Some students did not have tickets because they paid cash for their meals. Despite the proof of payment, the police made the students walk back to the restaurant while squad cars followed (McMunn, 2018). Upon arrival at the restaurant, the server stated the group of students were not the customers in question. The police department issued an apology (McMunn, 2018). Two years prior, in 2016, the institution experienced another racial incident with Asian students posing on social media in facial masks imitating and saying, "We're from the Zulu tribe" (Schienvar, 2016).

Students of color and students in the larger Washington University community expressed their concerns via social media. One comment made by a student anonymously said, "I think Asian-Americans need to work way harder to keep anti-blackness out of our

community. It is so prevalent," she said. "I'm pretty sure that every Asian-American has had an older relative tell them that they can't date black people or be careful around black people or things around those lines, and it's such a problem." (Schienvar, 2016).

Restorative Justice

Zehr (2015) defines restorative justice as the approach to achieving justice that involves, to the extent, those who have a stake in a specific offense or harm to collectively identify and address injuries, needs, and obligations to heal and put things as right as possible. The cyclical relationship between the media, the general public, and politicians continues to perpetuate the villain versus the heroin narrative (Loury et al., 2008). Ocen et al. (2015) spoke with students who were suspended due to fighting and couldn't recall being "introduced to or redirected to explore conflict resolution strategies"(p.33). Instead, students were used as an example for behavior that would not be tolerated and placed on suspension or expelled. A drawback to suspension or expulsion of students is the messaging that reiterates to students of color they do not matter, while missed classes or days absent sets students farther behind in coursework (Ocen et al., 2015). Wun's (2018) research on violence and school discipline affirms the perception of many students of color, both male and female. In her analysis, Wun (2018) recounts a student's experience, "one of her white male teachers gave her a referral for refusing to obey his rule despite knowing her history" (p.431).

There must be established pathways towards healing to bridge the gap between students of color and conduct processes. Clark (2014) offers two types of justice pathways: 1) restorative justice- the process by which victim and offender discuss the behavior and the appropriate disciplinary action and 2) retributive justice- a more passive approach where a third party allows the sanction. When deciding to use which practice is

subjective and is determined by the victim and the level of accountability the offender is willing to accept. Additionally, Clark (2014) takes a stance in favoring restorative justice stating "the tough approach to crime is not simply working" (p.710) as prison populations swell to capacity and campuses are increasing safety measures.

Whereas college campuses are ideal places to test and develop new campus judicial strategies, Karp (2005) agrees that restorative justice has become a new "response to offending behavior." Institutions' response to campus judicial matters has become slow to implement new strategies. In higher education, specifically university housing, restorative justice practices would positively impact the first-tier violations such as noise, identification, and visitors. Offenses such as sexual assault, theft, and alcohol are considered severe and are decided on a rolling basis (Clark, 2014). Clark (2014) adds that higher education institutions must be willing to look through a non-traditional lens to see how their current practices cause harm and identify ways to facilitate a learning experience for all to be effective.

Gaps in Research

Existing research stating zero-tolerance policies (ZTP) gained momentum in provincial and federal governments as K-12 institutions sought an alternative to violent offenses committed at school (Bell, 2015). At the same time, Black boys have endured hardships at the federal, state, and local levels of the education and criminal justice systems so have Black women (Brown & Husband, 2018; Morris, 2016). Crenshaw (2012) attributes the disregard for Black girls to the number of Black men and boys under "criminal supervision" (p. 1418), which misrepresents how the racial disparities of Black women and girls are perceived. The incarceration rates of Black women are comparable to the incarceration rates of Black men and their white counterparts (Crenshaw, 2012).

Black girls specifically have been stereotyped as Jezebel, a biblical character known as a sinner and of immoral values, loud, angry, and defiant (Morris, 2016; Harris-Perry, 2011). Compared to their white counterparts, Black girls are not seen as girls yet treated with the expectation of Black women, and "they are to know better" (Morris, 2016, p. 34).

Despite being ranked the top demographic leading the nation in earned college degrees (Katz, 2020; National Center for Education Statistics, 2020), Black girls transition into womanhood and find themselves underrepresented in several career paths such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics more commonly known as STEM fields (Collins et al., 2020). For example, white women and girls have become the standard litmus test for Black girls to experience or gain access to knowledge about STEM career pathways. However, Black girls have higher interests in mathematics yet are left out of gifted programming based on gender stereotypes and classroom behaviors (Collins et al., 2012). Moving from the classroom to the boardroom, Black women are generally the only ones in a department or one of very few within a company or organization (Galloway, 2012). Furthermore, the education level and status attained by Black women do not excuse their race or gender from being a part of the decision-making process but instead highlight it. Morris (2016) describes how the environment can impact Black women in the workplace. Morris posits:

Her opportunities to break through to the next level or become a leader are limited or nonexistent. Her senses even intuit that upward mobility is possible, but if she manages to crack through the ceiling, her mobility will likely be impaired. And, impaired or not, she will still have to navigate the misinformed gaze of Black femininity. (Morris, 2016, p. 36)

In higher education, the absence of Black administrators is alarming compared to white administrators. Whitford (2020) reported that people of color hold 13 percent of top executive positions, yet Black women are underrepresented in critical roles. More than 80 percent of administrators and leadership (Whitmore, 2020) are white, which signifies that higher education is not reflective of the diversity it strives to attain. With very few women, particularly Black women, in top leadership roles, an institution's failure to see students of color as individuals instead of a collective affects their ability to retain them (Pollak & Neimann, 1998).

Black women are needed in all spaces where Black youth, young adults, and other Black women are present (Farinde et al., 2016). The absence of Black women's voices in higher education on race, policy, inconsistencies within leadership roles, etc., will further perpetuate the mirage that progression is taking place, leaving behind “the articulation of our concerns” (Hooks, 1994, p.105).

Chapter Three

METHODOLOGY

This study examined the experiences of a graduate student woman of color impacted by university housing policies and practices as a judicial student conduct officer at a historically white institution. Using critical race theory (CRT) as a theoretical framework, this qualitative study used autoethnography, a form of narrative inquiry, to engage this phenomenon. The use of this methodological approach is transformative, such that readers are challenged to “reflect on their positionality and be inspired to take action in the service of social justice” (Huff, 2019, p.65).

This chapter will provide a detailed description of the rationale for choosing a qualitative research method and implementation. Next, I will explain my role in the study, which informed the autoethnographic approach taken for this study. Furthermore, I will describe how I collected and analyzed data and discuss how triangulation aided in establishing trustworthiness in the study. Finally, I will conclude by acknowledging potential ethical issues.

Qualitative Research Overview & Rationale

A qualitative design was chosen to implement this study. Initially rooted in anthropology, sociology, and philosophy, qualitative research was used to learn about cultures and groups in their natural settings during the early 1920s and 1930s (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Over time, qualitative research has developed into an approach that explores change, conflict, and the social world. Approaches to qualitative study such as symbolic interactionism and grounded theory began to emerge in the 1960s, which were later adapted by education and health professionals (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). According

to Creswell and Poth (2016), the qualitative research design is the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. Qualitative research allows several forms of data, such as words, images, and themes to be interpreted in addition to a deeper understanding of the issue is established (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Working within higher education for more than a decade

As a Black woman working in higher education, I realized it wasn't enough for me to see the problem and make a note of the harm caused by an incident. Instead, I needed to be proactive to find a resolution because it was not a matter of if the incident would recur but when. Being a part of the resolution meant I needed to share my personal experiences as a Black judicial student conduct officer outside of sacred spaces such as sister circles, an informal communal space that supports and uplifts Black women (Neal-Barnett et al., 2011), and Black lunches, an informal meeting on campus with Black colleagues (Breedon, 2021). This realization led me to autoethnography, an approach that uses personal experiences to analyze culture (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014), to look at: (1) the intersection of my identities and position as a judicial student conduct officer, (2) how policies and practices in university housing impacted me, and (3) how I showed up in the student conduct process for myself and Black residents. The qualitative research method of autoethnography holds space for all of my underlying questions to exist collectively or on their own.

Research Design

Autoethnography is a qualitative approach that considers the "subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher's influence on research" (Ellis et al., 2010). The type of ethnography chosen to share a researcher's personal experiences differs based on the context of events. For this study, I decided on narrative ethnography, a description of a

researcher's personal lived experiences that "intersect with analysis of patterns and processes" (Ellis et al., 2010). Autoethnography provides a platform for my lived experiences as a Black woman working in higher education and the intersection of my identities (Black, graduate student, judicial student conduct officer, etc.) in predominantly white spaces to coexist. To illustrate this, I used first-person narrative as a way to demonstrate and communicate to the reader how I observed, participated, and lived through an interaction (Ellis et al., 2011,p.275).

Additionally, autoethnography allows an opportunity to share with readers how my experiences have shaped my worldview, therefore impacting the ways I show up for myself professionally. As the sole researcher and participant of the study, I can reflect on and analyze my experiences on an intimate level. Furthermore, the process of autoethnography does not occur in real-time but in the moments after an incident has passed that "forces a person to attend to and analyze their lived experience" (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011,p.275).

Data Collection

As a judicial student conduct officer in an essential role, I am a walking recorder. I am not only collecting data from my lived experiences but also from the experiences of the residents and colleagues with whom I engage daily. Their stories and worldview, though not my own, have an effect and shape the way I may perceive an idea or people. For some, the process of autoethnography does not occur in real-time, but in the moments after an incident has passed that " forces a person to attend to and analyze their lived experience" (Ellis et al., 2011,p.275).

Since I am the object of my study, I was not required to obtain Institutional Board approval (IRB). The autoethnographic data was collected relying on memory in a

reflective journal. This process began with the exploration of what part of university housing was I most dissatisfied with, followed by writing down all the incidents in a list format that had an impact on my experience in university housing utilizing the following prompts: (1) What is it about the [university housing] training that you did not like or felt was missing?, (2) What is it about [housing] policies that you didn't like or felt was missing?, and (3) What was it about student conduct outcomes that you didn't like or felt was missing? To begin to recall memories that link to this study. I then read chapter two in Boylorn & Orbe's (2014)- Critical Autoethnography- work that allowed me to think critically about the particular incidents where my (a) race, (b) identity, (c) job title, and (d) the department culture intersected I then wrote a group of narratives in shorthand detailing the highpoints of the incident.

Examining the journal entries and shorthand versions of stories, I reflected once more, answering the prompt: Which incidents in university housing have made a significant impact? I selected and wrote the narratives once more using full details to describe the incidents where I was deeply impacted or impacted others. This process produced four narratives, and each narrative was written once except for one record that was rewritten to add a journal entry and provide a deeper context of a situation that occurred.

Archival data collected from my time as an assistant community director (ACD) was accessed to support the primary data source. Archival data examples include, but are not limited to, the University Housing Faculty Fellow Handbook, the ACD graduate student binder containing information relating to the judicial student conduct officer role, a joint proposal between university housing and academic advising to support the development of programming for Black male and female residents, weekly reports

written to my supervisor detailing my workload, engagement with students, and responses to reflection questions for the week. Upon completion of data generation, I organized data sets to prepare for emerging themes to allow for ease of coding during the analysis process.

Data Analysis

Ellis (2004) posits that "narrative refers to the stories people tell- the way they organize into temporally meaningful episodes... and is present in autoethnography" (p.195). For this inquiry, I analyzed four narratives utilizing memory and a reflective journal through the lens of the critical race theory (CRT) theoretical framework focusing on the CRT tenet of counter-storytelling. Additionally, literature written by researchers on critical race theory and autoethnography was used.

After initial coding was complete and reviewed, the following themes emerged: (a) power vs. resistance, (b) shifting in the Black body, (c) humanizing Black students and staff, and (d) I AM MORE than melanin.

Autoethnography

As a Black woman, an underrepresented; graduate student, and a judicial student conduct officer, I realized the duality of my roles. I began to reflect in-depth on my personal experiences within higher education and their impact on my identity. As a Black woman, my identity is responsible for reprimanding Black students, possessing a unique narrative of their own. Chang (2008) describes several ways that autoethnography is utilized as a tool for researchers to deepen their knowledge in diverse settings. To be effective, Chang states there are three areas where autoethnography lies: "(1) offers a research method friendly to researchers and readers; (2) it enhances cultural understanding of self and others, and (3) it has the potential to

transform self and others to motivate them to work toward cross-cultural coalition building"(p.52).

Participants/Researcher's Role

For this study, I am both the researcher and the participant. The stories recounted in this study are from memory and journal reflections on events during my tenure as an assistant community director (ACD). The use of autoethnography as a research method allows my perspectives, internal and external, on my experience to exist. To help readers better understand the culture, "ethnographers become participant observers in the culture that is, by taking field notes of cultural happenings, use personal experience to illustrate facets of cultural experience, and make characteristics of a culture familiar for insiders and outsiders" (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p.276).

Setting/Site

The study was conducted at a Midwestern institution in the southern region. The city of the survey has a total population of 24,800 residents with a median income of \$72,832 (DataUSA, 2020). Of the total population, 81.7 percent of residents are White, followed by 11.7 percent Black or African-American, 23.6 percent Hispanic or Latino, 549 Asian, and 403 residents identifying as having two or more races (DataUSA, 2020). The largest and most common employment sectors include legal services, education, retail, and health care/social assistance. According to the crime statistics reported by City-Data in 2018, the city ranked 44 on the crime-index scale, which was 6.2 times smaller than the U.S. average. For the past five years, the city has seen a steady decline in violent and property crime.

Located about 25 miles east of the Mississippi River, the four-year, midsize, state public institution lies in a suburban setting atop 2,660 acres. In 2019, the National Center

for Education Statistics (NCES) listed the institution with an overall student population of 13,281 students and an undergraduate enrollment of 10,833 students. The institution grants/awards undergraduate and graduate degrees. Compared to the city's race/ethnicity statistics, the university's student body is 73 percent White, 13.4 percent Black or African-American, 4.6 percent Hispanic or Latino, 2.3 percent Asian, and 3.5 percent of students who identify as two or more races (NCES, 2019a). During the fall 2019 term, 27 percent of undergraduates were new to the university, with 16 percent of undergraduates identified as new, first-time freshmen (Midwestern Institution).

The targeted institution has an Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion whose mission aspires to facilitate a campus climate where the celebration of diversity among faculty, staff, and students is embraced and celebrated. The institution's diversity efforts complement the university's efforts to create a learning environment that supports and inspires mutual respect within the campus community. University housing's impact on diversity and inclusion involves the commitment to engaging students in educational experiences in an open, civil, and respectful climate that will prepare them for global citizenship and lifelong learning (Midwestern Institution).

Beginning the 2014-2015 academic year, the university experienced its largest incoming first-year class with 2,126 registered students (Midwestern Institution). Approximately eleven percent of Black students who attend the institution decided to do so for an affordable cost, major availability, and ideal location (Midwestern Institution). The institution has more than 350 student organizations for students to become involved with, including cultural, fraternity and sorority, academic, and honorary.

The university housing department consisted of 12 live-on (6 Community Directors and 6 Assistant Community Directors). Each professional staff member was

placed between freshman and upper-class residence halls and participated in an on-duty rotation, responding to campus-wide issues or unforeseen circumstances by live-in professional staff. I was an assistant community director for a first-year residence hall and was on duty between 2-and 3 times per month. I was responsible for managing the front end (desk, security camera, room keys, equipment rental, etc.) of the residence hall and student staff known in university housing as desk managers (D.M.) and resident assistants (RA).

Ethical Issues

The researcher was employed at the institution of study in the Office of Admissions and University Housing. The researcher worked as a graduate assistant within university housing, working 20 hours per week in a first-year community. The graduate student experience provided insight into the institution's culture and the residential community. At the time of the study, the researcher will have been removed from the institution of study for more than four years. All access to student data and information was rescinded at the time of initial departure. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured during the study. University identification, student names, and other identifying information were omitted from this study to ensure privacy.

Verification/Limitations

The use of autoethnography as a data tool creates a set of limitations that are difficult to verify. For this study, I am both the researcher and the participant, utilizing memory as my primary source of data. Chang (2008) argues that data derived from memory can be considered "textual data" as "personal memory taps into a wealth of information on self" (p.72). The researcher's history and lived experiences may not be

generalizable yet are valid and can raise questions that lead to policy change. This summarizes the fundamental intent with which autoethnography is utilized in this study.

Chapter Four

FINDINGS

During my tenure in higher education, I've had a wide array of positions, such as admission counselor, student organization advisor, and program liaison. However, my time working in university housing was a unique and one-of-kind experience I could not have been prepared for previously. While I have always been aware of my gender and identity compared to the dominant culture, it wasn't until I began working in university housing that I witnessed the magnitude of how my identities, both personally and professionally, intersected. Thus, this autoethnography speaks intimately about this reality and my life experiences from a time working in higher education as a judicial student conduct officer in university housing. The following section describes how I organized and presented the findings.

The findings are organized in the form of personal narratives to reflect the experiences that I consider to be the most significant and best illustrate the impact on my ability to show up fully as a Black woman in white-dominant spaces and processes. The four narratives: 1) The Ken Who Cried Wolf, 2) Pity or Poor... Put Some Respect on my Name, 3) Caught Between a Yes and the Yellow Brick Road, and 4) Damien's Smile is No More are organized chronologically by occurrence. Following each narrative, an autoethnographic analysis is provided. Finally, all names used in the narratives are pseudonyms.

Presentation of Findings

Reflecting on the history and culture of African/African American oral traditions, the tradition of storytelling has always been a way to bring people together and to connect familial/cultural ties (Fabius, 2016; Waites, 2009; Banks-Wallace, 2002). Banks-

Wallace (2002) posits that "the collection and sharing of stories is considered sacred work" (p. 412). While Black women are bonded through our resilience collectively, individually, we have stories buried inside each of us that resonate in one way or another (Patterson et al., 2016). Additionally, based on Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a theoretical framework, I chose to present the findings using a counter-storytelling approach to disrupt the dominant narratives that often portray university housing from one perspective. "The counter-story is a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32).

Furthermore, personal narratives provide a space to connect and share with other Black women about my experiences in higher education. Hamilton-Howard (2003) posits that "survival for Black women is contingent on their ability to find a place to describe their experiences among persons like themselves" (p.25). Following analysis of the data, I identified four themes that help to describe the experiences of a Black woman judicial student conduct officer. The themes are 1) Shifting in the Black body, 2) I AM MORE than melanin, 3) Power vs. Resistance and 4) Humanizing Black students and staff. To emphasize each theme, I chose the corresponding narrative that shows the connection between the theme and the narrative. Because the themes are presented by one narrative does not exclude them from being present in others. At the end of the chapter, I will convey how each theme interrelates with all the others.

Theme: "Shifting in the Black Body"

Narrative Title: The Ken Who Cried Wolf

As a graduate student, I worked in University Housing as an Assistant Community Director for a first-year residence hall. The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (2019) identifies university housing as any residence hall or

housing facility located on or off-campus that is owned, controlled, and used by an institution in direct support of or in a manner related to the institution's educational purposes. I had several responsibilities, including assigning low-level policy violations, a sanction imposed on students for violating university housing to residents (i.e., escort, visitation, forgotten student identification cards, noise complaints, etc.) to making decisions using a guided sanctioning chart for every policy violation. Additional responsibilities included speaking with parents who called to check on the well-being of their child/resident.

While on break from class on a Saturday afternoon, I decided to pick up my crockpot from the residence hall. The day before was Student Appreciation Day, and I made my front desk staff Rotel a queso dip with meat and diced chilies and goodie bags because nothing says "I appreciate you" more than a homemade meal. I chatted with the staff and told them where to find all the condiments and turn off the crockpot when the food was gone with no worries about washing it. The next day was bright and sunny with a calm yet comfortable breeze in September, where summer still lingers, but the air of fall peeks through. The residents were buzzing around the hall because of the annual mud volleyball tournament happening behind the residence hall. When staff is not participating in duty rotation, a response to campus-wide issues, or unforeseen circumstances by a live-in professional team, we are encouraged to support the events throughout the department, particularly those occurring at our residence halls. Unfortunately, I had class but had time left on my break, so I thought I would kill two birds by popping over to the residence hall to gather my belongings, watch the residents fall over themselves, trek mud into the building, and return to class.

Before leaving, the desk manager on duty received a call from a concerned parent about not hearing from their resident. Unsure of what to do, the desk manager asked me how to handle the matter. Not thinking much of the issue, I took the call and spoke with the parent, who stated they had not heard from their child, Logan (pseudonym), a white male first-year resident, in several days and that he did not report to work as scheduled. Per policy, housing staff cannot confirm a resident's presence. At best, we can instruct the concerned party to continue to contact the resident. On the back end, housing staff, usually a resident assistant (RA) on duty, will follow up with the student to perform a health-and-wellness check, a routine check-in with residents following calls by a concerned family member, and relay the message to contact a family member. More often than not, the student has not been accepting calls, keeps forgetting to call back, or has some other minor excuse.

By luck, the RA on duty was hanging around the desk, and rather than go through the merry-go-round of stating what happened and instructing on how to resolve the matter. I decided to perform the health-and-wellness check and have the RA assist in completing the administrative task once complete. Upon arrival at Logan's room, the RA and I knocked on the door announcing *Housing* to state our identity. After the second knock, we hear Patrick (pseudonym), Logan's roommate and a white male first-year resident, say he needs to put his pants on and hold on. Patrick answers the door, enraged because he was disturbed from his slumber for a second time, unbeknownst to the RA and myself. Since I stood outside, I saw Logan asleep in his bed out of my peripheral.

As a courtesy, I apologized for disturbing Patrick's slumber; however, I informed him that the RA and I were at his door to perform a health-and-wellness check with Logan. Considering privacy, I asked if Patrick would try to wake Logan to speak with us

in the hallway. Patrick closed the door and began to yell at Logan, "Logan get up! The fucking housing people are outside! Get up, man! Get up!" While Patrick yelled at Logan, I knocked again on the door. This time, Patrick stood on the threshold of the door blocking eyesight of Logan and responding, "You fucking housing people are always here!" As tensions rose, I stated more firmly that we were there to perform a wellness check and needed to enter the space, to which Patrick responded, "Fuck you!" and proceeded to slam the door in my face. Liu (2017) defines privilege as the "entitlement and unearned authority of white men" (p. 352) to engage in behaviors or belief systems at any given time. Liu discusses white male privilege as the process of upholding the systems and structures associated with white supremacy. Granted by power-governor institutions (i.e., schools, banks, etc.), privilege is reserved for "white, cisgender, heterosexual, and Christian men" who, regardless of social class, are eligible to benefit from and maintain identity (Liu, 2017, p.352)

To prevent the door from shutting completely, I placed my foot in the nook of the door so the door would bounce off my foot. Patrick quickly became enraged and attempted to slam the door repeatedly. Becoming frustrated and feeling the adrenaline rush through my body because of the present altercation and the fact that Logan has yet to show signs of life with all the commotion, I try to push my way into the room.

By now, students on the floor are exiting their rooms to see what is happening. I stopped resisting, and Patrick slammed the door, pleading with Logan to wake up. Evans-Winters and Hines (2020) discuss the behaviors or the fragility of white students regarding safety. Evans-Winters and Hines state students who feel unsafe or what they perceive to be dangerous "can exhibit uncontrolled emotional outbursts, anger, and claim reverse discrimination" (p. 2). Due to the noise created by the slamming door and yelling,

students on the residence floor became concerned about a possible threat to the community. I assured the other residents that the situation was under control and that to return to their rooms. After what felt like hours, Logan finally came and walked outside the room. Concerned about possible harm due to Logan's lack of response, I asked Logan to tell me his Name and where he was to confirm he was able and fully functioning. Once he replied, I told Logan that he needed to call his parents immediately, to which he replied his phone was dead. I instructed Logan to come with the RA and myself to the hall office to contact his parents.

As we approached the front desk, Patrick called the front desk, enraged to report me. Noticing the desk manager shocked, I retrieved the phone from the desk manager and listened to Patrick call me derogatory and racist names. Embrick and Hendricks' (2013) study found how stereotypes and slurs are racially unequal in a workplace environment. Embrick and Hendricks assert that slurs and stereotypes from whites to non-whites do not possess the same impact as slurs from non-whites to whites. After a moment, I announced myself, and Patrick stated, "Yeah, yeah, is this that Black b*tch? I'm gonna have you fired, you'll see!" and hung up the phone. Diversi (2016) argues that white people of varying backgrounds "claim not to be prejudiced against African Americans yet justify the killing of unarmed black people" (p. 249). Through the use of social media, in addition to my personal experiences with white people, I have observed that most white people will bolster about being an advocate for the people until they are angered. That is when one's genuine emotions are revealed. Due to the magnitude of the altercation, an in-depth incident report had to be completed. Before leaving, I went to my office and wrote the incident report. For accountability purposes, I asked the RA to do the same. Once complete, I informed Kerri, my supervisor and hall director, who was outside overseeing

the mud volleyball event, of what happened. I gave her the gist of what happened, and we agreed to handle the matter on Monday.

Upon entering the office on Monday morning, I was concerned with all housing staff's concerns because word travels fast when you live and work on campus. I was informed that once I left the hall on Saturday, Patrick was removed by campus police escort because of his actions toward me with the clothes on his back, sanctioned with a mandatory judicial hearing, his contract terminated effective immediately, and he was not allowed within 50 feet of any residential hall facility. From several miles away, the Director of Housing, visiting South Africa, provided comfort and acted as an ally.

Allyship in higher education can present itself in several forms. Patton and Bondi (2015) posit to be engaging in ally work requires "continual reflection and perseverance" (p.489) and recognition for the work that extends beyond words and is put into action. Spanierman and Smith (2017) define white allies as individuals who: "(a) demonstrate nuanced understanding of institutional racism and white privilege, (b) enact a continual process of self-reflection about their own racism and positionality, (c) express a sense of responsibility, (d) engage in actions to disrupt racism and the status quo on micro and macro levels, and (e) participate in coalition building and work in solidarity with people of color" (p. 609). Haeny and colleagues (2021) describe a white ally as a "white person involved in the antiracism movement who demonstrate accountability, willing to take risks, and absolve themselves of their white privilege" (p.888). Overcome with mixed emotions, I did not know what to say or how to respond, but one thing was clear, the housing staff fully supported me. Over the next few weeks, I will share my perspective of the events with various staff members in preparation for the mandatory judicial hearing with the Dean of Student of Conduct, the hearing board, and Patrick.

Early Friday morning, the day of the hearing, I was seated in the Dean's office. Waiting patiently, I watched as staff floated in and out of the office. In the hall, I can hear Patrick's Black friends review their testimonials that speak to Patrick's good character and defense of being non-racist. I wrote in my journal:

One of Patrick's advocates wore a dashiki to show his dedication to the cause and possibly the culture. I chuckled and thought to myself; this should be fun. (Winston, personal communication, n.d.)

Patrick and his attorney arrived a few moments later. I anticipated the conduct hearing to be a circus; however, I was unsure who or what was going to be the main attraction. Patrick arriving with his attorney was a power move to show his class status and intentionally remind me of mine. Power governors, collective or individual institutions that can restrict or grant access to resources, enable white men's privilege to exist anywhere without boundaries (Liu, 2017).

For an hour and a half, we recounted the events before the judicial hearing board and the Dean of Student of Conduct. Patrick and his Black friends appealed to the hearing board. Patrick ramped up the dramatics and shed a tear or two. Matias (2019) describes white tears as "frustratingly predictable...that are strategically employed to stop mere dialogues of race and racism is a plethora of mechanisms of whiteness" (p. 266). The power of whiteness is aware of their privilege and, when given the opportunity, will use it to diminish the value of others (Hamad, 2018). Watching this altercation go further and further down a rabbit hole as the perpetrator flaunts his white privilege and plays victim, I reflected and often wondered to what extent a Student of Color, particularly a Black resident, would pursue the student conduct process, let alone hire an attorney.

Following several testimonies and meetings after the meeting, and a few weeks later, the judicial board decided to uphold the removal of Patrick indefinitely from university housing, deny his privileges to participate in student organizations and activities for one academic year, and complete a diversity webinar. Compared to the reprimands of some Black students in university housing, I felt this sanction was light. Demuth and Steffensmeier (2004) found that sentencing disparities exist between white, Hispanic, and Black defendants in their study of ethnicity effects on sentence outcomes. Hispanic and Black defendants were charged more harshly for similar crimes such as drug offenses than white defendants, with offense types between white and Black defendants among the largest (Demuth & Steffensmeier, 2004). As an adjudicator of the student conduct process, I empathize with the desire for students to learn how their behavior impacts the residential experiences of other residents. Though Patrick appeared remorseful during the meeting, based on the outcome and his white identity, he hasn't been labeled a threat to the community. "White men who are exercising their privilege are likely protected from punishments and consequences as their poor behavior is explained away or individuated away from systems of privilege" (Liu 2017, (p. 352). In today's America, white men can drive to out of town protests to protect local establishments and kill protestors in the Name of patriotism (Homans, 2021); disguise as a pseudo police officer and kill an unarmed teenager (Alvarez & Buckley, 2013); kill a woman in her home during a botched raid (Romine & Caldwell, 2021) then retire a year later; and commit to protect and serve all while being in fear for their life of the same community they were mean to protect (Eligon, 2020).

As a staff member of color, I often contemplated how different the outcome would have been if the race/ethnicities of the staff and students were reversed. Would the

incident have reached the Office of Student Conduct? Is a student being identified as a threat to the community subjective? Would a student of color with the same access to an attorney at their disposal and financial means be granted an opportunity to hear their case before the judicial board? Or have their conduct hearing been expedited? Indeed, this isolated incident in the student conduct process helped shape my experience as an adjudicator and highlights how student conduct outcomes differ immensely for Black students compared to their white peers (King, 2012).

Shifting in the Black Body

Shifting in the Black Body focuses on the natural shifting of Black women that occurs between their personal and professional identities (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). As a Black woman in America, I don't get to speak my feelings and innermost thoughts freely (Hooks, 1986). That privilege is not afforded to me and those that look like me. As a Black woman in a position of authority, in this instance, I had to succumb to what I felt was the "the customer is always right" motto instilled when working retail. Standing in the hallway while Patrick cussed me out and again by phone once I returned downstairs to the front desk caused me to exude great restraint (Watson and Hunter, 2016). Despite my remarks in response to Patrick's anger, I knew from a professional perspective I was wrong for resorting to his level of ignorance. Regardless of whether I felt no remorse. Yet, I felt a sense of guilt and angst come over me because I allowed my honest reaction to appear, which left me unsure of what to expect moving forward.

This altercation revealed the reality of the years of racial indoctrination that Black Americans have adhered to when interacting with white people (Kendi, 2016). Logan was a young, white male living in a residence hall, most likely because his parents thought it best for him to get the whole college experience. On the other hand, I was a Black

woman pushed out of her full-time job and applied for a graduate assistantship to keep a stream of income flowing while I worked towards my graduate degree. Should I have needed counsel, I would not know where to begin in my search nor have the money readily available to retain one. I say this in response to the timeframe in which Logan and his parents were able to find and retain legal counsel. This swift action speaks to the varying levels of privilege, access, and barriers between Black and white people (Kendi, 2016).

Moreover, for most Black residents, this level of advocating for his or herself would not exist due to a lack of resources, and it pissed me off that Patrick, this white boy, had the audacity to sit there and bring in his Black friends to advocate how he wasn't racist, shed tears, and listen to testimonies about his upstanding character. Both my identity and gender were called into question when Patrick uttered the words Black b*tch! Yet here I am in the judicial hearing telling Patrick, "if Logan was really hurt or dead even, I would still have to protect him [Patrick] because it's my job!". So yes, I attempted to push my way into the room because it was a matter of life and death. Yes, I responded to an enraged Patrick with the same level of intensity he gave me because it was a matter of life and death. While Logan's could have been hanging in the balance, I also thought about my livelihood, a thought that lingered in my mind constantly. Even though I had my colleagues' full support and allyship, my curiosity was piqued. If the roles were reversed and white housing staff members were at the door of a Black resident who responded the way Patrick did, nonetheless did not have access to the same resources, would the outcome be the same? The truth is, I don't think so, and that is the sad part. Thankfully, the odds were in my favor, but I understand how a bad decision on my behalf could have changed the outcome.

Theme: I AM MORE than melanin**Narrative Title: Pity or Poor...Either way put some respect on my Name!!**

The summer before the start of my last year as an Assistant Community Director, I attended the routine summer training. The training where everyone is gleefully happy and optimistic about the *new* academic year, up-to-date on all things diversity and inclusion, and where all the sessions begin to sound like Miss Othmar, the beloved teacher from the Charlie Brown series. As a leader of a residential hall, I was asked to participate in the privilege walk exercise along with my colleagues. The privilege walks an activity that displays the visual representation of differences that may exist among staff, paying close attention to the ways in which power is disbursed and who is impacted the most (McIntosh, 2015). The privilege walk is typically performed during a diversity session where peers and colleagues are provided with strategies for being aware of the community around them. At the completion of the exercise, the staff is presented with an opportunity to engage in discussion and reflect on what they experienced during the training. While the privilege walk is intended to highlight the disparities of privilege among colleagues and peers, the exercise is pretty much what I would call *surface level acknowledgment* that covers the who, what, when, where, and why of diversity-related issues highlighting or lacking the inclusion part. Magana (2018) suggests that influences on group behaviors can be dependent upon participants' racial identity, which can influence participant behaviors within a larger group setting.

To provide the group with an ice-breaker and conversation starter, the privilege walk exercise consists of asking participants a series of questions such as, " take a step forward if you grew up in a two-parent household or take one step forward if you went on family vacations, take one step back if you grew up with one parent in the home or take

one step back if your parent or guardian did not graduate from college, etc. Knowing what is about to happen, I walk to the back of the room and take my place on the scotch tape. Feeling the eyes of the RAs, I try my best to fix my facial expression not to show my disdain but to no avail.

Though I was a student like the resident assistants, I understand that my role as assistant community director (ACD) took precedence; therefore, my behavior and response should also reflect. Like clockwork, the firing squad of questions begins, and instantly I am triggered. "I knew it! It never fails! never!" Here I am stepping backward and forward without making any real progress in the privilege walk. I grew up in a single-parent household, and although I knew my father, I did not have a personal relationship with him. Father-daughter relationships are imperative in the socialization of black adolescent girls (Boyd, Ashcraft, and Belgrave, 2006). Johnson (2013) found that girls whose fathers actively engaged in their lives offered support and advice were more successful at navigating difficult times.

Growing up, I watched my mother work multiple jobs ranging from corrections to teaching to fast food to provide a living wage and further her education, which resulted in me staying with my grandparents often and being a latch-key kid, a child that had a key to their home and was often left alone after school due to their parents working outside the home.

Lopoo's (2005) study found that as mothers entered the workforce working more than 30 hours per week, children were more likely to be left to care for themselves. The increased workload was the result of the government looking to "self-sufficiency through work"(p.620) as the primary objective to resolve issues of poverty, in addition to stipulations placed on government assistance programs such as Temporary Assistance for

Needy Families and Child Care and Development Fund (Lopoo, 2005). As the questions continue, I notice my fellow ACD, Amiyah, has moved to the center of the scotch-taped path. Amiyah was from a two-parent home with siblings who took regular family vacations. Amiyah grew up in the Midwest. Despite us both identifying as Black women, we have varied lived experiences.

I've always been envious of people who had the *American Dream* lifestyle accompanied by siblings. I would kill for someone to blame for eating the last piece of chicken or breaking mama's favorite flower vase. On the contrary, I would love to have someone to share my wins, look up to, be proud of, and get into trouble with. Unfortunately, when there is just one child in the house, mama instantly knows who did something. When you're the *only lonely* one, imagination and the ability to dream become second nature. Singer and Singer (2010) found that only children are more likely to have imaginary friends. Singer and Singer discuss children's desire to have a playmate who will be there for them to offer protection and love, and children with imaginary friends experience increased positivity, creativity, and emotional capacity.

Surprisingly, I look to my left and see that I am not alone walking down memory lane. I see Joan, an upper-class community director, standing right beside me, and she has moved beyond the third taped row either. At the same time, I was excited to see that I was not alone nor the only Black person at the back of the room; I couldn't help but think about Joan's story. By this time, I had accepted that I was not going to move further because to do so would be committing insanity, the act of repeating something several times and expecting different results (Mitchell, 2014) and still listening and doing the two-step backward and forwards. It became a game. Using my best Jerome impersonation, the beloved broke down a pimp character from the 90's sitcom *Martin*; I

sang *one step to the front, take two to the back. Stop!!... Think about it!* I laughed to myself and did a small dance to the song in my head.

Finally, the facilitator asked the last question, signaling the exercise's end but not without the wrap-up commentary. The facilitator, the traditional white privileged woman, begins by asking the group to take a look at the positions of each housing staff member. The awakening of white women to the topics of race, racism, and their willingness to participate in antiracist work led many to believe that a change had come. On the contrary, black women and women of color felt that little change occurred, that despite addressing issues of race, white women maintained a position of power (Bell, 1994).

As expected, the white male staff member, Jeremy, was at the front of the room, representing those white men in American society have the most privilege among all ethnicities (Kendi, 2016; Wilkerson, 2010). Following Jeremy, the staff's positions in the privilege walk went as follows: a white female, Amiyah, another ACD, me, and Joan standing in last place, representing how specific experiences and life circumstances prevent us from experiencing certain privileges.

As I was listening to the facilitator, Sarah, explain to the group about the experiences of people of color, I noticed she spoke from a deficit perspective (Allen, 1995). Textbook, if you will. The more I listened, the more irritated I became. I stood for a moment, contemplating if I should say something or not because I know how *passionate* I can become. Lewis and colleagues (2016) study on racial microaggressions found that black women often feel branded by the social constructs of the Strong Black Woman (SBW) stereotype. One participant in the graduate student group described being treated differently because of the SBW stereotype and would tone down her passion when engaging with others in the workplace. Just like Pastor John at church says, *don't*

miss an opportunity to pray. I couldn't allow this moment to set the record straight past either. After all, I stood in one spot for 40 minutes only to listen to a white woman, who is privileged herself, attempt her best shot at telling my lived experience and wrapping it with a bow to exit stage left.

At the last minute, before Sarah closed the exercise, I decided to speak. I raised my hand, walked towards Sarah, and grabbed the mic like the headliner at a concert, and she was my opening act. I stated loudly and proudly to the group, " I know you see myself and Joan at the back of the room, not moving but only a few feet. However, please don't look at this or us and have pity. Like you are doing now, we have made it to and through college. Did it take us a while? Did we require help? Yes!! Yes, it did. What you see is only a *part* of our lives, *not* all of it. Also, those of you who may have thought that *all* black people experience the same upbringing. Well, we don't. Take a look at Amiyah. Though she is not in the front with Jeremy, Amiyah experiences, most two-parent households have. When attributes such as effective communication, supportiveness, and stability are represented positively in the couple/parental relationship or the home in general, children's developmental outcomes are positively impacted over time (O'Malley et al., 2015; Goldberg & Carlson, 2014).

Joan and I have experienced them, yet they didn't occur as frequently. Nonetheless, we have *earned our right* to be here and pressing forward. After what probably felt like a sermon on Sunday morning, I offered the benediction with a soft "okay" and smile. Handing the microphone back over to Sarah, the look on her face was priceless. There is value in black women speaking up and expressing their concerns about how dominant culture depicts them, cementing their stance on issues, and holding white women accountable (Collins, 1989; Hooks,1994). We gazed at one another, making eye

contact for a few seconds. Telepathically, I was sending her a message that said, "don't do this stupid (expletive) again unless you're going to do it right. I smiled and walked to my seat, playing the horns from Beyonce's *Crazy in Love* song in my head as the Black RA's clapped, laughed, and affirmed my sentiments with *I know that's right, OK! Tasha, don't play, and Tell them Tash!*

In an apparent state of awe, Sarah comes to and begins closing the segment out once more by encouraging the students to do more, advocate, and get involved. After Sarah left, the group took a break. During the break, I was approached by several RA and Joan, who thanked me for saying something. Remarks like "cause *they* don't know about *us*" and " she tried," which translates to *we* (Black people) in the room get what you were trying to do, but you missed the mark. *Try again*. At the same time, my intention was not to make a mockery of the exercise nor be pro-Black. The message I wanted to convey was even though I did not have traditional experiences such as family vacations or two parents in the home doesn't mean that I was poor or give reason to pity me. Poor is subjective, for there was plenty of love in my childhood.

Memories like cooking Thanksgiving dinner with grandma, working with my mom on bringing your child to work day, car trips back and forth on Paseo to McDonald's with grandpa for a Big Mac extra value meal are forever etched in my mind. Circumstances do not always depict the outcome of an individual's life, and it's all about whose lens you decide to view another's life through.

I AM MORE than melanin

In my experience working and attending historically white institutions (HWI), the illusion of what academic programs and culturally diverse experience institutions can offer students of color is a top priority (Clark and Esters, 2016; Wright, 2020). In a

university housing professional live-on staff of 20, I was one of seven total Black staff members. Of the seven Black staff members, there were five Black women, one of whom was an administrative assistant. The four remaining Black women did not have the same upbringing; thus, our lived experiences varied. The privilege walk exercise, in my opinion, was an outdated exercise that involuntarily invited people of privileged backgrounds into the lives of marginalized populations. While I'm not ashamed of my family, culture, etc., you may never know how an exercise like the privilege walk can trigger a person. Furthermore, the activity has been a sorry excuse for HWI's to show they are invested in diversity, equity, and inclusion work without having to exert too much effort.

Against my better judgment, I went along with the exercise, knowing the outcome prematurely. In the privilege walk exercise, the facilitator, Sarah, failed to make a connection between the differences between Jeremy, the white male at the front of the taped line representing his [natural] privileges and life's opportunities compared to my *lowly* existence at the back of the room. At the conclusion of the exercise, Sarah offered her closing remarks and, for the sake of time, tried to move swiftly to close; however, in trying to close out the activity, Sarah didn't realize the privilege she utilized at that very moment. I would be remiss if I were to allow that moment to pass without clarifying the narrative for the resident assistants, all of them.

Here in America, the narrative of Black people's existence has been made a mockery, told incomplete or not at all (Wilkerson, 2020), all while playing the palatable prominent African American leaders on repeat. Black people are more than our struggle (Hooks, 1994; Hoston, 2009), and we must tell the other side of the story, too, because our existence matters. I AM MORE than melanin is an affirmation that serves as a reminder

to myself and other Black humans that we are more than what others believe, tell, or deters us from, for we are capable and worthy of having a life of abundance; too!

Theme: Power vs. Resistance

Narrative Title: Caught between Saying Yes! and the Yellow Brick Road

The day was spring opening, and like a fool, I chose to be on duty, thinking, *oh nothing can happen outside the norm*. What I failed to remember was that the spring semester opened in the dead of winter in January. Either way, I was getting my duty out the way early so when the spring season really came, I could be free to hang with friends. After days of training, all staff was tasked with opening their halls for the residents' return. As the graduate assistant and resident Assistant Community Director (ACD), I was responsible for decorating the lobby, opening the desk, staffing the desk, and decorating the small bulletin board behind the desk. Myself and another ACD, Janine, we're really into the creative parts of the job. So much so that we supported the other's grand ideas. Well, this time, it was me with the over-the-top idea of the Wizard of Oz theme. I would deck the lobby in the yellow brick road and make paw prints tying in the school's mascot. But wait, there's more. We can't have the yellow brick road without Emerald City. Off to the supply room, we go! Taking all the yellow poster paper we could find, I started making the yellow brick road line by line and foot by foot. Janine finished her signs early at the sacrifice of sleep. I, on the other hand, was not about that life, and I so envied her.

The residents were scheduled to come back on Sunday. Doors to the halls would open at 10 am, with the duty person (me) signing on for duty at 8 am. The expectation was that all tasks were to be completed prior to the opening, which meant Saturday night for me. After staying up the previous two nights till 3 am, Saturday night came, and I was exhausted. The hall looked like the great Emerald City, and the infamous yellow brick

road was shiny in its glory. I still had the small bulletin board to complete, but at least all the circuit pieces and lettering were previously cut. Because Sundays are typically slow, I figured I would go to the hall and finish the board and open the desk. My supervisor, Kerri, was a white woman from small-town America. Kerri stood about five foot two with short blonde hair. Kerri was the epitome of a country gal with traditional style decor, Starbucks mugs, and an infectious midwestern drawl when she spoke. Kerri was the hall's resident director and a stickler for following all policies and procedures with no room for error. Before leaving for the evening, Kerri asked me once more if I needed help, and I assured her I was fine, again thinking I had Sunday morning; finishing up the decorations would not be a problem.

Abrams and colleagues (2014) indicate that a black woman's lack of vulnerability to ask for help often leads her to a place of isolation trying to deal with the daily hassles of life. The look of uncertainty if I would finish in time came over Kerri's face. I assured my supervisor with the standard *type A*, "I got it; it will be fine." I flashed a smile to seal the deal and kept working. I worked until I couldn't and placed all the remaining cutouts in my office.

Peacock and Black (2011) observe that African American women adhere to the script of the Strong Black Woman (SBW). Characteristics of the SBW often involve suppressing one's needs to fulfill the requests and demands of their job, family, and community (p. 144). Abrams and colleagues (2019) call the SBW a "self-proclaimed warrior who exudes psychological hardiness and endurance despite adversity" (p. 518). The femininity of African American women stemming from the days of chattel slavery is correlated to the expectations that place African American women at the helm of their

families and communities as pillars of protection, comfort, and spiritual grounding (Abrams et al., 2019; Harris-Perry, 2011; Peacock & Black, 2011).

Of all the days I am exhausted, have spring opening, cold weather, and am on duty naturally, I oversleep. As Black women are praised for their resilience, Woods-Giscombé (2010) conducted a study exploring African American women's perceptions of the Superwoman role and its impact on their health. Woods-Giscombé (2010) suggests that the Superwoman role may be a “double-edged sword- an asset and vulnerability to black women’s health” (p. 669). This comes as a result of a decreased presence of African American men in the home either by design or willingly (Williams-Butler et al., 2020), thus placing the role of breadwinner and the weight of survival on the women (Woods-Giscombé, 2010). Rather than complain and appear as a burden, African American women cope with the new role and press forward (Bacchus, 2008; Dickens & Chavez, 2019; Jones et al., 2021; Spates et al., 2019).

Realizing my alarm didn't go off, or I turned it off, I raced to get dressed and rushed to the hall. There, Kerri was at the desk waiting for me with that look of "You know we will be having a meeting about this, right," accompanied by a clenched jaw. I hastily rush the desk opening, tossing all the books on the desk, tripping over myself and the stupid duty bag. My reliable and seasoned desk manager, Jacob, said it would be OK, but inside I wanted to crawl under the desk, then under the carpet, and anywhere where I could escape the feeling of angst in my stomach. Jacob was a nursing student and used to trauma. On the other hand, I can deal with bodily fluids just fine but tell me or let me see the disappointment on someone's face; I *cringe* like a toddler eating vegetables.

Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2009) posits a Black woman’s strength is measured by her ability to transcend the beliefs, limits, and emotions associated with womanhood. As the

expectation for black women to be overtly strong becomes more inherent, they are denied the simplicity and safe space to be human (Harris-Perry, 2011).

At this point, the damage was done, and in my mind, I accepted the consequences that were forthcoming. What else could I do?? Kerri *specifically asked me if I needed help, and I told her no*. According to Jack and Dill (1992), the silencing of self-theory involves devaluing one's emotions to establish, maintain, and avoid conflict within relationships. The silencing of self-theory has four specific behaviors: (1) externalized self-perception (i.e., judgment by external factors), (2) care as self-sacrifice (i.e., placing the needs of others before your own), (3) the silencing of self (i.e., inhibiting self-expression from avoiding loss of personal relationships), and (4) the divided self (i.e., presenting an external compliant self that is contrary to the feelings and emotions of one's internal self) (p. 98).

Then, as if matters couldn't get any worse, I get a call about a pipe burst in the upper-class student apartments located a mile up the road. So, I was late because I overslept, my assigned tasks were not completed, and the day I planned to be at the hall, I now had to leave because there was a pipe burst in twenty-degree weather in the student apartments mile down the road. Opening day was a mess. A cold, wet, dreary lot. Yep!!! It was confirmed; I'm definitely getting written up!

Once you break the seal of duty calls, the other calls quickly follow suit. Overflowing toilets, no heat, no lights, short fuses, etc., you name it, I had it. Monday morning comes, and I drop the duty bag off and dread the walk of shame to my office. I walk through the doors to see the bulletin board still naked screaming dress me. I rolled my eyes, looked at the board, and said, "I should have said yes ."I put my things down and get right to work. Kerri and I had weekly one-on-one, so I figured the incident would

be addressed then. Wednesday came, and like clockwork, Kerri asked, "So, tell me, how do you think Sunday went?" Internally, I'm thinking you know damn well how Sunday went, and I am not in the mood to be *coached*. Save that *ish* for the RA's and not me. In their discussion of the relationship between white supervisors and their minority subordinates, Smith & Hunt (2020) cites white supervisors exert power in positions relating to policy, workplace bias, and diminishing inequality. As a result of this authority, Smith & Hunt (2020) posits black/white disparities are likely to shape how equal opportunity policies are implemented.

Nonetheless, I was ill-prepared. I replied not good, and I followed up with the I overslept exhausted spiel, which resulted in poor time management, etc., the entire day. Often, black women will say, "I put up my defenses," "I'll do it myself," or display a refusal to "let someone in" to guard themselves and to circumvent being vulnerable and dependent (Woods- Giscombè, 2010). Woods- Giscombè observes that black women showing resistance to vulnerability were rooted in mistrust and black women not wanting to give others an upper hand or advantage to expose their weakness later on (p. 673).

Kerri agreed and explained that this incident was a mess and that nothing was ready on time. Even when Kerri didn't mind helping and offered to finish the board, I *still* declined her help. Based on Sunday's outcome and a few other observations, Kerri issued me a written warning. Before signing, Kerri asked if I had anything to say; I replied no and accepted full responsibility. In their distinction between multicultural and cross-cultural supervision, Brown and Landrum-Brown (1995) define cross-cultural supervision as the analysis of supervision components inclusive of processes and outcomes in "which racial, ethnic, or cultural differences exist" (p.310). Burkard et al. (2006) suggest the "discrepancy between supervisee and supervisor training in

multicultural issues may contribute to conflicts during supervision" (p.288). I was wrong and should have planned better, and I let Kerri down, thus leaving her no choice but to issue the written warning. Kerri reminded me that there was no way I could have anticipated the duty issues, but I could have avoided the conduct sanction had I said *yes to help*.

Knowing that a written warning is one step before termination and this graduate position was directly tied to my Housing, I became paranoid about my actions moving forward. If I lose this job, I lose my livelihood, including basic needs: food and shelter. Despite the feeling of knowing the *write-up* was a formality, there was no way to be sure. So, to avoid the inevitable from becoming a reality, I *overcompensated*. Wilkerson (2020) discusses the caste system in America, comparing those in the lowest caste to the dominant caste. Wilkerson (2020) notes, "the caste system trained the people in the lowest caste that the only way to survive was to play the comforting role of servile incompetent."(p. 234). Like many communities of color, stereotypes exist. The three L's: *late, loud, and lazy* are stereotypes commonly used to describe African Americans' workplace behavior. Hence, when *we* don't present ourselves as the stereotypes suggest, it is a shock to colleagues and supervisors. Shifting, commonly known as *code-switching*, within the Black community consists of altering one's appearance, speech, and mannerisms to protect one's most intimate being (Dickens & Chavez, 2017; Jones & Shorter- Gooden 2014, 2003; Spates et al.,2019).

With two distinct identities: Black and a woman, Black women often find their identities intersect as they move between professional (predominately white), cultural (Black community), and social environments (sister circles) (Croom et al. 2017; Dickens & Chavez 2017; Spates et al. 2019). At this moment, as one of the few Black members on

staff, I stood out, thus feeling the pressure to *represent the community* and dispel the stereotypes. Sekaquaptewa and colleagues (2007) posit that African Americans are more apt to think of their collective self than themselves in isolated spaces. Moving from an "I" to a "we" frame of mind, African Americans will begin to internalize their behaviors, positive or negative, as a reflection of the entire black community (p. 322). While the consensus of the staff may not have cared if I were black, blue, or green, the stereotype of lateness and others runs through my mind, therefore altering how I show up in predominantly white spaces.

My being late on Sunday exposed me, and I was left in a vulnerable state, uncertain of what to expect. Kerri moved on from the conduct meeting while I mulled over the incident and the outcome days later. In exploring the intersectionality of race/ethnicity and gender among women, Juan, Syed, and Azmitia (2016) revealed that white women may resonate with challenges affecting women but will choose to remain blind to issues concerning race/ethnicity. Moving in a constant state of worry is not good, but I couldn't help myself. Regardless of how Kerri reassured me, *we were good*, and incidents happened, it didn't resonate with me. Soon the pain in my gut went away, and the feeling of being watched subsided. According to Krieger (2005), our "bodies tell stories that people cannot or will not tell, either because they are unable, forbidden, or choose not to tell" (p. 350).

In Woods-Giscombè's (2010) study on the superwoman schema, participants revealed that when they didn't prioritize self-care, their bodies would reflect in ways such as weight loss/gain, emotional eating, depression, and panic attacks (p. 678). Like other matters, the incident replay was inducted into the vault of life experience, and I moved on leery but functional. As black women navigate professional environments, they have to

overcome both gender and race discrimination challenges while in a constant state of valuing their self-worth. These factors can become psychological and stressful (Bacchus, 2008; Dickens & Chavez, 2017).

Power vs. Resistance

The pressures to meet familial, communal, and societal expectations of Black women are high (Abrams et al., 2014; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009;). If Black women do not welcome adversity or opt to blend in with the culture of the workspace with a smile, they could be labeled the Angry Black Woman (Kerwin, 2017). The analysis's collection of life note data revealed (1) the dynamic between the white woman employer and the Black woman employee relationship and (2) feelings of anxiety and internalized pressure to meet expectations. This expectation stemmed from years of oppression and the invisibility of Black women by society (Ritchie, 2017), unresolved trauma, and familial dynamics, which shaped my identity and influenced how I respond to situations. Pleasing others to the extent of ignoring my natural body sensors signaling danger, caring more about how my actions impact others before myself, and neglecting my feelings are what Woods-Giscombé (2015) describes as the Strong Black Woman schema. For example, when Kerri asked if I needed help, I declined her use because I was independent and wanted to show that I could finish my project.

In hindsight, it wasn't that I couldn't use Kerri's help, but more so, I didn't want to appear as a failure and incapable of completing my tasks as assigned. The outward expression of vulnerability is not a characteristic generally associated with Black women (Abrams et al. 2014); therefore, it is resisted and replaced with strength and resilience. My resistance to receiving help manifested negatively impacted my physical abilities to

perform well the next day (i.e., overslept, stumbling over myself, lagged response time, brain fog, etc.).

Aware of my shortcomings, the reality of me losing my job was a possibility. Unsure of the outcome, the power to terminate my position and rescind my basic needs of food and shelter rested with Kerri. I was rendered powerless and at the disposal of my supervisor, a white woman. Though Kerri was considered a safe space, it was times such as this where my identity as a Black woman and cultural upbringing separated us. Often, when I'm not on good terms in the workplace, I begin to have self-doubt, question my abilities as a worker, and develop an unhealthy fear of scarcity and its immediate impact. Whereas I was a university employee, I, too, was a student and not above going through the student conduct process. The intersection of my position as a graduate assistant often made boundaries challenging to establish and maintain with colleagues across campus due to my student status. The constant loom of having my basic needs rescinded became exhausting and often dictated how I performed my job responsibilities. The power dynamic of how much I relinquish control is a daily struggle. Both require trust in myself and others. When my livelihood was at stake, I realized I didn't trust many, and my deep-rooted resilience denied me the freedom to be vulnerable when I needed it the most. (Hooks, 1994).

Theme: Humanizing Black Students and Staff

Narrative Title: When Damien's Smile is No More

Damien was a resident of Patton Hall. Damien wasn't a resident of many words, but he had a smile that could light up the room. I first met Damien indirectly through my weekly conduct docket. Damien was consistently written up for not using his identification card to swipe into the building. All students living in university housing

must use their identification cards to scan or swipe at the front desk to ensure they are residents. The first non-swipe is a warning; however, each time a resident enters the building without using their identification card, an incident report is created. Students have the right to meet with hall staff and go through the student conduct process, yet they can also decline, thereby forfeiting their right to be heard, and a sanction will be given in their absence.

One day, I covered a desk shift, and Damien walked in without his identification to swipe into the building. Rather than write him up, I decided to have an impromptu meeting with Damien. Taking a communication style documented by Kochman (2013) found that Black Americans gravitate towards a passionate communication style, a form of communication that disavows the traditional "turn-taking" and need for third-party interference. Research shows that African Americans often communicate through immediate and direct exchange of information from person-to-person, rather than involve the use of authority figures (Davidheiser 2008; Scott, 2003). I shared, "Damien, now you know better!! Where's your ID??" Flashing his smile, Damien replies, "I don't know. I keep leaving it, I guess". I replied to Damien, " Well, I can't let you in without it, so what do you think we should do? By the way, are you getting any of my letters?" Damien, still smiling puts his head down in shame and says "Yes ." Acting as if I were upset, I said, "Damien! So, you telling me you're ignoring me??" Damien quickly replies, "Nah, it's not like that. Y'all just send so many, and it's not even a big deal."

At this moment, I realized that having a teachable moment about safety using a dialect such as African American Vernacular English (AAVE) that Damien can understand will have a more significant impact than a piece of paper with a violation written it. Smitherman (1940,1986) discusses the dialect of Black Americans, stating,

"Black dialect is an Africanized form of English reflecting Black Americans linguistic-cultural African heritage and the conditions of servitude, oppression, and life in America"(p. 2). Smitherman adds that language and style are the two dimensions that encompass Black speech, therefore, allowing American Blacks to create a "culture of survival" in a foreign land that has largely influenced the American dialect. In a calm tone, I said, "Damien, we keep sweating you for the ID to have all residents accounted for should something happen. If we have a fire, I do not want to be responsible for your mama cussing me out because I didn't know where her baby was. I know you're grown, but still, we have rules to follow like you do. So please help me help you. You got it??... We good??" Damien replies, "Yeah."

After what possibly felt like an eternity to him, I released Damien from my wrath to go about his day. Little did I know that would be my first and last interaction with Damien. The following day, I arrived for work as scheduled. Upon entering the double doors to the residence hall, I immediately felt a shift, like something was off. Lieberman (2000) defines intuition as a swift, subjective, and nonconscious process that, dependent upon an individual's experiences within an environment, is capable of depicting "probabilistic contingencies" (p.111). There was no noise. Not a peep of residents walking to or from breakfast, music playing, the copier was running--- nothing, just complete silence and the calm of the air conditioning blowing. I walked into the main office, and the administrative assistant was out for the day. My supervisor's door was closed, and I could hear talking; however, I assumed they scheduled an early morning conduct meeting. As I unlocked my office door and placed my belongings at my desk, Julie, the First-Year Resident Director, walked in behind me, shut my door, and told me that Damien had been murdered earlier that morning.

Speaking in a low and somber tone, Julie says, "In the present moment, we don't have full details; however, for now, follow procedure and inform the desk managers to forward all calls." In disbelief, I asked for confirmation, stating the Name, "Damien Hill?? I just saw him less than 12 hours ago. Damien Hill?" Julie confirms that Damien, yes, *our* Damien-misplaced ID. with a friendly smile, was the same resident involved in the incident. Kerri, my supervisor, and the residence hall director spoke with Damien's girlfriend, Tynisha. Tynisha, a freshman who lived in the hall also, became concerned when Damien's location marker didn't move for several hours. Tynisha said she called and messaged Damien with no response. Afterward, Tynisha thought it best to come to tell Kerri what happened and ask for help. Tynisha suspected the person Damien was riding with had something to do with his death.

With only minutes to process what Julie said, I immediately put my personal feelings on reserve, and my administrative role stepped forward. The reframing of Mammy and Jezebel stereotypes to fit modern-day society, and cultural expectations have left Black women feeling silenced and invisible (Bell et al., 2003; Collins, 2004; Dickens & Chavez, 2017; Lewis et al., 2016; Wingfield, 2007). As Julie requested, I relayed the message to the desk managers being sure to withhold information about Damien. I instructed the desk managers to forward all calls to Julie and should someone from the public contact the desk to inform me immediately. As the day went on, details of Damien's death began to spread throughout the campus. I wrote in my journal:

I remember being in my body, but I wasn't present. It was like a switch had flipped, and I became numb, only focusing on the administrative tasks of dealing with the death of a student. When my emotions would surface, I

said, "Nope! not now!". I would take a few deep breaths and keep it moving.

Outwardly, I processed as an assistant hall director who lost a student. On the contrary, inwardly, I processed the death of a black young man taken before he was able to realize his full potential and left wondering who Damien would have grown to be by his senior year and beyond. Colleagues heard about their student workers' behavior and then called me to confirm. " I can't talk about it!" was my standard answer for the day and the days ahead. I was mandated not to discuss what happened, nor did I want to. As I processed the matter in real-time, I wrote the following in my journal:

To talk about Damien's death meant I had to confront and confirm my issues with death. As children go through the maturation process to adulthood, milestones such as going to homecoming and Sweet 16 birthdays are celebrated. For Black men, milestones (i.e., 18th birthday, high school graduation, age 21, etc.) are celebrated because, per society, young Black men are not expected to. (Winston, personal communication, n.d.)

I kept replaying the moment at the desk the day before as if time stood still. Within the field of psychology, flashbacks are a subset of post-traumatic stress syndrome with varying intensity levels (Brewin, 2015). Bourne and colleagues (2013) describe flashbacks as "sensory-perceptual" visual images that can impede one's consciousness involuntarily (p. 1521) however are mostly distinct moments captured from an event rather than a traumatic experience. Bernsten (2010) states memories, involuntary or

voluntary, "operate on the same episodic memory system regarding maintenance and encoding" (p. 139), yet their retrieval processes vary.

To offer support to students, we provided on-site counseling and allowed them to grieve and pay their respects how they saw fit. Tynisha, Damien's girlfriend, wanted to hold a balloon release. We, as staff, followed Tynisha's lead and informed her to let us know if she needed help with setup or financial support. Students, staff, and community members gathered around 4 pm. Tynisha thanked everyone for coming and shared a few remarks about Damien. Other friends also made remarks through tears and disbelief of Damien's death. Afterward, we released the blue and white balloons on Tynisha's count, and while tears and music played in the background, the housing staff gave the students space to remember their friends and loved ones. Sas and colleagues (2016) discuss disposal practices that people can perform to *let go* and begin the healing process. One approach, passive disposal, consists of the disposal of elements through natural elements such as air and water. Sas and colleagues (2016) claim that "rituals of letting go are not about disposing of the loved one" (p. 11.) but the grief associated with their passing.

For the next three days, the mood around the hall was very heavy and solemn. Like any death, the checklist of tasks: informing family, deciding how to remove belongings, determining if Damien's roommate remains in the space, etc., and maintaining privacy as more information became available and quelling rumors took precedence. The director of Housing made the phone call to Damien's family about his death and coordinated staff to be available upon their arrival to retrieve his belongings. You can call it divine timing because I left moments before Damien's mother, Ms. Hill's arrival, to attend my therapy appointment. Responsible for shaping their spiritual atmosphere, Hucks (2001) says that Black women's religious identities involve a myriad

of layers that include the "supernatural world that allows for several religious traditions to coexist within their lives" (p. 90). In hindsight, I don't think I could have faced Ms. Hill without having a breakdown of my own. Journal entry:

The thought of a mother losing her child in what is supposed to be an exciting time for him, I couldn't bear to look into Ms. Hill's eyes or have the sound of her pain permanently etched in my mind. (Winston, personal communication, n.d.)

By day three, I was overcome with emotion and in need of a release. Participants in Woods-Giscombè (2010) focus groups share their remarks about knowing when they have reached a breaking point. One participant states, "Last weekend I had a breakdown because I realized I have so much stuff, and I was overwhelmed"(p. 678). Other participants discussed coping mechanisms and the importance of having someone present to "get things off your chest" (p.678). Upon arriving at my therapist's office, I sat down and cried for a good ten minutes as he watched on. In her work, *A Collective Cultural Woosah: Therapy in Black Community Brings Another Level of Healing, Resilience*, Kolade (2010) discussed how life's responsibilities could burden Black women. A licensed therapist, a part of Kolade's (2010) study, asserts that the coping methods from generations past of living and working while holding onto pain are no more.

Once I came to, I was somewhat able to share my feelings about what happened. The immediately apparent emotions were that you hear of students passing away. While the death of any student is brutal, it *hits different* when you not only know the student but you can empathize with the situation and cannot run from the grips of reality. As both Black men and Black women share the afflictions of racism, the requirements to meet

societal norms make Black men more vulnerable in all areas (i.e., home, work, and social) of their lives (Hare & Castenell, 1985). I wrote the following journal entry:

I empathize from the perspective that, as a person of color, I understand the challenges and some of the sacrifices made to get a black child into college. With Black men being among the lowest population to attend and complete college, to see them thrive in the face of adversity is exciting because "You made it!". Of course, the news stories, both campus and local media told the incident from a deficit perspective in the following weeks. (Winston, personal communication, n.d.)

In his discussion of the relationship between the media and their portrayal of minorities, Van Dijk (2000) states, "Negative attitudes about minorities are in the interest of most white readers for minority groups do not have enough power to oppose biased reporting"(p. 37).

It was to be expected. Tainting the images of people of color without considering a person's humanity is what the media does best. For example, the case of Ethan Couch, also known as the "Affluenza Teen ."In 2013, Ethan was partying with friends when they drove to the store and stole alcohol. Later that evening, an intoxicated Ethan went, and Ethan struck a car killing four people. Though Ethan's alcohol level was three times the legal limit per Texas law, Ethan received ten years' probation based on his psychologist's defense testimony stating Ethan's wealth made him incapable of distinguishing right from wrong (Victor, 2018). Unlike the images from Hurricane Katrina, the media broadcasted African Americans carrying unidentified boxes. They labeled them as looters, in addition to 13 male inmates being held in a "makeshift jail" surrounded by five white officers because the prison flooded (Voorhies et al.2007).

Regardless of who and how Damien was portrayed, I will never forget our first and last conversation about his misplaced identification card, chill/laidback persona, and pleasant smile. Black boys who grow to be Black men are not to be feared but uplifted and cared for. In place of society's microaggressions on black masculinity, Eunyoung and Denmond (2013) say Black men are not a monolithic group. To overcome and establish relationships with black men and allow space for vulnerability, Bost and colleagues (2019) observe we “must attend to the interior lives of Black masculine subjects and grapple with intimate, invisible, and quiet forms of violence” (p. 1). Before going to therapy and sitting with your feelings was an acceptable practice within the Black community (Kolade, 2020), I first practiced doing so with Damien’s passing. So, in essence, Damien taught me something too. I recorded this lesson in my journal to commit to memory:

While being strong may be seen as admirable, it's OK to take the cape off, allow your feelings to manifest outwardly, and be human. (Winston, personal communication, 2017)

It's also a gentle reminder that I reflect upon when challenging moments arise. In his letter, *From a Region in My Mind*, James Baldwin (1962) writes, “*Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.*” I want to thank Damien for helping me *face* my deepest fears head-on. I realized that strength is not just about one's ability to manage several things at once but learning your power and having the will to be vulnerable. As the days come and I go, I choose to remember Damien for the way he was spreading Black boy joy.

For Damien, may *your smile keep brightening the darkest of days, and you have eternal peace. Àsè*

Humanizing Black staff and students

Aware of death's mourning and healing stages, I took Damien's death personally. More than what I should have. Damien's death was the first time I lost a student I met professionally. When I entered higher education almost a decade ago, I did not consider the possible death of any student, let alone a student that I knew. As Black boys grow to become Black men and pursue higher education, I empathize and stand in solidarity with Black families, educators, and the Black community at large with the understanding the journey was not an easy one.

The death of Damien hit close to home for several reasons. First, Damien was a young Black man with so much life. Regardless of my level of interaction with Damien, the lived experiences of Black people are often relatable (Hoston, 2009). I didn't have to know Damien personally or beyond our brief conversation to have an affinity for him. Despite Damien being known for repeatedly violating the ID policy, I never wavered from seeing Damien's humanity. Rather than picture Damien as causing harm to the community, I saw a young 18-year-old college student who was forgetful, genuinely unaware of the policy violation, or just didn't care. Truthfully, I chose the latter nonetheless; the policy that Damien repeatedly violated, in my opinion, was minor and didn't require the student conduct process to address. I believe a conversation with Damien about the conduct violation with his RA would have sufficed.

Furthermore, my personal feelings were triggered as I sat in weekly staff meetings and discussed student conduct in a round-robin setting. Being a Black woman on staff and can identify with some of the residents' home environment, I became defensive when drug sanctions were discussed. I hated discussing drug sanctions, the use, and the potential selling of drugs with my white colleagues because of the notion that the

majority of residents violating the policy were Black. The matter-of-fact tone taken by some of my white colleagues was disturbing. Based on the approach used to describe residents and situations, I wondered if some of my privileged colleagues didn't see my color and separated me from *my people* because I wasn't like them. Through these weekly meetings, I was shown how caring for students was more of a buzz phrase when working in higher education rather than an intrinsic mindset.

When the news of Damien's death spread throughout the housing department and then campus-wide, the concern shown towards Damien's passing shifted among those same privileged colleagues. I remember receiving the customary I'm sorry. However, I felt it wasn't genuine. Even if the remarks of said elite colleagues were real after 5 pm, their character made a lasting impression. The details of Damien's death in the immediate and the days/weeks after that continued to reveal the interconnectedness of the Black community (Wilkerson, 2010). In the end, I learned that the impact of a person doesn't coincide with the length of time you've known them.

Chapter Five

DISCUSSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The unofficial mantra of higher education is “we do this work for the students,” but I dare to ask the question about the people who make up the “we.” For me, I was the “we.” Working in official roles in higher education such as assistant community director (ACD), admissions counselor, judicial student conduct officer, in addition to the secondary off-the-record roles of counselor, confidant, pseudo mentor, facilitator, big sister, auntie, and countless others that students and colleagues place you without permission. Rather than say no, Black women, including myself, often feel compelled to take on the unofficial roles alongside the significant responsibilities for reasons such as, but not limited to, (1) guilt, (2) fear/pressure of the outcome of saying no, (3) don’t want to disappoint Black students and staff, and (4) viewed as not being a team player among white and Black colleagues. The Strong Black woman schema is hurting us, literally (Liao, Wei, & Yin, 2020; Abrams et al., 2018; Watson & Hunter, 2016; Woods-Giscombè, 2010;). The truth of the matter is it's not worth it yet I/we don't speak up and advocate for what I/we need (i.e., time off, increase of pay, decrease in workload, etc .) or I/we see an incident involving a Black student and stay quiet because “I’m just here, so I don’t get fired!”.

University housing impacted my identity the most of the many professional roles I’ve held in higher education. This autoethnography was to examine the experiences of a graduate student woman of color impacted by university housing policies and practices as a judicial student conduct officer at a historically white institution. This study aimed to show how Black women can and have been harmed in white-dominated spaces and processes within higher education, thus impacting a Black woman's ability to be

vulnerable and fully present. Utilizing counter-stories as part of a critical race theory (CRT) framework, I hope to empower Black women within higher education to step out of the shadows and use their voices to impact change for themselves. Per chapter four, this autoethnographic study identified four emerging themes: (a) power vs. resistance, (b) shifting in the Black body, (c) humanizing Black students and staff, and (d) I AM MORE than melanin. For this discussion, I will share how the role of judicial student conduct officer and taking on additional responsibilities forced me to become a part of the same system that targets Black students daily. Additionally, in the following sections, I will discuss the themes further by drawing upon my interpretations, connecting findings to existing literature, discussing the study's boundaries, and identifying opportunities for future research. Then, I will offer recommendations with practical approaches for how best to incorporate inclusive policies and practices, including restorative justice practices, for residents of color who enter the judicial student conduct process within university housing.

Interpretations

Black women lead the nation as the most educated demographic (Katz, 2020; NCES, 2020). Yet, our resilience in the classroom does not shield us from the realities of history nor release us from the constraints white-dominant society has placed on us (Nelson et al., 2016). Compared to their Black male peers, Black women are often pushed out of the conversation (Morris, 2015), left to their defenses, and cope in silos (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). Furthermore, Black women have become accustomed to navigating corporate, academic, and social spaces (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). To analyze the themes, I centered my research on four counter-narratives:

1. The Ken Who Cried, Wolf.

2. Caught Between a Yes and the Yellow Brick Road.
3. Pity or Poor... Put some respect on my name.
4. Damien's Smile is No More.

Each counter-narrative represents the emerging theme—first, The Ken Who Cried Wolf portrays the emergent theme shifting in the Black body. For example, during the initial incident with Patrick, I attempted to remove his roommate safely but was met with anger and racial slurs. Later, during the conduct hearing with Patrick, I watched Patrick play the victim and weaponize his whiteness and use of resources, with a lawyer present, as he and his Black friends spoke about his good character. As a Black woman and in a position of authority at the time of the incident, I had to practice restraint and protect Patrick's identity, thus shifting my identity, despite his blatant disrespect for me.

The second narrative, Caught Between a Yes and the Yellow Brick Road, portrays the emergent theme of power vs. resistance. As Black women, we often feel compelled to deny help because we can adequately handle multi-tasking work and personal responsibilities (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009). For example, when preparing for the spring opening in the residence hall, my supervisor Kerri asked if I needed her to help decorate the bulletin board. I assured Kerri that I did not. The next day, I overslept and did not arrive at the residence hall on time to decorate the bulletin board or open the front desk. As a result, I went through the student conduct process and received a written warning documented on my student housing record. I accepted responsibility for my part in the lack of planning. However, I became hyper-aware of my interactions. I realized that Kerri had the power to terminate my position if my resistance to accepting help got in the way of doing my job per Kerri's expectations.

Next, the third narrative, *Pity or Poor, Put Some Respect on My Name*, portrays the emergent theme, *I AM MORE than melanin*. In the privilege walk exercise, the facilitator, Sarah, failed to connect the differences between the white male at the front of the taped line indicating the opportunities he is afforded compared to my existence at the back of the room. Black women are branded as a symbol of strength for our willingness to handle adversity, yet our existence is taught and often spoken from a deficit perspective. Thus, *I AM MORE than melanin*.

Finally, the fourth narrative, *Damien's Smile is no More*, portrays the emergent theme, *Humanizing Black staff and students*. Damien was a resident who repeatedly violated the identification policy. After several attempts to reach Damien, I happened to see him entering the building without his identification. I took the opportunity to speak with Damien informally about his ID people. Sadly, a few hours after our conversation, Damien was murdered. Some housing staff spoke about Damien before his passing differed once Damien was gone. I was seen as a staff member and not a Black woman who was impacted by a Black student's passing. Both Damien and I were invisible (Ritchie, 2017); thus, our humanity was not seen.

Implications

Past researchers have discussed the criminalization of Black students in the K-12 public school system through a series of policies and processes such as zero-tolerance policies and the school-to-prison pipeline. However, these researchers have declined to discuss the criminalization that Black women and girls experience at higher rates than Black men and boys (Morris, 2016; Ocen et al., 2015). This autoethnography examined the impact of university housing policies and practices of a graduate student woman of color as a judicial student conduct officer. Though my experiences are singular, they are a

part of many issues that collectively impact Black women. Thus, the need to address political and practical implications for Black women and girls in K-12.

Policy Implications

One of the significant implications of this work is that while student conduct policies in university housing are not inherently racist, the guidelines are grounded in theory created by white males from privileged backgrounds, thus alienating diverse student populations (Rendon, 1994). Scholars argue that zero-tolerance policies and the school-to-prison pipeline have created a mistrust of the criminal justice system with long-term effects on Black students, such as dropping out of high school and not pursuing higher education (Hines-Datiri et al., 2020; Starcke & Porter, 2019; Bell, 2015; McNeal & Dunbar, 2010.). Black women and girls have the highest criminalization rate compared to Black boys/men and any other race of girls (Ocen et al., 2015; Gilman, 2014) yet remain the least discussed demographic (Ritchie, 2017; Morris, 2016; Blake et al., 2010). Policies to protect Black girls and women cannot be enacted if the issues relating to their specific identity goes unaddressed.

Implications for Practice

Due to the pandemic, traditional higher education practices are and continue to be impacted. This change is an excellent opportunity for institutions, educators, and practitioners to deeply reflect, be proactive, and consider new approaches on how best to support their diverse staff and student populations. Particularly for Black students and staff, restorative practices will call for an active approach to be taken in the student conduct process. Additionally, where Black students/residents are discussed relating to student conduct, their voices need to be centered. Weiston-Serdan (2017) posits critical theories help guide practitioners toward an understanding of the "intricacies of

marginalization and minoritization" (p.29). Thus, Black women in university housing staff roles cannot remain quiet or passive about the practices and policies that can potentially harm them or residents of color. This active approach will help circumvent the tension within self or with Black students during student conduct meetings.

Boundaries/Limitations

Global Pandemic

Throughout the study, the world was experiencing a global pandemic of coronavirus, also known as COVID-19. In March 2020, the world experienced a shut-down of schools, workplaces, and entertainment venues. In my last semester of coursework, I was prepared to conduct the study when a mandatory quarantine halted the process of slowing the spread of COVID-19. Professional or social in-person activities were canceled and moved to virtual experiences only. Initially, this study envisioned speaking with first-year Black residents about their on-campus experiences in university housing. Still, due to quarantine measures, students were attending classes virtually, with only a crop of students living in the residence halls. The small group of on-campus students was not enough to create a sample. Additionally, the study institution decided to send students home indefinitely following the winter break. The COVID-19 virus has taken more than 900,000 American lives (Center for Disease Control, 2022) since the first case in January 2020 was discovered.

Autoethnography

As a pandemic pivot, my dissertation committee chair introduced autoethnography to share my experiences within university housing instead of having the narrative be white-washed or portrayed from a deficit point of view. It proved to be a

better outcome for the study based on my unique experience within university housing and providing a first-hand perspective of being a Black woman in a student conduct role.

This study took place at a midsize, four-year, Midwestern institution. The student population within university housing was approximately 3,500 residents living in five residence halls (3 first-year and two upper-class apartment-style housing). Of the 12 live-on professional staff, there were four Black women on the team (1 upper-class community director, one first-year community director, & 2 assistant community directors). My role as an assistant community director (ACD) was nuanced in several ways. First, I was in a position of power as a graduate student to make decisions. I was responsible for overseeing the front desk operations, including—student desk workers, managing resident assistants, and being responsible for low to mid-level student conduct cases. I worked 20 hours per week and attended a weekly all-staff meeting. Additionally, I was responsible for maintaining a budget with a department-issued purchasing card for hall programming.

Furthermore, I served as a facilitator for a housing initiative to decrease Black female residents' presence in the student conduct process. This initiative collaborated with the academic advising office, which placed academic advisors within the first-year residence halls to retain students within university housing. Due to my responsibilities as a judicial student conduct officer, I enhanced and acquired new skills. University housing duties at midsize four-year institutions vary, and the availability of resources and department budgets impact how responsibilities are assigned.

Moving Higher Education Forward

As a Black female graduate student in university housing, my first-hand perspective of experiences in university housing as both a professional staff member and

student at the institution align with the lived experiences of marginalized populations. My experience in university housing presents the ways my identities: Black, woman, graduate student, professional staff member, and judicial student conduct officer intersect, thus adding richness and value to how people of color, particularly Black women, view higher education policies and practices.

Future Research

Judicial student conduct processes within university housing environments at historically white institutions are well-timed. In a climate of social justice and the slayings of Black bodies, Black students are not favoring traditionally white institutions to pursue higher education like before (Williams & Palmer, 2019). Several future research endeavors can support and expand the understanding and impact of housing practices on Black women as judicial student conduct officers. Precisely, examining the experiences of Black women assistant community directors (ACD) between the ages of 22 to 25, with no formal work experience and have a student affairs background. Additionally, researchers may want to consider a deep dive into the lived experiences of Black women utilizing a Black Feminist Thought framework to engage their pathway towards a college degree and how student conduct policies have impacted their ability to complete. Finally, post-pandemic researchers may want to consider a participatory action research project that examines first-year and upper-class Black residents' experiences with the judicial student conduct process to improve policies and practices.

Recommendations

Given the highlights of this autoethnographic study, if Black women are to be instrumental and beneficial to university housing staff and residents, the following recommendations should be considered:

1. Dissolve the judicial student conduct process and rebuild using restorative practices. Much of the student conduct process emulates the criminal justice system (Custer, 2018). Black women can be triggered by the use of language such as hearing, officer, judicial conduct process, appeal, etc., based on their lived experiences and interactions with the criminal justice system. As student conduct officers address their biases first and break down the system from within, residents will benefit as a holistic process. Words have meaning (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003) and can invoke certain emotions. Therefore, university housing administrators should consider renaming the procedures taken to hold residents accountable.
2. University housing administrators may want to consider a clear and transparent sanctioning rubric. When sanctioning students, there needs to be a rubric that is simple yet appropriate for holding residents accountable. For example, Black students who favor listening to urban/hip-hop music loudly should not be seen as a threat to the community. To do this, university housing administrators may want to consult Black women professional staff, assistant community director level and above, to ensure bias and old-fashioned methods are not being used to implement university housing policies.
3. Recruit university housing student staff with intentionality. The use of visual and non-visual diversity to measure a person's qualifications is not an acceptable hiring practice. Students are interested in resident assistant positions because of the discount on housing. However, some students are not prepared to handle complex incidents involving staff and students of color. As a result, some Black students are mischaracterized and preemptively enter the student conduct process.

University housing administrators may want to consider inviting a robust group of Black professional staff to student selection interviews instead of keeping the process internal to the department.

4. Additionally, university housing administrators should consider in-depth training facilitated by certified diversity and inclusion professionals external to the institution. To not cause harm to Black women, professional staff, and Black residents in university housing, pieces of training covering topics such as restorative justice practices, implicit bias, cultural awareness, and addressing microaggressions (Lindsey et al., 2015; Kang, Johnson, & Thompson, 2011).
5. Finally, university housing administrators can consider increasing their knowledge on research that supports the development of Black professional staff and residents, individually and collectively. Traditional theories for student development are based on white male viewpoints of society (Tanaka, 2002) and no longer reflect the university housing student population.

Conclusion

Because of the lack of regard for Black women, stories like Breonna Taylor (2020) and Makayla Bryant (2021) are left behind. We must be willing to advocate for ourselves outside the sacred sister circles, Black lunches, and other sacred spaces such as the barber/beauty salons (Breedon, 2021). Furthermore, we must advocate and bring forth the lives, stories, and truth of Black women not being told beyond the initial point of harm or recognition (Ritchie, 2017).

Historically white institutions (HWI) need to sit down with Black professionals and listen to the reality of students. Yes! Black women are regarded for their strength, but the findings show strength in vulnerability. Shifting (Jones and Shorter-Gooden, 2003),

SBW cape (Abrams et al., 2014; Watson and Hunter, 2016), pushout (2016), Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire (Harris-Perry, 2011) are all names and actions that are associated with the pain inflicted by white society. It's time for Black women to find true happiness and no longer hide who we are to make white people comfortable or our presence palatable. HWI's need to be willing to hear the ugly and sometimes nasty truth about how their institutions benefit from Black labor (Kelly et al., 2021) and then erect a multicultural center as a band-aid to remedy the problem.

Before the students, a Black woman is usually working magic behind the scenes making the impossible possible for a Black student to remain in school one more semester. More concretely, a Black student doesn't have to be related to me to care about their well-being or want to see them succeed. Black is familial doesn't mean I know every Black human personally nor is it for everyone to understand. Stated, Black is familial means I see you S.I.S.T.A./my brother/my child. Black women deserve to be able to work in an environment where they have the freedom to choose how they will show up. When that freedom is taken away, the true essence of her being is never fully present (Allen et al., 2016; Hines-Datiri, 2017). In higher education, we are encouraged to support all students, but as a Black woman, I have an innate charge to be a light for students, nurture, reprimand, love, and empower. Though I have always supported all students, I have an affinity for Black students; it is not my sole duty to impact change or lead the initiative. It takes community and allies. Whether we speak silently or out loud, informing others of our needs, Black women need to be mindful of how we show up for ourselves, our students, and in dominant white spaces because *the body keeps score*.

Through the power of the Black voice, presence, and advocacy, real change can happen.“ It has been my experience that one way to build community ... is to recognize

the value of each voice” (Hooks, 1994,p.40). It’s time to speak up, but more importantly, it’s time to forgive ourselves for the times we said nothing and heal, for there is more work to be done and the next generation of Black students waiting on us to lead them.

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