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TWENTY SHADES OF BLACK:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE DATING, HOOKING UP, BELONGING, AND
THRIVING EXPERIENCES OF BLACK WOMEN STUDENTS AT PRIVATE,
PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

BY

Patricia P. Carver

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of
Bellarmine University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

February 2019
Patricia P. Carver

Twenty Shades of Black:
A Phenomenological Study of the Dating, Hooking Up, Belonging, and Thriving Experiences of
Black Women Students at Private, Predominantly White Institutions

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Acknowledgments

Karma has been with me throughout this academic journey. Being placed at the same table with Bob Cooter, not once but twice, at Bellarmine events was karma. Once to plant the seed about a new Ph.D. program in education, then again, years later, to convince me to join the Ph.D. in Leadership in Higher Education’s first cohort. It was not on my radar to pursue this degree until speaking with you. I thank you for that nudge.

Having the best cohort in the history of the program, in my opinion, was karma. You are my weekend warriors. Thanks for everything, including all the lively texts, jokes, and knowledge that you imparted on me. Tamekka, Kristie, T. Jai, Jessica, Glenn, Victor, Sarah, and Jerron. You are the best. Most importantly, to my sister circle, whom I could not have survived without, thank you. It was karma that brought you into my life. Kristie and my soror, Tamekka, we cried, laughed, consoled, and cajoled one another throughout the program. You got me through this process. It was karma that we all joined the program at the same time. I love you both.

To my committee members, Mike and Corrie, thank you for your wisdom and knowledge.

Thank you to the 20 brave women for letting me into the intimate parts of your lives. It was karma that led you into my life. You made my dissertation come alive. I will always remember every one of you and wish you the best as you move on with your lives. You all are destined for greatness.

Ida, thank you for the spirits, your advice, friendship, and closed-door sessions. You helped get me through. Elizabeth Dinkins, thank you for teaching me to be a qualitative researcher. I had no idea what it would do for me. My life is forever changed. As well, thank you for believing in my topic. You made the difference; it was karma.
Lorietta, my soror, thank you for sitting beside me in stats and encouraging me. You know I struggled through. You told me I could do it, and I believed you. You showed me the way. I had someone great to model in you. Dawn, my soror, thank you for always being in my corner and coming to my aid without hesitation. You and Lorietta jumped right in and helped when I needed a “critical friend.” Jakia, thank you for arranging the virtual writing retreats, the best kind for me. You keep it real and keep DJ in line and on his toes. Cynthia, thank you for all of the corrections and not laughing too hard at my errors. Karma brought all of you into my life.

Toni, thank you for being you and listening when no one else would do. You also know where all the “bodies are buried,” (j/k) and I know all of my secrets are safe with you. I love you. You also brought Cynthia into my life. That was karma.

DJ, my professor, my colleague, and most importantly, my friend. How ironic that our paths would cross when I needed you most. It was karma. You came into my life at the most opportune time, like an angel sent to guide me through this process. You pushed me to be a better writer, researcher, and thinker. I will be forever grateful to all that you have done for me. We are friends for life. I cannot thank you enough.

Rich, you are my lover, my friend, my chef, and my chauffeur. Best of all, you are my life partner who was with me throughout this process. You tolerated all the late nights, missed ballgames, missed meals, long drives, and messy tables. Thank you for listening to all of my complaining, rubbing my back, giving me hugs, and reminding me this is what I wanted. I’m done! Now we can get on with our lives. I am grateful to have you in my life. Thank you.

To my momma, who always believed in me, even when I did not know what I was doing. Thank you for your unwavering support and love. I miss you dearly. Hey Christine, look
at what I did! I know you were my guardian angel looking down on me and sending all that great karma my way. I know you would be proud of me. I miss and love you.
Dedication

I dedicate this to my granddaughters, Parker and Sinclaire. My thoughts were always on you as I journeyed through this process. You will be in college soon and going on your own journeys. Please always remember who you are and whose you are. Make a difference. Nonna loves you.
Abstract

This qualitative study explored and described the dating and hooking up experiences of 20 Black women students who attended private predominantly White institutions (PPWIs). Further, this study used a phenomenological approach to explore how the participants’ dating experiences influenced their thriving and sense of belonging, with particular interest in the intersections of their race and gender. Four frameworks were used to shape the study: Black feminist thought, intersectionality, sense of belonging, and the thriving concept. The following questions guided this study: (a) What are the dating experiences of Black women at PPWIs? (b) How do these experiences shape their perception of self? (c) How do dating experiences influence the thriving and sense of belonging of Black women at PPWIs? (d) How do dating experiences of Black women at PPWIs influence partner choices? and (e) How do dating experiences of Black women at PPWIs shape the perception of their university? Five central themes emerged: (a) Do they call it dating and hooking up or something else? (b) Black women understand the value of private education but…, (c) What Black women want, (d) The thing about Black women! and, (e) Men on campus expect something different. The study closes with a discussion of the findings and implications for practice and future research.
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Chapter One: Introduction

When I cast my eyes on the long list of illustrious names that enrolled on
the bright annals of fame among Whites, I turned my eyes within, and ask
my thoughts, “where are the names of our illustrious ones?” (Stewart,
1833/1994, p. 47)

The above excerpt is from a speech made by Maria Stewart in 1833 to address her fight
for the freedom of Black people from slavery (Stewart, 1833/1994). Stewart did not have the
privilege of attending college; therefore, her intellect and vast knowledge came from ingrained
intelligence and life experiences (Stewart, 1833/1994). Stewart was an early Black feminist,
blazing trails even before the term became known or widespread. Today, matriculating through
college is a common occurrence. However, the opportunity is not equal for all; therefore, the
fight must continue.

Research suggests that recruitment and retention are both major concerns at colleges and
universities (Bok, 2015; Jones, 2001; Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006; Lawrence,
2006; Tinto, 1993). Further, the quality of academics at any school should be the most important
determinant in the enrollment and successful graduation rates of students (Bok, 2015; Selingo,
2013). However, if students do not feel that they fit into the culture of the institution because of
their race, ethnicity, or sociocultural background, among other identity markers, they can
experience a disconnect, no matter the quality of the academics (Blume, Lovato, Thyken, &
Denny, 2012; Cuyjet, 2006; Cuyjet, 2011; Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010; Harper,
2012; Jones, 2001; Schreiner, 2010; Tinto, 1993). This detachment, or not feeling a part of the
community, can lead to issues with performance, retention, and graduation rates (Blume, Lovato,
Thyken, & Denny, 2012; Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010; Schreiner, 2010). Of
special concern are situations in which predominantly White institutions (PWIs) successfully recruit students of color—specifically African American or Black students\(^1\)—yet lack a well-developed infrastructure to ensure the success and well-being of the needs of these individuals (Moore, 2001). Universities have put great effort into the process of recruiting students of color but sometimes fall short of providing for their social needs (Cuyjet, 2011; Moore, 2001; Schreiner, 2010; Tinto, 1993).

Black students are expected to assimilate not only to academic life but also adjust to living in mostly White environments, which may be very unfamiliar (Spencer & Hughey, 2016). This sense of uneasiness or feeling as if they do not belong is accelerated when Blacks, students in this case, find themselves being the only one, or one of few, in the classroom or on campus. W. E. B. Du Bois (1903/2007) coined the term *double consciousness*, which defines how many Blacks view themselves through the lens of Whites. Du Bois called it a “peculiar sensation” (p. 34) when members of a race have to put away their own feelings and belief systems to conform to those of others. For instance, students of color may have difficulty interpreting the behaviors of the majority race as being helpful, “amused contempt, pity,” (Du Bois, 1903/2007, p. 34) or as complacency, adding to their discontent and frustration. Terhune (2008) defined this “solo status” (p. 550) as problematic and unfortunate as it keeps those affected off balance and ill at ease.

One such area of inequality is the dating situation that Black women encounter at PWIs. Although the number of women exceeds men at many universities, inequity in numbers is just one issue that Black women face with regard to not having partners (Birger, 2015). Research suggests that men desire Black women significantly less than they do White, Asian, or Hispanic women (Bany, Feliciano, & Robnett, 2014; Feliciano, Robnett, & Komaie, 2009). The problem
is even more significant at private predominantly White institutions (PPWIs) where the number of men, and especially Black men, whom Black women often prefer (Aud, Fox, & Ramani, 2010), is even lower, thus limiting options in an already dire situation (Birger, 2015). The lack of dating and other types of intimate relationship options can cause students to feel discontented with their universities, which could affect their performance, thriving, and sense of belonging (Barnes & Bynum, 2010; Cuyjet, 2006; Walley-Jean, 2009; Wilkins, 2012; Yancey, 2009). Further, studies show that when students are not thriving, or when they lack the feeling of belongingness, recruitment, retention, and graduation rates suffer (Cole & Arriola, 2007; Crocker & Wolfe, 2001; Schreiner, 2010).

**Statement of the Problem**

A major part of the problem is that the United States’ educational system is Eurocentric and, therefore, there is an expectation that all students assimilate to White cultural norms (Cuyjet, 2011; Spencer & Hughey, 2016). This expectation can become problematic when a Black student is the only one, or one of a few, in an environment. Terhune (2008) stated that this “solo status” (p. 550) makes it difficult for students of color to interpret whether specific actions are “normal White behaviors” (p. 550) or ones of racism. This inability to interpret these behaviors becomes difficult as there is no basis for contrast, and there is a continuous, and at times painful, reminder of White people’s privileged position (Terhune, 2008).

To further narrow the problem, when many universities address the issues of Black students, their efforts to do so usually involve the needs of men (Lewis, Mendenhall, Huntt, & Harwood, 2016; Rosales & Person, 2003; Schwartz, Bower, Rice, & Washington, 2003). When universities consider the needs of students who are women, their efforts usually involve the concerns of White women (Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Lewis et al., 2016; Rosales & Person,
Crenshaw (1989) advanced thought around this issue by developing the term *intersectionality*, which deals with the issues of Black women who face not only being racially minimalized, but also marginalized simultaneously because of their gender. Because of this negative treatment faced by Black women, they are sometimes left alone to learn how to maneuver the aspects of college life and cultural differences (Hesse-Biber, Livingstone, & Barko, 2010). This invisibility that Black women experience can be cause for less than ideal college experiences at PWIs, especially when it has been determined that Black women fare better when they are more accepting of their Afrocentricity (Love, 2010). The “double oppression” (Howard-Hamilton, 2003, p. 19) that Black women face, racism and gender inequity, comes from a history of giving their power over to what was considered a larger cause, that of freedom from slavery (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). This prevalence is still all too common today at PWIs where Black women have had to acquiesce to the needs of Black and White men, as well as to those of White women (Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Lerner, 1972). Further exacerbating the feeling of invisibility is the limited amount of men at PWIs, and especially Black men available to date Black women, which gets to the purpose of my study.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to contribute to empirical research regarding Black women at PWIs by exploring and describing the dating experiences of Black women students who were interested in dating men and who attended PWIs. Further, this study explored how these experiences influenced their thriving and sense of belonging with particular interest in the intersections of their race and gender. Black women students have not received much attention because over the past 20 years, the central focus of academic achievement with regard to African Americans has been on African American men, as they are often considered most at risk (Cuyjet,
2006; Rosales & Person, 2003). Although this is the case, universities are responsible for academic success, and therefore, should be responsive to many of the social needs of all of their students (Evans et al., 2010). This responsibility extends to African American women, who are sometimes thought of as model minorities, and therefore, considered invisible and without needs (Lindsay, 2015).

While learning to adjust to college life, many African American women also have had to learn to conform to a culture outside of their own without much support (Hesse-Biber et al., 2010). This adjustment can be challenging, especially when research shows that Black women who are most accepting of their Afrocentricity are better adjusted and more self-assured (Love, 2010), and therefore, are in a better position to be successful. Rosales and Person (2003) ascertained that it is essential for universities to respond to the changing needs of Black women students through special programs and services as deemed necessary. Therefore, I used a phenomenological research design to explore and describe the dating experiences of Black women students and the influences that these experiences had on their everyday lives at PPWIs.

**Research Questions**

Using the existing research on Black women students, this study explored their dating experiences at PPWIs. Exploring the following questions was the focus of my research:

- What are the dating experiences of Black women at PPWIs?
- How do these experiences shape their perception of self?
- How do dating experiences influence the thriving and sense of belonging of Black women at PPWIs?
- How do dating experiences of Black women at PPWIs influence partner choices?
How do dating experiences of Black women at PWIs shape their perception of their university?

**The Significance of the Study**

College is a time for individuals to grow, explore, and experiment in all aspects of their lives (Barnes & Bynum, 2010; Evans et al., 2010; Tinto, 1999). An important part of this process is developing goals, aspirations, and ideals outside of the realm of parental influence (Melendez & Melendez, 2010; Wells, Seifert, & Saunders, 2013; Wells, Seifert, Padgett, Park, & Umbach, 2011). Further, learning experiences are not just confined to the classroom (Evans et al., 2010; Schreiner, 2010; Tinto, 1999); attending college is also a time for students to try their hands at adulthood and independence in a somewhat safe environment by exploring their sexuality, which includes dating, hooking up, and engaging in romantic relationships (Barnes & Bynum, 2010).

The idea of individuals coming of age during their college years has relevance, as displayed by the number of completed studies about the state of dating on college campuses among Black women (e.g., see Fisman, Iyengar, Kamenica, & Simonson, 2008; Ford, 2012; McClintock & Murry, 2010; Medley, Reviere, & Stackman, 2016; Wilkins, 2012; Yancey, 2009). During this time students struggle with figuring out the role that dating, sex, hooking up, sexuality, and partners will play in their lives (Uecker & Regnerus, 2010). These issues add to the already turbulent time facing Black women attending PWIs (Barnes & Bynum, 2010; Evans et al., 2010; Tinto, 1999). Research suggests that Black women are disadvantaged with regard to dating because they are the least desired racial or ethnic group when considering the preferences of men (Barnes & Bynum, 2010; Cuyjet, 2006; Walley-Jean, 2009; Wilkins, 2012; Yancey, 2009).
Additionally, many Black women choose to primarily date within their race, which further exacerbates their disadvantage because of the low percentage of Black men attending colleges and universities (Barnes & Bynum, 2010; Cuyjet, 2006; Walley-Jean, 2009; Wilkins, 2012; U.S. Department of Education, 2016; Yancey, 2009). Researchers suggest that when students are unable to form close, intimate, or romantic relationships at PWIs, it can affect their socialization, sense of belonging, and self-esteem (Cole & Arriola, 2007; Crocker & Wolfe, 2001; Schreiner, 2010). This lack of socialization can lead to feelings of discontentment in their environment, therefore, putting retention and graduation in jeopardy (Evans et al., 2010, Hesse-Biber et al., 2010; Tinto 2007). This study explicitly concentrated on the dating, hooking up, and intimate relationship issues of Black women because of the large disparity of dating options that they endure (Brodkin, 1998; Ignatiev, 1995; Yancey, 2003; Yancey, 2009). Further, researchers suggest that while other cultures, e.g., Asian Americans and Hispanics, may have issues with fitting in at PWIs, they are more widely accepted as romantic partners (Brodkin, 1998; Ignatiev, 1995; Yancey, 2003; Yancey, 2009). Yancey, (2009) also proposed that they are more readily accepted because their physical attributes more closely resemble those of the White culture, making it easier for them to assimilate. As this study researched the experiences of Black women, Black feminist thought and intersectionality, along with thriving and a sense of belonging, were used to frame the study. These frameworks will be discussed in the following section.

**Theoretical Framework**

I conducted research to explore the dating experiences of Black women with regard to their experiences at PWIs. I used *Black feminist thought* (Collins, 1990), *intersectionality* (Crenshaw, 1989), *thriving* (Schreiner, 2010), and a *sense of belonging* or *belongingness*
(Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Hausmann, Ye, Schofield, & Woods, 2009; Maslow, 1943/2000) to frame the study. Black feminist thought does not have a clear delineation, starting date, or framer who can take credit for the term; however, Collins (1990) posited that Black feminist thought developed because of the intertwined interests of Black women with regard to racism and sexism. Feminist theory’s focus on sexism and gender issues is not motivated by the distinct issues that Black women face with regard to race, poverty, and ethnocentrism, though those concerns are equally as devastating (Collins, 1990; Hoffman, 2006; hooks, 1984). Black women at PWIs face the double burden of being subjected to stereotypical racist and sexist behaviors, such as the expectation that they are unintelligent, will placate and take subservient roles, and act in promiscuous ways (Thomas, Witherspoon, & Speight, 2008; Wilkins, 2012). These burdens are unique to African American women because of their intersecting characteristics, and thus, Black feminist thought will be coupled with the theory of intersectionality.

Although intersectionality was originally coined in legal studies to describe the oppressive treatment and disparity toward Black women in the court system (Crenshaw, 1989), racist and sexist treatment have also caused the same negative impact on women students of color inside and outside of the classroom at PWIs. Black women struggle with partners to date, are considered loud and angry if they disagree with their White partner’s consensus, and tend to be ignored by faculty and administrative staff when it comes to having their needs met (Hannon, Woodside, Pollard, & Roman, 2016; Walley-Jean, 2009).

While Black feminist thought and intersectionality are important to consider, along with these factors, higher education researchers have reported the importance of students thriving and having a sense of belonging while attending college (Hannon, Woodside, Pollard, & Roman, 2016; Hausmann et al., 2009; Schreiner, 2010). Hausmann et al. (2009) described a sense of
belonging as one having feelings of being a valued part of their college or university. Baumeister and Leary (1995) noted that when students do not have a sense of belonging in their college community, undesirable outcomes can be associated with these feelings. Black women have voiced that in many instances they have not fit into the established White culture of PWIs, as these institutions were not established with them in mind, nor has there been much movement to adjust the system (Fleming, 1984; Hotchkins, 2017; Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Lerner, 1972). Schreiner (2010) considered the idea of thriving as not just doing well in school, but also flourishing in five distinct areas: 1) engaged learning, 2) academic determination, 3) positive perspective, 4) diverse citizenship, and 5) social connectedness. Schreiner suggested that students exhibit more success when they flourish in the five areas of the thrive quotient.

In sum, I approached this research through the lens of Black feminist thought, which is derived from the perspective that one can equally value their culture and femininity; intersectionality, which posits that Black women cannot separate their role of race and racism from that of gender and sexism, and they are marginalized in unique ways because of their multiple oppressed identities; belongingness, which suggests that fitting into the campus environment is a formula for success; and thriving, which proposes that when students flourish, there are better outcomes with regard to, graduation rates, among other factors (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1989; Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Schreiner, 2010; Walker, 1983).

Summary of Methodology

This qualitative study used a phenomenological research design. Merriam (2009) described phenomenology as a type of research that is used to describe the experiences of its participants. Phenomenological research seeks to set aside preconceived notions, expectations, and biases in order to capture the essence of the subject being examined. In conducting research,
I was interested in examining the lived experiences of Black women students who attended private, predominantly White universities in the Midwest and Southeastern parts of the United States. The goal of the phenomenological research was to gather rich accounts of the stories that were important to the study and report those data in a way that remained true to the lived experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1994). This process was done by conducting one-on-one interviews with 20 women who identified as Black or African American and attended a PPWI. Interviews with the women lasted between 45 to 90 minutes. Once the interviews were completed, I coded, categorized, and developed themes from the transcripts derived from the interviews. The findings are presented in chapter four. In the next section, terms are defined to ensure that there is a clear understanding of how they are used in this study.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are crucial to my research; therefore, I am defining them so that there is no misunderstanding or misinterpretation of their meanings throughout the study.

Black women. This term is used to describe the undergraduate women who were the focus of the study. Specifically, women of African descent who were between the ages of 18-25 were sought out as participants of the study.

Racism. This term is defined as a form of systematic prejudice, discrimination, and the committing of harmful acts toward a targeted race who have relatively little social influence or clout by a racial group who has more social, economic, and sanctioned power (Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Clair & Denis, 2015; Diggles, 2014; Essed, 1991; Wijeysinghe, Griffin, & Love, 1997).

Sexism. The term is synonymous with misogyny, and is defined as denigration, prejudice, oppression, or pervasive domination over one gender or sex by another, and is more pervasive toward women and girls than men or boys (Masequesmay, 2008). Masequesmay
(2008) further explained that it is important to distinguish gender (socially constructed) from sex (biological) in order to dismantle the idea that one’s sex determines intelligence, competence, or temperament.

**Hooking up.** Hooking up can mean anything from casual sexual encounters, to kissing, to making out, to holding hands (Bogle 2008; Cambridge University Press, n.d.; Kuperberg & Padgett, 2015). Bogle (2008) reported that when students hook up, there is usually no strong commitment to the other person and the relationship, if any, is casual.

**Dating.** Mongeau, Jacobsen, and Donnerstein (2007) posited that the act of dating has changed over the last century and continues to move with the time. They also suggested that the act of dating is defined by the age of the group engaging in this activity. As my research focused on individuals of college age, dating will be defined as having a close friendship with someone that is based on “romantic interest and/or physical and sexual attraction” (Mongeau et al., 2007, p. 528) that may or may not lead to close intimate relationships. Mongeau et al. further suggested that women lean more toward romance, whereas men tend to emphasize sex or sexual attraction. In addition, Mongeau et al., suggested that college students seem to be less concerned with long-term relationships that may lead to marriage but are more interested in having fun and in exploring sexual attraction (Mongeau et al., 2007).

**Private Predominantly White Institutions (PPWIs).** A simplistic, straightforward definition for predominantly White institution (PWI) is a situation in which more White students attend a college or university than other races. (Bourke, 2016). Brown and Dancy (2010) defined PWIs as a colleges or universities that have 50% or more White students. However, Bourke (2016) also suggested that the meaning of PWI for students of Color conjures up the thoughts of whiteness as privilege, therefore giving the term PWI a more esoteric meaning.
Private institutions are not funded through state governments; therefore, private institutions primarily receive funds from private contributions, donations, and tuition. However, students are eligible for governmental financial aid. Many private colleges or universities are not-for-profit, church-or faith-based, and liberal arts institutions, although others are major research schools (National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, 2016). They offer a plethora of majors and degrees; however, they are normally smaller than public institutions (National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, 2016). For this research, PPWIs will be defined as not-for-profit institutions that do not receive government funding, and have a student population that is more than 50% White.

**Limitations**

The study had two limitations: The small number of PPWIs represented in the study and innate or unconscious biases.

**Geographical boundaries.** Although 20 women were interviewed, this number is small relative to the number of Black women who attend PPWIs within the boundaries of the study. Further, the interviews took place at five of the many PPWIs in the 200-mile radius of the researcher’s home base. Studies in other parts of the country would enhance the body of work and assist in understanding if the experiences of the participants are regional or national.

**Innate or unconscious biases.** The nature of the study and my intersection of ethnicity and sex lent itself to biases. However, I have been careful to write reflective memos and keep logs to ensure that my biases have not affected the research. Further, the use of member checks, peer reviews, and external audits through the use of interrater reliability were employed to reduce this limitation. External auditors included other Black women, doctoral level students,
PhDs in the field of education, and professors inside and outside of the education arena who reviewed the steps of my study at various stages in the research.

**Overview of Study**

The next four chapters are the literature review, the details of my methodological approach, the findings, and the conclusion, respectively. The literature review provides empirical research on the subject of my research, the dating experiences of Black women who attend PPWIs, and how those experiences influence thriving and belongingness. Therefore, the review will include literature related to Black women at PWIs and their experiences. Chapter three is an overview of the methodology that will be used to conduct my study. This chapter also speaks to my commitment to ethics and positionality with regard to the research. Chapter four will discuss the findings by disclosing the themes developed in the research. Chapter five concludes the research with a discussion of the findings, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to fill the gap of empirical research by exploring and describing the dating experiences of Black women students who attended private predominantly White institutions (PPWIs), and how these experiences influenced their thriving and sense of belonging, with a particular interest in the intersections of their race and gender. In order to deepen an understanding of this relationship, chapter two of this dissertation reviews the pertinent literature related to the experiences of undergraduate Black women attending predominantly White institutions (PWIs). The beginning of the review will give a brief history of African American women’s journeys through U.S. higher education. Following this section, there will be a broad assessment of the experiences of Black women at PWIs. These women hold the unique position of being affected by both race and gender, and it is important to explore how these roles determine treatment. Therefore, the literature review will examine how microaggressions, as well as gendered racial issues, have affected Black women on college campuses.

Fortunately, even with the hardship of gendered racial issues and microaggressions, Black women have been able to find some success and persistence in their pursuit of higher education by depending on one another (Apugo, 2017). The next section will lead into a literature review addressing institutional support offered to Black women and how these women support one another. Another important aspect of the college experience explored, and perhaps the crux of the current study, will be the area of dating, hooking up, and other terms used by college students, when exploring and forming relationships, and what that means for African American women (Lovejoy, 2015). Finally, the frameworks of Black feminist thought,
intersectionality, thriving, and sense of belonging are discussed to provide a context for considering and understanding the experiences of African American women at PWIs.

**Black Women and Educational Access: An Historical Overview**

History has not been kind to Black women, nor has it been generous in telling the stories or recounting their accomplishments throughout time, in general, or in the area of higher education (Alexander, 2004; Hine, Brown, & Terborg-Penn, 1993; Howard-Vital, 1989; Schocker & Woyshner, 2016; Zinn, 2001). Many schools use the same few matriarchs as examples when formally teaching about notable Black women before the 20th century, women such as Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, and Phyllis Wheatley (Hine et al., 1993). None of these great women were formally educated; however, they all left indelible marks in U.S. history for the roles that they played in emancipating their people (Hine et al., 1993; Zinn, 2001). These women lived before Black women were accepted into colleges, or they were too absorbed in liberating their brothers and sisters from the bonds of slavery to obtain formal education (Hine et al., 1993, Zinn, 2001). However, to understand the significance of Black women’s journey through the educational system, it is important to examine the history of U.S. higher education broadly.

In order to train White men of elite and privileged families for entry into leadership roles, the founding fathers of the United States began establishing its first higher education institutions in the early to mid-1600s (Zinn, 2001). The Constitution did not recognize women or Blacks as equal holders of rights in the United States; therefore, neither the founding writers nor their constituents could see the importance of educating these marginalized individuals (Lerner, 1972, 1990). Lerner (1990) further posited that this omission left out the majority of the population in the United States, as not only were Blacks and women excluded, but also men of lower economic
status. It took approximately 200 years for the United States to change its stance on who could receive an education.

It was not until 1835 that Oberlin College, the first in the United States to do so, began to admit all individuals into the institution without regard to race or sex (Hine et al., 1993). Fifteen years later, Lucy Sessions, who earned a literary degree in 1850, became the first Black woman in the United States to receive a college degree; and thereafter, Mary Jane Patterson graduated in 1862, making her the first Black woman to earn a bachelor’s degree in the United States (Hine et al., 1993). Still, even though educational doors were beginning to open, the turbulent times of the Civil War era, and the inequalities among American citizens played major roles in shaping the educational framework of the nation (Lerner, 1972). For instance, while the women’s suffrage movement opened many doors for White women, such as gaining the right to vote, the abolishment of slavery brought on its own set of dilemmas (Haynes, 2006; Lerner, 1990).

The Supreme Court upheld the court ruling in the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), helping the cause for many states, especially in the south, to establish what was known as “separate but equal” (Haynes, 2006, p. 11) laws. In addition, the Morrill Act of 1890 required states to either admit Blacks into existing universities or provide suitable institutions of learning for this segment of society (Haynes, 2006). The Morrill Act of 1890, along with the *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court Case, helped to advance the causes of many historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs); Haynes, 2006; Hine et al., 1993; Lerner, 1972; Noftsinger & Newbold, 2007). These rulings, along with anti-Black and racist sentiment, helped to solidify segregation, especially in the south, where most HBCUs were established (Brown & Davis, 2001; Haynes, 2006; Hine, Brown, & Terborg-Penn, 1993). The Morrill act assisted in
increasing—albeit not by much—the number of Black women receiving bachelor’s degrees (Haynes, 2006; Hine et al., 1993; Lerner, 1972; Noftsinger & Newbold, 2007).

In 1954, the Brown v. Board of Education (1954) decision brought about a major change in the educational system in the United States. The ruling that all schools were required to integrate began to slowly change the landscape for many higher education institutions, albeit with much resistance (Fleming, 1984; Haynes, 2006). Anderson (2002) suggested that “except for spectacularly successful attempts by individuals here and there, racial exclusion remained a pervasive practice in traditionally White institutions of higher education” (p. 10). It was not until the 1964 Civil Rights Movement that enrollment started to decline at HBCUs as Blacks began to slowly matriculate in PWIs (Haynes, 2006; Hine et al., 1993).

Moving into the late 20th and early 21st century, the number of Black women in colleges and universities continued to expand, and to outpace the number of Black men in enrollment and graduation rates (Ginder, Kelly-Reid, & Mann, 2017; Zamani, 2003). Even as the population of Black women in academia has increased at all levels, they are still wrapped in a cloak of invisibility, given that when race is the issue, the discussion is often about Black men, and when gender issues are of concern, it is often about White women (Hannon et al., 2016; Howard-Vital, 1989; Zamani, 2003). In Hull, Bell-Scott, and Smith’s (1982) anthology, All The Women Are White, All The Blacks Are Men - But Some Of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies, the title is apropos to the treatment of the Black women in higher education.

Hull et al. (1982) posited that the invisibility Black women experience is due to living in a White, male-dominated society that has negated and denied their importance; Black women were oppressed because of their race, gender, and many times, because of their socioeconomic status. Hull et al. called for an examination of the treatment and experiences of Black women
matriculating through the academy to ensure that they were not hindered by the intersections of their race and gender. While the number of Black women progressing through PWIs has increased, even surpassing that of Black men, their experiences have been documented as largely unacceptable and untenable due to feelings of not belonging, oppression, and of being inundated with racist and microaggressive acts (Hannon et al., 2016; Hotchkins, 2017; Howard-Vital, 1989; McDaniel, DiPrete, Buchmann, & Shwed, 2011; Zamani, 2003). These issues will be addressed in the next section of the literature review.

Experiences of Black Women at PWIs

Because of the multiple, interlocking oppressions of racism and sexism suffered by Black women, their experiences at PWIs should not be expected to conform to the common characteristics and development theories that have been around for years to predict behaviors and needs of students (Rendon, Jalamo, & Nora, 2000). Theorists and researchers are becoming more aware of the importance of individuals developing their own identities instead of assimilating to the majority (Evans et al., 2010). Doing so cultivates higher self-esteem, better educational outcomes, and improved self-awareness (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Evan et al., 2010). Therefore, institutional support for Black women should be deliberate and proactive when attempting to meet their academic and social needs (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Evan et al., 2010).

Howard-Hamilton (2003) also reported that Black women face the stressors of racism and sexism to an unparalleled degree as “double oppression-racism and sexism - was born for African American women when their subordinate status was assumed and enforced by White and Black men as well as White women” (p. 19). While the number of studies and student development theories on the needs of Black women, even with their extraordinary intersecting status, have been limited, there has been movement in a positive direction (Hughes & Howard-
Hamilton, 2003). For instance, Cokley and Chapman (2008) reported that while the roles of racial identity are multifaceted, it was noted that when students had a positive outlook on their cultural identity, they had better outcomes at PWIs. Along this line, Howard-Hamilton (2004) wrote that Black women students needed safe spaces where they could discuss, describe, and dissect their experiences within predominantly Black organizations such as support groups, sororities, and Black student unions. Howard-Hamilton (2003) further noted that it is important for faculty and administrators to support the needs of these students, or the “oppressive cycle” (p.25) that many women of color experience at PWIs will persist. Thus, faculty and staff have to be cautious and realize that even though they may not be outwardly sexist or racist, minor acts and remarks, when made maliciously and often, are just as impactful as outward and aggressive attacks (Corbin, Smith, & Garcia, 2018). As these microaggressive behaviors discussed in the study are aimed only at Black women, they are also considered gender-racial microaggressions (Lewis et al., 2016). This double impact of marginalization is discussed in the subsequent section.

**Gendered Racism**

Considered a form of oppression, gendered racism involves both racist and sexist behavior (Essed, 1991; Lewis et al., 2016). Essed (1991) developed the idea of gendered racism to help expose the “everyday racism” (p. 37) that African American women contend with because of their unique characteristics, “Blackness and femaleness,” (Thomas, Witherspoon, & Speight, 2008, p. 307) in their daily lives. Essed posited that everyday racism is embedded into common occurrences in one’s everyday life, especially when one has the notion of preconceived power over another. As these common practices continue to unfold on a regular basis, the giver of power and the taker fall into a “continuum through which the integration of racism into
everyday practices becomes part of the expected, of the unquestionable, and of what is seen as normal by the dominant group” (Essed, 1991, p. 50). To understand the ramifications of gendered racism, it is important to understand the concepts of racism and sexism.

Clair and Denis (2015) defined race as a social construct, normally based on a set of physical traits such as skin tone, body type, or shape of eyes that have no biological meaning. The social ramifications, however, have been monumental, because using race as a delineator is a simplistic way to differentiate or “racialize” (Clair & Denis, 2015, p. 857) people. History teaches that the using skin tone and other physical characteristics were simplistic ways to resort to racism or commit racist acts toward specific groups of people (Clair & Denis, 2015; Diggles, 2014; Essed, 1991). Likewise, gender is a social construction.

Ridgeway and Correll (2004) suggested that gender scholars are firmly settled on the idea of gender being more than an identity learned from the way a person is treated, raised, and encouraged through adolescence, but rather a social construct or “an institutionalized system of social practices” (p. 510) used to distinguish men from women. The distinctions embedded in this system are then used as a basis to treat individuals marginally, in the same way that race is used to discriminate against individuals (Masequesmay, 2008; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). When individuals, for instance, Black women, are subjected to both racist and sexist treatment, such treatment is considered gendered racism (Essed, 1991; Masequesmay, 2008; Thomas, Witherspoon, & Speight, 2008).

Essed (1991) conducted research to explore further the idea of gendered racism and the influence that it had on Black women. Essed’s qualitative study consisted of Black women (n = 28) from her home country, the Netherlands, and Black women (n = 27) from the United States; all were either college students or professionals between the ages of 20 and 45. Some of the
women had partners, others were single, and some had children. Essed noted that over one-third of the women from the Netherlands had White partners and all lived in White areas, whereas the women from the United States lived in Black areas of a city in California, and only one had a White partner. Many of the participants described elements of racism and acts of prejudice from peers, teachers, and colleagues. Essed concluded that these stories pointed to the existence of marginalization, as the dominant group treated the women as too incompetent to perform the same as their White counterparts.

Essed (1991) also noted that the Black women in the United States were able to understand racism from a wealth of life experiences, including historical events, cultural practices, and stories from family and friends. Women from the Netherlands explained away racism and racist acts by the Dutch as ignorance of the subject matter, as they did not have the history of slavery or other long-term cultural experiences. Essed posited that these Black women were acting in an oppressed manner by internalizing the acts done against them instead of putting the blame back on the racist individuals. Nevertheless, women from both the United States and the Netherlands had compelling stories about their experiences with racism. Lewis et al. (2016) concurred with the findings of Essed’s research in their study and exploration of the experiences of Black women (N = 17) who were undergraduates at a PWI. Their study revealed three primary themes: “(a) projected stereotype, (b) silenced and marginalized, and (c) assumptions about style and beauty” (Lewis et al., 2016, p. 767).

The theme of this projected stereotype Lewis et al. (2016) had two subsections, one being the “Expectation of the Jezebel” (p. 767), in which Black women were thought to be promiscuous, sexually aggressive, and seductive. The women in the study reported feelings of unwarranted objectification by men. Lewis et al. reported that one student was shocked by the
misogynistic remarks made by a White man who used explicit language to refer to her body as they were entering a local club. The other subcategory was “Expectations of the Angry Black Woman” (Lewis et al. 2016, p. 767) in which there was an expectation for Black women to be angry, loud, and unable to control their feelings and outbursts. One student reported toning down her passion so as not to seem angry or overly excitable in order not to be stereotyped by her White peers (Lewis et al., 2016).

Within the theme “Silenced and Marginalized” (Lewis et al., 2016, p. 769) two subthemes emerged in which were “Struggle for Respect and Invisibility” (Lewis et al., 2016, p. 767). The participants stated that they felt as if they did not garner respect, and that their intelligence and their authority were questioned when dealing with White peers, especially White men (Lewis et al., 2016). The participants also stated feeling invisible in classrooms where they were the only Black person taking a particular course. As one participant noted, “you know, always being that person that no one wants to be in a group with because they feel that you really don’t know what you’re doing” (as quoted in Lewis et al. 2016, p. 770). Lewis et al. (2016) posited that these experiences and “hidden messages” (p.771) given by others made Black women feel as if they did not exist and they had no value.

The final theme offered by Lewis et al. (2016) was “Assumptions About Style and Beauty” (p. 767) with the subheadings of “Assumptions about Communication Styles and Assumptions about Aesthetics” (p. 767). Lewis et al. suggested that the media played a major role in how others expected Black women to act, talk, dress, and display their physical appearance. One of the participants in the study recounted a story of a situation in which she felt that she was being attacked:
They used to insinuate things, like, because you’re a Black girl, you do such and such . . . when they would come around [me and my Black woman coworker] they would talk a certain way and because we spoke properly they were like, “Why aren’t you being Black?” (as quoted in Lewis et al., 2016, p. 771)

This story is one of many that were voiced by the women in the study, who shared their experiences about how they were expected to act in certain stereotypical manners or ways. The women stated that they felt the subtle forms of sexism and racism that make up the idea of gendered racism.

The participants also expressed that they were told to keep their voices down in certain situations before they even began to speak (Lewis et al., 2016). Lewis et al. (2016) suggested that it is not the responsibility of Black women to conform to the expectation of others, and no one should be made to feel uncomfortable because of preconceived expectations. They also noted that a person’s physical appearance such as body size, facial features, hairstyles, and other aesthetic appearances should not be ridiculed, demeaned, mocked, or used as a way to judge someone’s intelligence. Another way to look at these subtle forms of gendered racism is through the lens of microaggressions.

Microaggressions. What the reader must bear in mind is that these assaults to black dignity and black hope are incessant and cumulative. Even one may not be gross. In fact, the major vehicle for racism in this country is offenses done to blacks by whites in this sort of gratuitous, never-ending way. These offenses are micro-aggressions. Almost all black-white racial interactions are characterized by white put-downs, done in an automatic, preconscious, or unconscious fashion. These mini-disasters accumulate. It is the sum total of multiple micro-aggressions.
by whites to blacks that has pervasive effect to the stability and peace of this
world. (Pierce, 1974, p. 13)

The quote above eloquently describes what Dr. Chester Pierce (1974) named as
microaggressions. Pierce (1970, 1974) suggested that over the years, blatant racism has become
less prominent, and a new more subtle form of racist behavior called microaggressions has taken
its place. Pierce coined the term when describing “subtle, stunning, often automatic, and
nonverbal exchanges which are ‘put downs,’ of blacks by offenders” (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-
(p. 13) that, when accumulated, formed into racist behavior. Pierce noted that because of the
social cues from media and a history of racist behavior, “it was not unusual for any White to be
permitted, in terms of unwritten laws as well as written laws, to exploit, degrade, abuse,
humiliate, minimize, terrorize, and tyrannize any Black” (Pierce, 1974, p. 6). These actions were
a way for Whites to show their aggression toward Blacks at a time when it became illegal, and
socially and politically inappropriate, to commit overt acts of racism. Pierce suggested that
microaggressions have the power to kill, as the incessant, repressive, and oppressive meanness
that is aimed toward Blacks not only damages individuals mentally but also causes physical
impairment (Pierce, 1970, 1974). He noted that while he termed the problems as micro, the
resulting offenses were “incalculable” (p. 28) because of the devastating results they had on
Black people.

Corbin, Smith, and Garcia (2018) further expanded on Pierce’s theory of microaggressive
behavior to explore the experiences of Black women (N = 13) at a PWI in a Western state
regarding the “psychological tensions and silencing” (p. 2) they faced as they maneuvered
through their undergraduate careers. As with Pierce, Corbin et al. posited that the media distorted
images of Black women, causing White faculty, students, and staff to believe and form negative, stereotypical views leading to microaggressive treatment. The qualitative study used traditional storytelling to unravel the “historically constructed STRONGBLACKWOMAN imagery to counteract equally silencing Angry Black Woman imagery” (Corbin et al., 2018, p. 1).

Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2009) described the STRONGBLACKWOMAN persona as unconquerable, having the capacity to outdo men, and “less incapable than White women and emotionally resilient, physical indomitable and infinitely maternal” (p. 25). However, Black women can no more live up to this image than they can of the “ANGRY BLACK WOMAN” (Corbin et al., 2018, p. 2), who is described as “loud-talking, irrational, overly assertive, aggressive, and argumentative” (Corbin et al., 2018, p. 3). Further, both images cause Black women undue stress, burden, and hardships, because so many people buy into these stereotypical images (Corbin et al., 2018). Corbin et al. (2018) noted that because the women in the study resided in a state, town, and school that was predominantly White, the misogynistic and racist behaviors of their tormentors were intensified. Relying on the “STRONGBLACKWOMAN controlling image” (Corbin et al., 2018, p. 14) as a mechanism to deal with racist behavior is one way to combat microaggressions. However, Corbin et al. noted being a STRONGBLACKWOMAN does not come without flaws, as when battle fatigue sets in, there will always be antagonistic behavior on the part of those waiting for failure.

Vaccaro’s (2017) qualitative research also used storytelling to give voice to women of color who had been subjected to microaggressions at their predominantly White women’s institution (PWWI). The women in the study (N =18) who participated in focus groups ranged in age from 19 to 48, with an average age of 39. The stories consisted of racist and microaggressive behavior directed at the women from White faculty, staff, and other students. More specifically,
the stories were counternarratives about “colorblindness, mediocrity, and equal opportunity,” (Vaccaro, 2017, p. 262), debunking the idea that the PWWI was a warm and welcoming community as listed in the narratives on brochures. The stories told by the women lent credence to the idea that microaggressive behavior is racist behavior (Pierce, 1970). In many cases, these women were victimized not only by students, but also by staff and faculty who developed curriculum and other activities that were exclusive or unwelcoming to women of color.

Corbin et al. (2018) posited that it is not the sole responsibility of students to point out deficiencies within the curriculum, or to confront staff about racist behavior. PWIs should have leaders and leadership in place to address, adequately, the needs and concerns of Black women, including dealing with microaggressive behaviors (Corbin et al., 2018; Lewis, 2016). In further examining the experiences of Black women at PWIs, it is important to understand how an institution supports them, and what are some of the barriers they face as they attempt to further their education inside and out of the classroom.

**Institutional Support for Black Women**

Universities across the country have academic assistance, student success centers, and other resources to ensure the success of their students. In Miles, Jones, Clemons, Moore, and Golay’s (2011) study, they suggested that Black women should have programming and other assistance in place that catered to their specific intersecting needs. Miles et al. conducted qualitative research using Black feminist thought as a framework to focus the study’s process and to interpret the findings. The study was completed at a large PWI and consisted of Black women undergraduate students (N = 6), all juniors or seniors, participating in a focus group. Miles et al. conducted the focus group with the idea of developing themes to detect useful ways to improve institutional support through programming and services for Black women. They
noted that Black women were more successful when there was a connection to the campus community. Miles et al. suggested that most of the women felt their involvement with “minority organizations” (p. 120) was a positive experience. Other students said that not having Black women role models was problematic, as there was no one who looked like them that they could emulate.

Based on the above comments and other data presented, Miles et al. (2011) developed the following recommendations for consideration in supporting Black women who attend PWIs:

- Offer services that include academic advising, counseling, family planning, and financial assistance.
- Provide training to student groups and other professionals to help Black women lessen the feeling of isolation.
- Offer more culturally relevant programming.
- Ensure staff and faculty are able to understand and handle the concerns specific to the needs of Black women and be intentional in their efforts. (p. 127)

Similarly, Mina (2011) was also interested in the needs of Black women at PWIs; therefore, she conducted a qualitative study interviewing participants (N = 6) with two questions in mind: 1) How do African-American first-generation women describe their collegiate teaching and learning experiences with technology, and in what ways do such experiences vary? 2) What factors contribute to the nature of involvement for first-generation African American women in technology-driven, face-to-face college courses?

All of the women in the study self-identified as African American and were between the ages of 19 and 38 (Mina, 2011). Mina (2011) used social and cultural theory to frame her research because she felt it was important to document how students from lower and poor
socioeconomic statuses were at a disadvantage when starting their college careers. Because of their economic status, Mina posited that the women might not have come from homes or schools where technology was pervasive or available, due to inadequate funding in the schools, or because it was unaffordable in the home. Mina also framed her study using self-efficacy theory because she suggested that success oftentimes depends on one’s personal capability and motivation. Therefore, success may or may not be defined by economic status, race, or gender.

The findings suggested that the students felt that their ideas and comments were not valued in classroom discussion boards, due either to racism or lack of “classroom preparation” (Mina, 2011, p. 53). Mina (2011) noted that often, high schools did not prepare or encourage students to work with computers or advanced technology. In other instances, students could not afford computers; therefore, there were none in their homes. In both situations, the Black women were placed at unfair disadvantages. Other students felt that they were not properly prepared for the rigor of college, and were afraid to make comments on the discussion board as required by the professor, due to poor grammar skills or not understanding how to answer questions. This lack of responding led to students receiving poor grades, resulting in low self-esteem and fear of failure. In another situation, a student was deemed invisible because she did not want to jeopardize her White partner from getting an A:

The first thing he said was that he would take care of putting the paper together because he wanted an A in the class. I did not want to jeopardize his chances, so I went along with everything he said. My ideas were not included at all. I think that because I am Black, he did not value what I had to contribute. I sent him three or four e-mails with my ideas and a couple of strong paragraphs they were ignored.

(as quoted in Mina, 2011, p. 50)
These experiences, which had nothing to with academic ability, could be the cause of many Black women receiving low grades, developing low self-esteem, and even dropping out of school (Mina, 2011).

Mina (2011) also suggested that PWIs must take into consideration that African American women may have different and unique needs. She proposed that faculty integrate assignments that complement all learning styles, for instance, allowing students to incorporate oral history projects or other multimedia projects that would showcase “lived experiences and contributions” (p. 54) that would contribute to the class. There should also be programs that help nurture African American through their classroom experience such as “freshman seminars, summer bridge programs, and diversity centers that offer technology-driven teaching” (Mina, 2011, p. 55).

Both studies discussed the importance of programs that were specifically created for Black women. Institutional support is paramount to the success of Black women at PWIs. This point is especially true when Black women have to deal with other forms of oppression that they may not have ever encountered, or prepared themselves for, before entering college. The above studies expressed the unique oppressive experiences that Black women face as they matriculate at PWIs. Even while dealing with these repressive behaviors, many Black women remain resilient as will be discussed in the section below.

We All We Got: Resilience

Wasafiri (2010) introduced the myth of the “Obama Effect” (p. 1), the belief by many that racism and other stereotypical behavior toward Blacks disappeared when Barack Obama became U.S. President. For example, during his campaign for president, Michele Obama, his wife, was depicted on many occasions as being emasculating, blunt, and overbearing (Kelley,
2008), in other words, what is typically known as the “angry Black Woman” (Walley-Jean, 2009, p. 68). Walley-Jean’s (2009) study explored the stereotyped analysis of what is known as the “angry Black woman” (p. 68) and argued that the negativity surrounded by this image has led to undesirable beliefs about Black women, causing hardships in academic settings, partner or domestic violence, and the internalization of negative self-image. Therefore, if the public can think so stereotypically about the former First Lady, then the intersection of race and gender becomes even more salient for young Black women, who have no power when entering PWIs, especially in the South (Walley-Jean, 2009). Because of this lack of influence, Black women, for years, have had to develop ways to remain resilient, steadfast, and confident, especially when seeking success in predominantly White environments that may lack proper support systems.

One such system, PWIs, has been matriculating Black women at higher rates than ever as the number of students enrolling in HBCUs declines because of the passage of affirmative action laws (Haynes, 2006). However, because PWIs were not established with the needs of Black women in mind, they have been slow to put proper programming into place to ensure consistent success (Essed, 1991; Howard-Vital, 1989; Miles, Jones, Clemons, Moore, & Golay, 2011). In addition, Black women are still fighting to overcome stereotypical images that have plagued them for years (Corbin et al., 2018). Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) reported that Black women have to fight against images of being overly strong, yet inferior, criminal, promiscuous, and unfeminine. Combs (2003) suggested that Black women, more than any other racial group in academia, are marginalized, treated unfairly, and victims of discrimination. Further, these unfair stereotypical images put greater pressure on women of color to perform well and guard themselves against self-imposed thoughts of inferiority and self-deprecation (Jones & Shorter-
Gooden, 2003). In response to these persistent stereotypes, Black women have developed strategies to overcome derogatory experiences that have confronted them at PWIs.

For instance, Love’s (2010) qualitative study used a phenomenological approach in documenting the experiences and socialization of African American women undergraduate students (N = 8) who were studying nursing at a PWI. The study explored the idea of social justice within a nursing school program with regard to race. Love reported that the U.S. educational system is essentially Eurocentric, and has an expectation for all students to assimilate to White cultural norms. Therefore, along with the usual nursing curriculum, African American students also had to learn cultural skills that may have been outside of, or did not fit into, their cultural norms. Love concluded that this adjustment or socialization process put a heavier burden on the Black women, as White students were on the positive side of the equation with regard to racial differences. Love suggested that White students did not have to assimilate to a different way of thinking or acting in order to fit into the academic culture.

Love’s (2010) study resulted in six themes: 1) the strength to pursue more, 2) encounters with discrimination, 3) pressure to succeed, 4) isolation and sticking together, 5) pressure to fit in and talk White, and 6) the ability to learn with new friends and old ones. Love noted that theme one emerged because the women in her study wanted more out of life; therefore, they stepped out of their comfort zone to pursue nursing degrees. Theme two developed as the participants discussed their encounters with White students who openly made derogatory, discriminating, and disparaging remarks about the women, while at times, the professors looked on and even laughed. Theme three came about as the participants talked about how the professors and counselors either discouraged the women from joining the nursing program because of the high
dropout rate of African American women, or implied that they were admitted to meet a quota, not based on their own merit.

Love (2010) reported that the women felt a strong need to prove that they belonged in the program and were driven to succeed, which placed additional stress on an already stressful situation. Theme four reiterated how the women felt about being the only Black person, or one of few, in a class and how that isolation caused anxiety. The women said sticking together helped to overcome some of their loneliness and feelings of not belonging. Theme five came to fruition as the women spoke about the need to “talk and act White” (Love, 2010, p. 347) in order to fit in and be taken seriously by the other students. One student stated that she would put on an act for the year that she was in school, then went back to being her true self once the program was completed. In fact, Love reported that the student stated that she felt as if she was two different people, acting one way at school and another once she returned to her culture.

Love (2010) stated that the final theme emerged as one woman discussed positive ways to “fit in” (p. 347) in order to develop new friendships with a diverse group of students. Other students were not as optimistic about the idea of fitting in with the other students. This lack of desire was because they had been the recipients of past negative classroom experiences and were wary of developing fake or false friendships, and also because of derogatory encounters with White people in other aspects of their lives. Love noted that a few of the students did successfully navigate the system. However, those who did had to change aspects of their lives and give up parts of themselves in the process. Some would call it learning and growing; Love suggested that it was giving up part of their souls.

While Love’s (2010) research dealt mainly with classroom experiences and how students adapted, developed mechanisms, and learned to cope, Croom, Beatty, Acker, and Butler (2017)
explored Black women’s social engagements, and how they adapted and learned to survive at a
PWI. Croom et al. used qualitative research to understand what motivated Black women students
(N = 6) to engage in *sister circles* as support systems at their PWI. Croom et al. described sister
circles as groups that focus on members “that center” (p. 217) race and gender; for example,
Black Greek-letter sororities could be considered sister circle type organizations. Croom et al.
framed their research with the belief that “knowledge and realities are constructed in and through
community/ies and our socio-politically and socioculturally situated positionalities” (p. 219). The
following themes emerged from the research: 1) Observation—the students were interested in
knowing how other Black womyn and womym of color interacted with each other; 2) Finding
Role Models—the womyn wanted role models who cared about the students and were interested
in their success inside and out of the classroom; and 3) Being Whole—the womyn wanted to be
free to express all parts of themselves in spaces where this could occur (Croom et al., 2017).
Some participants expressed that while it was vital for them to join the Black Student
Association (BSA), they felt a yearning to belong to a group that was made up of just women in
order to feel free to “express yourself completely” (Croom et al., 2017, p. 223). Other women
voiced that it was uplifting that they could freely talk about issues of sex, sexuality, and how the
intersection of race and gender played a vital role in their lives. One participant called the sister
circle organization a “two for one group” (Croom et al., 2017, p. 222) because she was able to
talk and interact with Black women who looked like her, and they could also serve as role
models.

Likewise, Mitchell’s (2014) research suggested that Black women also use historically
Black sororities as retreats and havens from the rigors of everyday life at a PWI. Mitchell’s study
examined the lives of men (n = 4) and women (n = 4) undergraduate students who belonged to
Black Greek-lettered organizations (BGLO) at a PWI. Mitchell used qualitative research with a phenomenological approach to delve into the experiences of these students and the importance, if any, of belonging to a single-gendered organization. Mitchell found that the Black women students placed a great deal of importance to belonging to a Black sorority. One student used the word “powerful” (as quoted in Mitchell, 2014, p. 26) to describe how she felt about being in an organization that was completely run by Black women. The women voiced that they shared a special bond with one another that could not be duplicated for them anywhere else on the campus. It gave them a chance to support and be supported, to grow, and to celebrate the success of their Black sisters in a warm and welcoming environment where they felt a sense of belonging.

Clearly, sister circles, Black sororities, and mentors help Black women gain confidence, achieve success, and thrive at PWIs (Croom et al., 2017; Love, 2010; Mitchell; 2014). They provide safe spaces and give women the resilience to sit in a classroom, graduate from college, and strive for greatness, even when the odds are against them. Along with supportive peers, some Black women also want to have fulfilling and, at times, romantic relationships with men as they advance through their college experience; therefore, the next section will discuss the dating experiences of Black women who attend PWIs.

**Dating and Hooking Up**

Along with the struggles of maneuvering through academic spaces and relationships with faculty, staff, and other students, Black women are also figuring out who they are as sexual beings, which may include their experiences in romantic relationships, dating, sex, and hooking up (Henry, West, & Jackson, 2010). College is usually the first time that students are on their own and dealing with the pressures of sexual freedom without the guidance of their parents (Barnes & Bynum, 2010). They also may be figuring out who they are attracted to, and even
their gender identity. The idea of sexual freedom or what hooks (1984) labeled the ending of “sexual oppression” (p. 150) came about in the mid-20th century and prompted women to rethink notions around sex and sexuality, and these concepts continue to evolve. Along with this new freedom, women began to postpone marriage, causing the idea of dating and seeking long-term romantic partners in college to lose some of the relevance and importance that it held in the early 20th century (Bogle 2008; Kuperberg & Padgett, 2015). Bogle (2008) suggested that as a result of these factors in today’s higher educational environment, students are doing less traditional dating in favor of “hooking up” (p. 517).

Springer (2010) suggested that students still traditionally date; however, women more than men favored such a relationship. Birger (2015) found through research that women were more likely to go along with hookups or casual sexual relationships on college campuses where women outnumber men, and the larger the gap, the more hookups occur. Birger stated that where men outnumber women or the ratio is closer to 50 to 50, relationships tend to lean more toward dating and long-term relationships, and fewer casual sex encounters or hookups. At private PWIs, Birger stated that the average ratio for women to men was approximately 60 women to 40 men; therefore, students lean more toward hookups. At Howard University, an HBCU located in Washington DC, Birger reported the ratio gap for women to men was even larger, at approximately 70 women to 30 men; therefore, it stands to reason that more casual hookups are occurring than romantic relationships. In general, however, for Blacks attending college at PWIs, “when it comes to gender gaps the African American community is the proverbial canary in the coal mine” (Birger, 2015, p. 29) as the differences were so great. The skewed ratio of men to women is just one dilemma that Black women face as they look to establishing romantic relationships with men at PWIs, and “the struggle is real.” Because of the disparity in the number
of men to women in PWIs, this study will mainly focus on Black women and their relationships with men.

The Struggle Is Real: Perception of Black Women by Others and How It Affects Choices

Along with the gender gap faced at PWIs, Black women are judged more heavily than men and White women on matters such as promiscuity, attractiveness, and even skin tone or complexion (Esmail & Sullivan, 2006; Freedman, Carter, Sbrocco, & Gray, 2007; Henry, West, & Jackson, 2010). Skin tone was especially salient for Black women as studies show the darker their complexion, the less likely women were sought out as romantic partners (Esmail & Sullivan, 2006; Glenn, 2008; Freedman et al., 2007). Glenn (2008) found that lighter complexions, particularly on women, were considered more beautiful, and represented affluence and privilege, while women with darker complexions were viewed as unintelligent, unappealing, and dishonest.

For example, Esmail and Sullivan’s (2006) mixed method study examined the preference of skin tone that African Americans prefer in their mates. Esmail and Sullivan gathered quantitative data from Black men (n = 50) and Black women (n = 50) from a large PWI Midwestern university. Besides questions, students were given 12 pictures of the opposite sex with various skin tones. Esmail and Sullivan noted that 96% of the men in the study found the lighter to medium brown women more attractive than darker skin-toned women. Even with this finding, Esmail and Sullivan noted that only one male stated that he would not date darker skinned individuals; however, 34% of the Black men stated that they would only marry women with lighter complexions. Esmail and Sullivan reported that women did not have a preference with regard to skin tone for their life partners.
Esmail and Sullivan (2006) suggested that the idea of judging beauty by skin tone is of “great concern” (p. 218) as Black women have had to live through centuries of prejudice with regard to the idea of beauty, as it is based on racist Eurocentric expectations. This unrealistic idea of beauty has also caused divisiveness and kept Black women at odds with one another, pitting lighter against darker skin-toned women. Uzogara and Jackson’s (2016) mixed method research coincided with Esmail and Sullivan’s findings that even Black women (n = 1653) considered lighter skin tone more attractive in men and women. Uzogara and Jackson also discovered that women with lighter complexions had higher socioeconomic standings. Speculation is that these women were able to date and marry men with a higher standard of living, or that lighter skin-toned women were offered better career positions because of the value that the United States Eurocentric culture places skin tones and facial features (Keels & Harris, 2014).

Along these lines, quantitative research by Keels and Harris (2014) using hierarchical linear modeling analyses over 4 years and a longitudinal sample of undergraduate students (N = 2804) from 24 colleges and universities suggested that Black women were least likely to date outside of their race. Keels and Harris suggested, as with the above studies, that skin tone was also a determining factor in partner selection, as Blacks with darker skin hues were less likely to date. Further, Keels and Harris reported that Black men had a higher preference for women with lighter complexions, even higher than that of White or Hispanic men, tremendously lessening the dating pool for Black women. Along with skin tone, Black women were more harshly judged by other physical characteristics such as hair texture and facial features (Craig, 2002; Keels & Harris, 2014), as the Eurocentric United States culture tends to find women with long, straight hair and narrow and sharp facial features more attractive (Glasser, Robnett, & Feliciano, 2009).
Black women also suffer greatly from stereotypical images of being angry, loud, and promiscuous (Lewis et al., 2016). These stereotypical images can cause men to have unwarranted derogatory views of Black women. For instance, West (2008) suggested that White men justified or assuaged their guilt of sexual assault during slavery by labeling Black women as “Jezebel’s” (p. 296) or worse. West posited that today, instead of the label of Jezebel, Black women are called “hoochies, freaks, hoodrats, or chickenheads” (p. 294) because of, for example, dancers depicted in hip-hop videos who dress and dance in provocative ways. West stated that these images cause Black women at all levels, e.g., college students, professionals, and mothers to be unjustifiably labeled as promiscuous. Further, this stereotypical label becomes difficult to overcome when the media bombards people with such distortions, especially when that is the main avenue of contact with women of color until encountering them on a college campus (Punyanunt-Carter, 2008).

Furthermore, Walley-Jean’s (2009) quantitative research disputed the image of what is known as the “angry Black woman” (p. 68). Walley-Jean suggested that this stereotypical label has been attached to Black women, causing them much angst, as men use it as a reason not to see them as having potential as romantic partners. Walley-Jean surveyed African-American women (n = 76) from a large co-educational university and compared the results to a control group of females (n = 977), both professionals and students, with approximately 10% being Black. All participants completed a survey that measured anger and anger control using a Likert scale to ascertain differences. Walley-Jean grouped the participants by age (i.e., 18–19 and 20–29), and results indicated that Black women in both groups were significantly less likely to report angry feelings than the control group. Walley-Jean suggested that Black women in the younger group were more likely to suppress angry feelings rather than verbally or physically acting out on them.
than those in the control group, and Black women in the older group spent significantly less time “cooling down” (p. 76) than those in the control group.

It is common knowledge that Black women have been stereotyped as angry and aggressive, and Walley-Jean’s (2009) study is the start of a change of mindset on this unsubstantiated image that affects Black women in romantic, professional, and social relationships. These images that Black women have to fight to overcome become more problematic at PWIs, where women normally outnumber men. Therefore, men have numerous options in the dating and hooking up pool and less reason to debunk these false labels.

**Slim Dating Pool**

Researchers have established that women are enrolling and graduating in college at higher numbers than men, and this is especially troublesome for Black women who attend PWIs as they greatly outnumber Black men (Ginder, Kelly-Reid, & Mann, 2017). This shortage of men lessens Black women’s options for dating and having intimate relationships, given that they are less likely than any other cultural group to seek partners outside of their race (Fisman et al., 2008; Keels & Harris, 2014; McClintock & Murry, 2010). However, Yancey (2009) suggested that choosing to date within their own race may have come from Black women protecting themselves from stereotypical and racist behaviors that they have been subjected to in the past, especially from White men.

Yancey (2009) used general alienation theory to suggest that, with regard to interracial dating, Blacks are less willing to date outside of their race, and especially less willing to date Whites. Yancey’s quantitative study used the internet site Yahoo Personals to survey Hispanic, Black, and Asian White singles (N = 1076) about their dating preferences. Yancey’s results indicated that Blacks, and especially Black women, were generally less desired by Whites,
Hispanics, and Asians than other races or ethnicities. Yancey also contended that while all underrepresented races in the United States have some social dominance orientation, distancing tended to be stronger for African Americans and particularly for women. Yancey suggested that it was because of the racist treatment and experiences in United States history. However, the results also revealed that Asians and Whites were significantly less likely to date Blacks, especially women, than other races. Hispanics were significantly more likely to date Whites than Blacks and again, particularly with regard to men dating women.

McClintock and Murry (2010) approached a similar study of interracial and/or interethnic dating using a mixed method analysis, examining how and who students selected for partner hookups, dating, and/or romantic relationships by comparing patterns of homophily (i.e., the tendency of individuals to associate and bond with similar groups of people). McClintock and Murry administered the social life survey in 2005 to students (N = 732) who attended Stanford University to determine if race was a factor when selecting a partner for varying degrees of socialization. McClintock and Murry also conducted qualitative interviews gathering data on how partners met, if they had fun, and if there was some desire to have a lasting relationship. The authors indicated that Asian women and Black men were the largest populations to hook up and, along with White men, participated significantly more in interracial relationships than their same-race but differently gendered counterparts. McClintock and Murry also reported that while Black men were more open and likely to participate in hookups outside of their race, Black participants, especially Black women, tended to favor their own race when it came to dating and forming long-term romantic relationships.

Additionally, research suggests that even though more interracial dating and other types of intimate relations are forming, the percentage is lowest for relationships with Black women
(Bany, Feliciano, Robnett, 2014; Feliciano, Robnett, Komaie, 2009). Some researchers suggest that because Hispanics and Asians are moving more solidly into “whiteness” as many Europeans (for instance Jews and Irish) did in the past, there is more acceptance by Whites to form relationships (Brodkin, 1998; Ignatiev, 1995; Yancey, 2003). Yancey (2003) further suggests that Blacks will never transcend the racial divide because of the United States’ troubled past; therefore, limited acceptance will continue in general and with regard to dating.

In sum, even in the 21st century, college-age students are race and color conscious when selecting romantic partners (Esmail & Sullivan, 2006; Keels & Harris, 2014; McClintock & Murry, 2010; Stackman, Reviere, & Medley, 2016). Further, the dating pool is limited for Black women who are interested in dating men at PWIs since they prefer to date Black men. This preference may stem from a history of misogynistic behaviors directed toward them by White men (Yancey, 2009), because of the small number of Black men who attend PWIs, and because Black men are more willing to hook up and date outside of their race (Esmail & Sullivan, 2006; Keels & Harris, 2014; McClintock & Murry, 2010; Stackman, Reviere, & Medley, 2016). The above obstacles to dating and hooking up place Black women in precarious and unenviable positions as they attempt to blossom into educated, well-adjusted women who have a healthy outlook on life with regard to men, their own sexuality, and their place at PWIs. They are hampered in their attempts because of their intersection of race and gender. Because of the intersecting identities that Black women possess, Black women theorists have developed theoretical constructs such as Black feminist thought and intersectionality to assist in understanding the experiences that they encounter. These constructs will be discussed in the next two sections.
Theoretical Framework

As my goal is to center their lives and voices in this research as hooks (1984) suggests, the frameworks selected for this study reflect the importance of understanding Black women college students. With the above thought in mind, consideration should be given to the fact that Black women are complex individuals with multifaceted, intersecting identities. Therefore I will use Black feminist thought and intersectionality to assist in framing this research. Using Black feminist thought and intersectionality positions the research in a manner which reflects the lives of Black women, which are different from White women and Black men—it is vital to address this difference. The final two frameworks, thriving and a sense of belonging, are vital to the success of all students in the academy and are sometimes an afterthought when seeking ways for Black women to be successful at PWIs. Therefore, the emerging theory of thriving and a sense of belonging will also be used to frame my research.

Black Feminist Thought

Collins (2002) suggested that the idea around Black feminist thought was to give African American women voices and a way to name and define their own life experiences, endeavors, dreams, and pitfalls, instead of others interpreting for them. Collins posited that for most of the 20th century and earlier, most scholarship, written mainly by White scholars, focused on the oppressive social woes that Black women faced in life such as receiving welfare, being single mothers, and dealing with teen pregnancies. The idea of Black feminist thought was to change the trajectory from being of an oppressive nature to giving voice to Black women scholars, writers, and storytellers, enabling them to express their own stories and stories of their sisters, documenting what was important to their well-being (Collins, 1997). Black feminist thought
works to clarify the centuries of falsehood, misconceptions, and stereotypes that have plagued Black women for so long.

With that thought in mind, a number of key themes have emerged to frame the development of Black feminist thought from the perspective of Black women. Collins (1990, 1997, 2000) suggested the following established key themes as an enhancement to the lives of Black women:

1. All Black women share a common thread, and a legacy of sexist and racist treatment as White and male supremacy is well documented within the history of the United States.

2. While they all share in the legacy of similar mistreatment, not all Black women will react in a similar way or have a “distinctive group consciousness” (Collins, 1997, p. 243); therefore not all women will respond to situations in the same manner to a similar situation.

3. Because of the oppressive nature that they endured throughout history, Black women may see life experiences differently from members of other ethnic groups in the Eurocentric United States. However, some Black women may not be able to express these differences because of their lack of control over the “ideal apparatuses of society” (Collins, 1997, p. 247); therefore, they feel uncomfortable letting their true feelings be known.

4. Black women may struggle with developing their own set of rules or consciousness to follow what makes sense or is right for them. This consciousness may be slow in developing because of living under oppressive rules and marginalized treatment for so long.
5. Black women scholars who are authorities in their field play an important role in their communities. They are depended upon to be the experts, using their expertise and knowledge for laying the groundwork for change. This relationship is vital to the framework of Black feminist thought. These key themes are vital to the movement, as they intersect activism with intellect, and both are needed to cause a change in the treatment of Black women. As hooks (1984) suggested, Black feminist thought attempts to move African American women from the margin to the center of the spectrum. Being on the perimeter is a major problem for Black women at PWIs. Hamilton (2003) posited that Black women maintain what Collins (2000) calls “outsider within status” (p. 28) at all levels in the academy, as they are deemed invisible because they do not fit the status quo. They are an afterthought, so to speak (Hamilton, 2003). Collins (2000) posited that Black feminist thought gives women the “power to name one’s own reality” (p. 300). This naming is an important step for Black women in defining, or rather setting the record straight, on who they are and how they want their image represented.

Because of the emergence of Black feminist thought, more scholars recently have been using the theory in their research of African American women at PWIs (Cole & Arriola, 2007; Corbin, Smith, & Garcia, 2018; Fleming, 1983; Diggles, 2014; Hamilton, 2003; Hannon et al., 2016; 2016; Vaccaro, 2017). Hamilton (2003) suggested that Black feminist thought is important and vital to the success of African American women college students. In fact, Collins (2015) proposed that “When I wrote Black Feminist Thought, the undergraduate students who were enrolled in my courses constituted my primary audience” (p. 2353). The use of Black feminist thought in this research is an attempt to ensure that the voices of the Black women who participated in it are well represented, heard, and understood, using a Black feminist lens.
As mentioned, Black feminist thought is important when framing the research and documenting the experiences of Black women at PWIs. For instance, Robinson, Esquibel and Rich (2013) used Black feminist thought to structure their qualitative study examining how African American women college students (N = 7) perceived themselves and the issues they faced while attending a PWI. Robinson et al. asked and evaluated open-ended questions of the participants such as “What does it mean to be a Black woman on campus” (p. 61) because they wanted to emphasize “the empowerment of undergraduates as definers and resisters” (p. 61) and what it meant to for Black women to be enrolled at a PWI. Robinson et al. established two themes in their study: 1) being the one of few and 2) the resilience of Black women. Robinson et al. posited that even though the women in the study had strong spirits and a drive to succeed, they all voiced a feeling of being marginalized, and they also felt like the token Blacks in their classes as they were the only one or one of few. One participant in the study mentioned feeling as if her success, and or failure, was not just about her, but all Black people, especially Black women; however, instead of cowering away from that heady responsibility she embraced her role, which she said made her stronger.

In theme two of the study, the resilience of Black women, one woman’s self-description was “still here, I am still here, ” “Angela Davis reincarnated,” and a “White girl at a lily fair” (as quoted in Robinson et al., 2013, p. 63). Robinson et al. (2010) suggested that she was a bold, intelligent activist, who embodied the gendered, racialized characteristics to be “delicate, innocent, and pure” (p. 64) as perceived by “White femaleness” (p. 64) when the situation warranted that persona. Robinson et al. posited that the bold Black women in the study embraced their oftentimes onerous roles at their PWIs and did what they needed to do in order to be
successful. Along the same lines, intersectionality will be used to frame this study to further assist in understanding the experiences of Black women at PWIs.

**Intersectionality**

The intersectional perspective of one’s race, gender, and at times, social class is often neglected when thinking in terms of being the recipient of oppressive and marginalized behaviors (Crenshaw, 1989). Most observers tend to view derogatory behavior toward Black women, for instance, because of either their sex or their race. However, the double-edged sword of intersectionality runs parallel, and it occurs when the combination of, for instance, sexism and racism, causes a deeper form of marginalization or oppression to an individual (Shlasko, 2015). For example, Black women are often discriminated against because of the combined identities of both their race and gender. Therefore, while the conceptual lens of intersectionality originally was developed in legal studies to describe the marginalized and inequitable behaviors toward Black women in the court system (Crenshaw, 1989), these same derogatory treatments also occur against all Black women, including those who attend PWIs.

Although Crenshaw (1989) first devised the term intersectionality in 1989, the reality of oppressive treatment toward Black women has been around since slavery, as evidenced in the writings of Black women such as Sojourner Truth’s speech *Ain’t I a Woman* (National Park Service, n.d.). Her speech eloquently spoke of the discriminatory treatment of Black women as opposed to that of White women. Further, in her writings, bell hooks (1984) noted that the marginalization of Black women was more dominant than that of White women, and that discrimination was not always equal, even when concerning oppressive treatment, she posited:

> There is much evidence substantiating that the reality of race and class identity creates differences in quality of life, social status, and lifestyle that takes
precedence over the common experiences that women share – differences which are rarely transcended. The motives of materially privileged, educated, White women with a variety of career and lifestyle options available to them must be questioned when they insist that ‘suffering cannot be measured.’ …It is a statement that I have never heard a poor woman of any race make. (p. 4)

hooks (1984) made it clear that the experiences of oppression were very different for Black women than for White women in the feminist movement’s earlier phases, and this still holds true today. White women do not have to maneuver through college with the notion of being considered “less than” due to the intersection of their race and gender, and in some instances, the added burden of a lower socioeconomic status (Crenshaw, 1989; Wilkins, 2012).

To further explain, intersectionality as a framework is grounded in critical race theory and Black feminist thought (Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, & Tomlinson, 2013). Combs (2003) suggested that Black women, more so than any other racial group in academia, are marginalized, treated unfairly, and are victims of discrimination. Wilkins (2012) pointed out that when entering college, race becomes more prevalent among Black women. They have to learn how to function in a society that is “bound by the macrocosm (the larger popular culture) of American-White culture, but also racially identify with a specific subculture” (Hesse-Biber et al., 2010, p. 697). Hesse-Biber et al. (2010) also suggested that these multiple cultural roles cause great conflict and can be difficult to maneuver when shifting between “insider and outsider” (p. 697) roles. For instance, Hesse-Biber et al. and Smith (2004) suggested that women of color who attend PWIs may have to contend with feelings of being an outsider that are brought on because of the lack of role models, e.g., faculty, staff or other students of color who look like them, differences in body images, and diverse cultural experiences. Because of this outsider role, many women of color
look to family and friends outside of the college realm for academic support (Smith, 2004). Yet many Black women are first-generation students, and cannot depend on family members for advice because of their unfamiliarity with the college experience (Chen, 2005). Further, Hesse-Biber et al. contended that many Black women are expected to fit in and conform to a culture that was not developed for them or their needs; therefore, not having a clear and dependable support system in place is detrimental to their success. Additionally, although most schools have resources and student affairs offices to assist students, unfortunately, many are not equipped to meet the needs of the intersecting identities that women of color possess (Chen, 2005).

Along these same lines, one of the messages sent to many Black women is that higher education is necessary to become successful (Hesse-Biber et al., 2010). With this message, however, comes the idea that Blacks have to be two times better at whatever they do, than the average White person is, in order to receive any consideration (Terhune, 2008). Because of this thinking, many Black women place undue pressure on themselves to achieve these goals, while attempting to erase negative stereotypical images that they have lived under for decades (Terhune, 2008). This need to attain perfection puts greater pressure on Black women to perform well, guard themselves against self-imposed thoughts of inferiority and self-deprecation, and fit into an unfamiliar and sometimes unsupportive environment (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003).

Besides issues of race and gender, Hesse-Biber et al. (2010) pointed out that many Black women have to unpack other social identity struggles such as socioeconomic status, family issues, and in some cases being considered “too White” (p. 697) by some of their Black peers and in others, not being “White enough” (p. 698) for their White peers. These oppressive behaviors, along with the perception of “Whiteness as beauty” (p. 698) regarding body image, and other physical features such as hair texture and eye color, can greatly affect the well-being of
African American women at PWIs (Hesse-Biber et al., 2010). Crocker and Wolfe (2001) pointed out that self-esteem is tied to one’s identity or self-image. This formation of this self-image is developed from a lifetime of positive and negative experiences, images, and norms that are validated by society (Hesse-Biber et al., 2010). Unfortunately, most of the positive images portrayed by the media, academia, and society are not of Black individuals (Punyanunt-Carter, 2008). For example, many times the media depicts Black women as over-sexed Jezebels; the loud, obnoxious, and angry sapphires; or the docile unintelligent nursemaid mammy images, all of which are detrimental to the self-esteem and spirit (Townsend, Thomas, Neilands, & Jackson, 2010).

As the framework of intersectionality is more readily employed in the 21st century, it is evident that not only women of color experience ill effects or marginalized treatment due to interconnecting parts of their lives. Carbado et al. (2013) stated that “there is potentially always another set of concerns to which the theory can be directed, other places to which the theory might be moved, and other structures of power it can be deployed to examine” (p. 304). Thus students who may have marginalized intersecting identities such as gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability, or nationality have widened the lens with regard to intersectionality (Carbado et al., 2013). Carbado et al. posited that as this is a “work in progress of understanding,” (p. 305) and the reach of intersectionality as a framework is far from complete, as there are a tremendous amount of intersecting roles that cause marginalization in the lives of individuals.

In sum, PWIs play a major role how students develop a sense of identity and should have a strong commitment to understanding how the intersecting roles of race and gender impact the lives of Black women. This understanding and commitment are important to the thriving and a
sense of belonging for these women. As thriving and a sense of belonging are important to the achievements of college students, these two frameworks are being used as the final conceptual frameworks to structure this research.

**The Thriving Concept**

An emerging concept associated with the success of any student is the idea of thriving as they progress through college (Schreiner, 2010). Schreiner (2010) described thriving as “measures and perspectives of psychological well-being and student success” (p. 3). Although the idea of student success including retention, persistence, and graduation is not new and has been around for decades, Schreiner focused on the notion of “flourishing,” (p.4), which she described as entailing more than mere graduation as a definition of success. Schreiner posited that flourishing students perform better academically, remain socially engaged through interpersonal relationships, and are emotionally secure. Schreiner further reported that thriving or flourishing students have better retention and graduation outcomes.

For Schreiner, McIntosh, Nelson, and Pothoven’s (2009) study, they developed the thriving quotient, a questionnaire used to assess students’ commitment to academics, their social connections to the campus, and their emotional comfort level. To determine students’ level of thriving, Schreiner et al. administered the assessment to undergraduate students (N = 6,374), all under the age of 25, representing private (n = 19) and public (n = 9) institutions, from across the country. The results culminated into five thematic areas: (1) engaged learning, (2) academic determination, (3) positive perspective, (4) social connectedness, and (5) diverse citizenship.

Schreiner, Vetter, Primrose, and Quick (2011), in a later study, administered the thriving quotient to students (N = 5117) from four-year colleges and universities (n = 53), inclusive of private (n = 35) and public (n = 18) institutions. Of the participants, 69% were female, 21% were
first-generation, and 85% were White. Schreiner et al. sought to understand how Black and Latinx student participants thrived and what caused flourishing in the classroom, in activities outside of academics, and how they maintained a positive attitude toward life and school. Although the study was about these two specific groups, the article did not give a breakdown in numbers for Blacks or Latinx students. Schreiner et al. (2011) used the five thematic areas established from their previous study and further disseminated them into three categories, including (1) academic thriving, which encompassed engaged learning and academic determination; (2) interpersonal thriving that included diverse citizenship and social connectedness; and (3) intrapersonal thriving, which entailed positive perspectives. Using these three groupings, the study concluded that Black students thrived when they could do activities that caused them to connect to their faith and spirituality. Schreiner et al.’s study also suggested that campus involvement was not an enhancement for Black students with regard to thriving and flourishing.

Therefore, even though they are graduating from PWIs, Black women are not having positive or gratifying experiences, and are not thriving as described in the study (Schreiner et al., 2011). Kelly, Segoshi, Adams, & Raines (2017) suggested that the idea of thriving and the recommendations as stated in the study by Schreiner et al. (2011) may not have been extensive enough and had some limitations. For example, Kelly et al. (2017) conducted a qualitative study examining the experiences of Black women alumnae (N =16) who attended PWIs using the premise of thriving, Black feminist thought, and intersectionality frameworks. Kelly et al. suggested that although the women wanted to engage in the classroom, they felt as if the environment was not conducive to doing so as described by Schreiner et al. (2011). The women stated that they did not feel welcomed to ask questions, were made to feel unintelligent, and were
looked down upon. Further, some of the women stated that they lacked mentors or other confidants to talk with when they had trouble with classes or other issues that involved academic success. Therefore, the women had academic determination as prescribed by Schreiner et al., but no support to help them follow through.

Moreover, while faith and spirituality were important and helped with maintaining a positive perspective for the majority of the women, 25% of the participants stated that they did not attend church while in college or were never engaged in any faith-based activity (Kelly et al., 2017). Therefore, Kelly et al. suggested that engaging in faith-based activities is not a given for all Black women. The women in the study stated that participation with other Black students through sororities, the Black student union, and mentoring programs helped with social connectedness and coping. Also, the students said connecting with Black faculty and staff helped with staying motivated, especially in areas that were dominated by White men such as STEM majors. So while students may not have participated in the more traditional campus organizations, the participants did find that engagement with other Blacks was important to their thriving.

Finally, as advocated by Schreiner (2010), the students did advocate for diverse citizenship by voicing opposition to police brutality toward Black men and assisting in the organization of a protest in support of fair wages for faculty and staff at their school. So in essence, diverse citizenship could be defined in many ways, and might not be what seems acceptable to the White majority (Kelly et al., 2017). Along with Kelly et al.’s (2017) expansion of thriving for Black women, the concept of the anti-deficit achievement model (Harper, 2012) is also important to the idea of thriving.
While Harper (2012) originally established the anti-deficit model with Black men in mind, it was soon established that the framework is a positive notion for all students of color. Harper proposed that an anti-deficit achievement model should be used to promote thriving, resilience, and success in students of color. Therefore, instead of concentrating on the reasons why Blacks, for example, are not successfully completing college in high enough numbers, Harper suggested that concentration and efforts be placed on establishing techniques and models that seek to understand why and how Blacks are successfully completing their academic endeavors.

For instance, Cooper, Cooper, and Baker (2016) used, along with others, an anti-deficit achievement framework in their qualitative study of Black Women student athletes (N = 5) to document their academic experiences at a Division I PWI. Cooper et al. concluded that the women were successful because of the motivation from their families, who strongly believed in academic success and the completion of college. The students also reported that they had strong support systems that included their tutors, caring academic advisors, and supportive coaches. The athletes also voiced that they had a strong sense of belonging because of being on their sports team and having comradery with the other players. The women stated that playing on a sports team also gave them a certain amount of status, which increased their egos, self-esteem, and social status. Cooper et al. used their study to emphasize how the anti-deficit model, along with using coping techniques and motivating factors, enhanced the idea thriving at PWIs for Black women. Cooper et al. also suggested that having a sense of belonging is important to the success and persistence of women at PWIs, which is the final framework used in my research.
Belongingness/Sense of Belonging

The framework of belongingness is not a new notion as Maslow (1943/2000) introduced the idea as the third tier in his hierarchy of “basic needs” (p. 372) concept after physiological and safety needs respectively. Maslow described belongingness as the need for “love and affection” (p. 380) from family, friends, people in general, and having “a place within his group” (p. 380). Maslow suggested that without having a sense of belonging or belongingness being met, individuals would face instability, maladjustments, and in extreme cases, psychological problems. More recently, Hausmann et al. (2009) described belongingness as individuals having feelings of being valued members of their college or university. Further, Baumeister and Leary (1995) reported that when students did not have a sense of belonging in their college community, undesirable outcomes could be associated with their feelings. For instance, in Hausmann et al.’s study, using a longitudinal experimental approach, they questioned first year Black (n = 145) and White (n = 220) students to gauge their sense of belonging at their PWI.

Findings indicated that peer support decreased for African American women and thus their sense of belonging also decreased (Hausmann et al., 2009). In fact, Hausmann et al. reported that the pattern of decreased support was more prominent for Black women than for any other sector, thus suggesting a stronger feeling from the loss of sense of belonging. Interestingly, Hausmann et al. also indicated that especially for African American students, peer relationships and parental support were more vitally important to persistence than other factors regarding the sense of belonging that they developed at PWIs.

Along these lines, Leary’s study (2005) linked belongingness with emotions attached to self-esteem. Crocker and Wolfe (2001) referred to self-esteem as a global judgment of self-worth and suggested that it can be both biological and a state of being, meaning that people are born
with some level of the trait, but that the level can vary, depending on given situations. For instance, Leary suggested that when individuals feel lonely, isolated, or neglected, not only do they have a low sense of belonging, but they also may suffer from low self-esteem. Therefore, when people are placed in situations that they can strive and do well in, or are looked upon in a high manner, there is a greater possibility that their self-esteem or self-worth will rise (Leary, 2005). Likewise, Crocker and Wolfe posited that when individuals are faced with situations where they are looked down upon, or there is an expectation of failure, their self-esteem is likely to plummet.

For example, Hoffman, Borders, and Hattie (2000) defined gender self-acceptance or confidence as the level of certainty in which individuals believe in their own femininity or masculinity. With this in mind, Hoffman (2006) conducted a study of students who were women (N = 361), using both the feminist and womanist theories to examine if having positive feelings regarding the intersections of ethnicity and gender raised the level of self-acceptance in an individual. Hoffman’s findings revealed that when Black women were accepting of the status of their ethnicity, they gave positive indications that they were comfortable with their gender identity. In addition, Hoffman suggested that women who gave positive indications about their gender seemed to be happy with the status of their ethnicity and thus had higher self-esteem.

Hannon et al. (2016) further expanded the connection of self-esteem and belongingness for Black women by conducting a phenomenological study documenting the experiences of students (N = 7) who attended a PWI. Hannon et al. used the Afro-American emerging self-concept model (Browns-Collins & Sussewell, 1986), which offered three self-referents including “psychophysiological referent, African-American referent, and myself referent” (p. 1). Five themes emerged from Hannon et al.’s study:
• The students suggested that they had to live in “two worlds” (p. 658), one White and the other Black, as well as maneuvering their intersecting gender roles of being both Black and women.

• The women talked of the experiences of “belonging – in or out” (p. 659), and how in some instances they were good enough to belong to Black organizations such as sororities but did not qualify for the some of the White organizations.

• The women had “expectations” (p. 660) of themselves to be successful. These internal goals were with regard to graduation attainment and careers. Some women also felt the added burden of having to succeed because society as a whole expected them to fail.

• The women felt that there was always an “awareness of surroundings” (p. 660) because they were usually the only Black or one of a few in the room, or they felt that they were always on display.

• The women stated that they were constantly “coping” (p. 661) and using strategies to adapt to antagonistic situations. The participants discussed stepping out of their “comfort zones” (p. 661) in order to achieve a sense of growth and development, which meant developing self-confidence and a strong sense of self.

Hannon et al.’s (2016) findings concluded that students struggled with the need to integrate multiple cultures, one Black and one White, while managing to cope and fit into an, at times, uncomfortable environment. Hannon et al.’s research further emphasized the importance of Black women’s experiences, and how their successes were closely tied with sense of belonging as they matriculated through PWIs.
Chapter Summary

This chapter is meant to provide a synopsis and add substance to my study by using the literature to unveil the experiences of Black women as they matriculate through PWIs. More specifically, as this research is mainly about Black Women College students who are interested in dating men, and how dating affects their experiences, I presented literature on Black feminist thought, intersectionality, thriving, and belongingness to frame my research. Before presenting the frameworks, a brief history of the journey of Black women began the chapter, setting the tone and providing a clear understanding of their plight and place in the structure of higher education. The chapter then provided literature on Black women students and their relationships with PWIs with regard to institutional support, gendered and racialized aggressions and microaggressions, and dating. The findings suggested that the students felt that their ideas and comments were not valued at PWIs (Mina, 2011). Black women were also inundated with stereotypical, gendered, racialized, and microaggressive acts that caused great distress (Hannon et al., 2016; Hotchkins, 2017; Howard-Vital, 1989; McDaniel, DiPrete, Buchmann, & Shwed, 2011; Zamani, 2003). In addition, there were not enough role models for them to emulate and learn from; therefore, they had to depend on their own resilience and that of other Black women to find success and solace (Miles et al., 2011; Robinson et al., 2013). Therefore, the women formed sister circles, joined Black sororities, and found mentors, many times outside of their college, to help them gain confidence, achieve success, and attempt to thrive at PWIs (Croom et al., 2017; Love, 2010; Mitchell; 2014). The literature also noted that the women had to cope with having very few men to date, some of which were color conscious, causing at times, divisiveness, disappointment, and grief for the women (Esmail & Sullivan, 2006).
The four frameworks vital to my study were Black feminist thought, intersectionality, thriving, and belongingness. Intersectionality and Black feminist thought were vital to the understanding of the place that African American women hold in the United States and exemplify that they are hampered in many aspects of their lives because of race, sex, and social standing. These two theories, along with thriving and belongingness, were used to set the tone and assist with making sense of the experiences of the women in my study. Belongingness and thriving are important to the lives of Black women who attend PWIs, as they are vital and key components to the successful matriculation through PWIs (Hannon et al., 2016; Schreiner, 2010).

Conclusion

It is clear from the literature that Black women are highly disadvantaged when attending PWI’s. It is also evident that Black women are also resilient, as history has documented their long, arduous, and never-ending fight in claiming their rightful place at PWIs. Black women not only have to endure the negative effects of racism, but also the incessant sexist acts imposed upon them. However, the literature has failed to document how the lack of dating partners for women interested in dating men has influenced the experiences of Black women at private PWIs. There is, however, research documenting whom Black women are attracted to, who finds Black women appealing, and how skin tones impact dating. Studies throughout history have demonstrated how Black women have been depicted as promiscuous, angry, and loud. However, there is a lack of research documenting how the lack of having partners to date for Black women affects retention, graduation, thriving, and a sense of belonging at private PWIs. Further, research suggests that Black women are in a more precarious situation with regard to dating than most others who are considered underrepresented, thus the importance of this study.

Therefore, my study will add to the body of knowledge by documenting the dating experiences of Black women at private PWIs, filling the gap of empirical research by exploring
and describing how those experiences influence their sense of well-being, with a particular interest in the intersections of their race and gender.
Chapter Three: Methodology

Chapter three presents and details the plan used in this study in the following order: research questions; methodological approach; researcher’s positionality; statement of ethics; details on the participants; techniques for data collection; interviewing process; research sites; analyzing the data; validity; and, a statement on trustworthiness. The purpose of the study was to document the dating experiences of Black women who attended private predominantly White institutions (PPWIs) and were interested in dating men. In this regard, the study delved into how these experiences affected their thriving and sense of belonging at PPWIs. This study contributed to the body of empirical work on Black women’s experiences, as there are limited to no studies that connect the dating experiences of Black women with thriving or a sense of belonging at PPWIs.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to contribute to filling the gap of empirical research by exploring and describing the dating experiences of Black women students who attended private PPWIs and how these experiences influenced their thriving and sense of belonging, with a particular interest in the intersection of their race and gender. This study documents and discusses the dating experiences of Black women who attend PPWIs using the frameworks of Black feminist thought and intersectionality. These two theories were used as they best reflect the depth and understanding of the experiences that Black women face in predominantly White environments. Black feminist thought uses the voices of Black women to express who they are, who they want to be, and how they want to be treated (Collins, 2000). In concert, intersectionality as a framework best represents marginalized, intersecting identities, and in this
case, race and sex that lead to racist and sexist acts against Black women that marginalized them in unique ways (Crenshaw, 1989).

Further, within the study, I employed the frameworks of thriving and sense of belonging, as both are vital to the success of students as they advance through college. Students who thrive and feel a part of the community, i.e., a sense of belonging, perform better and are more likely to graduate (Hausmann et al., 2009; Schreiner, 2010). With these thoughts in mind, this study examined the following questions:

- What are the dating experiences of Black women at PPWIs?
- How do these experiences shape their perception of self?
- How do dating experiences influence the thriving and sense of belonging of Black women at PPWIs?
- How do dating experiences of Black women at PPWIs influence partner choices?
- How do dating experiences of Black women at PPWIs shape the perceptions of their universities?

As the questions in my research were designed to increase understanding of and to document the experiences in the lives of Black women who attend PPWIs, a qualitative research methodology best fit the study.

**Methodological Approach**

Qualitative research is best for research that attempts to ascertain, describe, and understand what is relevant in the lives of the participants, as well as to document how they voice and explain their experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Thus, my research fits the criteria of qualitative social research as it seeks to “investigate human phenomena” (Carspecken, 1996, p.
3) and tells stories as expressed by Black women who attend PPWIs. Further, my research does not lend itself to quantitative methods, as there is no intent to quantify the participants’ experiences, but rather, to understand better their lived experiences. Ravitch and Carl (2016) also posited that there is no primary goal in pursuing an objective or “immutable truth” (p. 9) in qualitative studies; however, qualitative research does aim for validity and reliability. Therefore, reliable research usually transcends time, is constant, and reasonably reproducible from one study to the next, using similar methods (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013). Further, valid research takes adequate steps to ensure that the results and conclusions made are credible (Maxwell, 2013). Most research begins with a desire to have a problem solved or a question answered. It is then up to the researcher to select conceptual frameworks and a research design for the study that best fits the questions or problems. For instance, the questions guiding my research deal with the dating experiences of Black women students attending PPWIs. As such, this investigation was best suited for a phenomenological approach.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology as a philosophy was originally associated with Edmund Husserl (Creswell, 2009). Phenomenological research developed from Husserl’s concept of studying the conscious experience and how those events formed meaning in one’s everyday life (Merriam, 2009). With this in mind, Creswell (2009) described phenomenology as a research design that has the purpose of describing the lived experiences of its participants around a specific occurrence or relationship. Vagle (2014) stated that phenomenology is based on the idea that the same experience can be interpreted in multiple ways depending on the reality of the participant. Vagle also noted that the primary purpose of the research method is to examine how one reacts in those relationships. Phenomenology likewise focuses on what is important for the purpose of
the event, episode, or interaction, and the importance of the individual participant’s voice or experience (Vagle, 2014). Merriam (2009) suggested that phenomenology is most relevant when studying “intense human experiences” (p. 26) such as “love, hate, and betrayal” (p. 25). Therefore, phenomenology is not concerned with the cause of, or a solution for, an event or experience, but rather, with delivering the experiences of the participants with authenticity.

Further, phenomenological research attempts to gather rich anecdotes from the stories that are important, and then report those data in a way that remains true to the lived experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, while there may be some similarity to these stories, there is no intention for my study to be generalizable (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). As such, my qualitative study was guided by a phenomenological approach, and one-on-one interviews served as the basis for my data collection. As the qualitative researcher develops the frameworks for the study, collects the data, and makes meaning of participants’ experiences, it is important to understand their positionality (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Therefore, the next section will address my positioning in this research.

**Researcher’s Positionality**

I stepped into this research as a Black woman who teaches at the small, private, predominantly White liberal arts university. Because of my race, gender, and role at my university, I hold certain biases in relation to this study. I felt obligated and responsible for the well-being and success of the participants, and this commitment was in part due to my upbringing. It was a given in my family and the Black community in which I was raised that because I stood on the shoulders of my elders, someone could stand on mine. This obligation is why I was so interested in the topic of my research. Although no one has said that these women’s feelings are irrelevant, there has been no one taking up this cause. It was important to them, so it
was important to me. Black women often feel marginalized and unimportant; we are looking for justice, respect, and beneficence. This study gave the participants a chance to voice their concerns, something they often feel they have never had in the past. I was concerned about helping them attain justice and beneficence from the study. I also want the best outcome for PPWIs. I hope that Black women receive a positive outcome for their spirits as well as their minds.

Although I had no personal relationships with any of the women in my study, I knew that there would be some insider trust, as the participants and I shared uniqueness in race and gender (Hesse-Biber, Livingstone, & Barko, 2010). In some settings, this trust would not be important; however, at small private universities where Black student populations are small, and the number Black faculty are few as well, relationships and trust are more relevant.

Service to the university, as well as education of its students, is a large part of faculty requirements at colleges and universities. As a Black woman at a PPWI, I felt that it was important not only to serve my academic department but also to serve the students of color. Therefore, I gave my time and service to work as an academic advisor to the Black student union (BSU) at my university. In this role, I heard stories of the burdens, and observed firsthand the challenges, that students of color face at a small, private, PWI.

I was also brought up in a different time, being a Baby Boomer, with my participants being millennials. Their journeys were unlike my own, but so like my own. I was married before I started college as a part-time student; therefore, I never had to maneuver the day-to-day life of living on a college campus. The social activities at the large state college that I attended were not a part of my life. Nevertheless, I do understand the feeling of isolation from being the only one, or one of the few, with regard to race in the classroom or at the office. I am familiar with the
feeling of isolation and feeling as if I was not a part of the group. I got that my participants were seeking justice, respect, and beneficence. I too will be seeking ways in which to validate the stories of these women. Because of this relationship or comradery, I was thankful that they willingly shared their most intimate thoughts and feelings, hoping that I would honor their wishes.

I am the researcher, and I was conflicted and anxious about the process of conducting strong qualitative research. Ravitch and Carl (2014) pointed out that tensions and conflicts aid in this process by causing researchers to “examine their assumptions and blind spots” (p. 7), enhancing the possibilities, and honing their research. Qualitative research is difficult with lines that blur, processes that get messy, and it is not always logical (Research Design Review, 2010). However, Ravitch and Carl (2014) stated that it is the responsibility of the researcher to find clarity in the subjective nature of qualitative research, creating “rigorous and valid research” (p. 15), which was my intent. An important part of this process is to name and control possible biases, and mine are portrayed in the following section.

Identification and Control of Possible Biases

Although I am no longer an advisor to the BSU, as a Woman of Color my commitment to the Black students at the university has not diminished. Recounting the stories told by young Black women has always been important to me. Doing this research has given me the rare opportunity to recount their stories, and to do it with credibility and validity. However, being an African American woman and an instructor at a PPWI, I was aware of my possible biases going into the interviewing process. I identified two biases that I knew were important for me to control. The first was my thoughts and feelings on the new phenomenon of using online dating services solely for the purpose of hooking up. At times, it was difficult not to interject my own
beliefs about safety while listening to the women speak. My second bias related to issues of racism and sexism that the women experienced. I wanted to talk about my personal experiences as a Black woman in the 1970s and currently being the mother of a Black son and daughter. However, I knew it was important to give myself over to listening to the voices of the participants. Creswell (2009) suggested that memos and reflection were good tools to use to address biases. Therefore, writing short memos before and after each interview to reflect on my personal experiences with the data assisted with controlling these biases. My training as an auditor facilitated the process as well. Although the lives of these young women were more personal to me than my previous line of work, I have learned to control my emotions and facial expressions during an interview process.

This next section discusses my ethical point of view and the basic principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice concerning my research, as these are fundamental to conducting studies on human participants.

**Statement of Ethics**

Erickson (1986) described qualitative research as a way to gain an understanding of a particular issue, question, or problem. He went on to state that the guiding theory behind this type of research was developed out of concern for and “interest in the lives and perspectives of people in society who had little or no voice” (Erickson, 1986, p. 122). When delving into the life of any individual, especially one who is marginalized, there comes a certain responsibility on the part of the researcher. Rahul (a pseudonym used for a participant in a study) referred to the researcher as a “worthy witness” (as cited in Paris & Winn, 2014, p. xiii) or an ethical person, one who respects the participants, and is well-intentioned. In the Belmont Report, three core
principles listed as the ethical guiding factors in the research of human participants: *persons*, *beneficence*, and *justice* (Office for Human Research Protections, 1979).

As I attempted to research the dating experiences of Black women who study at PPWIs, I knew the importance of acting as a *worthy witness*, giving respect to my participants, being beneficent, and perpetuating justice, as these guiding factors are the pillars for the study of human subjects. I extended these principles to my participants in a manner that portrayed my respect for them and for the process of qualitative research.

**Respect for Persons**

The basic tenet of respect for persons with regard to qualitative research is that participants should be regarded as autonomous, and that people with diminished capacity or autonomy are entitled to protections (Office for Human Research Protections, 1979). The Belmont Report stated that in most research involving human subjects, respect for persons stresses that participants have sufficient information about the research and have a choice as to whether or not they want to be a part of the study (Office for Human Research Protections, 1979).

As the participants in my study were college students 18 and older, I assumed that they were capable of self-reflection and adept at decision-making skills. Still, to ensure that the participants were aware of the topic of my research, information was given to each person describing the essence of the study. I also verbally communicated the topic of my study and gave any interested individual a copy of the consent form. As a final step, before the start of the interview, I read the consent form to each participant, answering any questions and ensured them that they could stop the interview or step away from the study at any time.
With all of these steps in place, I felt comfortable proceeding with my study. In fact, the Belmont Report put forth that it would be a showing of disrespect to disavow the judgment of autonomous individuals (Office for Human Research Protections, 1979). In other words, the participants should be afforded the right to make the decision, as long as they are not of diminished capacity or in a situation where there is the possibility of or opportunity for coercion.

**Beneficence**

The Belmont Report set forth two specific guidelines with regard to beneficence. The first is to do no harm (Office for Human Research Protections, 1979). I attempted to carry out this principle by ensuring the privacy of the individuals in my research. They were given pseudonyms of their choice. The colleges and universities in my study were given also given aliases as a further way of protecting the identities of my participants because of the importance to my research.

The other principle of beneficence is to maximize possible benefits and minimize possible harm (Office for Human Research Protections, 1979). The entire premise of my research is for faculty and the administration of the PPWIs to understand how the intersection of race and gender affects the lives and socialization of my participants with regard to thriving and having a sense of belonging. My goal was to be a voice that benefits them in a way that they may not be able to achieve on their own.

**Justice**

The Belmont Report related that in matters of research, individuals should be treated with equality in a just and fair manner (Office for Human Research Protections, 1979). This treatment should take into consideration how participants are selected, as well as who benefits from research findings. For instance, the poor, people of color, and welfare recipients should be able
to benefit equally from the conducted research as those who are rich, White, and of middle-class or higher standing. Further, there should be no undue burden placed on one particular group being subjected to research that benefits an entire population.

The research unquestionably deals with a justice issue, not because of the selected participants, but because of the lack of thriving and sense of belonging for Black women at PWIs as evidenced in the literature review. A general demographic description of the women follows with a more extensive account of their experiences following in chapter four.

Participants’ Backgrounds

The 20 participants in the study all identified as Black or African American women, ranged in age from 19 to 22, and were sophomores, juniors, or seniors. Four of the women were sophomores, nine were juniors, and the remaining seven were seniors. Five women were 19 years of age, five were 20, eight women were 21, and two women were 22 years old. Table 3.1 summarizes more demographic data about each of the participants in the study.
Table 3.1

Demographics of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym*</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Family Yearly Income Level</th>
<th>High School GPA</th>
<th>First Generation</th>
<th>College GPA</th>
<th>Class</th>
</tr>
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<td>3.2</td>
<td>Sr</td>
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<tr>
<td>Simone</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>$25,000 - $50,000</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>Jr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misty Copeland</td>
<td>22</td>
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<td>2.8</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>Sr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jada Pinkett</td>
<td>22</td>
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<td>2.3</td>
<td>Jr</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beyoncé</td>
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<td>Sr</td>
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<tr>
<td>Issa Rea</td>
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<td>&gt;$100,000</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>So</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>&lt; $25,000</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>So</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2.5</td>
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<td>NO</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Jr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shae</td>
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Note. * Each PPWI was given a pseudonym to protect their identity  
** Each student selected a pseudonym to protect their identity  
*** Student did not respond
Data Collection

The purpose of my research was to understand the dating and hooking up experiences of Black women who attend PPWIs and how those experiences affected their thriving and sense of belonging. Before starting the research, in accordance with the guidelines of Bellarmine University regarding the protection of human participants, I submitted a request for review to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval to interview approximately 25-45 participants for this study. After receiving IRB approval, participant recruitment and data collection began. I conducted one-on-one interviews, using audio recording, with 22 Black women (two of whom were eventually eliminated), who were sophomores, juniors, or seniors and attended PPWIs in the Midwestern and Southeastern parts of the United States. Selecting sophomores, juniors, and seniors seemed most plausible, as their college experiences were more established, which allowed for richer and thicker data. As mentioned earlier, I eliminated two women from the study as one was a first-year student and the other in graduate school, thereby, not meeting the criteria for participating in the study. It was not discovered until reviewing the demographic questionnaire that they were not eligible to participate in the study. Each woman was compensated for their time in the same manner as other participants.

Additionally, I intended to conduct at least one, but no more than three, focus groups consisting of five to eight women in each session. However, when given the option, none of the women chose to participate in a focus group. As this was the case, I decided to allow the women to participate in the manner that they preferred. Therefore, I eliminated focus groups from the study. The change in protocol was in keeping with Maxwell’s (2013) suggestion that while “prestructuring” (p. 89) is important in the research design, flexibility in the process is also vital.
when it makes sense and does not threaten the validity of the study. The next paragraph details the information about the selection of participants for the study.

Creswell (1998) suggested interviewing between five and 25 participants in a phenomenological study; therefore, interviewing 20 women was appropriate for the purpose of this study. The participants in this study were recruited using purposeful sampling. Maxwell (2013) pointed out that one of the goals of purposeful sampling is intentionally to select participants who are vital to answering the question of the research. Due to the nature of my research questions, the selection process for participants was purposive. Ultimately, the students selected for the study self-identified as Black or African American women, attended a PPWI, were undergraduate students between the ages of 18 and 25, and were sophomores, juniors, or seniors. Further, to ensure that the findings were not just associated with the phenomenon at one particular PPWI, I recruited women from five institutions.

All the data collected in this research were collected through interviews and using a recording device. Merriam (2009) suggested that in order to get to the true meaning of the experience being researched in a phenomenological study, interviewing is often the method of choice. In many phenomenological studies, as in this case, the actions surrounding the research are not observable because they happened in the past and are the lived experiences of the participants (Merriam, 2009). In addition, interviewing is the method of choice when the researcher is interested is attempting to get to the “essence or basic underlying structure of the meaning of an experience” (Merriam, 2009, p. 25). Further, Erickson (1986) theorized that “because of the (theoretically) unlimited opportunity for revisiting the recorded instance by replaying it, the instance can be observed from a variety of attentional foci and analytic perspectives” (p. 145). Thus interviewing and audio recording were used to assist me in
capturing the essence of the participants’ experiences and how they made sense of their everyday lives in a manner that remained truthful and valid (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Therefore, developing the proper protocol in collecting documentation was an important step in the interviewing process, as will be described below.

Before the interviews were conducted, three well-qualified researchers reviewed the interview protocol of my study to ensure that it was adequate and made sense. The process included reviewing the questionnaire, the demographic worksheet, and the procedures for recruiting potential participants. Once I made the appropriate changes, I conducted a pilot study with two Black women by conducting individual interviews with them. During this process, they offered suggestions on how to strengthen the questions, and I made further adjustments to the instrument. My approach to structuring the questions was to ask neutral or very general questions at first to establish rapport with the participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The design of the one-on-one questionnaire (Appendix A) was to ask questions about family members, and then about experiences at the university with regard to classroom, faculty, staff, school activities, campus involvement, and with dating and hooking up. Ravitch and Carl also suggested wording interview questions in a way that is open-ended and not leading. Therefore, my questions were couched in such a way that caused the participants to have open responses. Conducting pilot studies assisted with this process as well. Finally, to ensure further the validity of the research, I recruited students from five PPWIs. This approach was taken to understand if, and how, experiences at diverse PPWIs were similar and different. Recruiting students from five PPWIs was a major undertaking; the success of recruiting students would not have possibly happened without the assistance of gatekeepers, which is discussed in the next section.
**Gatekeepers.** There were gatekeepers at each PPWI included in the study. Ravitch and Carl (2016) described the gatekeeper as a person who can provide or deny access to participants early in the study. Gatekeepers are important as they provide the participant with a level of trust in the researcher (Singh & Wassenaar, 2016). Singh and Wassenaar (2016) also suggested that because of the trusted role that gatekeepers play, it is important that they are fully aware of the study and any influence that it may have on potential participants. Therefore, I prudently contacted gatekeepers and kept them informed of all undertakings of the study. Each university required a different approach.

At one university, I contacted the director of diversity through e-mail correspondence (Appendix B), and he afforded me an invitation to a Black Student Union meeting where I introduced my research study. Seven women showed interest in the study. I took their contact information, sent them an invitation through e-mail (Appendix C) laying out further the intent of my study, and was able to arrange interviews with the women. Six of the seven women participated in the study, and interviews were conducted at their university. The seventh woman did not respond to my correspondence.

I was able to access students at another university with the assistance of a classmate in my Ph.D. program who works at the school in question. She contacted a professor who had regular access with Black women, forwarding her my e-mail about the study. That professor gave students my information, and they contacted me with their interests in the study. I contacted them and conducted the interviews on their campus. There, I interviewed four students, but just three were eligible for the study after one participant was eliminated for not meeting the criteria for inclusion. Another one of my classmates put me in touch with the dean of students at one of the participating PPWIs, who then reached out to students. Five students contacted me and set
appointments to take part in the study. In this case, one of the students ended up not meeting the criteria set out for the study, so four students from this institution are represented in the findings.

In another instance, one of my former colleagues contacted current Black women students from her alma mater. Two students e-mailed me with interest in the study. Both of the students were studying abroad, so I conducted the one-on-one interviews using FaceTime and Skype (i.e., video conferencing). At the end of one of the interviews, one of the participants mentioned an organization for Black women at her school and asked me if I would be interested in interviewing her classmates. I accepted her offer, she sent my information to the president of the organization. Four additional women contacted me with interest in the study. Ravitch and Carl (2016) described this type of recruitment as “snowball or chain sampling” (p. 134) when other qualified individuals are referred to participate in the study because their lived experiences enhance, corroborate, or give a different take on the research.

Finally, I sent out e-mails to individuals at three additional schools in the region, asking if they would assist me by contacting women who fit the criteria of my study at their respective schools. I then followed up with phone calls to those individuals, verbally seeking assistance and to answer any questions they had about my study. I was able to make contact with one of the three institutions. The assistant director of diversity at the institution referred two women to me to participate in the study, and those students e-mailed me stating an interest in participating in the study. After settling on a date and time, I traveled to their university and interviewed them. In all cases, once the gatekeeper agreed to assist me, I then sent that individual an invitation letter that laid out the particulars of my study to forward to students.
Interview Process

The interviewing process took place from September 2018 through November 2018. The participants included Black women from five of the seven solicited PPWIs who showed interest in, and fit the criteria for, the study. These women received an initial copy of the consent form (Appendix D) in order to get an idea of the expectations of the study and to understand their rights as participants.

When meeting for the one-on-one interviews, before the start of the interview, each participant and I went over the consent form. This process was to ensure that they understood what they were signing, the kinds of questions I would ask, who would have access to their transcriptions, and the rights in place for their protection. As the researcher, I ensured that each participant understood that they could drop out of the study at any time during the process. Additionally, before, during, and after the interview process, the women had opportunities to ask questions.

I intended to collect thick and rich data as proposed by Carspecken (1996). Therefore, I conducted one-on-one, in-person interviews with each participant, which lasted between 20 and 90 minutes with an average time of one hour. Again, two of the participants were studying abroad, and in those instances, I used FaceTime and Skype to conduct the interviews. Another student was away from her campus for the semester for an internship; therefore, I also used FaceTime to complete her interview. In order to gain trust and to build rapport, as suggested by Ravitch and Carl (2016), during the interviews, my first questions took on a general nature, asking the participants about their demographics and background, e.g., where were they from, who were their family members, and what were their school experiences. As the interview proceeded, I used a semi-structured approach to build on responses from the participants.
Ravitch and Carl described a semi-structured approach as one that has structured questions asked to all participants but also leaves room for the interviewer to decide on the best way and in what order to ask the questions. The semi-structured approach also allowed for probing and follow-up to answers. At the end of each interview, the student was given a chance to ask questions or to add any other information. Finally, as a thank you, I provided $25 gift cards to each participant. The two women disqualified from the study also received $25 gift cards. After listening to the recordings, reviewing the transcripts, and writing reflexive journal entries, there was only one additional follow-up question that I felt was pertinent to the study. As it was just one question, I contacted each participant by email and asked her to respond. Nineteen of the twenty women responded to the follow-up question.

To assist further in the collection process, Maxwell (2013) posited that reflexivity and journaling are two important ways to develop findings and better understand your topic. I reflected and wrote notes to myself before the interviews to ensure I was in the right frame of mind and to recognize my biases and preconceived notions. What I found, however, was that journaling and writing memos at the end of each interview was more important, especially after my first few interviews. The process of journaling and writing memos helped to ground me in the study and assisted me with clarity and transparency as suggested by Ravitch and Carl (2013). I was able to reflect on what the participants said and how I reacted to their responses. These journals especially helped as I proceeded through the study. While all the women in the study identified as Black or African American, they had very diverse personalities, stories, and goals in life. Although not all of the participants attended the same university, they all chose to attend PPWIs. Therefore, the following section shares background information on those PPWIs. Each
school has been given a pseudonym in order to maintain confidentiality for the participants and schools.

**Research Sites**

The data used in this research were gathered from Black women students who attended PPWIs. I interviewed students from five colleges or universities located in the Midwestern and Southeastern parts of the United States. I selected PPWIs with small populations (under 5000 students) within a 200-mile traveling distance. Ravitch and Carl (2016) suggested that the researcher consider the importance of the site as well as how it coincides with the goals and objectives of the study. As there was no one certain school considered important to the research, I chose and contacted seven PPWIs, eventually including five of them. Below is a brief description of the five PPWIs included in the study.

**Lucy Craft Laney University.** Lucy Craft Laney University, a private liberal arts institution, is located in the middle of its Midwestern state and was established in the early 1800s. Craft Laney University began its existence as a seminary for men, but later expanded its academic offerings and also welcomed women to its campus. Craft Laney University’s website states that it has approximately 1,400 enrolled students, and 7% of the class of 2022 identify as Black or African American. Craft Laney offers over 25 majors, with approximately 15 pre-professional programs. College Factual (n.d.) reports that African Americans are the second largest racial or ethnic group after White students at 5%, while Black faculty makes up 3% of the population.

**Josephine Bakhita University.** Josephine Bakhita University, a liberal arts institution, is located in one of the largest cities in its Southeastern state. Although originally established as men’s college, Bakhita University now welcomes women. The school has a 65% woman
population. The school has approximately 3,400 students with about 2,600 undergraduate students. Bakhita offers over 50 graduate and undergraduate majors and up to a doctoral-level degree. African American undergraduates make up the second largest population at 4.5%, with approximately 64% identifying as women. There are 176 full-time faculty members, and approximately 4% are Black or African American.

**Mary Lange University.** Mary Lange University is a private liberal arts institution located in the Northern region of its Southeastern state. Although Lange University began its existence as a college to train women as teachers, men attended classes to further their education as well. It became a co-educational institution in the mid-20th century. Lange has approximately 2,000 students in attendance with about 1,400 as full-time undergraduates. Lange University offers approximately 40 majors, 29 associate-level majors, and five master’s degrees. College Factual (n.d.) reports that the campus has 5.9% of students, its second largest population, and 2% of faculty who identify as Black or African American.

**Thea Bowman University.** Thea Bowman University is located in the largest city in its Midwestern state. Bowman University, founded as a private liberal arts college, had a mission of training women as teachers. In the mid-20th century, Bowman moved to become a co-educational school and expanded its offerings. Currently, Bowman University offers over 50 majors from undergraduate degrees to the Ph.D. Further, of Bowman’s approximate 3,600 students, 2,400 are traditional undergraduates. College Factual (n.d.) reports that 11.7% of students and 7% of its faculty identify as Black or African American, which is the second largest population after White students. College Factual also reports that 69% of its student population are women.

**St. Monica University.** St. Monica University is located in one of the largest cities in its state and is in the Southeastern region of the United States. Founded in the late 18th century, St.
Monica was one of the first universities established in the state and was known for educating many of its region’s early, more prolific political and business leaders. Today the private liberal arts university educates approximately 1,000 students in 46 different majors. Its website states that St. Monica has a 60% female population, and students of color account for 16% of the student body. College Factual (n.d.) reports that approximately 4% of St. Monica University’s students identify as Black or African American, making them the third largest racial or ethnic population after Whites and Hispanics. Further, of the approximately 83 full-time faculty, 6% identify as Black (College Factual, n.d.). The following section details the process of analyzing the collected data from participants who attended the above-described institutions.

Data Analysis

Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) posited that a clear conceptual framework assists in the determining what information should be gathered, who should be studied, and how the data should be analyzed in qualitative research. Miles et al. also suggested that phenomenological research leans toward a thematic approach, developing meaning and uncovering “essences and essentials” (p. 8) through participants’ stories. Further, Merriam (2009) stated the importance of using, for instance, epoche or bracketing, a process of removing or becoming aware of one’s own preconceived notions and prejudices before proceeding with analysis. This process ensures that interpretation and analysis of the data are not swayed by one’s own personal experiences and biases. Denzin (1989) listed the following steps in the bracketing process that I employed, which assisted me in my understanding of how to proceed in the analyzing process:

- Locate within the personal experience or self-story, key phrases and statements that speak directly to the phenomenon in question.
• Interpret the meanings of these phrases, as an informed reader.
• Obtain the subject's interpretations of these phrases, if possible.
• Inspect these meanings for what they reveal about the essential recurring features of the phenomenon being studied.
• Offer a tentative statement, or definition, of the phenomenon in terms of the essential recurring features identified. (pp. 55-56)

Using Denzin’s steps in the data analysis ensured a fluid process, in that it was ongoing throughout the collection and analysis phases, as suggested by Maxwell and Miles et al.

Miles et al. (2014) further suggested two cycles or major stages for coding data. The first cycle coding has various methods that can be employed for coding and used early in the data collection process (Miles et al. 2014). My first cycle of coding or analysis took place in the form of reflexive memos and preliminary coding. For instance, once I completed an interview, I wrote notes on any nuances and themes that I felt were emerging. Further, I listened to parts of the recording to catch any additional nuances and to ensure that my questions were not leading, that I did not interject my personal thoughts into the process, and to listen with fresh ears for developing themes. I then employed the methods of in vivo coding, which uses phrases or short description from the participants’ own words, and descriptive coding, which summarizes passages of the transcriptions into codes (Miles et al. 2014). In an attempt to be thoughtful throughout the process, I enlisted a qualified researcher to review my coding technique before starting in vivo and descriptive coding. We each coded a transcript and compared notes to ensure that my coding held validity.

Syed and Nelson (2015) further suggested that “A well-articulated coding manual is the bedrock of a strong and successful coding system” (p. 7). Once I had transcribed the interviews, I
read them for purposes of clarity, to seek patterns, and to deepen my understanding of the
narrative as proposed by Erickson (1985). I then used an inductive approach, reviewing each
interview transcript to see what came to the surface in an attempt to further the coding process
(Miles et al., 2014). As needed, I again listened to the audio recordings to enhance my sense of
the data and for added accuracy. Phenomenology recommends reviewing data from an internal
perspective; therefore, I searched the data for codes, and then made notes and looked for patterns
to emerge to assist with coding and the development of my book of codes (Vagle, 2014). I then
reread the transcripts one more time to ensure that all similar responses and codes were grouped
together as recommended by Miles et al. (2014). In some instances, the codes were combined if
wording and phrases were overly similar. Miles et al. referred to this process as the second phase
or cycle of pattern coding.

Once the first cycle of coding was complete, I began the second cycle of this process, by
looking for what Miles et al. (2014) referred to as “assertions and propositions” (p. 100), or a
way to connect codes, condensing and combining them into categories and themes. Miles et al.
defined assertions as “declarative statements” (p. 99) that the data substantiates through pooling
like codes together. Miles et al. further described propositions in qualitative research as
“conditional events” (p. 100) that can be predicted based on the outcome and linkage of the data
into categories and themes. Maxwell (2013) pointed out that one of the more important factors in
research design is validity; therefore, it will be discussed in the next section.

Validity

Carspecken (1996) pointed out that one importance of qualitative research is being able
to develop truth claims that are valid within the subject being studied. As suggested by Ravitch
& Carl (2016), steps were taken to ensure that the data were valid. These steps included
contacting the participants to clear up responses that could not be understood in the audio and asking for clarification of responses that seemed ambiguous or unclear. When needed, I read back parts of the transcriptions to the participants to ensure that I had gotten the information correctly. The participants were also asked follow-up questions as needed, giving them the opportunity to add information and to clarify any parts of the interview that they felt were not clear. I also reminded them that they could step away from the study if they were so inclined. As suggested by Ravitch and Carl, I also ensured theoretical validity by examining other research and existing theories to inform the data collected in the study. The next section further discusses trustworthiness and its importance in qualitative research.

**Trustworthiness**

I used steps recommended by Ravitch and Carl (2016) to account for the trustworthiness of my research using the criteria *credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability*. I attempted to be purposeful in the implementation of my study to ensure that each tenet was followed as proposed by Ravitch and Carl. By doing so, I intended to create a design that ensured transferability was evident by citing rich and thick data that would be comparable to, and compatible with, other research as well as with potential frameworks on similar matters (Miles et al., 2014). Dependability closely aligns with the idea of transferability in that it expects that the research protocol leads to answering the questions of the research and outlines how the data is collected (Miles et al., 2014). The data collection protocol was outlined in the data collection section of this chapter.

It was also important to carefully name my biases and make sense of the data in a way that challenged my assumptions, so that I maintained confirmability (Erickson, 1986; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I have had some personal experiences that were similar to the participants.
Therefore, I was intentional, attentive, and careful with journaling so that those experiences minimally interfered with the process.

Further, for the tenet of credibility, I used triangulation to corroborate the findings by reviewing other similar research and literature (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I also conducted member checks with participants by sending themes and finding to participants for their review as proposed by Merriam (2009). In addition, I was careful to place the theoretical frameworks in the context of my study. I also initiated peer reviews throughout the interviewing, coding, and analysis process to ensure that my procedures and findings made sense and followed protocol. Finally, I used interrater reliability to validate my coding process, and that is discussed below.

**Interrater Reliability**

Barbour (2001) used the term “multiple coding” (p. 1116) when referring to *interrater reliability* in qualitative work as it is more readily used in quantitative research. Barbour (2001) and Ravitch and Carl (2016) positioned interrater reliability as an additional way to establish and enhance validity. Researchers often use this technique when there are teams of researchers working on the same study. The researchers develop a set of meaningful code descriptions, or a codebook, from the participants’ transcriptions to use in the coding process (Barbour, 2001). The researchers then select excerpts from the transcription, individually coding them using the book of codes. Once the process is complete, the researchers compare their coding, confirming the validity of the coding process (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Ravitch and Carl and Barbour warned that while this process does increase the level of validity, it should also be used as an opportunity to further explore and expand on the translation of the data. For instance, Barbour posited “the greatest potential of multiple coding lies in its capacity to furnish alternative interpretations and thereby to act as the ‘devil’s advocate’ implied in many of the checklists in alerting researchers
to all potentially competing explanations” (p. 1116). Therefore, this process should assist in a
deeper and more meaningful coding.

As the only researcher of this study, I employed multiple coding or interrater reliability
by employing two “critical friends” (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 205) to code a sample of the
transcripts, thereby increasing the validity of the study. Each of the researchers had a Ph.D. and
was familiar with qualitative research. Further, each woman identified as Black or African
American and was familiar with the intimate interworking of PPWIs. To explain further, one of
the researchers was on the faculty at a PPWI, and the other completed her Ph.D. in education at a
PPWI.

Once having established and refined a codebook, I enlisted interrater reliability by
selecting a sample of 20 excerpts from the transcriptions for my critical friends to code (Table
3.3). They were also given the codebook along with the associated questions asked that had
triggered the excerpt or response. I used the “percent of agreement or PA” (Syed & Nelson, 2015,
p. 10) to establish reliability. Syed and Nelson (2015) explained the calculation as follows: \[ PA = \frac{N_A}{N_A + N_D} \] “where \( N_A \) is the total number of agreements and \( N_D \) is the total number of
disagreements” (p. 10). Interrater number one had a \( PA \) of 90% or 18 / (18 + 2) and interrater
number two had a \( PA \) of 100% or 20 / (20 + 0). Miles et al. (2014) emphasized a range of at least
85% agreement percent as acceptable, and my critical friends averaged 95% agreement. Even
with an acceptable interrater reliability rate, Merriam (2009) reminded us that there is no one
single “truth or reality” in the narratives that can be determined, even with a high consensus of
interrater reliability. Therefore, it is up to the researcher to provide rich, thick data to enable
readers to find reliability and validity in the study.
Table 3.2

*Interrater Reliability*

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Number in Agreement: 18
Percent of Rating: 90%

Note: 1 = agreement; 0 = disagreement
Chapter Summary

This qualitative study using a phenomenological approach was designed to expand the literature on the dating of Black women who attended PPWIs and how those experiences influenced their thriving and sense of belonging. Black feminist thought and intersectionality, along with thriving and belongingness, framed the study. Therefore, I purposely sought out Black women from five PPWIs to participate in the study. This chapter also described the intended participants, research sites, methodology, collection, and analysis process, the trustworthiness of the data, the statement of ethics, and the researcher’s positionality.

My intent was to provide rich and thick data describing the experiences of Black women in a manner that was transferable and could be applied to the research of other PPWIs. As such, it was important that my research process was reliable, dependable, and confirmable. Overall, the purpose of this study was to add to the body of knowledge on the subject of Black women who attend PPWIs.
Chapter Four: Findings

Chapter Overview

This phenomenological study sought to understand the dating and hooking up experiences of Black women who attended private predominantly White institutions (PPWIs). Further, the study sought to document how these experiences influenced the women’s thriving and sense of belonging, with a particular interest in the intersection of their race and gender. Therefore, along with the frameworks of thriving and sense of belonging, I also used Black feminist thought along with intersectionality to frame the study and introduce the findings. Within this chapter, I introduce twenty Black college women who attended one of five PPWIs in the Midwest or the South and who shared their stories and experiences on dating and hooking up. All of the women were very open and forthcoming about their experiences at their universities. Ravitch and Carl (2005) pointed out that the objective of qualitative research is to provide “rich, detailed and complex data” (p. 265) that remain true to the voices of the participants. Because of the participants’ willingness to openly interview with me, themes began to emerge from the rich stories they told. Before addressing these themes and findings, the next section will introduce the participants in the study.

Participant Profiles

While all of the participants identified as Black, they had very different lived experiences before entering their universities. For example, not all of the women identified only as African American. In one instance, one of the women’s father was Nigerian, and a few of the other participants were naturalized from the Caribbean Islands. In another case, one woman had an African American father, and her mother was from the Philippines. However, regardless of their origins, most of the women had shared similar experiences at their respective PPWI. Further, as
stated in chapter three, all of the participants selected pseudonyms and will be addressed by them in the narratives below and throughout the presentation of the findings. Finally, to add a further layer of protection of their identities, none of the women will be associated with a specific PPWI. Each participant profile begins with a quote from the participant.

**Miya**

*It’s good to have - to see somebody that looks like you on campus.*

Miya was my first interviewee in the study. She is a 19-year-old sophomore who is majoring in psychology and minoring in English. She was raised in a single parent home with her mother and grandmother. Miya knows her father; however, she does not see him often as he lives in another state. Miya reported that her mother received no college experience and is considered to be in the lower-to-middle-class socioeconomic status. On campus, Miya is currently involved in the Black student union, a dance company, the English club, the LGBTQ club, and a group that comes together to abolish poverty, hunger, and preventable disease. She also took part in the dance ministry at her church. Miya stated that she selected her PPWI because of the small class size, and she felt a sense of home during her campus tour. Her goal is to become a psychologist, using poetic literature as a therapeutic method to work with children. Although Miya has friends from other races on campus, she wishes that her institution was more diverse. Miya was mainly attracted to White men, but negative experiences have caused her to rethink that position.

**Loretta Lynch**

*The Black identity is if you’re Black, you're born into a struggle in itself.*

Loretta is a 21-year-old political science and pre-law major. She is a senior and was in the process of applying to law schools. Loretta grew up in an upper-class two-parent household
with two younger siblings. She chose her PPWI because it offered her the largest scholarship, and at the time, she felt it was a good fit. Loretta mentioned a number of times that she stayed at her PPWI so that she could work to make a difference for the better, for Black students who will be entering the university in the future. Loretta is a member of the Black student union, student government, law society, and the president’s committee. Loretta mentioned that when looking for law schools, it would be important to attend an institution with a more diverse population. Loretta was very confident in the interview process. She was extremely thoughtful in her responses, pausing and thinking through my questions before answering.

Simone

*I don't feel that I'm thriving, I think the only reason why I'm thriving now is 'cause I learned how to be independent and not depend on others to fuel my fire.*

Simone is 21-year-old senior and looking forward to graduating with degrees in political science and sociology and a minor in English. Simone is an exceptional student with a 3.7 grade-point average, and she is looking forward to attending law school. Most of Simone’s childhood included a two-parent home along with her two siblings. Now, Simone lives at home with her mother and commutes to school. Simone and her family’s standard of living is middle-class. Simone chose her college because her mother was a graduate of the school, and the institution offered her the largest scholarship. She reported that she grew up coming to the campus with her mother and did not realize it was a private institution until she researched it during her college search. Simone is a “get to the point type of person.” She is deeply entrenched in her Blackness and is unapologetic in her space. Simone pointed out that she learned to forge her Black experience based on how people who are not Black interact with her. She says this because many White individuals do not know what it is like living in Black spaces and may not “get” what that
means. She says that is what makes her realize that there are racial differences. Simone is a member of the Black student union, LGBTQ club, and English club. She also tutors students in English and advocates for students with disabilities. Simone is also an active member of Black Lives Matter.

**Misty Copeland**

*If I gave up now, everything that I've gone through would have meant nothing.*

Misty is a 22-year-old senior who grew up in a two-parent middle-class home with an older and younger sibling. Misty aspired from childhood to be a professional dancer. She explained to me that her dream was to attend a dance school in a large city such as New York or Los Angeles. However, her mother wanted her to remain close to home. Misty is on the dance team and cheerleading squad at her private institution that is close to where she grew up. However, she has not let go of her goal to become a professional dancer and choreographer. She is a dreamer with big dreams and aspirations, with plans to become successful in New York or Los Angeles, choreographing for well-known hip-hop artists. Misty has already made her mark on her university as she helped to create the Black student union. She saw a great need and worked to get the goal of meeting that need accomplished. Misty is also a member of the student government association, and she volunteers her time to coach cheerleading teams at not-for-profit organizations.

**Jada Pinkett**

*Hey, you've got it going on. You're tough. You're strong. You've got it. You have a voice so at some point you've got to use it. I feel like now is my time.*

Jada is a 22-year-old junior communications major who hopes to make her living as a motivational speaker or an actor. Jada comes from a middle-class, single-parent home, and was
raised by her mother. She has a limited relationship with her father, although she hopes to forge a stronger connection to him as she gets older. Jada has had heartbreak in her life as she lost a sibling at a very young age. This unfortunate tragedy has played an important role in forming Jada as a person. Jada started her college career at a public institution. However, because of a breakup with her then-boyfriend, Jada transferred to her current private school after feeling the need for a fresh start. Shortly after arriving at her current institution, Jada became engaged to get married, but broke it off sometime later. Jada was quick to talk about her sometimes-shaky relationships with men. She wondered if her sparse connection to her father played a role in shaping her connections with men. In talking with Jada, it was obvious that she had grown and learned from her life lessons. She is currently in a relationship and feels very confident about it.

Beyoncé

Don't be afraid to be Black around all your White friends or your White peers. Don't be afraid to be Black anywhere.

Beyoncé is a 21-year-old senior who plays a major sport at her university. She is the youngest of four children and lives with both parents, who maintain a middle-class standard of living. Beyoncé is a psychology major who plans to attend graduate school once she has completed her undergraduate career. She is a very confident young woman who got a sport scholarship to play at her institution. She has done well on the team and boasted that her team was one of the better ones on the campus. Beyoncé has a strong sense of connection with her school but readily admitted that some of her thriving and sense of belonging was because of her position on her sports team. She has a close connection with her team members and feels comfortable on the team and at the university.
Issa Rae

Having a healthy sense of Black identity is being proud of where you came from. Being proud of your African roots. Accepting and also challenging the adversities that are place upon you by society.

Issa describes herself as a 19-year-old Nigerian American. Issa’s upper-middle-class family consists of her father who is Nigerian, her mother who is African America, and her younger brother and sister. She is a sophomore who is majoring in nursing and aspires to become a nurse anesthetist. Issa received full scholarship offers from three different institutions but chose her current university because of the strong nursing program and what she assumed was a welcoming nature. Issa talked about how she felt isolated as a Black student in her first year of college. Therefore, part of her agenda while at the university is to not only to excel academically, but also to ensure that new Students of Color have a welcoming environment and can navigate the predominantly White campus. Issa spoke a lot about the strong Nigerian roots and discipline instilled in her since birth. For instance, she has a near-perfect grade point average, was the past president of her first-year class, and president for her sophomore class. Issa belongs to the Black student union and nursing association. She also functions as a tutor, an orientation leader, and a member of student government.

Hope

A lot of people say that it [the university] is family, and every time they say it in class I'm like, what are you talking about?

Hope is one of 11 children that her father and mother had between them. However, she has only one sister that she shares with both parents. Hope grew up faster than did many young people, and discovered her sexuality at a young age. Hope’s mother raised her, and she saw her
father infrequently. When Hope was 16 years old, her mother died of breast cancer. This sad experience left a void in her life. As Hope did not want to live with her father after her mother’s death, she fought for, and gained, emancipation. Hope’s father did not contest as Hope agreed to live with her grandparents until she turned 18 and began college. Hope is currently 19 and majors in nursing at her university. She chose her university mainly because of the full scholarship, but also because of the beauty of the campus. Hope’s only involvement in the school is the Black student union. However, she is strongly engaged in her church and calls her church her family. Unlike many other students, Hope considers her university her home because she has no place else to go. During summer break, her church members have been kind enough to open their doors so that she has a place to stay. Hope’s strong inner faith in God and her strong church family are helping her to flourish. She is going to make an excellent nurse as Hope has a very caring and nurturing nature.

**Elizabeth Loftus**

*One thing that makes me unique of being Black is I am very open and accepting. I am ready for anything, give me all you’ve got. I’m here, I’m here for it.*

Elizabeth is a 20-year-old junior psychology major who is looking forward to graduate school. Although raised in a single-parent, middle-class household by her mother, she was surrounded by family, living with three sisters, a brother, and a niece. Elizabeth’s mother is an immigrant from the Philippine Islands, and her father is African American. Elizabeth talked extensively about her diverse neighborhood while growing up; therefore, coming to a PPWI was a bit of culture shock. However, Elizabeth has a very outgoing and vibrant personality, giving her the ability to fit into most any situation. Elizabeth noted that she selected her university because of the substantial scholarship she received, she was able to continue running track, and
the track coach gave her a good “vibe.” She strongly wants to make a difference at her school so besides running track, she is also a member of the Black student union and a member of the student government association.

**Solange**

*I just feel like being resilient is just kind of, just ingrained in Black people period. Just from history, Black people have always had to be resilient, and have always had to come back.*

Solange is a 20-year-old junior majoring in criminal justice and political science. She is considering a future in corrections, politics, or law. Solange told me that she lives with her mother who is White, and she has two older brothers and one older sister. Solange’s father is Black. She stated that she identifies more closely with being Black as she grew up near her father’s family and went to mostly predominantly Black schools. Solange chose her institution strictly because they gave her the largest scholarship. Solange also stated that she struggled with the idea of transferring to a more diverse school between her first and second year of college. In the end, she said that she was glad that she remained at her current institution. Solange is currently president of her university’s Black student organization and is a strong proponent of social justice. Because of her strong advocacy agenda, Solange ran for, and won, a seat on the student government association. She felt it was important to be in student government because this is where many decisions and policies are made concerning student life at the university.

**Shae**

*I want to be a professor, and so seeing a woman who's Black, who's like me in front of me, teaching, whether it was ... despite it not being science, it still meant something to me and it was awesome to just share that experience with her.*
Shae is a 21-year-old senior majoring in behavioral neuroscience. Her future goal is to become a scientist. Shae comes from a middle-class background, which she shared with her mother, grandmother, and two younger brothers and a younger sister. Shae emphasized that she and her family are tight-knit and stated that her extended family is her immediate family. She also reiterated that although she had a relationship with her father, her great-grandfather was the patriarchal figure in their family that everyone looked to for support and advice. Shae is a first-generation college student and received full scholarships offers to some schools, but chose her institution because of its small, hometown feel, and what she calls an “everybody is nice” type of place. However, this environment was very different from the predominantly Black schools that she attended in her hometown. She joined a White sorority to try to fit in but soon found out that it made her question her Black identity. She stepped away from the organization within one year of joining it, as it was not what she envisioned. Shae was looking for sisterhood and comradery, and what she says she found were acts of microaggressions and not feeling as if she belonged. Shae is now a member of an organization that supports women Students of Color, where she feels a sense of sisterhood and acceptance. She also belongs to a mentoring program that reaches out to young Black women in her college community and the surrounding county.

Lorena

*I love my Blackness, I absolutely do, but me loving my Blackness has been a journey.*

Lorena is a 21-year-old senior who is majoring in sociology and anthropology with the hope of becoming a college professor. Lorena and I conducted our interview over FaceTime as she was studying out of the country for the semester. This opportunity was part of the scholarship she received for attending her institution. Lorena is Haitian-American, and her parents are both immigrants from Haiti. Even though her parents were married, Lorena lived
with her mother, aunt, and her older sister for the first ten years of her life because her father was unable to immigrate to the United States right away. Lorena talked about how she did not meet her father for the first ten years of her life and the fact that women mostly raised her. Lorena has two younger siblings who were born after her father’s arrival to the United States. She also talked in detail about the richness of the diverse community in which she lived, and how race was less important than the island of your birth. Although neither of her parents were college educated, Lorena comes from a middle-class background in the eastern part of the country. Lorena’s outstanding academic achievement garnered her a full scholarship to her current institution, although she originally had her heart and mind set on an all-women’s historically Black institution. Lorena stated that since she was at the school, she was going to make the most out of every opportunity by being intentional in achieving her goals. Besides being a member of a women of color organization, Lorena also participates in a leadership and mentoring program. She is a resident assistant, attends church, and is a member of her scholarship foundation.

Kay

I know people don’t even try to talk to me, or even my friends that are single. Just knowing that they don’t want to talk to us because of our skin color. That’s really frustrating in itself.

Kay is a 20-year-old junior who is majoring in communications and is planning a career in digital marketing. Kay and her sister are part of a blended family, having both a stepmother and stepfather along with her parents in her life. Kay and I talked about the fact that she grew up in a middle-class household, attending private and public schools that were predominantly White. Although her parents were pushing toward her attending a Historically Black College or University (HBCU) in Louisiana, Kay was not sold on the idea. Kay felt that she was prepared
for the less-than-diverse aspect of her university because of her earlier childhood school experiences. Even with that being the case, Kay still struggled with being at a PPWI and with the lack of diversity. In the end, she chose her current institution without physically visiting the campus even though another less diverse university offered her more in scholarship funds. Kay is a member of the Black student union, the photography club, and on the cheerleading squad at her university. She also plays club basketball. Kay is currently dating the same Black man and fellow student whom she dated in her first year of college. They rekindled their relationship after a yearlong breakup. They attend the same university.

**Lisette**

*I see myself as imperfect... I am a queen. I am all that but I'm also ... I have my days where I'm not the best and that's okay — also, determination. Black womanhood, to me, also means having the backs of other Black women. Especially in predominantly White spaces.*

Lisette immigrated to the United States from Haiti at the age of 10. When Lisette was two years old, her older sister, who lived in the United States, adopted her. However, Lisette was unable to immigrate to this country until she was 10 years old. Her adopted mother (sister) sent money to ensure Lisette was cared for in Haiti until it was possible for her to immigrate to the United States. Once she arrived in the United States, Lisette’s extended family included an aunt and four other children. Lisette boasted about her Haitian heritage, stating that her family was very close, steeped in religion and in their Blackness. She grew up in a predominantly Afro-Caribbean community, having neighbors who were Trinidadian, Jamaican, and Haitian, making her close-knit friends Afro-Caribbean, the same as she was. Given this background, her first real encounter with racism was on her high school visit to her current university where someone in
the community called her a racial slur. Lisette voiced her surprise that this kind of racism still occurred because her only context of racism had been reading about the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s in textbooks. Lisette discussed how her family was very strict, which influenced her selection of a college. Reasons for choosing her school were the distance away from her home and the sense of freedom it provided her. Lisette talked about the excitement of her first year of college and the fact that she joined a White sorority to foster a sense of community. Lisette disassociated with the sorority at the beginning of her sophomore year as she felt that it was not giving her a sense of belonging or community. Instead, she joined an organization that catered to the needs of Women of Color. Lisette talked about how this group felt more like a true sisterhood than the sorority. Lisette also is involved with a program that mentors Black girls in the community as well as the choir at her church.

Natalie

I feel like I had to learn to be comfortable with myself and not care how people viewed me.

Natalie is a very outgoing 19-year-old junior majoring in politics and international studies with plans to attend law school upon graduating. Natalie’s middle-class family includes her parents, a younger brother, and a younger sister. It was obvious that Natalie is very close to her mother and looked to her often for advice and guidance, as she frequently spoke about her. Although her family strongly identifies as African American, both of Natalie’s parents are biracial. She talked about some of the inherent struggles that go along with this status. Specifically, Natalie mentioned that in some settings, she is not considered White enough, and in others, she is not Black enough. Furthermore, some individuals chide her for trying too hard to fit in. However, while Natalie is struggling with identity, it is obvious that she is growing into her own
person and becoming comfortable with her individuality. She is currently dating a White student and very comfortable with her choice. As Natalie runs track, she chose her school because of the great program and the fine academics that the school had to offer. Natalie is a member of student government and the organization that assisted her with a scholarship. The scholarship program, steeped in social justice, actively supports such efforts in the community. Natalie is also a member of an organization that supports Black women and the diverse student union.

**Jana**

* I think race is just really swept under the rug a lot. It's just people want to be so color blind to just everything, that there's no conversation for the needs of Black people on campus, especially the needs of Black women on campus because sometimes they're different. *

Jana is a 21-year-old junior majoring in anthropology and sociology and has plans to attend law school upon graduation. Jana’s middle-class family includes her mother and her sister. Jana is a first-generation college student, and she spoke of her appreciation of the financial struggles her mother has made to assist her in achieving a college degree. Jana mentioned being attracted to her college because they offered her the most scholarship aid, and she said she felt a sense of community when she made her high school visit. She later went on to say that the visit was somewhat distorted as the school gives the illusion that its population is racially diverse when in actuality that is not the case. Jana participates in an organization for Black women, a mentoring program, and the pride alliance club. She is also a member of a local Baptist church in the community as well as a member of the local LGBTQ community. Jana stated that although she did not like to label her sexuality, for people to understand her, she would call herself bisexual with a greater interest in men.
Natasha Rose

*I feel being Black is resilience 24/7. We have a proud skin color. I feel it's a bold skin color, where there is the lightest of the light and the darkest of the dark. We're bold.*

Natasha Rose is a 19-year-old sophomore who is majoring in psychology and plans to become a sports psychologist upon graduating from college. Natasha Rose’s parents divorced when she was in the ninth grade, and she lives with her mother and younger sister. However, her father is a big part of her life. Natasha Rose selected her school because of a sports scholarship. She talked about how the school seemed like a good fit when she first started. However, she seems to be having some second thoughts as she maneuvers being the only student of color on the team. Natasha spoke about how she has had challenges of microaggressions from team members. She also talked about how she felt has dual personas—one being a student-athlete and the other of an isolated Black woman student attending a PPWI. Natasha uses the support of the women of color organization to which she belongs to help balance her existence.

Shaka

*An educated Black woman is just a weapon to be reckoned with... And I think that strikes fear, but it should challenge. Challenge in a positive way.*

Shaka is a 21-year-old international studies major in her senior year of college who aspires to be a trauma psychologist. Shaka’s mother is an immigrant from Haiti, having come to the United States at the age of 14. Shaka’s father is from New York. Shaka is of middle-class socioeconomic status and lives with her mother and siblings in the New England area while her father remains in New York. She chose her university because she felt the need to grow her experience of maneuvering a PPWI. Shaka felt it would help her after graduation when working in predominantly White environments. Shaka reminded me of a very worldly person, as she
seemed wise beyond her years. The reason is not just because she has studied abroad a few times, but she is an explorer of all things and unafraid to take risks. She talked about the importance of connections and the missed opportunities because of prejudices and poor race relations at her school. Shaka is a member of the school’s singing club, French and Japanese clubs, an organization for Black women, and a group that mentors children with disabilities.

**Yvonne**

_Sometimes, with my team, I'm always supposed to be the one that dances… They want me to be the stereotypical Black person. I mean, I am a Black person. I do do those things, but not all the time I guess not always like a joke. It's not always a show._

Yvonne is an only child who lives with her mother in their middle-class household. She sees her father on holidays and special occasions. Yvonne is a 20-year-old junior majoring in exercise with the goal of becoming a nutritionist. She selected her university because the school was the only place that offered her the opportunity to continue playing a sport on scholarship. While Yvonne was critical of the lack of diversity at her university, she seemed satisfied for the most part with her sports team. Besides sports, Yvonne is in the Black student organization and a group that works to end homelessness and poverty.

**Camryn**

_If people of color don't invade spaces like this, they'll never get to where they need to be._

_Someone has to do it. Even though it sucks sometimes that it's me._

Camryn is a 20-year-old junior majoring in sociology and planning a life of political activism. Camryn’s large family includes both parents, three sisters, two brothers, and sometimes cousins. Camryn calls her family very close and loving. Camryn comes from a politically active family. Her engagement was obvious in how enthusiastic she was when talking about racial
issues and activism at her institution. Camryn came alive when she mentioned taking classes in racial dynamics and understanding the impact that race had on people’s lives. She told me that her choice of university was because of her desire to continue playing a sport. Also, while she is happy with her sport, Camryn was quick to say that the school is not without its racial biases. If she had it to do over, Camryn said she would have made a different choice in universities. Besides playing a sport, Camryn is a member of the Black student organization.

The above 20 women contributed to this research study by providing rich stories regarding their backgrounds and their experiences in dating and hooking up while attending PPWIs. Because these women willingly and generously shared their stories, I was able to develop codes, categories, and themes in the research. The following sections will present the themes and findings of the study.

Substantial Evidentiary Support - Overview of Themes

The following themes presented in this section addressed and attempted to answer the research questions in the study:

- What are the dating experiences of Black women at PPWIs?
- How do these experiences shape their perception of self?
- How do dating experiences influence the thriving and sense of belonging of Black women at PPWIs?
- How do dating experiences of Black women at PPWIs influence partner choices?
- How do dating experiences of Black women at PPWIs shape the perception of their university?

Five overarching themes were developed from the data:

- Do they call it dating and hooking up or something else?
• Black women understand the value of private education, but…
• What Black women want
• The thing about Black women!
• Men on campus expect something different.

Although the themes became the foundations of my findings, each overarching theme had subcategories or subthemes that helped to more extensively draw out the experiences of the participants. For instance, some of the women went into detail explaining or defining dating and hooking up, while others thought the term dating was outdated. In another theme, the students had varying opinions on how they felt about their experiences at their PPWI. Therefore, there are some sections about the women’s experiences concerning thriving, sense of belonging, and expectations of the schools. Along those same lines, the women talked about their preferences in men and the options available to them on and off campus. The women also discussed how they felt the men at their PPWIs perceived them, and how these perceptions made them feel. In the section below the first theme discussed is the women’s perceptions and definitions of hooking up and dating.

**Do They Call It Dating and Hooking Up or Something Else?**

As part of the research, it was important to understand how the women interpreted or defined dating and hooking up. In chapter one, I laid out how researchers, interpreted the terms. However, there is no one firm definitive way to define these terms as they change with age, from person to person, from group to group, and culture to culture. As the women talked about their experiences, I felt it was important for each of them to use the terms that made them feel comfortable. Therefore, I asked them for their definition of dating and hooking up. In dissecting this overarching theme, I assumed there would be more push back when asking the women to
define dating as I thought that they would find the word old-fashioned. Only a few women corrected me or questioned my use of what some of them felt was outdated terminology. Beyoncé stated, “Dating in this generation is nonexistent. Me personally, I think if someone's dating then they're ... it can either be them getting to know each other, going out, texting, that kind of stuff, or they're dating in a relationship.” Some of the women, such as Jada, preferred the terminology “talking,” and she stated:

That is such a question for my generation. There’s different levels of dating for us new generation folk. You have your talking stage. Your talking stage is you might go out on dates with them, and you're just texting them, or calling.

When I asked Solange to define dating, her first response to me was that dating was “kind of like the talking state… So you guys talk.” Elizabeth let me know that there was a new term for dating when I ask for the definition. Her immediate response was, “Of dating? Okay, so it has recently changed. I consider dating and talking one in the same.” Lisette began her definition of dating by saying “In my generation, people call it the talking stage, but I would consider that dating.” Although “talking” is not new terminology as some of the students alluded to, it was the most frequently used term when correcting me on the use of the word dating.

On the other hand, none of the women questioned my use of the term “hooking up.” This term has been around for quite some time and holds different meanings depending on the user of the term. The students gave a number of definitions for dating and hooking up, and these are discussed in the next two subsections.

**Dating.** As a major component of the study was to understand the dating and hooking up experiences of Black women who attend PPWIs, getting an understanding of how they interpret the terms seemed important. The first subcategory in this section is how the women defined
dating. In fact, the first question I asked, with regard to women and men in relationships, was their definition of “dating.” There was no one uniform or definitive way in which the women defined the term. For instance, Natalie said that it was “just hanging out… and you haven’t made it explicitly clear that you’re boyfriend and girlfriend.” Lisette felt the same way stating:

When you first meet someone, you guys are texting constantly, and you both like each other and you actually go on dates, but then you're not in a relationship quite yet. It's kind of the tryout; you're trying it out to see if you would date, be in a relationship with that person. I feel like dating is a process that shouldn't last too long, I don't think you should be dating, or talking to someone for three months. I feel like that's a bit much, maybe three to four weeks and then get into a relationship.

I asked her to clarify that the point she was making was that the act of dating was before the start of a relationship and she said yes. Conversely, Miya felt that dating was more intimate and shared that it was “being comfortable with… like you could be naked, and nothing happens; it's just like, it's just like second nature, it's all about you guys and how comfortable you are with them.” However, Lorena felt it should be defined in more of the traditional sense. Her thoughts were, “it's intentional, I need effort. I need something that ... I'm not down with, ‘Hey, let's hang out and do this.’” Elizabeth had the same feelings:

If you take me on a date, if you treat me out, well you have to agree that this is a date we're going on. I can't just think it's a date in my head. This is a sanctioned date, and you treat me to lunch, to dinner, to breakfast, and we spend some time afterward walking, talking, going to the movies. We do anything that is a date. It
could be super simple, but if you designate time to spend alone with me because you like me, we're dating.

Jana went as far to say, “Dating is getting to know someone with the intent of marriage.” Although she felt that on college campuses, it was not as complex and dating was “just getting to know someone.” Consequently, the women’s descriptions of dating were wide ranging, and they defined it anywhere from a casual outing, to get to know one another, to something more serious that could lead to marriage.

**Hooking up.** The second subcategory or theme in this section was how the women described hooking up and some of their experiences with the topic. Again, there was not 100% agreement on what the term expressed. However, most described casual sexual encounters when discussing the meaning of the term. Many of the women described hooking up as “meaningless sex,” as did Natasha Rose who said, “I feel hooking up is just meaningless sex… No commitment attached to it.” She also said, “Hooking up is, you are physically attracted to this person, but you don't have any intention of being in a relationship with that person, to being committed to that person on a deeper level.” Shaka included the idea that hooking up could be a one-time occurrence or it could last over a long period.

Natalie gave a scenario to explain her views on hooking up: “Hooking up is, I feel like, a one-night stand. Not necessarily having sex with someone, but having a one-time thing with a person.” I asked Natalie to clarify what she meant by “thing,” and she explained further:

So, I go to a party with my friends and then I start dancing with a guy, and then I go back with him. And so, if I spend the night, that's like hooking up. It doesn't necessarily mean anything happened, but in most cases, more than not it is a sexual connotation.
Loretta was wavering on her definition of hooking up. She wanted to get it right and seemed concerned with how to define the term. At the beginning of the conversation, she said that sometimes hooking up included sexual intercourse, and other times it did not. She went on to say, “If I hooked up with someone, for me that’s not, I had sex with them.” So for Loretta, hooking up could mean sex, kissing, or going out with a friend. It depended on the situation and the parties involved. Solange used two words when asked to define hooking up. She said, “Having sex.” When I asked if she wanted to add anything more, she reiterated, “That’s how we define it.” Solange did add to this definition after a bit of thought, and noted that hooking up was, “Having sex when you're not in a relationship. And you can hook up with one person, so you can kind of have sex, with one person. Or you can have many people that you hook up with.” At first Issa told me that she did not know the definition of hooking up. After we established that I was not looking for a textbook definition, she shared that she felt it was “people having intercourse.” She also let me know that she did not date, and therefore, did not know about hooking up. Shae was the most vivid in her explanation of hooking up:

Just straight having sex. Like, literally, what you ... like the, what you doing? Text WYD, in quotations, and then you like, oh nothing, I'm just, you know, chillin'. And like, can I come over? Of course. Go ahead. Come over, you hurry up and clean, like, your dirty room. Wash your private parts real nice. Put your hair back, take off that bonnet… And y'all just have sex, casually. Like, it's nothing. There's no strings attached. You know, it could be a drunken fling one time or it can be, like, a long-term fuck buddy thing. But that's what I think of hooking up. Like, you gettin' your common desires out. There shouldn't be any other expectations of that.
After giving me this explanation, Shae said that people do, however, “get caught up” and want more than just sex.

Miya and Lorena agreed with this sentiment, saying they expected more after hooking up with men. When Lorena talked about hookups, she said there was still a need for some type of emotional connection, and Misty stated that in some cases hookups turned into dating. Yvonne expressed that she too felt there needed to be a connection:

> When I think of sex, I just kind of feel like that is really important. I don't like to just hook up without any meaning behind it. I like to have ... Because I feel like people have vibes. When you have sex, it gives off like a really emotional vibe no matter what. I just feel that, that is really important for people. I don't think that people should just hook up like that. But, it's life, so I know people do, and I do.

Yvonne said that she hooked up once with a “friend of a friend,” so she felt somewhat okay with the arrangement. However, she stated that she would never try it again but did not regret the experience.

All but four women shared that they had engaged in at least one hookup in their lifetime. The experiences that they shared suggested that some of the women may have tried hooking up once or twice as a way to experiment. Others were in relationships or in different stages in their lives and so no longer participated in hookups, whereas other women unapologetically engaged in hookups on a more regular basis.

**Black Women Understand the Value of Private Education, But…**

This theme will answer these research questions: (a) What are the dating experiences of Black women at PPWIs? (b) How do dating experiences influence the thriving and sense of
belonging of Black women at PPWIs? and, (c) How do dating experiences of Black women at PPWIs shape the perception of their university?

Most, if not all, of the women were pleased with the academic education that they were receiving at their respective university. In fact, many of the women praised their professors, and felt that many faculty members went out of their way to ensure that their classroom experiences were positive. However, the participants also mentioned times and shared examples and instances that were less than affirming. More importantly to the study, many of the participants were not as pleased with activities and functions outside of the academic sphere. Thus codes arose from the interviews that led to this theme and subsequent subthemes. The subthemes of this theme will delve further into the experience and insights of the women and are as follows:

- My lack of options in dating does not cause me to thrive.
- Where’s my sense of belonging?
- It’s not the university's fault; I don't expect them to do more.
- College is a time to explore sexuality.
- If I had to the opportunity for a do-over.

**My lack of options in dating does not cause me to thrive.** During the interview, I explained Schreiner’s thrive theory to the participants, and then asked the women if they were thriving. To put it quite simply, my explanation was that for a student to thrive there had to be academic, social, and emotional involvement on their campus. For the most part, the students said no, they were not thriving. Loretta shared:

If I were to do it all again, I wouldn't pick my same institution now that I know about the dating and hooking up scene. Honestly, it’s really discouraging going through four years of never getting to know or date anyone on this campus. There
really is a difference between just being “okay” and thriving. I would definitely have chosen to go somewhere so that I could have the opportunity to thrive.

Loretta, a strong and involved student, voiced her frustration and disappointment in not having dated anyone during her time at her institution. However, Loretta was not the only one to have these thoughts. Simone said, “I don't feel that and thriving, I think the only reason why I'm thriving now is ’cause I learned how to be independent and not depend on others to fuel my fire.” Simone shared this about her moving off campus, which enabled her to explore friendships outside of school.

Jada, who is biracial, talked about how she has always had issues with fitting in because of her Black and Filipino background. When asked if the lack of options affected her sense of belonging, she stated:

Of course, because I feel if one person is saying, “Hey, it's not cool to say you don't like Black women...” Just say you got a preference and just go ahead and go with it, instead of you all sitting there just bashing us.

Jada was referring to Black men at her PPWI who talked negatively about Black women as a way to justify their lack of attraction to them. She implied that it affected how she felt about fitting in at her PPWI. Yvonne shared that she knew her experiences were different; however, she never put it in terms of thriving:

I guess no then because I haven't been able to really experience it, like not with anybody here. I didn't think about that. Interesting. Because people that I have hooked up with or dating, they don't even attend [my school]. I didn't think about that. I guess it does affect me because there's nobody here that interests me or is interested in me. So, I'm just like a person that's walking around. Then, I hear all
the stories of other kids hooking up and stuff. And I'm like, “Oh, okay. I have never experienced this.”

Miya, a sophomore, noted that she felt as if she was thriving, although the school was not meeting her social needs:

I feel I will still keep on doing me and if I happen to see somebody here then yeah, maybe I'll try it out, but I probably won't put my hopes up for it. But it won't ... I love this school for like how it is and how like it helps me, like the academics and stuff, not really social.

Miya is extremely happy with her academics and is willing to forego “thriving” to maintain what she considers an excellent education. Lorena, however, is trying to make a difference at her institution and she noted, “The culture of the school itself doesn't really create a space where people that look like me, women, Black women specifically, can thrive. But I think I personally have tried to create a space where I'm able to thrive.” Lorena helped to create a club for women of color at her institution.

Camryn shared that she wished her school caused her to thrive more. “I feel like thriving wouldn't really do it, because I feel like if I was in a place where I felt even more or most in it, I probably would do better because I mean I do get frustrated.” Camryn stated that she would not describe herself as thriving. She said she did not have a strong connection to her PPWI. As such, she did not push herself to do her best work. Camryn went on to say that even with the frustrations, she still had to function because there is life beyond her PPWI.

Beyoncé, in contrast to most of the other women, felt that she was thriving and doing well on her campus:
I'd say so. I think that a large part of that is because I'm on the basketball team, and we're one of the better teams on campus. We're a national championship program, so that might play a part in it, but I think that the community here is very close-knit type [knit], family-like, family-oriented.

Beyoncé shared that her sports team helped her to fit in, and although there were not as many options for romantic relations as she would have liked, she was satisfied with the school and felt as if she was thriving.

**Where’s my sense of belonging?** The women were also asked if they had a sense of belonging at their institution. So that the women got a clear understanding of the theory, I explained to them about Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. However, it was evident that most of the women were familiar with the psychologist’s work, and therefore, felt comfortable answering the question. Natasha Rose shared that she felt like she lived in two different worlds at her university:

I am a[n] African American woman on campus, and I am also a student athlete on campus. Being a student athlete on campus, I feel like I do have a sense of belonging, and they try to commit you to be fully invested in the school because you contribute to their athletic program, so they want their athletics to do well, which brings in money, brings in alumni… But then as a[n] African American woman, I don’t feel that sense of belonging here because I’m forced to put that identity aside because I am a student athlete.

Natasha went on to state that being the only Black woman on the team meant that she had no one to relate to about her Blackness and what it meant to be at a PPWI. She also shared that she felt that she had no one to date, and would have to wait until she graduated to pursue a relationship.
Camryn suggested that her sense of belonging was with her Black friends, as did most of the women. She also said she felt a sense of belonging on her sports team:

Do I feel like I belong with my friends? Yeah, because since I am in a Black student alliance, I have friends of my own race here. It helps to have them around. As a whole I feel like I stand out. I wouldn't say I feel super-included, but I don't feel like I'm not supposed to be here. I wouldn't say I'm in it, like I'm kind of like on the outskirts.

Loretta also felt that she belonged with her select group but not with the university as a whole:

Absolutely not. Yeah, belonging, but belonging with a select group of people. Finding people who are also in the same situation that I'm in and being able to connect that way, but not a sense of belonging as a whole at this university.

Loretta stated that as she looks for graduate schools, they will have to be diverse and have a larger population of Black men. Likewise, Simone shared that she also felt a sense of belonging with her friends:

And in terms of do I feel like I belong? With the friends, I made here, which ... who are Black women, yes. I feel like I belong with them, but the general campus community I feel like I'm just getting by and that ... that's the short of it.

Simone, who is a senior, talked about what she would tell Black women who might be interested in coming to her PPWI:

One, you got to vibe with a few things about yourself. Are you fine with being alone for an extended period of time...? Are you fine with being confronted about what your hair may feel like? How important is dating to them... And are they
willing to make their experience their own experience? Like, people talk about all
the time, “college is what you make it…” And it really is, but it shouldn't be this
freakin’ hard. It shouldn't be hard to find a best friend or just a friend to talk to at
lunch.

Jada made the point that not having a sense of belonging was one of the largest issues
facing Black college educated women:

I guess a sense of belonging because it's easier for Black males to fit in than it is
for Black women because all the White girls just love the Black guys. Oh my
gosh, they just drool all over them and then, of course, a lot of these guys are
athletes, so of course they're interacting with these people, so they've already got
the acceptance there.

Jada was concerned that the stereotypical way that Black women were viewed by the media and
others, being angry and bitter, made it difficult to be accepted and befriended on campus. Issa,
who is the top nursing student in her class, said she is warming up to her school:

Last year I was super involved. I was in about nine or 10 clubs. But I still felt like
people were still kind of afraid to talk to me. ... I went to kind of predominantly
White, but still diverse high school. So, people were super open-minded…. But
here, I've just never been around these certain type of people… Very right-
winged, kind of ... Not kind of racist, pretty racist. Just kind of closed-minded and
they have certain things about different cultures and people that they think, and
they'll just say out loud. I've never been in a situation like that. So that was kind of
alarming. And then just the way people, in general, treated me.
Issa said that she was feeling better about her situation in her sophomore year because her school started a Black student group. Issa also volunteered to be on the first-year orientation committee to ensure that new students of color had someone who looked like them around, so they did not feel quite as isolated and alone. Hope also said that she was aware that there would be a struggle with developing a sense of belonging on her campus:

I fully came into this knowing. But it was my fault. … The school, it doesn't really offer much for me in that area, when it comes to community and belonging.

I thank God for a relationship with God. Otherwise, I wouldn't have continued going here most likely… 'Cause you feel alone. You just feel so distant, and it makes you just, especially if this is technically your home, 'cause now you're not living with your family or whatever. Right now, this is my home.

Hope has no extended family to go home to when she gets lonely or during short breaks. She depends greatly on her church family and her campus housing to act as her home.

When I asked Shae what she would tell Black women who might be interested in coming to her institution, she said:

I would say academics are a 10 out of 10. Come there for that. But socially, if you're coming there, you'll find your group, hopefully, you'll find your group. 'Cause I know Black women…were finding it hard to find a group even with other Black women who were on our campus, so hopefully, you'll find your group. It's not guaranteed, but usually, there's at least one other person there. And, don't come here looking for a man, yeah. I mean, maybe you'll get lucky, but I don't know. I don't know.
Shae was concerned that although intelligent, beautiful, and worthy, many women question if they are good enough, and if they belong at PWIs. She stated that there were not enough role models of Black women in academia to emulate. Shae also shared that although she did not need a role model to achieve, it makes the journey so much more believable, possible, and more probable.

It was clear that the women felt they lacked a sense of belonging in terms of Maslow’s intent. However, they also knew that they had to choose whether to stay for what they all seemed to consider a quality education or leave for a more inclusive and uplifting setting.

**It’s not the university's fault; I don't expect them to do more.** Although most of the women were unhappy with their lack of social and relationship opportunities on campus, some did not fault their universities. Others were distraught with their institutions but did not expect their schools to be concerned enough to take steps or look into ways to address the issue. Solange shared that her PWI “for people of color, is a place for study, rather than a place for social (dating) activity/events.” Natasha shared that she did not expect anything more from her institution: “I expected this type of dating and hooking up scene from a predominately White institution.” However, she went on to say that, it would have been more of a “positive experience” had it been different. Simone added, “When I applied to this university I understood that Black people were underrepresented on campus. I was hoping that the academic and career opportunities would override those issues. But they don’t.” Lisette said, “So my school is predominantly White, very conservative, way more conservative than I expected going in.” Still, she was fine with where she chose to go for her education and tried to make the most of her situation. She said it was up to her to get involved. Therefore, she joined a few organizations. Lisette soon learned that trying to function in the all-White organizations was more than she
could handle. She said that she could not connect with the other women and found herself leaning more toward the Black women on her campus.

Issa suggested, “Predominantly White private schools were not meant to teach Black people.” Issa told me she selected her institution over two other schools in her state, even though she knew she was going to be a “huge minority.” When I asked her what she would tell Black women who were interested in her school, she said:

The place is for Catholic White students who come and just feel amazing and at home. It's not really a place for ... It's not really made for Black students to come and feel definitely at home. Hopefully, I'm not dissing my school or anything, but it's just, you've got to try.

Issa also said that she felt a sense of warmth and friendliness on her campus visit, something that she found somewhat misconceived once she began classes.

Hope voiced that she was familiar with PPWIs because of her experience in attending a predominantly White high school:

I expected it when I came here because I went to my last two years in high school, I went to a predominantly White school. So, I knew how it felt, and I knew that although it may be a little different because it's college, these are the same students and same teenagers that I was with not too long ago.

Hope says that she was not very concerned and did not expect anything different. Hope’s goal is to get a degree in nursing, and she feels her institution suited her needs best. However, she also revealed if not for the outstanding nursing program, she would have selected a different school.

Jana felt as if she was shown an inaccurate picture of her school when making her campus visit:
I came here as a potential student with the hopes of it being a diverse community. I was told what, “Oh, we're so diverse.” And like when I came, they threw all the people of color at me and told me, “Oh yeah. We are definitely a diverse school.” And then I got here, and I look around, and I've seen no one like me. So that was hard too.

Jana was very disappointed when she found out that the campus lacked much diversity. However, she said she would not change her experience:

I think I would diversify it more maybe, but at the same time, I don't know if there is much I would change because honestly, it's preparing me for society at large, for the bigger picture. And from the experiences that I have had here, they have taught me a lot. I have grown a lot.

Jana, along with other students, voiced that the times at their schools have been difficult because of the lack of diversity. However, many of them also talked about the importance of learning to deal in the real world once they graduate. They felt that they had learned to adjust to environments that were unfamiliar and, at times hostile, to them. Camryn talked about the fact that her school held long-standing traditions that did not include Students of Color, making it difficult at times to feel a part of the institution. Camryn stated:

It still shows today even as it tries and it gets better, it is a place where upper-class White people go. It shows in how the school runs and who's here. We do have the legacy thing where if your kids went here, well if you went here, your kids can go here and all that stuff.

Camryn also talked about a racialized experience she had with one of the staff members on her visit to the school. A staff member made a joke about watermelon and fried chicken. Even
though the institution fired the staff person, this experience solidified Camryn’s realization that she was stepping into a school where the staff felt comfortable enough to make inappropriate remarks. However, she still chose to attend.

**College is a time to explore sexuality.** Some of the students voiced that they had missed part of their life experiences by attending a PPWI. Loretta shared her views:

All of my [Black women] friends will joke around and sit around and be like, man if there were more options, and this and that. That definitely plays into that. I think that's a part of the college experience, too. You're supposed to date and be able to have fun and figure out what you do and don't like. I feel like I don't have that chance on this campus.

Loretta was frustrated because she has not dated anyone on her school’s campus in her four years. Lorena also expressed her desire for more options:

Yeah, I would have wished. Like a lot of people say, like in the movies, you go to college, you find the love of your life, everything is great. Not having that has really, I don't know, messed with my mind and my perception of college. That doesn't happen, you know? For Black women anyways. I know for a lot of White women, at the end of your [college] career, they do get married.

While Lorena reiterated that she was not expressly looking to get married, she was disappointed that she missed the experiences of having a college relationship. Lorena went on to tell me what she had learned from her professor:

I had a sociology professor who said this is the best time to find yourself a mate and then he gave a percentage of how a majority of students get married to an alum from [this school]. I had to raise my hand, and I had to clarify. I was like,
you have to be more specific. Black women aren't the women that are being married. They're not the women that are being chosen, so this is not the best place to meet a mate. It's not.

Kay agreed, she said:

I don't know I feel like college is a place where you're supposed to, go out to meet potential, I don’t know, someone that you could spend the rest of your life with. So I think I would kind of be upset because I never would get the chance to. Then I’d have to, I would have to do this into my future. Like, I don't know, I think I would be kind of upset about it in that case. I don’t know ‘cause there you also get to see experiences of what you like and what you don't like. I feel like I need to figure that out especially while you’re young. Trying to do that while you're older is different.

Kay is dating someone at her university, but was voicing this sentiment on behalf of all Black women who attend PPWIs, especially those who have not had a college relationship or have had to look elsewhere for a date. Simone also voiced her concerns about the dating scene at PPWIs:

So, I'm basically just adjusted to it at this point. 'Cause I remember ... I went on Facebook and I was like, “I can be at [an HBCU] right now, engaged.” Like, legit. Like, there was one girl, legit, she's the one at [an HBCU]. We went to the same middle school, and she went to a private high school and then she went to [an HBCU] and, like, she met this dude. I was like, “they 'gon get married, watch.” They in this Black love environment and it's college. They're gonna get married. Senior year pops up, [and she’s like,] “I'm married y'all. It's amazing. Like, I got engaged.” And I'm just like ... and they about to buy a house together. And I'm
like, that coulda been me. I coulda had that ring. I could have. And not that it's my
goal in life, it's just like, that coulda been an alternate reality, instead of choosing
another school that probably could've had that environment or that opportunity,
but I choose [my PPWI].

Simone disclosed to me that she just recently got into a relationship and that she is happy with it.
However, her friend does not attend the same school. Simone unequivocally stated that there is
no one on campus for her to date. Natalie shared that her dating experiences have been beneficial
to her growth:

But I guess in the long run, I do think dating is beneficial so that I can see like,
okay. Like I can't be with this kind of person and this is why. And I've learned
from that. And so, I guess it does make me a better person. I hope.

Natalie shared that she has been able to learn about herself when she has been in relationships.
She knows how she wants to be treated, whom she likes, and what it is like to be in a healthy
loving relationship.

**If I had to the opportunity for a do over.** The women were varied on whether they
would still attend their PPWI, knowing what they know now about opportunities to date and
hook up. However, most said they would choose their institution again. For instance, Hope said:

I would've still chosen this college. I say this because I didn't come to college to
find someone, but to learn. I think I might've actually chosen this college because
of the dating scene here. Before choosing, I would know that there would be a
rare occurrence of distractions from guys. Having someone compliment you feels
good, but at the end of the day, anything else becomes a distraction.
Hope has been in relationships in the past. However, she has found solace in her religion and has vowed to remain unattached for the time being. Beyoncé selected her institution because of sports, and she suggested:

I would never base my college selection on dating or possible hookups—this is not first, or even second, priority to me. I selected my institution and would select it again, because I love the close-knit feeling, am here for basketball, and it is relatively close to my family.

Beyoncé probably had the strongest thriving and sense of belonging of all of the participants. It was obvious that her sports team staunchly supported her, and she was entrenched in her school. Natasha Rose, who also played a sport, also would have selected her school again. “I mainly came to this school to play sports and even though it would be positive if the dating and hookup culture was different, but my goal was and still is to play basketball.” Yvonne felt the same as well noting, “Yes I would still choose to come here. Even though the hookup and dating scene here isn’t ideal, I feel that the success and experience with my team and academics I wouldn’t have received anywhere else.”

Shae also said she would still attend her school as she met her boyfriend there: “We have been together for three years and often talk about our future together. I would not have met him if it wasn’t for [my PPWI] bringing us together.” Misty felt the same as well, stating, “I met some amazing people, and I can’t give that up. I met the love of my life, and my forever friends who truly have made me their family.” Solange noted, “Knowing what I know now, I probably would pick this school again because of the scholarships. I think [my PPWI], for people of color, is a place for study, rather than a place for social (dating) activity/events.” Miya would select her same school as well sharing, “I would still select [my PPWI] because of the things that [it] has to
offer that would benefit me, for example, the small classes, being closer to home.” Issa felt that it was more important for her to remain at her school and focus on her studies:

I would definitely choose my school again because, in my opinion, it would be nice to find love or to just date in college but the real purpose of college is to stay focused and get your education. My school doesn't really have that many options for girls like me to date but it has a wonderful program that I'm really enjoying and flourishing in.

Elizabeth agreed with Issa saying, “I really wish the dating scene on campus [was] better, but since I know I am getting a good education I don't mind as much. I can always find someone to be with romantically.” Likewise, Jada would not change schools, and she shared that she “would still pick this institution. I picked this school based off of education factors and not ones that involve my dating life.” Most of the women felt that while something was missing from their social and romantic life, their educational goals were more valued.

Conversely, some of the other women in the study felt differently about their situation and suggested that they would look for other options. Lisette stated:

I would not choose [my PPWI] knowing what I know about the dating and hook-up scene. Growing up, I would watch Black college movies and TV shows (such as “A Different World”) and always assumed that it would be very easy to date in college because there would be so many options and that there would be Black men who would find me desirable. I had no idea that dating at [my PPWI] would be as hard and cause me to have insecurities and an overall sense of hopelessness when it comes to dating. Although I’ve had the opportunity to date outside of [my PPWI] and no longer have a desire to date on campus, I sometimes wish I’d gone
to a bigger school, perhaps in a bigger city or town, in a different part of the
country, or an HBCU where dating would be so much easier.

When I asked Lisette what she tells other Black women who were looking to attend her
institution she said:

So, I tell 'em what I told you. I love the academics, I love the study abroad, I love
the professors, but I also warn them that they're going to be the minority. A lot of
them have questions about boys, and I'm like, “If you're going there for dating,
don't go.” I tell them that it's racist, I'm honest with them, but I also balance it out
by being, you have to find out for yourself, whether it's worth it.

Lisette was very clear that she was looking for something more than just academics. She went
through major adjustments at her institution. However, she said it all worked out for her
academically. Jana also said that she would consider switching schools:

I feel as though I miss out a lot on the typical college experience. I consistently
hear my White female peers talking about the guys they've hooked up with most
recently or the drama they are having with their boyfriend/ex-boyfriend. As weird
as it may sound, I have not been afforded such a luxury. College is supposed to be
a time of exploring what I like and dislike, and I have not gotten the chance to do
that. I see very often White couples graduating, getting engaged, and married; and
I have only witnessed one Black couple from this campus thrive past [my PPWI].
This definitely sets my life plan back a few years as I planned to meet and marry
someone from college, but life doesn't always work out that way.

Loretta felt the same. She shared that she had not dated anyone on her campus during her
four years at her institution. She said, “I would definitely have chosen to go somewhere so that I
could have the opportunity to thrive.” Simone was unhappy with her institution as well, stating that she would have found another university for a number of reasons:

But not just because the dating scene was unfulfilled. When I applied to this university, I understood that Black people were underrepresented on campus. I was hoping that the academic and career opportunities would override those issues. But they don’t. Rather [my PPWI’s] lack of full-time faculty of color, limited and shameful courses on non-European subjects, along with a terrible dating scene would lead me to not choose the [PPWI].

As noted in their experiences, the women felt as if they had missed important phases in their lives by choosing to attend a PPWI. Simone even went further by disclosing more deeply her displeasure with the lack of a diverse faculty and curriculum. Most of the women said they would still choose their school in spite of the lack of options for dating and hooking up options. However, they explicitly stated that they had preferences on who they wanted for partners and how they wanted to be treated in relationships. These preferences will be discussed in the next section.

**What Black Women Want**

Most of the women in the study were sure about what and who they felt were best for them in a romantic relationship. The women discussed their particular needs and wants in a relationship, and they shared why race in a mate did or did not matter. Further, they discussed the complexity of relationships with Black men. These women also shared how the use of online sites has changed the trajectory of dating and hooking up on college campuses. This section answers the research questions (a) What are the dating experiences of Black women at PPWIs? (b) How do these experiences shape their perception of self? and (c) How do dating experiences
of Black women at PPWIs influence partner choices? The subthemes that fall under this section are as follows:

- Race doesn’t matter.
- I want a Black man.
- Black men/Black women relationships on campus are complex.
- My man needs to understand me.
- Online dating sites are a viable option.

**Race doesn’t matter.** As the populations of Black men at the universities in the study were in some cases were less than one percent, I was interested to hear whom the women dated, and if they would date or hook up with anyone outside of their race. The women had mixed feelings on the matter. Some of the women were open to relationships outside of their race while others had strong preferences. For instance, Beyoncé stated, “You can't put a race on attraction.” She went on to say that her interests on campus were more related to whether or not someone was an athlete. She stated:

> It's you're either getting a Black guy who's an athlete or a White guy who's an athlete or not an athlete… and I'm not ... I'm not gonna say I don't like them, but I'm not attracted to nonathletes. At other schools you can see businessmen and athletes and then guys who do ... you have a lot more diversity whereas here you're stuck with just athletes.

So, while other women may be concerned about race, Beyoncé’s concern was about athleticism.

Natalie, who is biracial, was in a relationship with a White man who attended her college. This relationship is her second with a White man and she shared:
I met somebody but it was weird because I was a freshman and he was a senior and so I was kind of nervous and I didn't know how to be you know. And so, I think that was weird because I had never dated a White guy before. And so that kind of just made me question like who I was and like if this was right for us to be together because it's not normally ... I don't think it's normally accepted that a White guy is interested in a Black girl. So that made me question a lot about myself and about him. Yeah. That was a lot. Until that was pretty much that. And now, I am dating someone else, my junior year. And I feel like I had to learn to be comfortable with myself and not care how people viewed me. Yeah so, I guess I got over that.

As Natalie and I talked further about her racial preference, she shared, “It was Black, but I guess now it's whatever.” Although all of Jada’s relationships have been with Black men, she disclosed that she had no preference:

I don't have one. I don't have one, but they always end up [Black]... I've never dated outside of my race. Nobody's really ever approached me and if they have, they always start off with the same BS line is, I love Black girls. Oh my God, you're so ... They point out my race. It's like, Okay. Obviously, I know you're White, but I'm not pointing it out to you. I just automatically get turned off and I never really give them a chance at all.

Jada went on to say that she had to be approached in an “appropriate manner” to consider getting involved with a White man, and thus far, it has not happened. Kay did not have a racial preference, and she shared, “I don't really have one. I just feel like, if you treat me right then that's all that really matters. And care about the things that I care about and issues that could
happen to me.” Misty is in a relationship with a White man who does not attend her university. She told me that she has no racial preference:

I don't really have a preference, honestly. I don't have a preference. You can be clear. If you fine, you fine. That's just how I see it. You could be clear. If I like you, I like you, and it's just that simple. I don't really have a preference. If we're talking about skin color, I don't, but if we're talking about attitude and personality, I do… I think that all races are attractive… It's kind of absurd to me to think that only this one race looks good. Like, I don't think that you're wired that way.

When Loretta and I spoke, she also said that race was not a deciding factor in her relationships:

I think also because of the past relationships I've been in... it just doesn't matter.

To me, it doesn't matter. You just have to be honest and loyal and genuinely a good person and passionate about whatever it is and this and that because... your race shouldn't have anything to do with that.

She went on to clarify her thoughts on the matter, noting, “I mean, there's nothing wrong with a beautiful chocolate man, but if you're Asian or White or whatever, that's fine. You just have to be able to identify with and recognize what I go through and those differences.” Loretta felt that race was not as important as the treatment she received in a relationship. Further, as long as the men in their lives understood about the plights of intersectionality that come from the intersection of racial and sexual biases, Loretta along with Natalie, Beyoncé, Jada, Kay, and Misty had no preferences with regard to race.

I want a Black man. Other women in the study were clear about their preference of a Black with regard to their relationships. Jana shared that her preference was “Black men though I don't limit myself to that just because there are other fish in the sea.” She went on to state,
however, that her hookups were with Asian and White men. I asked her to elaborate, and she explained that the men she dated were Black but that she was not sure why her hookups were not. She shared, “I have no idea, honestly. I honestly have no idea. I think that’s the only people that I find a mutual interest with on the dating apps.” Miya found herself in a couple of bad situations with “White guys” when she was in high school, and therefore, changed her preference:

I mean really like ... It was—at first like way before, it was White [men]. Because I felt like no Black guy liked me, or would like me for my skin color, and but I know, after what happened to me, I feel like now is just like Black. [I] kinda feel like Black guys respect me more.

Miya later shared that she still hooks up with White men, and she did not have a preference. Yvonne stated that she “definitely likes Black men.” I asked her what she would do if a White man asked her out and she said, “I would definitely think about it long and hard, because I don't want to hurt anybody's feelings, but I would just turn them down.” Although Hope has no plan to be in any kind of relationship anytime soon, she stated, “I do have a preference. I'd rather date African American males, but I would be open to dating other races, but I do have a preference.”

Solange was explicit in her preference for Black men. I then asked her if she would at least consider dating a White man. She said, “From having my one experience I had with that White guy, … probably not.” Solange felt that the man she dated was not attuned to the issues of Black women; therefore, she ended the relationship. Lisette, who is Haitian, shared that her preference was Haitians:

It's Black men in general. I do feel more connected to other Afro-Caribbeans and other Haitians, just 'cause of that cultural aspect. For me, my culture is personally,
very important to me, and my biggest fear is losing it, through generations, and so
I find that dating Haitian men is easier because they know so much about me.
I'm more excited to date Haitian men, even though I haven't really dated; I've only
talked to that one guy who was Haitian.

Lisette also voiced some fears and stereotypical views that she heard about Haitian men:
With Haitian men, there's this stereotype that they cheat, and they are liars and
possessive and jealous. People make jokes about it on Twitter and Instagram all
the time. I'm very careful when meeting Haitian men. When I talk to Haitian men,
I don't really go on dates with them unless they really impress me. But yeah, my
preference overall is Black men.

Issa Rae, who is half Nigerian, spoke about her preference for men:
So, I don't like to use the word preference, but I definitely have a preference for
African American men. I think a lot of that has to do with where I grew up and
who I grew up around. But I'm never going to say I wouldn't date anybody else
because that's really messed up.

Further, Issa shared that she would consider dating a White man; however, she voiced her
concern about the wishes and hopes of her father, who is Nigerian:
But my dad wants me to get with a Nigerian guy, and Black is the next thing that
comes after that. But I think he'd go completely insane, completely insane. And I
don't know. I always fear disappointing my parents. So, I would have to think
about that.

Issa shared that although her father has been in the United States since he was five, he has held
strongly on to his African and Nigerian culture.
Elizabeth was very precise in whom she preferred: “So my personal type, the people who I choose over others to be in a relationship with, are guys who are usually tall. Who are Black, and educated. They're smart.” I then asked her if she would date someone from another race if asked. She responded, “Yeah, I could… I can honestly say that I'm not very much attracted to other races. They just don't catch my eye as much as a Black man does, but I'm open to it.”

Camryn was to the point as well, saying, “I like dark-skinned Black guys.” She did backtrack some in telling me about her high school boyfriend: “I guess not completely outside of my race, but he was half Black/half Puerto Rican. So, I guess I'm cool with people of Latino descent, dating them, but I usually don't venture outside of Black and Brown people.”

Natalie Rose stated that her preference was Black men, but she was attempting to be more open:

Black men. But recently [my preference] has started to become, trying to be more open due to it being predominantly White here. I've thought about probably looking for any person that will make me feel like they really care about me and who's committed and who I can trust to be in a relationship with.

Natasha explained that she dated a White high school student for three months, so while her preference was Black men, she could see herself open to others. Shae was clear that while she would date individuals of other races, her preference was Black men:

Yeah, I mean, definitely yes, racial preference, but, like, I wouldn't not hook up or date a White guy or a guy from another race. But ... okay, I would date, first definition date, casually go out on dates, with a White guy or I would hook up with a White guy or another guy outside of my race. But I could not…be in a committed relationship with a non-Black person.
Some of Shae’s bluntness was because of ridicule she received as a child. She explained that others would tease and call her an “Oreo,” meaning that she was Black on the outside, but acted White. She continued:

However, once I got to college, as I said, that was my first time in a predominantly White space, so when people are telling you, Oh, you're such a White girl. You're so this. You believe that because then I look around at the Black women around me, and the Black people around me and I am different from them. So I'm like, “Oh, if I'm not that, then I must be White, but then at [my PPWI], I was in a White space, and I was like, excuse my language, but, hell nah, I am not a White person.” That is not me. I am not an Oreo, and that's when my Blackness really became salient to me because I realized I am a Black woman.

Once Shae was able to get away from the teasing and bullying, she realized that there are many shades and hues of Blackness. It is not a one-color-fits-all race, and she was able to explore and find herself.

Shaka was a bit unclear on her preference, although she did mention Black men. Shaka shared:

I prefer, honestly, I wouldn't say oh I only prefer Black men, but I do kind of prefer like Black men in a way. Actually I don't even have a preference. I actually really wanted to be, like my ideal was like marrying an Arab. You know like whoa. They're different, and I like it. But I realize that's not how life works, and so I'm happy right now. But I do recognize that the essence of a Black man that's different. There's nothing like…a Black man.

She went on to say that she liked a certain type of Black man:
And again, Black men are different. Everybody's different in their own way just like Black women. Just women and people in general. But that aggressiveness that masculinity, that over masculinity. I don't know it's just something I just like. You know? It's just like, it's not even passive, it's more active. It's more of like, I tell you. It's kind of controlling, which in of itself is probably not good, but I like it in a way.

Although Shaka only talked about her preferences for Black men, she is currently in a committed relationship with someone who is European. She met him while studying abroad and they have been together for over two years. It is a long-distance relationship, and they travel to destinations between Europe and the United States every three or four months to see one another.

Lorena shared that she preferred Black men and would not consider dating men of other races:

I really love Black men. There’s not many Black men on [this] campus. I think I'm not willing to really branch out and date other men that aren't Black, which I don't know, I just can't. I really can't do it. It's been really hard with that because I think I can count on two hands how many Black men there are at my school. It's nonexistent.

I asked Lorena how her choices make her feel since her options were so limited:

It's not on my mind all the time. It's not something that's constantly looming over me. I think I just have moments where I'm not busy at school, or I'm not doing any extracurriculars, or I'm not working, and I have that downtime to think. I'm like, Aw, I wish I had someone here. I wish I had a boyfriend. I wish I had this,
that, and the third. I think those moments are the moments where I think about it the most, and I get lonely.

Simone preferred to be in relationships with Black men as well:

I prefer Black people. I have, actually, never dated anyone, or had sex with anyone, outside my race. Like, I always thought, “oh, I'll be different,” but nah. I just ... I can't... I can't visualize myself doing it. Like, in theory, I'm like, I probably shouldn't care, but I do.

As we talked further, Simone told me that the man she is currently in a relationship is biracial:

And the funny thing, and here’s the kicker—[my boyfriend] is half White. I probably should've mentioned that. I didn't know that until, like, we started actually having a conversation. He started talking about his mother. I'm like, so show me a picture, and it was this White woman on his phone. I'm like, “are you half White?” He's like, “yeah.” I was like, “are you sure you're not adopted?” He's like, “why would I lie about that?” I was like, “you're right.” But looking at him, you would not know at all... And he's like ... and he thought I wouldn't date him because he was half White. I was like, “well I ain't even know baby, so. I love you all the same. It don't even matter.”

Simone shared how much she really cared about her boyfriend. Further, the fact that he was biracial had no influence on her feelings for him. I asked Simone if she had options on her campus and she gave me a resounding “no.” She talked about how some of her Black girlfriends on campus would share that they were hooking up with men. She told me that she was surprised
because the Black men were limited. Simone further explained that the women were hooking up with White men, something that she reiterated was not an option for her.

**Black men Black women relationships on campus are complex.** Although few, there are Black men on each of the college campuses in the study. As such, I asked the women about the options on their individual campuses to date or hook up with Black men. Some of the women talked about the fact that Black men were attracted to White women, which I will address later in the chapter. The women also spoke about other dynamics that went on between Black men on the campus. For instance, Jana explained:

- So, because of my preference of a Black male on campus and there's only maybe 25 of them. I'm not saying they're not awesome people because they are and they're fantastic, but it's just so limited that if I were to date one and then break up and go to another guy, they're also friends. So that's just ... It's weird. It's a weird dynamic so I just kind of stay friends with them instead.

Shae was of the same opinion:

- The Black men who are interested in Black women, it may be awkward because depending on how soon you guys start feeling each other or being interested in each other, there's already [a relationship formed and they brother and sister]...

Being that the Black population at [my PPWI] is so small already. We have kind of a family, you know, vibes going on, and so, it's like there's a threshold, which, after that point, it becomes weird. You're kind of in the friend zone or its kind of like, I look at you as a brother, or I look at you as a sister, so now even going, hooking up with you becomes awkward because we didn't start off like that.
Shae went on to explain that women only could date one or two different men before it became problematic. She shared:

If you were to be a Black woman who dates a Black man on campus, then you're kind of blackballed... Not like you're literally blackballed, but it's kind of like because all the Black men are friends, it's gonna be hard for you to find someone else to date or talk to someone else seriously, unless, you just don't care about that and they also take you serious. So, it's kind of like you have one chance. You have one shot and you better get it right because then it becomes awkward to you if it doesn't work out and then you're interested in someone else. And, I hear that, too, with a lot of women on my campus, yeah. It's kind of like, well, I can't date two of them 'cause if I date two of them, I done dated like 50%, so yeah, I think that's something as well, which just goes to show as well that the options are very slim.

Natalie voiced some of the same sentiment:

Well, I think being on this campus, it's kind of hard to be interested in the Black men here just because I feel like I'm so close with them and I do consider them to be like my brothers. And so, I feel like we've just developed a relationship where I can't really cross a line to want to date them. If that makes any sense.

I asked Natalie why she “friend zoned” the Black men, but felt it was fine to pursue the White men on campus. Her response:

I don't necessarily friend zone them. It's just I feel like there's only been one or two that have pursued me. And I do friend zone a lot of Black guys, but I feel like
out of the Black guys that I do know on this campus, only one has pursued me and
then he ended up dating my best friend.

Lisette had the same feelings when I asked her about options and pursuing a relationship
with the Black men on her campus:

Definitely not. Now that I'm a senior, I'm really into older men, and I just find the
men on my campus very immature, both Black and White. And now that I'm a
senior, I'm even older, so all the Black men in my [class], they're like my
brother[s] at this point because we've been through these four years together, we
hang out. I would feel weird dating them. I'm definitely not interested in the
younger Black men, so I don't think there's options.

Many of the women felt the same way. With the population of Black men being so small at the
school, it was difficult to date around. Lorena shared:

I've never had a relationship in that nature with anyone at my school. I think it's
just so small. Actually, no, I lied. Sorry, no, I have. Just one time, and that was
last semester, but other than that, I haven't had any relationships of that nature
with anyone at my school.

I asked her if it was intentional that she had not pursued other relationships on campus.
Her response was, “Yes, yes and no. Yes, because I think it's just such a small campus and
everybody knows everybody. I feel as if, if you're messing with one guy, someone else has
probably messed with him. I don't like that.”

Loretta was disappointed in the fact that Black men on her campus were not interested in
dating Black women. When I asked her why she thought men were not attracted to Black women
she responded:
I don't ... I could not tell you. I've been trying to figure that out. They're ... Specifically for the Black men, and that's very confusing because you were brought into this world by Black women. The people that I do know, the Black women are still a part of their lives, and they highly value, but they don't even mess with Black women themselves. They don't even ... then they're not even seen as options for me because they're constantly looking at other races besides a Black woman.

Shaka said that she was surprised about the way that some of the Black men ignored the women on campus. She explained:

I wasn't prepared for the way that Black men here are. Because a lot of these Black men come from White institutions, around White women for the most part... [and] for the first year or two of them being in college, they refuse to talk to Black women. They refuse.

Solange expressed the same sentiment:

Black men on this campus, they will see, I'll be walking with my friend, a guy, and they'll, “oh, what's up? What's up bro?” And they'll look and me and won't say nothing. And, it's just like, they don't even know my guy friend, and they don't know me. But they spoke to him and didn't speak to me. Just like, why? So, I think we get ignored on this campus.

These excerpts voiced the sentiment that the Black men on the participants’ campuses did not want to date them, or that they felt too close, like family, to date.

My man needs to understand me. Many of the women felt that when they were in relationships, their partners had to understand the issues that go along with dating a woman,
especially a Black woman. For instance, Kay expressed that White men who were interested in Black women did not get a free pass: “If you're not Black, you still have to understand the things that come with me being a Black woman and respect that.” Misty agreed with this sentiment as well. She shared with me a story about a past relationship:

I was talking to this guy and I had never shown him my true self, like my 'fro; I feel like that's the rawest I can be. And … when I showed him finally, he just simply said he didn't like it. I don't like that on you. And I was like, “What?” He was like, “I don't like that on you.” That broke me, and not completely, it just hurt, because he was White, and I actually cared about him. I cared about his opinion. I cared about what he thought about me. I cared, and I felt like, when I showed him my true self, he wasn't satisfied, and he didn't like who I was. And I said, “Well, I don't know how you're going to like any other Black woman, because this is us.” Hello.

Misty’s went on to explain that his unacceptance of her natural hairstyle hurt her. She told him, “If I have to straighten my hair for you to love me, if I have to do something different with my hair for you to love me, then you don't love me.”

Solange felt the same way. She shared her dating experiences with a White man:

Me being pro-Black, I like to make sure that if you're White, then you know the right and wrong, things to say, things not to say, and stuff. And he was just kind of like, he was educated, but he wasn't really educated on the issues. He didn't really know what was really going on. And so, I was just like, alright. So, I don't really want to be with somebody who is not able to understand what's going. Or isn't able to understand what I'm going through. So, I don't want to go call him
and be like, yeah, somebody just said the n-word. And he's like, well what's wrong with that? You know? So, yeah.

Solange, like many of the participants, felt that the persons they dated had to be willing to understand some of the issues that were important to them when regarding race. Shae had similar feelings:

My Blackness is very important to me, and I feel like if I was to seriously date or be committed to someone who was not Black... Maybe I could date another person of another color, but I still feel like the experience would be different. Because I feel like there's certain things I would have to explain to them, or when I'm crying because I hear about another Black man being killed in the street, they're gonna be looking at me like, “Oh, I guess I understand why you're crying, but I don't really understand why you're crying, crying. You didn't know him or anything.”

Shae went on to talk about other issues that could affect a relationship:

Or, when I wear my hair like this or when I sleep with a scarf on my head, you know? It's certain things that I don't see my boyfriend who's Black... There's certain things we just get about each other where I don't have to explain to him. Those things or anything I do have to explain is because I'm a woman, not because I'm Black, and I just think in a world where my Blackness is constantly under a microscope and constantly being attacked and constantly being threatened and constantly just... I don't even know. Everything's against it. I don't want that to be in my relationship where something... when that's something so close to me, and my relationship is supposed to be somewhere I seek refuge.
Shae wants a relationship with a man who understands her, is understanding of her Black culture, and her needs as a woman.

Natalie shared that the man she is in a relationship with is very cognizant of her feelings about race:

He is very supportive, and he does bring that up a lot, that he does want to have some deeper understanding of things that I struggle with. Because I would consider him to be pretty socially aware, but he just wants to make sure that he doesn't do anything to upset me or upset my community.

Natalie shared that they were friends before committing to a relationship, which helped tremendously in their dating. Natalie explained that this was the first relationship where she and her partner were friends first, and it was a very positive experience for her. Conversely, Loretta felt that the men on her campus lacked maturity:

Maturity level. Let's just say a White male ... not even. I won't say absolutely not, but a lot of the White males on this campus are ... like I said earlier, I think what's important for me is being able to understand my situation and where I come from and a lot of the White men on this campus can't do that. Some of the Black men can't even do that on this campus.

Loretta voiced her frustration in the fact that she could not find a man who she could feel compatible with on her campus. Likewise, Lorena and Simone felt that many men were intimidated by their intelligence. Lorena explained:

Something else that I think has limited my dating pool is that I think men have the tendency to desexualize women that have an opinion, women that are intellectuals or smart. I think that's something that has disrupted that a little bit. I've gotten,
“Oh, you're too intimidating.” Or I've gotten men that I've had relationship with that say, “Oh, I feel like I'm not good enough for you or I don't have enough.”

Simone stated that the men on her campus preferred women that were easy. Further she wanted a relationship with a man who did not require much too much “mothering.” She noted:

So, in terms of options of Back men, I didn't feel like a lot of options. I didn't feel like they were either worthy or, of course, they were afraid of me. Like, the basketball players, I knew none of them wanted me 'cause they had other girls that they could easily grab onto. Like, I think when it comes to Black men, they would rather have someone who would submit to them or do things for them, and there are girls who do that. I'm just not one of those ladies… Like, I think a lot of the Black girls on this campus feel like, "I'm not ..." Like, I'll take care of you, but I ain't your mom. Like, I'm not gonna take care ... I'm not gonna, like, be under you 24-7 and some dudes just don't like that. Like, how dare you not be under me 24-7. I'm a god. Alright, and I’m a goddess. Now what?

Lorena was also not interested in dating the men at her university because she felt they were not compatible. She explained:

I mean, the men that I'm interested in, they're just not there. I'm not going to seek something out that I know isn't there, you know? A lot of guys under 20, they're not looking for something I'm looking for. Again, I'm not wasting my time. I always say I'm not a social worker and I'm not a mother and I'm not signing up to do that. I think a lot of the times, when you're in relationships, you're either signing up to be a social worker or a mother and I don't have time to do that.

Simone, Loretta, and Lorena felt that the men at their respective schools lacked the depth, maturity, confidence, and respect to be in relationships with Black women. Most, if not all, of the
women felt the same way concerning respect and maturity level, and felt that there were very few options for them at their PPWIs.

**Online dating apps are a viable option.** As many of the women in the study felt that there were no viable options for dating at their respective universities, they enlisted other alternatives. One of those alternatives was using online dating applications (apps) to find potential men. As I began the journey of this study, my knowledge of online dating and dating apps was marginal. However, the women in the study were very familiar with them, and some used dating apps often. For instance, Miya met the man she is currently in a relationship with on the dating app *Tinder*. However, she did not disclose much about her relationship with him except that he was 25 years old. Further, Miya informed me that many women at her institution also use dating apps. Misty also met her “boyfriend” on social media. Initially, they followed each other on *Instagram*. However, a relationship did not form at that time. They found each again on *Tinder*. She explained:

> I got on this site called *Tinder*, and this is a dating app. This is when I thought that people were actually serious about dating on that app. I did not know that people were going to take this app as basically an open free hookup thing. I did not know that. So, I thought these were serious people who wanted to date. And so, I saw him on there, and I was like, oh, that's funny. We follow each other on *Instagram*. He's DM'd [direct messaged] me before. I'm just going to swipe right because that's funny. Like, he's going to laugh, he's going to like it. It's cool. So, and then shortly after that, he DM'd me. And then we started messaging, and then, from then on, he gave me his number, because he was like, “You really are not good at messaging people, so just text me.”
Misty explained to me that “swiping right” on the app means that one is in acceptance of a person’s offer for further contact as there is some type of interest.

Jana has tried both Tinder and PlentyOfFish, another dating and hooking up app. She tried Tinder in high school but stopped using it for some time after she entered college. She shared:

And then I got to [my PPWI]. I kind of just stopped dating. Stopped hooking up just because this campus is really small, so I wasn't really comfortable with putting business out there because it gets out there very fast. So, I just went on apps instead, and I just started hooking with guys from the surrounding area.

I asked Misty if she used Tinder for her meetings and she responded, “Tinder. Yeah. I think PlentyOfFish maybe. Yeah. So, Tinder and PlentyOfFish.” She stated that she had never hooked up with or dated anyone at school because the campus was too small, and she did not want gossip to spread about her.

Shae went on the Tinder app after she broke up with her boyfriend. She felt no one on her campus was viable to hook up with or date. She explained:

I broke up with my boyfriend because I need a lot of attention and he wasn't giving me a lot of attention… I love that you're doing this topic because I wasn't ... I was hooking up with people. Other than one guy, the people I was dating or I hooked up with were from Tinder. That's how bad [my PPWI] is. It wasn't even people from my campus. I was on a[n] app on my phone matching with people from 70 miles away and dating them and stuff.
Shae reiterated that she used the app only for a short time. However, she did hook up with at least three different men. She went on to say that many of the Black women at her institution also used a dating app. She explained:

And, most women at my school use *Tinder*, at least, most Black women. When I talk to some of my White friends, they have no problem hooking up with guys on campus, but when it comes to the Black women on campus, literally, 100%, 99.9% of my friends who I’ve talked to about hooking up and things like that, we all have had a *Tinder* app.

I then asked Shae if they use the app because there's lack of men, lack of Black men, or lack of Black men who were interested in Black women at her institution. She responded:

I think all of the above because I have friend who, they don't mind. They have slept with White men. They've hooked up with White men. They've been with White men before, but like I said, it's like men aren't really interested in the Black women so that kind of axes out that choice. Then, you do have some Black men who you may be interested in, but if that's not reciprocated, which for the most part, that's not being reciprocated, that axes that choice.

Lisette used *Tinder* as well; however, she was apprehensive. Therefore, she went at a slow pace when first using the app. She explained:

I hooked up with one boy towards the end of my freshman year, but my sophomore year was when I…downloaded *Tinder*. One of my friends had it, and she told me about it, and I said, “oh, that sounds cool, I kind of wanna like,” I was a virgin back then, and I wasn't really experienced with boys, so I downloaded the app. That summer I was too scared to actually meet up with anyone, so I would
just talk to people, and when they would ask to hang out, [and I would] just not respond. But sophomore year, I was really sad, and I needed attention, and I was looking for attention from boys, I downloaded it, and I think I met up with two boys that semester… I like Tinder a lot because I got, I felt like I was getting a lot of attention, I was getting men telling me that I was pretty and that my bio was funny and so I felt pretty special in there. I redownloaded it, and I would talk to boys again but not really meet up with them.

Lisette had numerous more encounters on Tinder and even used dating apps when she studied abroad. As a result, Lisette shared that she was able to learn about herself and embrace her sexuality during this time. She shared:

I kind of changed the way I thought about sexuality and sex, and I started thinking about myself as a ho but I didn't feel bad about it. I would tell my friends like, Yeah, I'm a ho, what's wrong with that? I was also following people, I was really active on Twitter, I followed a lot of Black women, who were Womanist, who proudly post things about their sexuality. I met women on Twitter who were celebrating their ho-ness, tell their ho stories. I found a community online, through other women who were confused about that at first but were embracing their sexuality. I started embracing my sexuality more. I became less ashamed of having sex with a lot of people.

Most of Lisette’s encounters have been when she was away from her institution studying abroad or working in internships across the country. Lisette shared with me that upon returning to her campus, she could not bring herself to get involved with the men at her school. She was not interested in being with them.
Conversely, Issa’s experiences with dating apps were not as satisfying as the experiences of other Black women in the study. In her pursuit to find someone to date, she tried *Tinder* as an option. She shared her experience noting, “And you could go on websites like *Tinder* or ... That stuff is terrifying. I did it for like a month, and I'm glad I'm alive. It was horrible. You just meet really weird people.” I asked Issa if she talked or met anyone from the site. She shared that she had been in contact with a student who was in town for a sporting match. She explained:

No, because he wanted to meet me in the parking lot of a Walmart. So, I was like, “no thanks.” I did end up meeting one guy, but he was from out of state. He was just having a wrestling competition here. And I thought we were just going to meet to just talk. But then he was like, we can go back to my hotel. I was like, that's what you wanted. Okay, well I can hear my friend calling me. So yeah, definitely we're seen as sexual people and, oh, she definitely wants to have sex with me.

I wanted to know how Issa felt about not being able to find someone to be in a relationship with in general, as she had never really dated anyone. She shared:

[I feel] kind of sad, but at the same time it's like, okay that's just life. I don't know. I guess it's kind of frustrating because I'll hear some of my friends just like, oh I haven't had a boyfriend in like three months. I'm like try 19 years. But like, oh my gosh. They'll just complain about the smallest stuff. And it's just like, they don't understand. Sometimes you don't have people to talk to about that. But again, I'm lucky because I'll be able to talk to my friends about it.
Issa was one of the few women in the study who had never seriously dated anyone. Further, she has a very positive attitude and says that being single has allowed her to concentrate on her studies. However, she still voiced that she wishes she had someone special in her life.

**The Thing about Black Women!**

This section of chapter four is dedicated to issues that Black women face with regard to being stereotyped, the concept of colorism, and doubts that plague women because of the ill treatment that they receive from men. These concerns have been around and have beleaguered Black women for centuries. Black women are often stereotyped as overly sexual, loud, and argumentative (Lewis et al. 2016). Also, the hue of their skin tone caused Black women to be valued or devalued (Esmail & Sullivan, 2006; Glenn, 2008; Freedman et al., 2007). The participants felt that men sometimes used these stereotypical characteristics to deflate, disregard, and ignore their needs. Indeed, their feelings are well documented, as Black women for centuries were prized or diminished depending on the hue of their complexion (Clair & Denis, 2015; Diggles, 2014; Essed, 1991). It is well known in the Black community, that the lighter the complexion, the more beautiful the majority population considers Black women and men as well (Clair & Denis, 2015; Diggles, 2014; Essed, 1991). This distinction stems from slavery when women with lighter skin worked as house slaves and women who had darker skin worked in the fields (Clair & Denis, 2015; Diggles, 2014). This colorism still goes on today, and the women in the study had much to say on the matter. With this in mind, in the next section the participants will share their experiences with being stereotyped, followed by colorism, and lastly, self-doubt. The subthemes in this section answer the research questions (a) What are the dating experiences of Black women at PPWIs? (b) How do these experiences shape their perception of self? (c)
How do dating experiences of Black women at PPWIs influence partner choices? and (d) How do dating experiences of Black women at PPWIs shape the perception of their university?

**Black women are stereotyped.** As the women began to open up and talk about their experiences with dating on campus, they began to voice some of their frustrations about the stereotypical treatment and views of some of their White peers. Simone shared:

> Like, people looked at me and said, “Oh, you're an activist.” I'm like, where you get that from? Cause I wear head wraps? They're like, “yeah, you know, you're all about the people power.” You don't like White people. I'm like, “I like how y'all just gonna put this whole exhaustive list on what ... who I am without even asking my first name.” So, I don't necessarily feel like the community here is as welcoming as it should be when it comes to... especially our minority students, and even minority women, who get ridiculed more than our Black men do. 'Cause everyone's trying to replicate what the Black guys do. Black guys are the pinnacle of what's cool... Like, there's one guy that everybody knows, and they was like, hey what are you doin, blah, blah, blah? He's a track runner. He's really great and now knows all the White kids, especially the White guys, are always hanging around him askin', what's new? Or what they're listening to. And with the Black women, it's more like, let me not go near her ’cause I might make her upset ’cause she's a ticking time bomb. 'Cause, you know, we don't have emotional constraints at all. We just ... talk to us and we get angry and, like, we just throw stuff.

Jada talked about how unjustly they were judged by peers who did not want to let go of stereotypical views:
The thing is that we are not even really aggressive. A lot of times we're just trying to look out for people, where we're trying to express what's going on in a genuine matter. It's not even that serious, but yet, here you all take it as us being aggressive. I don't understand it.

Kay felt the same way when it came to the treatment of Black women on her campus. She explained:

I've had friends [that] wanted to talk to a White guy on campus, but the White guy doesn't date Black girls, just because the stereotype that comes with it. That hurts. We're people, too. But there's just a stereotype that comes with being Black and a woman.

I asked her to elaborate on what she meant by stereotypes. She went on to share some of her and her friends’ experiences at school:

You're loud. You're rude. Black women can be independent, and a lot of men don't like that we fend for ourselves. I don't know, just being independent and not having to rely on them. A lot of men feel like they don't want a woman that can do things on her own. They want a woman that will rely on them and ask them to do things for them. A lot of Black women aren't really like that.

Natasha pointed out that Black men also exacerbate society’s stereotypical views on Black women. She expressed:

Another thing that is against educated Black women are the Black men themselves because I feel some Black men feel, what is the [word] for it ... they're scared. That's the best I can do so far. Even though we're all Black, Black as a majority of women, are stereotypically seen as lower than men, even in their
culture. So, if a Black guy sees a girl who's educated, got her own "Miss Independent." … But a lot of dudes will not go out with Miss Independent because she's too hard quote, unquote. So, I feel that's another problem with Black women, educated women.

Natasha then shared that she had a White “boyfriend” who dated her because he thought that she would be aggressive and “overly sexual.” She shared:

I've dated a White male in high school. It lasted about a couple of months. The reason why we ended was because he did not respect me as a person should respect me. I felt he also went off the stereotypes of Black women, so he wanted me to be overly sexual. He thought I was overly sexualized and fit the stereotypical Black woman of like, "I would be overly dramatic." He wanted me to yell... For example, we went out on a date, and he wanted me to be aggressive towards a waiter because his food was not right. I'm like, "That's not my problem. That's yours. Why do I have to be the person to be the dominant person?"

Natasha blamed much of stereotypical views that people have of Black women on the media:

The media is another thing for education Black woman because they portray all these stereotypes and they're feeding into past things, so that's what people expect to see. But, when they don't see it in real life, they're like, “What? What's going on?”

Natasha’s response referred to the way her White boyfriend expected her to react. Her thoughts were that most people got their education about cultural, racial, or ethnic groups from the media, which in many cases did not reflect reality or was a distorted version of truth. Misty felt the same as well saying, “People don't think we're as smart as we are, people think that, when they see us,
we're about to be really ghetto. I don't know why that is. Probably because society in every movie makes us be loud and ghetto.”

Misty, Issa, and Natasha Rose talked about how Black women were viewed as uneducated. As such, they felt overlooked, doubted, and scorned. Natasha said that she was concerned over “the fact that because you are an educated Black woman in a White men majority world, they're always going to second guess you.” Issa pointed out that her classmates overlooked her as the one person who did well on a test. She shared:

They won't ask me how I did, but once they realize, oh there is someone in this class got 100%. … they'll ask everybody except me. And at the end, they'll be like, oh how did you do? I'm like, I did really good. So just being underestimated is a challenge. Well, I like proving people wrong. So, I don't know if that's a challenge. I guess people stereotyping you as... So, I think I guess for some people the scariest thing is an educated Black woman, right?

Issa maintained a 3.98 grade point average and felt as if she was always second-guessed by her peers. She felt it had a lot to do with her being Black with darker skin. Issa felt some of the same anxiety over the fact that she was treated differently on her sports team because she was the only Black woman. Natasha and Issa both spoke of the exhaustion they felt from being on guard all of the time to counteract the negative images imposed on them by their classmates.

Issa and Simone shared that White peers expected then to act in stereotypical ways. Issa shared:

Like if you are Black and you're not dressing a certain way or behaving a certain way or being hypersexual or just if you're not fitting that mold, then it's like, what is she? That's kind of scary. I don't know about her.
Simone shared a story about being approached by someone who was White at a party. She explained:

Like, we legit had this conversation and, like, Black women, we have to speak up about it 'cause we're the ones that experience it. Like, when you get called, that one Black girl, or the loud one, or oh my god, you're so sassy and feisty. I just love you. Or when someone [White] that you don't know says, girl, what's up? And you're like, I don't even [know you]... huh? I got asked ... I remember one girl at a party [asked me], “do you know how to twerk?” And I'm like, “no. I don't know how to twerk. Not at all”. [She said] “But your butt's so big”. I was like, “and your butt is flat. Thank you. I'm glad you have eyes.” Like, amazing. Ah.

Both Simone and Issa were frustrated by the stereotypical expectations that their peers had of them. They felt that they were not portrayed in positive images and that it affected how they were viewed. It also prevented them from feeling comfortable in mixed race environments.

Lorena was concerned about being stereotyped as aggressive. She shared:

I think that characterizes a lot of my relationships of people misconstruing my passion for aggression or trying to be dominant when, if it was a White woman or a White man, I would just, again, I would just be regarded as passionate, but it's misconstrued when it comes from my body. I think being a Black woman, I have to be intentional about how I navigate different spaces.

Lorena felt that if she were not a Black woman, people would characterize her emotions differently. She did not want to be labeled as confrontational and aggressive. Therefore, she felt silenced to protect her image. Lisette summed it up, stating:
I also feel like forming bonds because of how we're treated. The Black people on my campus, although we come from different parts of the country or even different parts of the world, we connect over the fact that, when other people look at us, they have all these negative stereotypes. We get treated, we all get called the n-word no matter where we're from. We bond over that common-like oppression.

Lisette, who is Haitian, pointed out that she was not African American or even Black American, but she received the same disdainful treatment and lived through the same stereotypes that all Black people experience in the United States.

**Colorism remains problematic.** The participants spoke of the differences that Black people, and more specifically Black women, dealt with based upon the hue of their complexion. For example, Issa Rae felt that people had negative connotations of her because she had a darker skin complexion. She shared:

> I definitely think Back women, there's just certain things that we go through that literally no one I feel like can relate to. I would say definitely I'm kind of getting...

Off topic, but hair, skin tone. I know having deeper complexion in the Black community is a whole colorism thing… But I've grown a thick skin, especially going to high school in a predominantly White place. I kind of developed a hard skin to that. And also, just being a dark-skinned female, I'm just kind of used to people... I'm used to not being people's type. And I know I am gorgeous. I know I have it all.

She went on to talk about the issues she has faced with colorism on campus and men not paying attention to her. She shared:
There's not that many of us to begin with. And that whole colorism thing. So, a lot of the Black guys here typically go after White girls. That's a huge thing. And if they do end up with a Black girl, if they do try to hit on a Black girl, it's going to be a light-skinned girl… But you have to have a strong sense of self as a Black woman going through all of this. I remember I was walking with my friend [Hope] on the sidewalk and these two Black guys definitely hit on her a lot. And we've had this discussion about colorism. So, she's kind of mixed, but I know both of her parents are Black. But she's light-skinned. She has really loose curls. And she's always getting hit on. And she's like, [Issa] you're so pretty. I don't understand. I'm like, that's the Black community for you.

Issa shared that she felt like the problem was very prevalent and not going away anytime soon.

She explained:

And I don't know how to necessarily fix that. And I feel like it's just going to get worse in the future because now everyone's like I'll only date White people. Or, I'll only date light-skinned people to have children of a certain hair or a certain skin color. And it's like, those kids are going to be going around because there's mixed kids today who put other darker-skinned people down. Like, “oh I'm better than you.” So that's just going to keep occurring. And it's like, if I have dark-skinned children, I'm just afraid that they'll go through that. And it's just like … And I don't know how to… I don't know how to fix that problem, or I don't know what to do.

Issa said she was confident that she would eventually find someone to be with her. However, this was a problem that she has lived with all her life, and she was concerned. She
pointed out that society’s preferences and prejudices against people based on skin color cause much angst and unwarranted heartache. When I asked Misty how she saw herself as a unique Black woman, she responded:

I see myself as a queen. I say that because I didn't always see myself that way. I felt like I had to be different. I used to go in the mirror, and, because I have big lips, I used to go in the mirror and try to make my lips smaller and see if I could talk like that throughout the day. I couldn't. I used to just want to be White so bad. Because it was a social norm, to think that White women were just the most beautiful, because that's all I saw on TV and it was just so in my face all the time that it was very hard for me, as a Black woman, but also as a dark-skinned African American woman, to see myself as beautiful.

Misty said that she grew out of those feelings of unacceptance. She explained:

But I think queens go through a lot, and they make sure the crown never falls. So, at the end of the day, no matter what I go through, I'm going to always be a queen, and that's where my culture started. We were kings and queens, so I'm going to always think of myself as a queen. That's how I describe myself as a Black woman. I also describe myself as an inspirational Black woman.

Misty was a confident woman who said that she was not going to let other peoples’ negative views of her looks dissuade her from her goals or from being the vibrant, self-assured person she has become.

When I asked Camryn what her options for dating on campus were, she replied “very slim to nonexistent.” I asked her why she felt that way, and she answered:
Yeah, so I mean obviously I have a very distinct type, and there's not a lot of that here. The ones that do go here usually don't go for girls that look like me, I feel like, or at least that's the impression that I get from who I do see them with.

I then asked her whom the men on campus were with, if not with women who looked like her. She shared:

White girls, or if it is a Black girl, she's usually [has a] lighter [complexion] and I'm very dark. So usually I'm not in the running. Then I said that's why I don't ... and then why they don't? I don't know. I just feel like the guys here ... some of them like Black girls and some of them want to hook up with Black girls. It's just usually not me. I'm very tall. I'm really thin. They're just like nah.

I asked her how it made her feel knowing that the men on her campus were not interested in her. She shared that, “I don't think I'm ugly, but sometimes it's a little hurtful. I mean this sounds bad, but it gets to a point where you're used to it.” Although Camryn said that she did not come to school to find a partner, she would have liked to have the experience. Further, she was dating someone who did not attend her university, so she did not feel alone and left out.

From a different point of view, Jada stated that her lighter skin tone gave her more options with more men on her campus. She shared:

The thing is me, as a light-skinned woman ... Even though I'm Black, as a light-skinned we have this privilege over a lot of other people. So, they're more willing to "wife me up" and take me more seriously than they would dark-skinned women. I notice it a lot. A lot of them get played really badly and then light-skinned girls, we're "wholesome" or whatever. There is no correlation between
the two of those. It's just the look that you're going for, and it doesn't really mean anything. I don't know.

I asked Jada how it made her feel knowing that she was getting the attention that her other Black friends were missing out on or ignored. She stated:

It doesn't make me feel the greatest. If I was dark skinned, would you all really like me for me? Because, I know I have that privilege over people. I'm not saying, “Oh, I'm better than anybody,” but I acknowledge that and it's not the greatest feeling at all. I think it's stupid the way people operate.

Natalie had some of the same feelings. When I asked her what her dating options on her campus were, she shared:

For me, I feel like it could be anyone. But I do like talking with friends about dating and hooking up here. I think that colorism plays a lot into it and so I know like even a lot of the Black men won't talk to or date a woman with a dark skin color. And so, I feel like it is very limiting to some of my friends.

Both Natalie and Jada knew how society uses colorism as a tool to put women in certain categories. Colorism could be used as a divisive weapon to come between the harmony and kinship that the Black women share on their respective campus. My participants shared that they were aware of the pitfalls and have avoided the hazards.

What's wrong with me? Some of the participants discussed how the effects of not being pursued by men on their campus played on their psyches. For instance, I asked Loretta how she felt about never being approached or asked out by a man on her campus. She shared:

Sometimes it's like, “this really sucks,” but other times it's like ... you have to be comfortable with just being with yourself kind of thing. Also, …there aren't many
options anyway on campus, just from maturity level and this and that. Yeah, I
don't think it ... necessarily bothers me anymore.

I asked her to further elaborate and explain what she meant. She went on:

At first, it does. Because then you're looking around and you have friends who are
in relationships, or somebody else got asked out on a date or whatever, and then
you're like, “Oh, I'm forever alone,” going through that thing. But I think as I've
gotten older it's ... how can you expect to be in a relationship with somebody else
if you're not even cool with just being by yourself? You know?

Loretta went on to explain that being by herself now was just fine. She felt that it was giving her
an opportunity to find out who she was and whom she wanted to be with in a relationship. She
did say, however, when selecting a law school, that it would be a larger institution in a more
metropolitan area of the country.

Issa was concerned about the self-hate that Black women sometimes had because of the
way they were treated and depicted by society and by Black men. She shared:

I could go to different colleges and try to meet some people. But it's a time thing,
and it's also I don't want to put myself out there and end up getting hurt in a way.
Because I've ... Just the way ... Just the self-hatred in the Black community is I
want to say disgusting. The way Black men put Black females down. Or if you're
not a certain shade of a Black female, how they put you down... And sometimes
it's like I just don't even want to deal with any of that. Because some of the guys I
have talked to, I'll be like, okay everything's great. And then they'll say something
about like, “oh you're a burnt cookie, aren't you?” I'm like, “what even is that?”
Or they'll say something just completely crazy. So sometimes I feel sad that I
don't have a boyfriend. There was one time I was like, what's wrong with me? But I was like, I'm fine.

In this conversation, Issa was referring to Black men seeing her as a woman with a darker complexion. However, Issa said that she is very self-aware and that she has to have a strong sense of self not to be negatively affected. Lorena also questioned why no one on her campus was attracted to her. She shared:

I get lonely, and I ask myself, "Oh, am I good enough?" I think that's always a question that I have, and I think all Black women on [my PPWI] have, “Oh, am I good enough? Am I worthy enough? What is it that other non-Black women have that I don't, that makes me single?” For the most part, I'm fine with it. I just really just want to work on myself and I really want to be the best person that I can be. Whenever that person shows up, they show up.

Lorena thought that when she started college, she would be able to explore her sexuality since she had little freedom in high school. She shared her thoughts on sexuality:

A lot that I know about sex is characterized by fear, by silence, and the politics of respectability. I feel as if I'm never in that space where I feel comfortable. I'm always thinking about just, I don't know, the fear of being taken advantage of because I was conditioned to think of sex as being something that's negative. I think I'm at that point right now where I'm trying to figure out what it is that I believe because I was never given that space where I was able to explore that and I was raised as a Christian woman in a Baptist church. Sex was always deemed as wrong. You only have sex with your husband, which has also informed what I think about sex. What I do, which I understand makes no sense at all, I won't have
sexual intercourse, but I'll do other things. And for some reason, that makes me feel better because I'm not at that point where I can do it just yet. I don't know. There's something that always doubts me, and I think there's just unlearning that just has to happen.

Lorena felt as if being at her PWI did not help her to resolve her issues because there were not options for relationships. She went on:

Something else that I think has limited my dating pool is that I think men have the tendency to desexualize women that have an opinion, women that are intellectuals or smart. I think that's something that has disrupted that a little bit. I've gotten, "Oh, you're too intimidating." Or I've gotten men that I've had relationships with that say, "Oh, I feel like I'm not good enough for you or I don't have enough."

Further, Lorena said that she did not want to waste energy pursuing someone who was not interested in her. She explained:

I just don't want to waste my time and I don't want to waste emotional energy on something that I know isn't going to work out. I would much rather just focus on myself and just focus on improving myself because I know that's something that someone can't take away from me.

Lorena shared that she had a lot of issues surrounding the idea of sex because of the strict childhood. She felt that she had a lot of work to do on herself before embarking on a relationship with someone else.

Shae, who is in a relationship, felt that it was a good feeling to be wanted and everyone wants that experience. She explained:
It makes me feel sad. I mean, 'cause even though I did end up finding one of the 5%, if I didn't ... when we weren't together, for example, I don't know, it's like you don't have anybody. Granted, you don't go to college to marry someone or meet someone or date or hook up with someone, but it's nice to have, and you're constantly feeling like you're not good enough or pretty enough, you know? Or, you're only good enough or pretty enough when someone's drunk, which obviously means you're not good enough or pretty enough.

Shae was referring to when the Black women attended parties and the men, after getting drunk, would ask them for a hookup. She said, “It's not a good feeling because you're looking around and everyone else has somebody, and you're kind of left with nobody. Even from men who look like you who should be there for you, they're not there for you.” Shae was referring to the Black men on campus who show no interest in Black women.

Shaka questioned why Black men would not approach Black women on her campus. She shared her feelings:

And for the woman, why am I not even approachable to you? It's more of an internalizing thing, rather than external thing. What is wrong with me? Maybe I should dress better, or maybe I should do this or do that in order for you to see me. But they will never see you until they're ready to see you. And I think that is the issue that lies on this campus specifically.

Shaka shared that she felt that Black women were too challenging for Black men at her institution. She felt that they were looking for easy sexual encounters and Black women were not accommodating. Shaka’s thoughts lead into the next theme. The women felt as if men were
looking for something different than they had or were willing to offer. The next section explores the theme that men are looking for something different from women.

Men on Campus Expect Something Different

In the interviews with the participants, I wanted to understand the experiences and views on what, and who, held the interest of the men on the respective campuses. The women, for the most part, were in agreement on two issues. First, they agreed that White men fetishized Black women, and secondly, many Black men were more interested in the pursuit of White women than Black women. Therefore, the final section of chapter four will address these two themes, starting with White men fetishize Black women and ending with Black men want White women. The subthemes in this section address the research questions: (a) What are the dating experiences of Black women at PPWIs? (b) How do these experiences shape their perception of self? (c) How do dating experiences influence the thriving and sense of belonging of Black women at PPWIs? (d) How do dating experiences of Black women at PPWIs influence partner choices? and (e) How do dating experiences of Black women at PPWIs shape the perception of their university?

White men fetishize Black women. One of the many topics that seemed to run through all five of the institutions was the unhealthy treatment of Black women by White men; however, the experiences were not 100% negative as at least three of the women were in relationships with White men. For example, Natalie was a relationship with a fellow student on her campus, and Lorena and Misty were in committed relationships with White men who did not attend their institutions. All three of the women voiced that they were happy and treated well. There was, however, an abundance of conversation about the way that the White men on the respective
campuses fetishized Black women. For instance, Lisette talked about her experiences upon returning to her campus from studying abroad. She shared:

And then I went back and, ugh, it hasn't changed. It's still the same White boys I have no interest in. The White men at [my PPWI], they either ignore you; they ignore you during the day and fetishize you at parties during the night. So, there are a lot of White males who were in my classes and stuff. They wouldn't pay attention to me if I'm at the cafeteria or anywhere else. But as soon as we were at a party, the lights were dark, they would grab you, try to kiss up on you. They'd be like, “Oh yeah. You're cute.” I'm in no way attracted to… White men, at all, so that wasn't appealing to me.

Elizabeth says she sees some of the same actions at her school as well. She explained that “It's very aggressive,” and in some ways that “White guys objectify the Black girls.” Issa said it also happens on her campus. She shared a conversation she overheard: “And then there's a thing with White men fetishizing Black women. And it's horrible. That's happened a couple of times at [my PPWI].” Kay talked about being approached by a White man on a sports team. She explained:

I feel like, for dating, it's really not a lot of options. I know, for instance, last semester when I was single, there's a guy on the basketball team, and he only liked talking to Black girls, just so he could have sex with them. I'm not like that. If that's the only reason that you want to talk to me is because you want to get the Black experience, then no, I'm not with it.

I asked her if he was White for clarification. She indicated yes and finished her story: “I know a lot of White guys on campus want to have sex with the Black girls because they hear, I

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guess that it's like ... I don't know what they hear.” I asked her how it made her feel. She shared, “Bad. I don't know, I feel like people are just using Black women for our bodies, really, and they don't really care what we really ... Like the substance that comes, other than your body. That's kind of annoying.”

Jana stated that at her school White men “have this fantasy of hooking up with the Black woman on campus and I will not be your token Black woman to hook up with on campus.” Yvonne explained that at her institution she was not concerned that she had no options because she felt that the White men lacked sincerity. She shared:

It doesn't really bother me, but it definitely makes you feel different because, for one, nobody's really super interested in you, or people would have ... What do they call it? What do they call it? Jungle fever. So, then you have that going on in the back of your head like that's all they ... They just want to date, hook up with Black girls see what it's like, you know?

I asked her if this had ever happened to her and she responded, “I've overheard people say it, but not directed to me.” Yvonne and the other women were not interested in hooking up with or dating White men. The women did not want to feel as if they were being used by White men who had no feelings for them. They felt as if there was nothing to be gained from such an experience.

Miya shared a story about her relationship with a White man on her campus. She related: White guys are just gonna use you for you ... not use you, but they see you more than just like ... they don't see you as a person. They'll see you as just like an object. Cause that's what happened with the guy, I hooked up with this guy that
was White. And now every time I see him ... It's not bad that we're friends, but I
could still tell he looks at me and stuff.

I asked her in what way did he look at her. She continued:

Like kinda like sexually, looks at me up and down. But like...we're still friends.
Like we talk and joke and stuff, but it's like, I know sometimes he gets, he gets
like a little bit wild with his eyes, like he'll look. I don't wanna be looked like a
piece of meat or anything like that.

Miya went on to explain that he sometimes made her feel uncomfortable and that he would text
her expectantly for a hookup and she no longer had those types of feelings for him. She
explained that she was looking for something different and not based on hooking up.

Shae shared how a White man seemed to be interested in her. I asked her about the
options she had on her campus. She explained:

I mean, that's where you can meet the people. Okay. What are my options for
hooking up or dating? Okay. White ... oh. I feel like, honestly, if we have to do
percentages, I would say like 5%. Okay, ready? So, you have White men on
campus where... So, when I first got to campus, there was this White guy, and he
told this Black girl, “Oh my gosh, go tap her for me.” And then when I started
talking, he's like, “I saw you dance, again, in the frat houses. I saw you dancing,
and your body was so mesmerizing. Have you ever hooked up with a White guy
before? Oh, well, I've hooked up with this Black girl,” says her name. And then,
“Yeah, you sure you never hooked up with a White guy? Would you like to hook
up with a White guy? Can I dance with you?” Of course, this guy was drunk, and
the next day, he sees me. He doesn't even speak to me. You know, and so, I see,
for the White men, either they're obviously, A, not interested, or they're interested when they're drunk. So, it's more so a fetishization of you. Like, I saw you dancing, and it was mesmerizing, you know, things like that, but it's like, Yeah, because you're lots of drinks in, but you would never soberly approach me to date me or to dance with me or take me home to your parents. So I feel like with the White men, definitely no.

Shae explained that this is the mentality of many of the White men on campus and she will not partake. She has no desire to be a part of what she sees as inappropriate behavior and demeaning attitudes toward Black women.

**Black men want White women.** Just about every woman in the study had something to say about Black men dating or hooking up with White women. Miya, reflecting on her institution, said, “I feel like there's not many really many because the Black guys here kinda either go for White girls.” She went on to say that, she was not going to put much effort into the men on campus because they would probably leave her for a White girl.

Jada explained that Black men thought that she was too aggressive and would make snide comments to her. She shared, “I'll hear a little, slick comments talking about, ‘Oh, that's why I don't date Black women. I don't date dark-skinned women.’” She went on:

Some of the Black guys. I've never heard anybody go and talk about that, but I've heard some Black guys say that a lot of times on social media. Then nobody talks about, I like Latinas because of their attitude. I'm like, Latinas and Black women pretty much have the same attitude, but they just speak it in a different language. What's the difference?
Jada was referring to the point that Latinas are stereotyped to be loud and aggressive the same as Black women. Jada explained to me that she felt the attitudes of some of the students on her campus were immature. Therefore, she felt she did not have options for a relationship. Jada went on to say that students should not engage in racial attacks. I asked her who she was referring to. She explained:

The Black guys. Or, not bashing our race. Period. I know you've all got a Black mama, but if you all was more proud of your race and more active, I feel like it would make me feel a little bit more better about this school. A lot of people, they too cool for all that.

Jada previously commented that she felt that one of the largest issues facing Black women was the lack of a sense of belonging because Black men date White women. Her response here added to that train of thought. Although she felt that Black men are free to have a preference, they should not put down or degrade Black women in the process.

Yvonne said on her campus that some of the Black men like only White women. She shared:

Well, I know some of the ... A couple of Black men here, they've said that they're only into White girls and whatever. I'm just like, okay. Fine with me. I don't care. So, they wouldn't even be looking at us anyway. Then, I just feel like since we're such a small campus, everybody knows everything. Everybody hears everything. Rumors get started, and that's just too much drama, so no.

Yvonne was commenting on not having options on her campus. However, she was not overly concerned by the lack of choices at her institution. She explained that the small number of
men, and students in general, at her institution caused everyone to know each other’s dating status. She was not interested in publicizing her relationships across her campus.

Simone felt White women accepted Black men in relationships more readily than White men accepted Black women. She shared, “Black guys usually don't have that experience. I think they get sexualized by White women. They're like, oh, they have a big ... insert, you know, that word there that you can infer.” I did not want Simone to feel stifled or to feel the need to alter or censor her thoughts and responses. Therefore, I told her to feel free to say what was on her mind. She continued:

Oh, okay. Well, White girls want Black guys 'cause they have big dicks, or they have better sex, supposedly, or whatever. And Black guys are like, yeah, I'm gettin' all the ladies, you know what I'm saying. Like, it's just cool. We can all be human. Like, and some of them are allowing their ... okay, one of them, doesn't care if their White friends say 'nigga', right? Yeah. Oh, yes. Yes. Yes. It's on this campus. It's ridiculous. And then one of those White boys ends up lettin' their White girlfriends say it, and then somehow, they come back to us Black women and end up saying it and like, “what is your problem?” And they're like, “why you gotta be so mad about it?” Why did you think that was okay to say to me? And then we're painted as the mean, evil, oversensitive people, and it's like ... I like how I'm oversensitive when I'm naturally reacting to something that is offensive. It's... one thing if you said, like, “no forget it.” No. I'm gonna react like a human being. And the fact that when we react, or when we talk, it's automatically 'cause you think that we're overreacting or that we should be grateful that something worse hasn't happened to us, or something like that.
Simone voiced her frustration with the difference in the way that White women respond to Black men as opposed to, in general, the treatment Black women received by White men and women.

When I asked Natasha Rose how the options or lack of options made her feel about her college campus she responded:

The lack of options makes me feel like I have to wait until after I graduate from this college. Because I feel they try to recruit Black men here on campus, but I feel like Black men on this campus do not date Black women. They date White women majority, and I'm not against interracial dating, but it stings a little bit because it makes me question my worth as a Black woman. I was raised on Black love, so when I see a Black man with a White woman here on campus, I'm just like, dude, there's not that many of us, but you chose the majority almost. So, it's like, what don't I have that she does? It makes me want to wait until after I leave here… I feel it has tempered on me dating here on this campus college because even though I am open to dating outside my race, I prefer Black men. It makes me feel I have to choose outside of Black men. I feel I'm almost forced to exclude Black men here on campus because I feel they only date White women here. Natasha expressed that she was not necessarily opposed to interracial dating, but more so voiced her frustration of not having anyone to be in a relationship because the White men were not interested as well.

Loretta commented that Black men sought out other races for relationships, and I asked her how she felt about that situation. She shared:
It's annoying. I feel annoyed. That's the case a lot of places. I went to a high school that was predominately White and the Black boys that I just loved and everything, they always wanted a White girl. I think, from an earlier age, I just started not falling back, but just kind of keeping to myself, not being too bothered by that because that's not something that I just experience. That's like ... People go on Twitter, like all the Black females and they're experiencing this thing where Black men just don't like Black women kind of then. Then they get mad when a Black woman dates somebody who's not Black. Then they're confused. Serena Williams, everyone ... all these Black men, really all men, a lot of people attacked her for appearances and stuff and now she's with this nice White man who's treating her like a queen. Everyone's like, ‘She didn't even give a Black man a chance.’” Black men didn't even really want her, tore her down and stuff. Not that I'm comparing myself to Serena Williams.

Loretta voiced her feelings about not having a Black man to date. Conversely, she was frustrated that some Black men feel denied when Black women chose someone other than them to be in a relationship.

I asked Hope about her options on her campus, and she responded about the Black men: They don't try. If I go to [another school’s] campus, it's not even in five minutes time there's somebody sitting next to me trying to talk to me and trying to make a move or something. Here, no. They typically go for Caucasians.... And if they don't go for Caucasians, they already have a girlfriend that goes to another college, or they are just doing it with anybody and anything. So, there's very few
that would sit down and be like, Yes, I'll be open to any race. They'll say it, but no.

Based on Hope’s experiences the Black men on her campus were not interested in Black women. Further, if the Black men were interested, they were looking for hookups, in which Hope holds no interest.

Shae talked about the percentages of Black men at her school and the White women that they pursue. She shared:

With the Black men, that's where the 5% comes in because a lot of the Black men on my campus either only date White women and I've had some Black guys who I've been close with tell me, “Oh, I'm not even gonna marry a White woman. I'm just doing this because I wanna mess around, so when I'm ready to get serious, I'm gonna date a Black girl,” which still isn't fair to the White women, but that's where their mind is. Or, two, they just really don't date Black women, or, I was talking to my boyfriend about this the other day 'cause I told him I would be speaking with you. He was on the football team, and he said that a lot of Black guys, too, are afraid about approaching. They don't come from areas where there's lots of Black women there, so even if they are interested in Black women, they're kind of intimidated and don't know how to approach the Black women, so then they just fall back on just dating the White women. And then, you do have the small percentage of guys, Black men who will date Black women, yeah, but, literally, the options are very slim to none.
Shae explained that Black men were looking for a convenient person to be with until they decided to settle down. Further, she felt that Black men were unfamiliar with being in relationships with Black women; therefore, they went with who made them most comfortable.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this research was to explore the dating and hooking up experiences of 20 women who identified as Black or African American and attended one of the five PPWIs represented in the study. Their voices were but a sample of the Black women who attend such schools; however, their significant and compelling experiences provided an important glance into a topic that seems never to have been explored in such depth. Overall, the experiences of these women provided rich, thick data within the frameworks of intersectionality, Black feminist thought, thriving, and sense of belonging.

The themes in the study provided a sense of what Black women experienced on campuses where the number of Black students was relatively low. The themes, taken from the voices of the students, showed what the world of Black women consisted of with regard to dating and hooking up while attending a PPWI. While most of the women dated or hooked up, their experiences highlighted that the majority of this did not occur at their respective PPWIs. At these schools, the women had few to no options of men to seek out for relationships with their classmates. For instance, the women reported that White men were not interested in Black women, or they were looking for sexual encounters that did not interest the women. In addition, the Black men at their institutions were more interested in women of other races. As a result, the women reported that they were not thriving and had little to no sense of belonging in relation to dating.

Because of the men’s lack of interest, the women looked to other alternatives to find companionship. For instance, many of the women tried online dating apps with various degrees
of success. Some of the women found that they were comfortable meeting men in this manner. Other women found that the sites were nothing more than hooking up venues, and that was not what they had in mind. Because of the lack of success in the relationship arena, some of the women suggested that when searching for graduate school they would ensure that there was a large population of men, and the school would be located in a more metropolitan area.

Finally, the women discussed their experiences with dealing with long-lasting stereotypes that have plagued Black women for decades, if not centuries. For example, the participants experienced that some men thought that the women were hypersexual and would easily submit their desires. Other men stereotyped the women as being overly angry and aggressive. Thus these men were apprehensive about approaching the women or expected unsubstantiated behaviors.

While this study points to substantial findings, it is clear that this research is just the beginning of important work. Much is needed in this area to expand and broaden the scope of research in order to expose the stories of women who attend PPWIs and their experiences in dating and hooking up at PPWIs.
Chapter Five: Discussion of Findings, Implications for Practice, Recommendations for Future Research

Overview of Chapter

The objective of this phenomenological study was to give voice to 20 Black women regarding their dating and hooking up experiences as students at private predominantly White institutions (PPWIs). Furthermore, I examined how these experiences affected the participants’ thriving and sense of belonging at their respective PPWIs. The following research questions were used to guide the exploration of the study:

- What are the dating experiences of Black women at PPWIs?
- How do these experiences shape their perception of self?
- How do dating experiences influence the thriving and sense of belonging of Black women at PPWIs?
- How do dating experiences of Black women at PPWIs influence partner choices?
- How do dating experiences of Black women at PPWIs shape the perception of their university?

In addition, I examined the experiences of the Black women participants through the lenses of Black feminist thought, intersectionality, the thriving concept, and a sense of belonging or belongingness. Black feminist thought as a framework posits that Women of Color have strong voices and should use it to blaze their own trail (Collins, 2002). Additionally, the framework suggests that educated Black women pave the way for their sisters, using a combination of intellect and activism (Collins, 1997). Intersectionality transpires when intersecting discriminations, such as racism and sexism, are used in such a way that causes a
deeper form of marginalization or oppression (Shlasko, 2015). The thriving concept suggests that students do best when they flourish in college settings (Schreiner, 2010). Flourishing is more than just graduating from college, and includes solid academic performance, social engagement through interpersonal relationships, and emotional security. Maslow (1943/2000) introduced the final framework, belongingness or sense of belonging, as the third tier in his hierarchy of needs. Maslow described a sense of belonging as a need for affection or having a place within one’s group. More recently, Leary (2005) linked belongingness with emotions attached to self-esteem.

With the above frameworks in mind, this study was grounded in the existing literature. This literature suggests that the intersection of race and gender is heightened when Black individuals are put into settings, by choice or otherwise, where there are few if any other people of color for them to associate with or emulate (Hesse-Biber et al., 2010). Wilkins (2012) pointed out that these intersections complicate the matter. Race is problematic for Black women because of the unresolved history of racism and prejudices that not being in the majority brings (Hannon et al., 2016; Hotchkins, 2017; Howard-Vital, 1989; McDaniel, DiPrete, Buchmann, & Shwed, 2011; Zamani, 2003). Gender becomes salient as well because the past and the current culture teaches that us that women are still regarded as second-class citizens and have not been afforded all the rights of men (Alexander, 2004; Hine, Brown, & Terborg-Penn, 1993; Howard-Vital, 1989; Schocker & Woyshner, 2016; Zinn, 2001). Further, as depicted in the participants’ stories, Black women are not seen as feminine or beautiful, but rather as undesirable (Corbin et al., 2018; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). This lack of regard causes emotional and physical upheaval in the lives of the disparaged women (Hesse-Biber et al., 2010).

Consequently, there continues to be a great need for this kind of research. Certainly, however, there have been studies conducted about the dating and hooking up aspects of women
and men based on ethnicity, age, and race at colleges and universities. Also, student achievement concerning the concept of thriving and the sense of belonging has been extensively researched. However, there has been little to no research conducted on the how the influence, or lack thereof, of romantic relationships, dating, and hooking up affects the thriving and sense of belonging of Black women at colleges and universities. Moreover, Black women at PPWIs are more intensely affected because of the small number of Black men who attend these institutions (Birger, 2015). Due to the type of questions that I attempted to answer in this research, the methodology best suited for my work was a phenomenological approach.

Merriam (2009) described phenomenology as a “study of people’s conscious experience of their lived world” (p.25). Therefore, as proposed by Merriam, it was my task as the researcher to describe and illustrate the social existence and shared experiences of my participants’ everyday lives or their lived worlds concerning dating and hooking up at PPWIs. I used the technique of interviewing to get to the essence of their experiences with dating and hooking up. Upon analyzing the data, five central themes emerged as follows: (a) Do they call it dating and hooking up or something else? (b) Black women understand the value of private education, but… (c) What Black women want (d) The thing about Black women! and (e) Men on campus expect something different.

Each of the themes included subthemes that emerged from the data. Within the following section, I will discuss those themes, subthemes, and associated findings, situating them within the existing literature. Following, I recommend implications for programming and practices at PPWIs and make suggestions for future research. This chapter ends with a conclusion of the work and the research in general.
Discussion of Findings

The developed themes related directly to the experiences of the women in the study. Some of the themes and findings spoke to the women’s thriving and sense of belonging at PPWIs. Others, however, were associated directly with the women’s sense of self, their responses to events, and their survival techniques in the world of dating and hooking up. Each theme and its relation to existing literature is described in the following sections.

Do They Call It Dating and Hooking Up or Something Else?

The women in the study described dating similarly to the way that Mongeau et al. (2007) defined the term. Mongeau et al. suggested that the idea of dating changed with the times, and that the age of the group also helped determine the meaning of the word. For instance, college-age students were more likely to be looking for romantic relationships that involved friendship and possibly sexual encounters (Mongeau et al., 2007). Similarly, the women in my study were less interested in the idea of marriage, and more concerned about having fun and exploring their sexual attraction to others. Therefore, while many of the women stated they felt the term “dating” was outdated, they had similar definitions to the literature. Although some of the women preferred the term “talking” when describing dating, their thoughts and ideas closely aligned with the literature. Only one out of the twenty participants felt that dating was defined as being in a romantic relationship with the intent to marry, although she further stated that was not necessarily how dating was thought of by college students.

Researchers defined hooking up as a casual encounter that could be anywhere from holding hands, kissing, and making out up to sexual intercourse (Bogle 2008; Cambridge University Press, n.d.; Kuperberg & Padgett, 2015). Bogle (2008) suggested that when students hooked up, there was no strong commitment to the relationship. The participants agreed with this
designation. While there was no one single definition, the majority of the women felt that hooking up meant that people were engaging in sexual encounters, but not necessarily sexual intercourse. For instance, Natasha defined hooking up as “meaningless sex,” while Natalie stated that she felt it was “not having sex with someone but having a one-time thing with a person.” The next section further explores the study, discussing the sense of belonging, thriving, and placing the participants within the context of universities’ settings.

**Black Women Understand the Value of Private Education, But…**

The above-referenced theme consisted of the following five subthemes: (a) My lack of options in dating does not cause me to thrive. (b) Where’s my sense of belonging? (c) It’s not the university’s fault; I don’t expect them to do more. (d) College is a time to explore sexuality; and (e) If I had the opportunity for a do-over. Within this theme, the women spoke extensively about their experiences at their respective institutions. The findings in my study suggested that Black women had thriving and sense of belonging within their small intimate groups; however, this feeling did not extend to the university as a whole. These findings were similar to Hannon et al.’s (2016) study that suggested that Black women were accepted within their own racial and ethnic groups or clubs, but not so much in predominantly White organizations. With this in mind, however, the women in my study were savvy enough to understand the importance of gaining entry into organizations that were vital in the decision-making on the campus, such as student government. For instance, Loretta, Issa, and Misty stated that they joined the student government organization at their respective PPWIs in order to be involved with institutional decision-making. This thinking aligns with Hannon et al.’s study, which suggested that students had to exist in two different worlds when attending PPWI’s, one White and the other Black. My participants placed themselves in such an environment by attending PPWIs and enduring marginalized treatment;
many stepped out of their comfort zones in order to exact needed change for the betterment of current and future Black students, and especially women.

Further, similar to the Schreiner et al.’s (2011) study, 19 of the 20 women in my study indicated that they did not have a rich sense of belonging from their institution, nor did they feel as if they were thriving. In their study, Schreiner et al. indicated, unlike with White students, that campus involvement was not an enhancement in causing Black students to thrive. Instead, Schreiner et al., suggested that Black students turned to spiritual and faith-based organizations in order to thrive or find their sense of belonging. While six of my participates reported that they were affiliated with a church or faith-based organizations, only two women mentioned having strong associations with their church or using that affiliation as a substitute for their lack of connection with their school. Further, Schreiner et al.’s study did not address how the lack of dating options caused hindrance or added to the feelings of isolation and lack of flourishing. In fact, none of the literature reviewed addressed how the lack of dating or hooking up impacted the sense of belonging or thriving in Black women.

Even though many of the women felt their lack of social options was at times intolerable, they said it was what they expected when they entered into a PPWI. They reflected that they knew their respective institutions would lack in social activities for the students of color. Even so, many of the women reflected that they had a harder time than originally expected with fitting in, thriving, and having a sense of belonging. Their feelings were no different than the women in Essed’s (1991) study in that her participants voiced the same concerns. As with my participants, the most unfortunate aspect of this ill treatment was that the Black women in Essed’s study came to expect oppressive behavior as everyday life.
To overcome feelings of isolation, my participants created their own programs and spaces to garner a sense of belonging. However, some of the women felt that the organizations that they created got little to no support from the broader community. These feelings of isolation and lack of respect are ongoing in the literature. For instance, my participants confirmed what Vaccaro (2017) discovered in her research. The women in Vaccaro’s study met racist behavior and were faced with dealing with curriculum and other activities that were not inclusive. Therefore, the women in Vaccaro’s study did not feel a close association with their university. As one of my participants put it, “the school, doesn't really offer much for me in that area when it comes to community and belonging.”

Further, Mina’s (2011) study suggested that predominantly White institutions (PWIs) should understand that Black women have special and different needs than the majority, and these essentials should be considered when designing programs. However, a strong sentiment among the women in my study suggested that “PPWI’s were not meant to educate Black people.” The problem, however, is that Black women want quality educations from these institutions, and PPWI’s make attractive offers to lure in those individuals, yet they offer little to no support to ensure that Black women thrive.

Even though many studies have been conducted that speak to the importance of students maturing and finding their sense of self, including of their sexuality, while in college (e.g., see Fisman, Iyengar, Kamenica, & Simonson, 2008; Ford, 2012; McClintock & Murry, 2010; Medley, Reviere, & Stackman, 2016; Wilkins, 2012; Yancey, 2009), most of my participants were not afforded that opportunity at their PPWIs. The women felt they were missing out on discovering who they were as sexual beings because they had no healthy avenues to explore their sexuality. Therefore, as suggested by research, the women in my study lacked positive
socialization and a sense of belonging. Further, they missed out on the opportunity to explore intimate and romantic relationships at their PPWIs (Cole & Arriola, 2007; Crocker & Wolfe, 2001; Schreiner, 2010).

Even the six women who voiced that they would have chosen differently if given the opportunity to select another institution stayed at their respective PPWIs. Most of the women, including the participants who said they would have chosen the same institution if given the opportunity to select a different one, stated that one of the reasons they chose to stay at their respective PPWIs was to ensure a safer and more enlightened environment for those that would follow them. These women emulated Collins’s (1990, 1997, 2000) concept of Black feminist thought. Collins suggested the importance of having a voice and making a difference for those who have little or no say in their situation. Further, Robinson et al.’s (2013) study participants mirrored these ideals. As with my participants, the women in their study spoke of resilience and the need to start a positive narrative for Black women that included strength, strong spirit, and success (Robinson et al., 2013). The women in the study, as well as the participants in my research, had the forbearance to stay at their PPWIs, make a difference, and change the trajectory for the students coming after them. My participants knew what they wanted and how they should have been treated, which leads to the theme in the next section.

**What Black Women Want**

This overarching theme had five subthemes: (a) Race doesn’t matter; (b) I want a Black man; (c) Black men Black women relationships on campus are complex; (d) My man needs to understand me; and (e) Online dating sites are a viable option. As with this study, the literature suggests that Black women prefer to date within their race. Keels and Harris’ (2014) study suggested that Black women were less likely than any other studied group to date outside of their
race. While women in my study also preferred Black men, I found that they were actually open to other races and were concerned more about their treatment. The findings suggested that six of the 20 women were open to dating and hooking up with men outside of their race and had no racial preference in a mate. As with all of the women, they were more concerned with the treatment they received in their relationships. Additionally, while the other women had preferences for Black men, many did not rule out dating or hooking up with men of other races. Conversely, a few women did not intend to ever date outside of their race. One or two of the women spoke of negative experiences with dating men of other races, while other women had intentionally only dated Black men.

McClintock and Murry (2010) suggested that Black women tended to prefer their own race when dating and entering into long-term relationships. Further, studies suggested that Black women were less apt to venture into dating men outside of their race because of ill treatment they had been subjected to in the past (Yancey, 2009). For instance, one woman in my study spoke about the abuse she had received from two different White men she had dated. Other women spoke about how White men had expected them to be overly aggressive or hypersexual. Because of their preference for Black men and the short supply of them at PWIs, many of the participants in the study used online dating apps to meet and hook up with partners. Research shows that it is an ongoing occurrence on college campuses (Beauchamp et al., 2017).

Beauchamp et al. (2017) suggested that online dating applications (apps) such as Tinder and BumbleBee were mainstays in the lives of students seeking hookups. Many of the women in my study pointed out that they would not have anyone to date or hook up with without using these apps. In fact, two of the women met their “boyfriends” on dating apps. Other women stated that dating apps filled the void of not having anyone on their respective campus with whom to
hook up or date. However, there is cause for concern, as Beauchamp et al.’s (2017) study pointed out that Women of Color were sexually victimized more than other groups when using these online dating tools. This is of concern because as men at PPWIs become less viable options for Black women, they will continue to seek alternatives to fill the void. The accessibility and ease of dating apps are helping them to become more popular. Beauchamp and colleagues further suggested that this new genre of hooking up with the assistance of dating apps had many pitfalls and dangers. These dangers are especially salient for women who are attempting to explore their options and are not savvy and informed about the dangers of meeting men in unsafe environments.

In comparison, only one of the women in my study felt that she had put herself in an unsafe situation by utilizing online dating apps. However, because of its continued growth in users, it makes sense that dating app usage should be explored by student affairs offices as a potential danger to students (Beauchamp et al., 2017). This is especially true for Black women, who tend to be victimized in higher numbers. Unfortunately, this victimization is a continuance of the [?] because of stereotypical treatment that has plagued Black women for centuries, as will be discussed in the next section.

The Thing About Black Women!

There were three subthemes within this theme. They were as follows: (a) Black women are stereotyped; (b) Colorism remains problematic; and, (c) What's wrong with me? These subthemes addressed issues surrounding the treatment received by Black women from men, PPWIs, and society. Much of the unwarranted behavior based on historical and stereotypical views of Black women that individuals continue to manifest. For instance, the women’s experiences revealed that many men at their respective campuses viewed and judged them in
stereotypical ways. Notably, my participants felt they were depicted unjustly as loud, angry, and overly promiscuous because of old stereotypes and the way that the media portrayed women of color, and the literature supported these findings. Numerous studies suggest that Black women are depicted as loud, angry, oversexed Jezebels, not in control of their feelings, and unintelligent (Corbin et al., 2018; Lewis et al., 2016; Townsend, Thomas, Neilands, & Jackson, 2010). Corbin et al. (2018) further suggested that these stereotypical views caused undue burden and stress in Black women, who continuously try to change the image that was bought into by much of society. For instance, one woman in my study mentioned how she felt she could not defend her position for fear of being portrayed as overly aggressive. Another woman wondered if changing the way she dressed or wore her hair in would cause her to fit someone’s unrealistic expectation of Black women. Another one mentioned how some Black men on her campus used these old stereotypes as a reason not to “talk to” Black women.

Further, the women expressed concern over being judged, positively or negatively, because of their skin tone. Similarly, studies have shown that for centuries Black women with lighter skin tones were more highly prized over those with darker hues (Craig, 2002; Keels & Harris, 2014). For example, some of my participants spoke about how the Black men on their campus sought out only women with lighter skin tones. Another woman spoke about how hurtful is was that none of the Black men on her campus was attracted to her because she considered herself “very dark… really thin…and very tall,” and that was not having a look that attracted Black men. Glasser et al. (2009) suggested that the Eurocentric United States tended to find women with long, straight hair and narrow, sharp facial features more attractive. The authors proposed that these features more closely aligned with White women, who were considered the essence of beauty in the United States. The women in the study pointed out that these judgments
still occur at PPWIs. Keels and Harris (2014) pointed out that Black men in their study preferred Black women with lighter skin tones. Because of this preference, some Black women were left with few to no options when considering men to date. As one woman in my study pointed out, Black men were willing to “wife [her] up” because of her lighter skin tone. She and the other women stated that it could not help but be noticed that women with lighter skin tones are considered more beautiful and “wholesome” than women with darker skin tones. This was true for many of the women in my study, as they stated that they have many conversations on the matter for two main reasons. One reason is to affirm one another, and the other reason is to ensure that the lines of communication remain open and they do not let other peoples ill-conceived notions come between them.

These issues of dealing with stereotypical behaviors as well as colorism had the potential of causing women to question their beauty and self-worth. However, the women reported that they remained steadfast and strong in their attempts to combat negative thoughts that could have easily entered and bruised their psyches. Their sense of awareness and unwavering belief in themselves helped to dispel punitive thoughts. Combs (2003) suggested that Black women face being marginalized more so than any other group in academia. Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) added that Black women have to be strong in order to remain positive and strong when faced with this conflict. The women in my study used these mechanisms to guard against discriminatory acts as well as outperform others to safeguard themselves against self-imposed thoughts of inferiority as suggested by Jones and Shorter-Gooden. All of these issues suggested that Black women enter into academia at a severe disadvantage. In sum, they have remained cognizant of the world around them in order to remain resilient. However, even when changing the trajectory, men may want something different as discussed below.
Men on Campus Expect Something Different

This major theme had the following two subthemes: (a) White men fetishize Black women and (b) Black men want White women. Although many of the participants stated that they were open to dating outside of their race, they also expressed concern over treatment they received by some of the White men at their PPWIs. The women voiced how White men viewed them as sexual objects instead of human beings who deserved respect. Because of this lack of respect, some White men had no issue with approaching Black women and asking for sexual favors while at parties. However, this action became more problematic when those same men did not speak or acknowledge them during the day or in class. West (2008) suggested that this type of behavior was carried over from the slavery era where White men justified misogynistic behaviors. West suggested that White men saw themselves as superior and saw Black women as “Jezebel’s” (p. 296), promiscuous, or worse. Punyanunt-Carter (2008) add that White men had issues with separating media’s depiction of Black women from reality. Therefore, they treated Black women as dancers depicted in hip-hop videos and other demeaning roles rather than as highly educated women pursuing degrees (Punyanunt-Carter, 2008). While many women felt that they were treated in demeaning ways, there were instances in which my participants stated that they were in healthy and positive relationships with White men. These women expressed that they had concerns over their partners’ understanding and supporting their Blackness as well as their womanhood; however, they were happy and felt supported in their relationships.

Additionally, many of the participants’ feelings were diminished because the Black men were more interested in White women at their PPWIs. Thus the Black women were left with few to no options of dating on their respective campuses. Similarly, McClintock and Murry’s (2010) study suggested that Black men were more likely to date and hook up outside of their race than
any other group of men. However, the study also suggested that when choosing mates for long-term relationships, Black men preferred Black women. The women in my study voiced that Black men had similar attitudes. They talked about the fact that when Black men were ready to settle down, they wanted a Black woman. While this is hopeful for Black women who tend not to date outside of their race, today’s college students are less likely looking for long-term ties or marriage, but rather less serious relationships and exploring sexual outlets (Mongeau et al., 2007). Because of this, the women in my study were still left with no one to hook up with or date. The next section provides recommendations on what PPWIs could do to assist in aiding the students in thriving and developing a sense of belonging.

**Recommendations for Future Practice**

As noted in the findings, the participants were mostly pleased with their academic experiences; however, they felt underwhelmed with their social lives at PPWIs. While there were no expectations for PPWIs to provide dating and hooking up experiences for the women, institutions have a responsibility to understand the special needs of Black women. Many of the women in my study depended on each other to provide safe havens, motivation, and advice, as they had few to no resources to meet their special needs. PPWIs could assist Black women by providing outlets for them to work through the issues that affect their social lives.

For instance, Mitchell (2014) posited that historically Black sororities provide a safe haven for women, allowing them a space to support one another. Further, groups such as sister circles, Black student unions, and other organizations that support Black women provide safe havens for women to vent, voice concerns, support, and be supported by one another (Croom et al., 2017). In addition, research suggests that mentors, faculty, and staff of Color provide outlets
for Black women to voice concerns as well as offer modeling for students to emulate (Love, 2010; Miles et al., 2011; Robinson et al., 2013).

Finally, research suggests that online dating sites and apps are here to stay (Beauchamp et al., 2017). Student affairs offices may be wise to look into this new phenomenon to understand who is using the sites and to what extent college students utilize them. While student affairs offices are not able to dictate the perimeters and use of dating sites, it would be wise to educate students on the ins and outs of using such avenues. Providing training on how to remain safe when engaging in hooking up with individuals from these apps would provide a needed layer of precaution to ensure students remain safe.

**Future Research**

As this research explores how dating and hooking up affect thriving and sense of belonging for Black women at PPWIs with populations of under 5,000 students, I recommend that future studies exploring dating and hooking up for Black women be expanded to large PPWIs and PWIs more generally. In addition, it would be interesting to see this study expanded to other parts of the country, as most of the PPWIs in this study would be considered in the Southern United States. Further, an expansive look at women of different cultures and ethnicities would also close additional gaps in the research on this topic.

I also suggest that the concept of thriving be further explored, expressly with the idea of understanding the experiences of Black students with regard to their relationships with PWIs. Schreiner et al.’s (2011) study suggested that to achieve thriving, Black students depend more on faith-based organizations and spirituality than on school organizations. After listening to the experiences of the women in my study, I recommend that exploring the reasons behind why they lean toward religion and other faith-based organizations would add to the body of work.
Finally, because the research suggests that Women of Color encounter sexual victimization more often than other groups (Beauchamp et al., 2017), I recommend the topic of Black women utilizing dating apps while in college for future research. As the Black women in this study were unable to engage in intimate relationships on their campuses successfully, they sought other outlets, and dating apps were viable options. Exploring this topic and understanding the experiences of Black women who use apps can provide important information about the satisfaction of sites, safety mechanisms employed, availability of men, and how these sites assist with belonging and thriving for college students.

**Conclusion**

This study examined the dating and hooking up experiences of Black women who attended PPWIs and how those experiences informed and shaped their thriving and sense of belonging. It also allowed the participants to voice their experiences and opinions on the issues of PPWIs with regard to the intersection of their race and sex. The five research questions explored in the study explained the nuances and trepidations of being a Black woman at a PPWI. It also brought into context the issues surrounding Crenshaw’s (1989) articulation of intersectionality and how Black women are demoralized and marginalized because of the intersection of their race and sex. These two intimate and substantial aspects of Black women’s identities affected their daily existence, and it is impossible to deny either (Crenshaw, 1989).

These women continuously described their existence at their university with regard to dating and establishing intimate relationships as substandard. It caused them to question their thriving and sense of belonging as proposed by researchers (Hannon et al., 2016; Schreiner, 2010). They used their voices to describe their untenable experiences as suggested by the tenets of the Black feminist thought (Collins, 1990). These women understood and voiced issues that
caused them to pause, feel discontentment, and react with sadness and pain to situations and events on their campuses. One major point to keep in mind is that Women of Color, and Black women in this case, cannot fix the issues that plague PPWIs, as they are not the problem (Hesse-Biber et al., 2010).

As PPWIs continue to step up their efforts to provide safe and healthy environments for their students, it should be noted that, while enabling students to earn a degree is the main objective, it is not the only concern of higher education institutions. The very fact that there are student affairs offices at these institutions speaks to the responsibility of educating the body and spirit of the student as well as the mind. Educational goals and objectives should be developed in such a way that they seek positive outcomes for Black women. Efforts should include taking into account the unmet needs of Black women and what that means as far as services provided and actions that are taken. This is a serious proposition, and PPWIs should take note, as the face of the world is changing, and institutions of higher education would be smart to change as well.
Note

1. African American and Black are used interchangeably for the purposes of this study.
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Appendix A

Questions for One on One Interviews

1. Tell me about your family.

2. Tell me about where you are originally from?

3. Why did you select your school?

4. Talk about the culture of your school and tell me if you feel as if you fit in and have a sense of belongingness.

5. Tell me about your classroom experiences and your interactions with faculty.
   
   a. What do you think about that?

6. Have you had Black faculty and if so has it made a difference and was it important.

7. What are some of your highs and lows while you’ve been here?

8. What causes you to be resilient and to keep going in college?

9. How do you see yourself as a Black woman, what are some things that make you unique to being Black?

10. Do you think this motivation is the same for all Black women at your institution?

   a. If no, will you talk about why you think Black women or do not persist at your school?

11. What do you think are the largest issues facing Black college educated women?

   a. Do you feel there are issues around race on the campus? If yes, see below.

   b. What are the issues that you see on this campus, surrounding race, especially with regard to Black women?

12. What the school organizations that you have joined?

   a. What is your role
b. Why did you select those particular ones?

c. How are you treated and do you feel as if you fit well into the organization?

d. Are there others that you want to join? Why haven’t you?

13. Would you change your experience at your school if given the option?

14. How is your school meeting your social expectations?

15. What social activities do you take part in on your school’s campus?

16. Who do you hang out with at school? Away from school?

   a. How did that come about?

   b. What do you do in your free time?

17. What would you tell other Black women who may be interested, about your school?

18. What causes you to be resilient and to keep going in college?

19. What is your definition of dating?

20. What is your definition of hooking up?

21. Do you date, hook up, both or neither?

   a. Yes - Do you mind sharing with me about your choices?

   b. No – is this by choice? Explain

   c. Did you date or hook up before coming to your school?

   d. Same or different race?

22. What are your racial preferences when dating?

   a. Would you date outside of your race? Why or why not?

23. Would you date outside of your race if someone asked you?

24. What are the options for you dating or hooking up on your school campus?

   a. How does that make you feel?
b. Have you dated or hooked anyone on your school’s campus? Explain
   
i. How did that make you feel?

  c. Would/have you date someone of the same sex?

25. Do the options or lack thereof, for dating or hooking up at your school affect how you feel about your college or university? Please explain.

26. What influence has your dating or hooking up had on your college experience?
Appendix B

Correspondence to Gatekeeper

My name is Patricia Carver, and I teach in the Rubel School of Business at Bellarmine University. I am also currently a Ph.D. candidate in the Leadership in Higher Education program at Bellarmine. The purpose of my dissertation, tentatively titled “Black Women Dating Experiences at Private Predominantly White Campuses” is to empirically explore and describe the dating experiences of women students who identify as Black or African American and attend a private predominantly White institution (PPWI). Further, I want to explore how these experiences influence their sense of belonging and thriving at their respective institutions. The study will focus on the intersection of race and gender, as Black women students do not receive much attention in educational research. I am also specifically looking to interview students who attend a PPWI within a 200-mile radius of Louisville, KY. The interviews are either one-on-one or focus group sessions of up to eight women, with each type lasting approximately 60 minutes. I am also providing gift card as incentives to the women for their time.

The reason I am reaching out to you, is to ask for your assistance in passing along my introduction letter to Black women who are sophomores, juniors or seniors, inviting them to participate in my research study. I strongly believe in and am passionate about this research. My goal is to give the opportunity to Black women to voice their concerns, feelings, and experiences of being underrepresented students on private predominantly White campuses. My hope is also that faculty, administration, and staff at PPWIs begin to understand better that the experiences of Black women may be different from that of majority students. Finally, my hope is that an enhanced understanding of the issues will lead to the enhancement of programs for Black women at private predominantly White colleges and universities.

If you can assist, I will forward you the invitation letter to send to potential students. If you find that you are unable to assist me, but know of someone at your institution who can, I would appreciate it if you sent me their name so that I may contact them. I also appreciate any help and guidance that you may be able to offer. Please call or email if you have any questions or concerns. My information is below. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Patricia P. Carver
Appendix C

Correspondence to Participant

Dear Participant:

I am a Ph.D. candidate and a faculty member at Bellarmine University. I am interested in studying the dating phenomenon for Black women on private predominantly White colleges and universities and looking for potential candidates to interview. Let me tell you a little about it, and you can decide if you want to help. This research will be about the hooking up, dating, and romantic experiences of individuals who identify as Black or African American women and attend private predominantly White institutions (PPWIs). My interest in this topic stems from having had conversations over the years with Black women who attend private predominantly White institutions on this subject. The discussions have been very candid and informative, however, informal in nature. I would like to hear from you on a more formal basis, detailing your responses and experiences for my dissertation.

If you agree to do this, we will need to meet for one, 45 to 60-minute interview, with a follow-up interview or phone call. The interview process will take no more than a total of 2 hours of your time and will be audiotaped. I will come to your university or city to conduct the initial interview. We can also arrange to meet at a time that is as convenient as possible for you. Your participation is voluntary, confidential, and you may withdraw at any time without penalty. Depending on your university and the number of responses, you may have the option of taking part in a focus group or a one on one interview. If you prefer to participate in one or the other, please let me know so that I can attempt to accommodate you.

You can even start to do this now and change your mind at any time during the process, and we will just stop. If you think that you would like to help, please contact me at pcarver@bellarmine.edu; at work at 502-272-8165; or my cell at 502-649-6926 with your interest. I will then be in contact with you regarding signing a consent form, meeting times, and other pertinent information. If you decide to take part in the study, you will receive an incentive for your participation. I will provide food and a $10 gift card if you choose focus group participation or a $25 gift card if you decide on an individual one-on-one interview.

I am excited about this research and looking forward to talking with you.

Best,

Patricia P. Carver
Appendix D

Black Women Dating Experiences at Private Predominantly White Campuses
Subject Informed Consent

Introduction and Background Information

You are invited to participate in a research study. Dr. Donald Mitchell, Jr and Patricia Carver are conducting the study. The study is sponsored by the Annsley Frazier Thornton School of Education at Bellarmine University. The study will take place at private predominantly White institutions within a 200-mile radius of Louisville, Kentucky. We will have approximately 20 – 45 women who will participate in the study, in either a one-on-one interview or group sessions. We are asking for no more than two hours of your time. We are inviting up to 20 women to participate in a person-to-person, one-on-one interview. Your interview will last for approximately 60 minutes for the initial interview with one or two follow-up conversations that may be in person, by phone, Skype, or FaceTime lasting no more than an additional 60 minutes. Approximately 5 – 24 women will be invited to participate in one of three (3), focus group sessions consisting of five to eight participants. Your participation in the focus group study will last for approximately 60 minutes for the initial interview with one or two follow-up conversations that may be in person, by phone, Skype, or FaceTime, lasting no more than 60 minutes total. You may select to participate in a one-on-one interview or a focus group session. The researcher will travel to you and meet you at your convenience. The researcher will also attempt to accommodate your selection of participating in a one-on-one interview or a focus group, depending on the number of participants who agree to participate in the study at your site. However, if you want to participate in a focus group and the number of women is too small at your location, if you are willing to travel, we will accommodate you at another site. Further, you can opt out of the study if the researcher cannot accommodate your choice of interview option.

Purpose
The purpose of this research study is to describe the dating, hooking up, and romantic experiences of Black women who attend private predominantly White institutions and how those experiences influence the sense of belonging and thriving. As such, we will be interviewing women who identify as Black or African American and attend private colleges or universities. We are interested in hearing the stories you may have about your experiences and how it has impacted your sense of belonging and thriving at your institution.

Procedures
In this study, you will be given a background information sheet to complete that will have questions about your family, grades, and activities that you take part in at your school. For the one-on-one interview and focus group sessions, you will be asked questions about your college experiences. This will include questions about how you feel you fit in on your campus as well as questions about your dating, hooking up, and intimate relationship experiences. The first session whether you take part in a focus group session or a one-on-one interview will take approximately one hour. We may ask you for one or two follow-up sessions that could take place in person, over the phone, Skype, or FaceTime that will total no more than 60 minutes. If you agreed to participate, at any time during the session, you may decline to answer any questions that make
you feel uncomfortable or may cause you legal problems. With your permission, the conversations will be audio recorded and then transcribed. Once the audio file is matched with the transcription, the audio taped will be destroyed. eCopies of the transcripts will be kept in password protected digital folders, and hard copies will be kept in locked file cabinets.

**Potential Risks**
There are no foreseeable risks associated with the study.

**Benefits**
The possible benefits of this study include an opportunity for Black women to voice their concerns, feelings, and experiences of being underrepresented students on a private predominantly White campus. Further benefits of this study include faculty, administration, and staff understanding that your experiences may be different from that of majority students. Our hope is that your voices will cause the enhancement of understanding of the issues of Black women, leading to the enhancement of programs for Black women at private predominantly White colleges and universities. The data collected in this study may not benefit you directly, however, the information learned from this research may be helpful to other Black women who attend private predominantly White colleges in the future.

**Compensation**
Focus group participants will be provided lunch or dinner and $10 gift cards at the end of the sessions. Participants of the individual one-on-one sessions will be provided $25 gift cards to the store of your choosing, at the end of the study. If you participate in a one-on-one interview and decide to withdraw from the study, you will be compensated on a prorated basis receiving a $10 gift card for your time.

**Confidentiality**
Although absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, confidentiality will be protected to the extent permitted by law. The study sponsor or the Institutional Review Board may inspect your research records. Should the data collected in this research study be published, your identity will not be revealed. Financial personnel may need to be notified of your participation in order to process compensation payment.

**Voluntary Participation**
Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw your consent at any time without penalty or losing benefit to which you are otherwise entitled.

**You’re Rights as a Research Subject and Contact Persons**
If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may call the Institutional Review Board Office at 502.272.8032. You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions, in confidence, with a member of the Board. This is an independent committee composed of members of the University community and lay members of the community not connected with this institution. The Board has reviewed this study.
You acknowledge that all your present questions have been answered in language you can understand. If you have any questions about the study, please contact Dr. Donald Mitchell, Jr. at 502.272.8135 or Patricia Carver at 502.272.8165.
Consent

You have discussed the above information and hereby consent to voluntarily participate in this study. You have been given a signed copy of this consent form.

___________________________________________
Signature of Subject or Legal Representative

___________________________________________
Signature of Investigator

___________________________________________
Signature of Person Explaining Consent if other than Investigator

Date Written: 08/24/2018