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Sometimes Sisters: An Exploration of the Culture of Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Its Impact on the Campus Climate for Lesbian and Bisexual Female Students

Donique R. McIntosh

University of Massachusetts Amherst, Liberationworker@gmail.com

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SOMETIMES SISTERS:
AN EXPLORATION OF THE CULTURE OF HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES
AND UNIVERSITIES AND ITS IMPACT ON THE CAMPUS CLIMATE FOR
LESBIAN AND BISEXUAL FEMALE STUDENTS

A Dissertation Presented

by

DONIQUE R. MCINTOSH

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

September 2011

Social Justice Education

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Approved as to style and content by:

Maurianne Adams, Chair

Kevin E. Quashie, Member

Joseph B. Berger, Member

Christine B. McCormick, Dean
School of Education

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my mother who first taught me the meaning of justice.

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I extend a special thanks to the students at Stacker College for entrusting me with their stories.

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ABSTRACT

SOMETIMES SISTERS: AN EXPLORATION OF THE CULTURE OF HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES AND ITS IMPACT ON THE CAMPUS CLIMATE FOR LESBIAN AND BISEXUAL STUDENTS

SEPTEMBER 2011

DONIQUE R. MCINTOSH, B.A., FISK UNIVERSITY

M.S.S.W., UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE

M.T.S., VANDERBILT DIVINITY SCHOOL

M. ED., UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

Ed.D., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Directed by: Professor Maurianne Adams

For approximately the last 20 years, researchers have studied the “environment” for students who are lesbian, gay, and bisexual. However, there has been little empirical research on the experiences of lesbian, bisexual, or gay students at historically Black colleges and universities. Most of the literature to date has focused on students at predominantly White institutions and students who are male. Further, HBCUs have long been lauded for the unique educational experience they have created for African American students in general as evidenced by reports of greater satisfaction, faculty and social support, positive self-images, strong racial pride, and better psychosocial adjustment (Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991; Berger & Milem, 2000; Fleming, 1984; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Terenzini, Bohr, Pascarella, & Nora, 1997). However, little research has been conducted on within-group differences among African American students at HBCUs to explore whether and how other social identities such as sexual

orientation or socioeconomic class impact an African American student's experience of an HBCU.

This is an exploratory study that examines the experiences of seven lesbian and bisexual female students at an historically Black college and inquires into the relationship between the culture of HBCUs and the students' perceptions of campus climate. Drawing from a focus group interview, a survey, institutional artifacts, and historical data, I explore three research questions. The questions are 1) what can be characterized as the culture at historically Black colleges and universities; 2) what is the lesbian and bisexual female student perception of the campus climate for lesbian and female bisexual students at HBCUs and; 3) how, if at all does the HBCU culture impact the campus climate?

The culture was characterized by adherence to traditional gender norms of dress and behavior, affirming racial identity but not sexual identity, the dominance and prevalence of Christian values and beliefs, and a system of rewards and punishments for conforming or not conforming to gender norms. The climate was characterized by students feeling afraid; being harassed; feeling as though they are not wanted at the institution; restricting themselves from participating in activities; facing threats of expulsion; and having little to no social or institutional support.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The study of the complex relationship between people and environment is not new. Organizational theorists and psychologists alike have studied the impact of the workplace on human behavior. Fifty years ago, Robert Pace and George Stern (1958) built on the work of Kurt Lewin (1936) which theorized about the relationship between people and their environment. Pace and Stern applied Lewin's theory to the organizational climate of colleges. The early work of Lewin, Pace, and Stern, laid the groundwork for what are now commonly referred to as "campus climate" studies. Campus climate as it is being used here refers to the "current common patterns of important dimensions of organizational life or its members' perceptions of and attitudes toward those dimensions" (Peterson & Spencer, 1990, p. 7).

In the early 1980s, Bernice Sandler and Roberta Hall (1982) coined the phrase "chilly climate" to describe the classroom experiences of women on college campuses. Later, Hall and Sandler (1984) highlighted the overt as well as subtle out-of-classroom experiences of women in university settings. Some of the overt behavior included women's intellectual abilities being disparaged and women being counseled to lower their aspirations. Some of the more subtle behavior reported included people paying less attention to women or seeking opinions from men more frequently than women. They concluded that this climate and resulting behavior negatively impacted women's self-concept, educational experiences, and, ultimately, careers.

Some of the criticism of campus climate studies has been that there is not a consensus on what different institutions have meant by the phrase "campus climate" nor

has there been one way that the concept has been measured (Hart & Fellabaum, 2008). However, since Hall and Sandler's (1984) study, generally when campus climate has been studied it has been studied with the experiences of a marginalized population or marginalized populations at the fore. For instance, in the mid-to-late 1980s researchers began examining the campus climate for students of color at predominantly White institutions. Students of color had reported incidences of harassment and fear for their safety. Institutions undertook campus climate studies to assess the "climate for diversity" (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1999). One of the key features of those studies was an examination of structural diversity. That is, leaders of institutions wanted to increase their numbers of racial and ethnic minorities because they believed that there were educational gains for students who interacted with a diverse group of people (p. 19). Hurtado et al.(1999) argue that, too frequently, institutions place an overemphasis on increasing their number of students of color without attending to the other facets of campus climate such as the psychological climate (prejudice) and a behavioral dimension that measures how racially and ethnically diverse groups of people interact with one another.

More recently, campus climate studies have emerged that examined, not the structural diversity but, the psychological climate and behavioral dimensions mentioned by Hurtado et al. (1999). Those studies have focused on the experiences of students who are lesbian and gay and have, on occasion, included bisexual and transgender students. Findings from those studies indicate that the climates are hostile and that students are verbally harassed, threatened with physical violence, physically assaulted, afraid for their safety, and feeling pressured to conceal their identity (Brown, Clarke, Gortmaker, &

Robinson-Keilig, 2004; D'Augelli, 1989, 1992; Evans & Broido, 2002; Rankin, 2005; Waldo, 1998). To be fair, only small numbers of the more than 4,000 institutions of higher education in the U.S. have conducted climate studies with regard to sexual orientation. And, of those institutions that have conducted them, the data may not be generalizable across campuses. While it may not be possible to generalize across all institutions, it is reasonable to assume that students at other institutions face similar challenges.

At historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), those challenges for sexual minorities remain largely unknown because most of the research heretofore has been conducted at predominantly White institutions. Not only has there been a lack of research on campus climate for sexually marginalized populations done at these institutions, there has been inadequate institutional support which may also impact campus climate. Currently, there are 150 colleges and universities in the U.S. that provide institutional support in terms of a part or full-time professional staff person and/or physical space for student use. According to the Consortium of Higher Education Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender (LGBT) Resource Professionals 2009 Annual Report, of the 150 U.S. colleges and universities that provide support, 135 them are operated by a professional student affairs person (p. 12). None of the 150 colleges and universities that provide institutional support, as defined above, is a historically Black college and university.

Walter Allen and Joseph Jewell (2002) note that while historically Black colleges and universities have tended to be leaders in dealing with racial issues, they are lagging behind other institutions in dealing with other forms of oppression like classism or

heterosexism. Why is this? Culture is likely to be one factor that may explain why historically Black colleges and universities have failed to lead in addressing heterosexism. The larger Black community, of which HBCUs are a part, has deeply planted roots in what is known as the Black Church. The Black Church is much more than a religious institution within Black communities. Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) describe it this way, “The Black Church has no challenger as the cultural womb of the Black community” (p. 8). And, the Black Church as purveyor of religious, social, cultural, and political values has, as an institution, generally been inhospitable to lesbian, gay, and bisexual people who were open about their sexuality. Given that HBCUs are a microcosm of the larger Black community and are more often than not reflective of strong Church influences in their creation and culture, researching the influence of the religious facet of Black culture is essential. In addition to examining the role that religion may play in historically Black colleges and universities’ current standpoint in dealing with heterosexism, examining the history of the founding of HBCUs may also shed light on the subject since many HBCUs were founded by Christian ministers and missionaries. Equally important to the study of religion and its role in Black culture is the social construction of race, gender, and sexuality of Black women and men. These constructions, influenced by slavery, Jim Crow, and pervasive discrimination, affected perceptions of Black people when HBCUs were being founded and show particular ways that iconic images of Black people as sexually deviant may have contemporary import in relation to culture and thus the climate for LGB students at HBCUs.

Statement of Purpose

This study explores the campus climate for lesbian and bisexual students at historically Black colleges and universities and whether culture impacts students' perceptions of campus climate. Using qualitative methods and historical data, I explore the culture of historically Black colleges and universities and ask what the lesbian and bisexual students' perceptions are of the campus climate. I also explore whether there is a relationship between the culture and the perceptions of the climate and examine the relationship between the culture and the perceptions of the climate. The specific research questions this study examines are:

1. What can be characterized as the culture of historically Black colleges and universities?
2. What are the lesbian and bisexual student perceptions of campus climate for lesbian and bisexual students at HBCUs?
3. How, if at all does the HBCU culture impact the campus climate?

Significance of the Study

This study explores the campus climate for lesbian and bisexual women at historically Black colleges and asks whether the culture impacts student perceptions of the climate. These questions are important for three reasons. First, such an inquiry will add to the body of literature on campus climate and correct the current neglect of campus climate at HBCUs. There has been little empirical research on the experiences of lesbian, bisexual, or gay students at historically Black colleges and universities. Traditionally, HBCUs have been ignored or overlooked in research on campus climate with respect to sexual orientation. Most of the literature to date has focused on students at predominantly

White institutions and students who are male. Existing research has documented the campus climate for LGBT students but it is unknown whether these findings bear out at historically Black colleges. It is unclear whether the unique culture at HBCUs has any bearing on perceptions of the campus climate.

Second, this inquiry will add to the body of knowledge about historically Black colleges and universities. HBCUs have long-been lauded for the unique educational experience they have created for African American students in general as evidenced by reports of greater satisfaction, faculty and social support, positive self-images, strong racial pride, and better psychosocial adjustment (Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991; Berger & Milem, 2000; Fleming, 1984; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Terenzini et al, 1997).

However, little research has been conducted on within-group differences among African Americans at HBCUs. That is, little is known about whether and how other social identities such as sexual orientation or socioeconomic class impact an African American student's experience of an HBCU. There is one study that focused on the developmental experiences of first year students who are lesbians at a historically Black college (Patton & Simmons, 2008).

And, third, the study will inform practice. Student affairs practice, which is informed by theory, is incomplete because of the lack of theorizing about a segment of the population. Thus, the study will inform student affairs practices at HBCUs for lesbian and bisexual students as well as potentially impact practices at predominantly White institutions that want to enhance their services to African American lesbian and bisexual female students.

Overview of Climate and Culture

Campus Climate

In order to frame my study of campus climate, I will explain the importance of studying climate in higher education and review the findings on campus climate for LGB students. Studying campus climate is a way to “take the temperature” so to speak of an institution. It is a way of gauging how members of a particular campus community experience that community. According to Cress (2008):

Studying campus climate is an attempt to describe how students, faculty, and staff experience interactions with one another which are laden with individual values and meaning. In other words, it is a way of discerning how the environmental complexities of a campus affect the overall functioning of both its members and the organization. (p. 96)

Assessing campus climate is important for several reasons. First, one of the goals colleges and universities are charged with is creating and reproducing knowledge. The environment in which that knowledge is created or reproduced (or not) is critical to determining whether an institution fulfills its mission. Another goal of colleges and universities is equipping students with skills to be contributing members of society. Essentially, colleges and universities socialize students to interact with an increasingly global world. An institution’s climate is a factor in that socialization. Third, how members of a community experience the institution is directly related to satisfaction and thus retention.

Campus climate studies. For approximately the last 20 years, researchers have studied the “environment” for students who are LGB. Most of the studies on campus climate for lesbian, gay, and bisexual students are largely comprised of the voices of the students themselves (Brown et al., 2004; D’Augelli, 1989, 1992; Evans & Broido, 2002;

Rankin, 2005; Waldo, 1998). The students report experiencing harassment and/or discrimination. In a study done in 1988, researchers found that the majority of the harassment was derogatory comments (D'Augelli, 1989). At one large campus, a researcher found that 77% of a sample of lesbian and gay undergraduates had been verbally harassed because of their sexual orientation; 27% had been threatened with physical violence; and 3% had been punched, hit, kicked, or beaten (D'Augelli, 1992). Students also report fearing for their safety even if there had not been incidents of physical violence. Not much has changed in the years since these early studies were conducted.

Rankin's (2005) national study of fourteen colleges that also included transgender students' experiences found that more than one-third (36%) of LGBT undergraduate students have experienced harassment within the past year. Other findings include anti-LGBT graffiti (39%), pressure to conceal one's sexual orientation or gender identity (38%), written comments (33%), and physical assaults (reported by eleven respondents). The majority of the harassment came from students (79%). Of the 11 physical assaults noted in the study, 10 were reported by students (Rankin, 2005). One other noteworthy finding was that about half (51%) of the 1,669 respondents concealed their sexual orientation or gender identity to avoid intimidation and that students who identified as people of color were more likely to conceal their sexual orientation or gender identity to avoid harassment. They commented in the open-ended section of the study that they felt less comfortable being open about their identities in places where heterosexual people of color were in the majority (Rankin, 2005).

Noting the paucity of research specifically focused on lesbian and bisexual women, Evans and Broido (2002) conducted in-depth interviews with ten women who identified as lesbian and bisexual who lived in residence halls at a large research university in the east. Their research revealed that perceptions of the climate in the residence halls ranged from supportive to hostile. A positive or supportive climate was characterized by knowing a resident assistant or professional staff member who was LGB and open about it; programming centered on LGBT people or their concerns, and having roommates who were accepting of their sexual orientation. Conversely, a less supportive or hostile climate was characterized by having large numbers of sorority members or athletes or first-year students; having roommates that were less accepting or distant or who made negative comments; and not having visible signs of support or programming geared toward LGBT people (Evans & Broido, 2002).

One of the more fascinating themes the authors noted was that “Women often experience homophobia and heterosexism in more subtle than direct ways” (Evans & Broido, 2002, p. 38). The harassment that LGB students face referenced earlier in this work, the authors’ research suggests is more subtle. One participant described it this way, “I think for the most part women are less physically violent than men would be. Women tend to talk behind people’s backs. They’re more emotionally violent...I think in a lot of ways, emotional violence is probably worse” (p. 34). This particular theme, absent in other research about campus climate, highlights the unique ways that homophobia, biphobia, and heterosexism play out among women.

Patton and Simmons’ (2008) research on the developmental experiences of five first-year lesbian students at an HBCU, while not a typical campus climate, is useful in

that it identifies some of the distinctive experiences of women in general and for African American women in particular. They found that students faced challenges because of their nonconformity to traditional gender norms, lack of faculty acknowledgement of LGBT students, feeling as if their racial identities and sexual identities were in conflict, and feeling like an outsider because of not being accepted due to the sexual orientation. One of the particularly noteworthy findings, not noted in traditional campus climate studies, is that students reported felt alienated by college traditions such as orientation and induction events that required them to wear traditionally “feminine” attire.

Craig Waldo (1998) conducted a study that examined perceptions of campus climate based on sexual orientation. The research, carried out at a large institution in the Midwest, did not specifically focus on LGB students’ issues. What is included here, though, represents the portion that did focus on LGB students’ issues. Waldo’s approach is unique and helpful to this study in that he acknowledged that culture can and does impact people’s perceptions of climate.

Of the nearly 2,000 respondents in his study, 36 undergraduate gay and bisexual men and 23 undergraduate lesbian and bisexual women responded to the survey. Graduate students participated as well, but since my primary concern is with undergraduate student experience I excluded the data associated with their experience and perceptions. One of the instruments used by Waldo, the Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Campus Climate (LGBCC), was used to explore differences in perceptions about the climate for LGB students among subgroups. Examples of subgroups that Waldo references are heterosexual students who are members of the Greek system, politically conservative students, students of color, and students who are less religious. The other

instrument was the GCC or General Campus Climate that explored perceptions of a variety of quality-of-campus-life indices. It measured perceptions about such things as interactions with faculty, students' self-confidence, classroom experience, and campus safety (Waldo, 1998).

In reference to the LGBCC, heterosexual men were more likely than heterosexual women to view the climate as accepting of LGB students. The same men, however, did not support the implementation of policies that would support LGB people and they were more resistant to interpersonal contact with LGB students when compared to heterosexual women (Waldo, 1998). Additionally, students of color viewed the climate as less accepting than did White students. In contrast to heterosexual men, they did, however, support the implementation of policies that would support LGB people and they were more open to interpersonal contact with LGB students. The author hypothesized that students of color were "more in tune with the LGB students' negative experiences" because they shared a common minority status at the institution (Waldo, 1998, p. 767).

Students who are politically conservative and students who are Christian demonstrated less empathy about LGB students' experience of the climate than did students who are more liberal and those who are not Christian. Politically conservative students and Christian students both exhibited more attitudes that were not supportive of LGB people. Interestingly, members of fraternities or sororities had more negative attitudes than non-Greek students about interpersonal contact with LGB students and yet they viewed the climate as *less* accepting of LGB students than students who are not involved with fraternities or sororities. Waldo posits, "Perhaps there is something about this campus subcommunity that breeds understanding of the LGBCC while also fostering

attitudes that reject interpersonal contact with LGB students” (Waldo, 1998, p. 768).

Waldo’s speculation that “there is something about the campus subcommunity” suggests why an examination of the relationship between culture and climate may be necessary (p.768). He cannot necessarily explain the dynamic but he perceives that there is something about the culture that may shed light on the climate.

Given the treatment of LGB students documented thus far, it is understandable why such students fear for their safety and hide their identities. In an earlier study at Penn State (D’Augelli, 1989), homophobic attitudes were prevalent. In fact, about half of the respondents in that study believed that homosexuality is immoral and that males who are homosexual are disgusting. Rankin’s (2005) more recent study revealed that an overwhelming majority of the campuses surveyed believed that their campus climates are homophobic. That includes 73% of faculty, 74% of students, 81% of administrators, and 73% of staff. That same group of respondents perceived the campus climates for non-LGBT people as friendly (90%), concerned (75%), and respectful (80%) (Rankin, 2005).

In one study (Brown et al., 2004) conducted at a large university in the Midwest, researchers looked at groups across campus to assess their perceptions of campus climate similarly to Rankin. Students who did not identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender were surveyed as well as faculty, student affairs staff, and resident assistants. Some of the other significant findings not already reported here were that student affairs staff people reportedly were more supportive than faculty. Examples of support included showing more interest in topics related to LGBT people and participating in LGBT-related programs and workshops. Student affairs professionals were also “more likely to have

confronted a student making derogatory remarks about LGBT people than were faculty” (Brown et al., 2004, p. 20).

Among faculty, those in the “soft sciences” were found to be more supportive because they participated more in LGBT-related workshops, saw the relevance of LGBT-related topics to their fields of study, and had more positive attitudes than did faculty in the “hard sciences”(Brown et al., 2004, p. 20).

It is clear that students who are lesbian, gay, and bisexual experience harassment, threats of violence, and actual physical and emotional violence on college campuses. Students are afraid to disclose their sexual orientation, feel isolated, feel alienated because of campus traditions. Waldo is the one researcher who mentioned that the culture(s) of institutions can impact the campus climate. He engages the topic minimally but does mention that there is a relationship that needs to be explored.

In the bulk of the studies the overwhelming majority of students who participated are White and most of the research has been conducted at large, predominantly White institutions. Also, there is research that discusses the prevalence of students who “come out” prior to college or while in college. It is not known whether this is the case at HBCUs. And, in reference to sex differences a few studies noted that women tend to be more accepting of LGB students. Again, does this pattern bear out at HBCUs?

One of the difficulties in the research had to do with non-differentiating among aspects of sexual orientation. Some of the research mentions bisexual people explicitly; others do not. In many instances, bisexual people get subsumed under the terms “gay and lesbian”. Even in studies that have purported to be studying the experiences of bisexual

people, there is no mention of the particular experience of biphobia. Biphobia has different manifestations than homophobia does.

Bisexual people, among others, should be considered a subgroup with their own culture. Yet, most studies do not seem to recognize that subgroups exist and thus fail to recognize their significance in studying culture and climate. Similarly, most studies being conducted do not mention religious influences on perceptions of campus climate or on how they shape culture. Accordingly, when examining campus climate there is little to no mention of how the chaplain or office of religious life impacts campus climate.

The literature on campus climate with respect to sexual orientation is replete with examples of harassment, fear, and violence. One of the relatively untouched areas of inquiry is how an institution's culture impacts or shapes the climate for LGBT students.

Culture

In this section, I provide an overview of how culture is conceptualized and was measured throughout the study. Institutions of higher education exist within a larger society that transmits values and beliefs. Because of the inextricable link between institutions of higher education and the society of which they are a part, they cannot be properly understood outside that context or without an appreciation for the ways in which larger society influences educational institutions. Examining culture is one way of exploring that interplay. In this study, HBCUs and their concomitant culture are examined in relation to their connection to larger Black culture. HBCUs occupy a unique place within both the Black community and the higher education community, thus the culture of both is explored.

Culture is a contested term. Anthropologists, sociologists, linguists, organizational theorists, and scores of other people study culture and each is likely to define it in myriad ways. Common to each is its own understanding of what culture is, how or if it can be understood, and the significance it has to the life of people or to one's work. Although the definition that I use derives from a report that is specific to higher education institutions, it is useful for exploring the larger Black culture as well because it is grounded in cultural anthropology and sociology. Cultural anthropologists study social systems and how they are maintained through personal interactions and how participants in that system create meanings from the interactions. Sociologists examine formal organizational structures, subgroups or subcultures, and the process of socialization (Kuh & Whitt, 1988).

Kuh and Whitt (1988) define culture in higher education as “the collective, mutually shaping patterns of norms, values, practices, beliefs, and assumptions that guide the behavior of individuals and groups in an institute of higher education and provide a frame of reference within which to interpret the meaning of events and actions on and off campus” (p. 13). This definition most aptly fits the concept of culture that I am using for my research because it 1) recognizes the influence of culture on individuals *and* groups; 2) recognizes that culture is holistic but does not assume that the norms and values are shared by all the members of an organization; and 3) acknowledges that interpretations individuals make are not limited to what happens on campus.

Analysis of Culture

I use Edgar Schein's (1992), framework for analyzing culture at HBCUs. Schein, a former management professor whose analysis fits well with my study, suggests that organizational culture exists at three levels. The first, which is at the observable level,

consists of artifacts. The second level consists of values, and the third level involves basic assumptions. Schein's framework is useful in examining culture at colleges and universities.

According to Schein, artifacts consist of categories that overlap 1) the physical environment; 2) the social environment; 3) technological output of the group; 4) written and spoken language; 5) overt behavior of members; and 6) symbols. The physical environment can expose elements of a college's culture. Through its physical layout, it is possible to make meaning out the order of a place. Or how big some spaces are on campus are relative to other spaces may reveal something about a particular college's culture. The social environment provides clues about relationships between members of a group and how they communicate with one another. The use of technology can also be an indicator of a college's culture. The language that people use to describe the institution or use to address each other is important in understanding organizational culture as are the stories that get passed on to successive classes and faculty. Overt behavior obviously can reflect a particular culture. At one institution, students may sit outside and socialize whereas at another institution they may tend to congregate inside. Beginning class with a prayer can reveal important information about the values of an institution. Lastly, an institution's symbols provide outward manifestations of a particular value. Symbols can be mascots or rituals or other traditions that signify meaning to individuals or groups.

The second level of Schein's (1992) framework is values. Although values reflect deeply held feelings, they are not usually easily discernable but must be inferred by examining artifacts which are observable. Collectively, values make up an important part of the organization's culture and once the members of the organization become aware of

the collective values of the institution those values can be called beliefs. Bess and Dee (2008) contend that it is difficult for organizational members to articulate clearly what the values of the institution are because sometimes the values are not espoused openly. And, of course, sometimes there are gaps between what is espoused and what actually happens which adds to the ambiguity (Bess & Dee, 2008, p. 369).

At the third level are basic assumptions which are what drive behavior. Schein's (1992) analysis of assumptions shows how to uncover an organization's beliefs. The underlying assumptions reveal 1) the organization's relationship to the environment; 2) the organization's beliefs about the nature of truth and reality; 3) how the institution views human nature; and 4) and the nature of human relationships.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 includes an introduction to the study, the purpose and significance of the study, and an overview of culture and climate. Chapter 2 describes the research methodology used in the study including data collection, management, and analysis. Chapter 3 presents the literature that was reviewed as part of the historical data. Chapters 4 and 5 comprise the data from the focus group interview, campus climate index, and historical data. Chapter 6 presents a summary and discussion of the findings as well as the implications and limitations of the study.

CHAPTER 2

METHODS

Introduction

This is an exploratory study using qualitative methods that examines the experiences of lesbian and bisexual students at historically Black colleges and inquires into the relationship between the culture of HBCUs and the students' perceptions of campus climate. Using mixed methods, I explore three research questions to guide my study. The questions are 1) what can be characterized as the culture at historically Black colleges and universities; 2) what is the lesbian and bisexual student perception of the campus climate for lesbian and bisexual students at HBCUs and; 3) how, if at all does the HBCU culture impact the campus climate?

In order to understand college culture and climate, their relationship to one another, and how they shape lesbian and bisexual student's experiences at HBCUs, I used mixed methods to gather data. Three methods are used to triangulate. Triangulation, Esterberg (2002) contends, strengthens the researcher's analysis by accounting for strengths and weaknesses of different methods. For the first research question that examines the culture at HBCUs, the methods I used included written artifacts from the institution's website, a focus group interview, and relevant historical data. To answer the second question which focuses on lesbian and bisexual student perception of campus climate for lesbian and bisexual students at HBCUs, I used a questionnaire that I adapted from a national study on campus climate for LGBT people and data from the focus group interview. And, for the third question that examines the potential relationship between culture and perceptions of climate at HBCUs, the methods I used are the focus group interview, written artifacts, and historical data.

Qualitative methods capture the student's experiences of the campus culture and enable the researcher to explore the relationship between culture and perceptions of campus climate. Qualitative methods are most appropriate for this type of inquiry because they allow the individual's experiences and voices to be heard. Given that the population I am researching is understudied, qualitative methods are particularly appropriate. Qualitative methods both describe and analyze individual's experiences and primarily rely on what people say and do for data (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Setting

The study was conducted at a historically Black college or university. The description of the institution will be limited to protect the identity of the research participants. The institution, which will be referred to as Stacker College (a pseudonym), is located in the southern part of the United States and is a 4-year institution.

Study Participants

The participants in this study were seven undergraduate women at an HBCU who 1) identified as African American or Black; 2) were born and raised in the United States; 3) identified as lesbian or bisexual and; 4) had attended the institution at least two years prior to participating in the study. One of them identified as bisexual and the remaining six identified as lesbian. All of them were "out" (having acknowledged or disclosed their sexual orientation) on campus to some extent.

I recruited students who identify as African American or Black and were born and raised in the United States because I believe that their socialization, in terms of race and sexuality, in the United States is different from someone who grew up outside the United States. I restricted participation to students who had attended the institution at least two

years because I believe that students who had been at the institution at least two years were more capable of answering questions about the campus' culture and climate thus yielding richer data.

Data Collection Methods

Focus Group Interview

Focus group interviews are an appropriate method for this research because, in this method, it is assumed that the way individuals think and feel are shaped by what others say about their thoughts and feelings (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Participants tend to be more relaxed, the facilitator is able to probe, and the voices of the participants are heard. Because I researched both an understudied and marginalized population and an understudied topic, it was important that participants were comfortable and that I was able to probe their responses to my questions, process which in turn increased the likelihood that their voices would be heard.

To gather participants for the focus group, I invited at least eight participants. According to Krueger (1994), the ideal size for a focus group is between six and nine participants. Snowball sampling was used. Snowball sampling is used when there is an informant available and that person has access to others who meet the criteria for the study (Esterberg, 2002). It is a particularly useful method for reaching study participants who may be hard to locate. Given that my research was on students who may not be open about their sexual orientation, snowball sampling was appropriate for this population.

At Stacker College, I had a contact who is a faculty member there. She had knowledge of and access to the student group for LGBT students. I contacted her, informed her about my research, and requested that she forward my call for participants

via e-mail (Appendix A) to the student group and other students whom she knew that met the criteria for the study. I created a separate e-mail account to manage the responses to the recruitment e-mail. I planned to follow up with the students who responded by sending them a demographic questionnaire (Appendix B). The demographic questionnaire was to be used to determine if respondents were prospective focus group participants. In my follow-up communication with the respondents, I planned to explain the purpose of the study, the time commitment involved in participating, discuss the date of the focus group interview, and have them complete a survey that I adapted from a national campus climate index that measures campus climate for LGBT people (Appendix C).

Although I had intended to recruit participants as outlined at Stacker College, the actual recruitment transpired differently. In the fall¹, I traveled as arranged with my faculty contact to Stacker College. Despite the faculty person having forwarded the call for participants, I did not have any students respond. I visited the student union where I would be able to observe and meet students. As I was leaving the building, I saw a student and asked her if she knew anyone affiliated with the student group for students who are not heterosexual. She pointed me to a building where she knew a leader of that organization was working. I introduced myself to the student leader and explained my research and the purpose of my visit. We exchanged contact information and I contacted her a few hours later as she had requested.

The student leader organized a gathering of seven students later that night who met the criteria for the study. I explained the consent forms (Appendices E and F) and

¹ The year that I collected the data is intentionally being left out to protect the identity of the research participants.

had the participants sign them. After they completed the demographic questionnaire, I administered the survey and then conducted the focus group interview. The interview was recorded using a digital voice recorder. Because I draw heavily on the students' words, each student was given a pseudonym during the analysis of the data.

The focus group interview lasted an hour and 45 minutes in length and consisted of a series of questions focused in keeping with my research questions. According to Krueger (1994), a typical focused interview has about twelve questions and they comprise five categories. The categories are opening questions, introductory questions, transition questions, key questions, and ending questions (p. 54). The question guide I developed for the focus group interviews derives from research questions one and three that guide my study (Appendix D).

The opening question was a question that everyone answered and was used to identify commonalities between participants. The introductory questions introduced the topic to participants and were designed to generate conversation. They were not necessarily central to the analysis. The transition questions, however, were more important because they moved the participants closer to a more focused discussion of the topic. The questions that drove the study were the key questions. There are usually between two and five key questions in the interview that require the most analysis. The ending questions were designed to bring closure and allowed participants to reflect on the discussion. The interview questions had been previously reviewed by the dissertation committee for feedback on the content.

Survey

I administered a survey (Appendix C) that measured lesbian and bisexual student's perceptions of the campus climate to answer the second research question. The survey was administered prior to conducting the focus group interview. This was important for several reasons. First, since one of the research questions is about how the HBCU culture impacts perceptions of campus climate it was important to gather data about the perceptions of campus climate prior to discussing whether and how the culture impacts perceptions of it in the focus group. Second, administering surveys before the focus group interview allows the researcher to gather insight about the meaning of the results in a way that would not be possible using a survey alone (Krueger, 1994). Third, the specific focus of the survey enabled students to focus their attention onto the subsequent focus group interview.

The survey contained questions that measure how students perceive their respective campus with regard to facets of campus life. The survey was adapted from an index used in a national study (Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, & Frazer, 2010). That index was developed by Campus Pride and has over fifty self-assessment questions that correspond to eight "LGBT-friendly" factors. The survey that I developed uses five of the "LGBT-friendly" factors (support and institutional commitment, academic life, student life, campus safety, and counseling and health) from the 2010 study. I added religious life as a factor because of the relevance of it to my research questions. Students responded to questions measuring the climate with respect to 1) support and institutional commitment; 2) academic life; 3) student life; 4) campus safety; 5) counseling and health and; 6) religious life. I chose these particular facets to measure because my earlier literature

review on culture and climate (reported in chapter one) revealed that there is little support for or resources available to students who are lesbian, bisexual, or gay at HBCUs (Patton & Simmons, 2008), that students who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender frequently encounter challenges with faculty, living in residence halls, and with people who are religiously conservative (Evans & Broido, 2002; Rankin, 2005; Waldo, 1998).

Written Artifacts

In addition to the survey and the focus group interview, I reviewed written artifacts to answer research questions one and three. Marshall and Rossman (1999) contend that “History and context surrounding a specific setting come, in part, from reviewing documents. And thus, documents reveal much about the values and beliefs of the participants in a particular setting” (p. 116). The artifacts that I analyzed include an employee nondiscrimination statement, admissions policies, residence life guest policies, and presidential convocation speeches. Each written artifact was accessed through the institutional website. I chose which artifact to analyze based on the categories Schein (1992) uses to conceptualize culture and whether I thought they would reveal the culture of the institution.

Historical Analysis

I reviewed published literature to situate the research topic in broader historical, social, and cultural contexts. Situating the topic in its historical, social, and cultural contexts is necessary to address research questions one and three. The bodies of literature that I reviewed were 1) the social constructions of race, gender, and sexuality of African American women and men with a specific focus on women; 2) the historical context of

the founding of HBCUs and how it shaped early education of African American women; and 3) literature on the larger Black culture of which HBCUs are a part.

Data Management and Analysis

Focus Group Interview

Prior to the start of the interview, I made a diagram of the seating arrangement so that I could recall participants' names more readily. I made sure the recorder worked properly prior to participants' departure. The interview was partially transcribed, omitting the irrelevant portions that result from a focus group interview with multiple participants. I saved the audio recording and the transcript in folders on a flash drive.

I listened to the audio recording of the interview. Then, I hired a transcriptionist to transcribe the interview. I instructed her on how I wanted the interview to be transcribed. After I received the transcript from the transcriptionist, I listened to the recording again to ensure that the segments responsive to my questions matched the transcript. I made corrections in the transcript when there were discrepancies between the transcriptionist and my hearing and recollection of the interview.

Informal analysis of the data began when I listened to the interview. After I got the transcript, I imported it into the qualitative research software Nvivo to begin formal analysis of the data. I coded the interview transcript using grounded theory. In the grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006), researchers transcribe interviews and read through a small sample of text. Potential themes arise from reading the text. As the themes emerge, the data from those themes is culled and compared for linkages. A theoretical model is then built while simultaneously checking the model against the data

(Charmaz, 2006). Negative cases- voices or experiences that differ from the model- are also explored.

After identifying themes, I gave each theme a code. The codes sometimes changed as I listened to the interview more and studied the transcript. The dissertation committee checked the codes as well as a peer debriefer. A peer debriefer is someone familiar with the work who also helps add validity to the research by challenging the researcher's assumptions and probes the researcher's interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Survey

After reviewing and coding the transcription of the interview, I reviewed the surveys. I read over each one to take note of how the participants answered each question. I tallied the answers for each question to gauge what the participants thought about research question number that measures their perceptions of the campus climate. I kept the surveys in a secure location in my home.

Written Artifacts

The artifacts chosen were kept in the same place as the surveys in my home. After I had gathered each artifact, I read over each one and looked for themes and patterns. I examined the language used in the artifacts. I analyzed the artifacts using grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) as I did with the interview data. I coded each artifact using the themes generated during the reading of each one. Then, I compared the data from the interview with the written artifacts to determine if they answered research question number one. In the same way that negative cases were explored with the data from the focus group interview, they were examined with the written artifacts as well.

Historical Data

To analyze the historical data, I reviewed literature that illuminated the themes in the focus group interview and in the written artifacts. In grounded theory, the literature review follows other data collection methods so that the researcher does not overly rely on previously published research to augment their work (Charmaz, 2006). Rather, the literature review emerges from, in this case, the other data sources I used such as the focus group interview and the written artifacts. An analysis of the historical data revealed two narratives about Black culture. One of the narratives, a “dominant narrative” is presented in chapter four along with data from the institutional website while the “counter-narrative”, which is drawn from the focus group interview and the survey, is presented in chapter five.

Researcher Location

In the fall of 2002, I heard about a young man at an all-male historically Black college who had been assaulted in a shower by a fellow classmate who thought he was being romantically or sexually propositioned. In subsequent reading and conversation with friends and colleagues, I often wondered about the context in which an incident like that occurs. I started an ongoing process of research into resource centers in higher education for students who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender. I discovered that although there are some resource centers, there are none at HBCUs. My research also revealed that there was little empirical evidence on Black college students who are lesbian or bisexual. Armed with this information, I embarked on this journey to study what the climate is for students at HBCUs who are lesbian and bisexual women. My

purpose has not just been to shed light on a particular phenomenon, but also to give voice to a population sorely understudied- Black lesbian and bisexual women.

As a Black bisexual woman who is a graduate of a historically Black college, my knowledge of HBCUs as well as the issues lesbian and bisexual women face has shaped not only my interest in the topic but also my analysis of the data. In analyzing the data, I made sure to stay “close to the data” to ensure that my conclusions derived from the data itself (Charmaz, 2006). Additionally, I offered study participants the opportunity to read the transcript to clarify any misunderstandings or misrepresentations. And, I enlisted the help of a peer debriefer to have another perspective of the data. While the feedback from the debriefer informed my research, I did not substitute the debriefer’s opinion for my own but relied on my interpretation of the data.

Ethical Considerations

I developed consent forms for the research participants. In each consent form, I described the purpose of the research, the data collection methods, and the way(s) I intended to use the results of the research. Focus group participants agreed to maintain confidentiality. Copies of the consent forms are in Appendices E and F. I gave participants pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. Lastly, a proposal of this research was reviewed and accepted by the School of Education’s Institutional Review Board to ensure that research participants’ rights were protected.

In the next chapter, I present the historical data drawn from a review of literature on 1) the social constructions of race, gender, and sexuality of African American women and men with a specific focus on women; 2) the historical context of the founding of

HBCUs and how it shaped early education of African American women; and 3) literature on the larger Black culture of which HBCUs are a part.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to explore why HBCUs generally have failed to lead in addressing heterosexism, it is helpful to situate them within their larger social, cultural, and historical contexts. These contexts led me to examine three areas of literature which contain overlapping themes. The chapter begins with an examination of the social constructions of race, gender, and sexuality of African American women and men generally as well as a more specific focus on women. Second, I discuss how those constructions of race, gender, and sexuality shaped early education of African American women. Lastly, I situate HBCUs within the larger Black cultural context.

Social Constructions of Race, Gender, and Sexuality

The constructions of race, gender, and sexuality of African Americans have been critical factors not only in how dominant culture has viewed them but also in how African Americans have viewed themselves. The intersections of race, sexuality, and gender, especially as they relate to Black people, have been the subject of a myriad of analyses spanning many academic disciplines. Despite the fact that the research has spanned multiple fields, the constructions of Black women's and men's sexuality and gender have been fairly consistent across these fields of inquiry. In response to these constructions, Black women developed their own construction of womanhood. Accordingly, it is appropriate to examine the literature in more detail. The literature outlined here traces constructions from the sixteenth century to the early twentieth century.

Winthrop Jordan (1968) recounts stories of European travelers in the sixteenth century who went to Africa in search of trade. Those travelers, startled by the discovery of people with darker skin than they had been accustomed to seeing, mentioned the skin color frequently in their travelogues. According to Jordan, Europeans thought that Africans' skin color was "the most arresting characteristic" about them. Apparently, it was so "arresting" that Europeans had difficulty seeing variations in complexion and simply referred to Africans as "Black. They were so taken with the skin color, Jordan suggests, not simply because it was different. He contends that because early dictionaries had defined Black using words and phrases such as dirty, foul, iniquitous, and wicked that when they saw "Black" people they projected onto them/associated them with what they had read. Jordan's work is significant because it highlights how connections were drawn early about the so-called relationship between Blacks' race and their inferiority and immorality. His work also highlights how those early constructions informed and shaped scientists' quest to understand, classify, and control Black bodies.

The role of early pseudo-scientific theories of racial classification in constructing Blacks as inferior and immoral, in both Europe and America, cannot be overstated. Londa Schiebinger (1990), whose work chronicles theories of racial and sexual difference in the eighteenth century, refers to that era as the "age of classification". It was during this time, Schiebinger (1990, 1993) contends, that scientists were consumed with categorizing race and sex differences. Jordan (1968) asserts that the justification for categorizing people, in America at least, during the eighteenth century was fear of losing control. That is, he claimed that White people in America feared losing control after the Revolutionary War

and were grasping for ways to maintain it and used classifying bodies as part of their strategy. Science was a tool in the overall strategy to maintain White supremacy.

Using the European male as the standard, eighteenth and nineteenth century scientists sought to explain physical differences among humans and ascribe status to those differences by examining characteristics such as skin color, pelvises, and skulls. In terms of race, it was African men who commanded the attention of eighteenth century European anatomists (Schiebinger, 1990). They, along with European women were considered “exotic” because both deviated from the European male standard albeit in different ways. African men deviated from the standard because of their race while European women deviated from it because of their sex. African women did not garner lots of attention from anatomists and physical anthropologists during the eighteenth century according to Schiebinger (1990, 1993). Scientists developed several theories to explain racial and sex differences.

Scientists who advocated a monogenetic theory of human origin and development believed that humankind originated from one original source and that physical difference among races and sexes could be attributed to such things as climactic changes, occupation, social class, or people of different races mixing. Monogenists believed that humans were all one species and that differences reflected the order of the universe and that that order did not indicate a hierarchy. Despite monogenists’ own denials of racism and Schiebinger’s (1990) reluctance to call proponents of monogenetic theories racist, their own words provide contradictory evidence as they account for racial differences among human beings. Winthrop Jordan (1968) provides an example that is illustrative of his point about the arresting nature of the Africans’ skin color and subsequent interest in

classifying it as inferior. He quotes that writer and physician Oliver Goldsmith noted in 1774:

[Variations in human color] are actual marks of the degeneracy in the human form; and we may consider the European figure and colour as standards to which to refer all other varieties, and with which to compare them. In proportion as the Tartar or American approaches nearer to European beauty, we consider the race as less degenerated; in proportion as he differs more widely, he has made greater deviations from his original form. That we have all sprung from one common parent, we are taught, both by reason and religion, to believe; and we have good reason also to think that the Europeans resemble him more than any of the rest of his children. (Jordan, 1968, p. 248)

While Goldsmith does not actually use the word inferior, his contentions that people of other colors “degenerate” from their original [White] form and that the extent to which they deviate from that form reflects the depth of their degeneracy, indicate that he believed European men to be superior. Goldsmith was not alone in his assessment. Influential anthropologists, biologists, anatomists, and natural historians of the time maintained that Black people were “naturally” inferior to Europeans, that Black people were closer to apes, and that Caucasians were the most perfect human type from which all other racial groups degenerated (Gossett, 1997; Schiebinger, 1990, 1993).

In addition to examining skin color as a marker of difference, anatomists studied skeletons. More specifically, skulls were thought to be indicative of intelligence in males and pelvises were thought to be a sign of womanliness. Samuel Thomas von Soemmerring, a reputable anatomist during the eighteenth century, believed that a man’s skull revealed much more than a physical difference; it revealed important clues about his moral and intellectual capacities. Soemmerring, a monogenist, believed that the body “spoke for itself” and that any inequalities between races and sexes should be attributed to nature and not science (Schiebinger, 1993, p. 173). Soemmerring’s claim not only

absolves scientists of any role in perpetuating racism, it also offers further proof of the ways that people who purported to believe in equality during this time managed to still position Black people at the bottom of the social order.

Studies of women's pelvises reveal some of the same inclinations. Scientists did not investigate women's bodies often during the eighteenth century, but when they did pelvises were what they investigated. In their work, anatomists found White women's pelvises to be larger which they attributed to her "higher" class because she was White. African women's pelvises, on the other hand were narrower and not as delicate. In fact, scientists of the time believed that Africans' pelvises resembled those of apes. This particular "finding" is noteworthy because it emphasizes not just the belief that Africans were inferior to Whites but also because it underscores what monogenists had already been articulating, namely, that Black people were more like animals. The "findings" and rhetoric of the monogenists makes it difficult to decipher the difference between them and polygenists.

Polygenists differed from monogenists in their theories about the origin of humankind. While monogenists believed humankind came from a single source, polygenists reasoned that humans came from multiple sources in different parts of the world. Thus, they further reasoned, multiple sources created separate species that had innate differences. Whereas monogenists held that humans were ordered merely to provide structure and not hierarchy, polygenists contended that humans were ordered hierarchically with one species on top and successively lower beings on the bottom. One particularly well-known example of a polygenist theory is the Great Chain of Being which was popularized by Charles White in 1799 (Gossett, 1997; Jordan, 1968). Using

the metaphor of this great chain of being, White argued that along the scale of humanity, Black people occupied a place somewhere between White people, who were on the top, and apes who occupied the lower end.

Schiebinger (1993) even claims that European naturalists described apes in a way that seemed to humanize them as they simultaneously pointed out the ways Africans exhibited ape-like characteristics. Another widely circulated notion was that Black people had had sexual intercourse with apes (Gilman, 1985; Jordan, 1968). While theories about White people having sexual intercourse with apes had circulated as well (Schiebinger, 1990), the significance of saying that Black people had had sex with apes was that it added credence to the claim that Blacks were lustful as well as evolutionarily closer to apes. Further, characterizing Black people as bestial was not new as Jordan (1968) and Gilman (1985) point out but what made the association of Blacks and apes so impactful, was that it undoubtedly bolstered proponents of United States slavery's claims of inferiority and lustfulness which later served to justify their treatment of enslaved Africans.

Another characterization that would later impact the treatment of enslaved women was that of the Hottentot woman as the quintessential deviant sexual being. By the nineteenth century, scientists had developed more of an interest in women in general and in African women in particular. Sander Gilman's work (1985) chronicles the history of gender and race stereotypes in art, literature, and medicine in the late nineteenth century. Gilman skillfully shows how both art and science converge in depicting the Hottentot woman as the antithesis of White women. His work shows that scientists' obsessive interest in the shape of Sarah Baartmann's buttocks and genitalia revealed not only a

desire to showcase physical differences between races but also a continued desire to assign rank to those differences. In discussing the ways that Sarah Baartmann and other Hottentot women's genitalia differed from White women's and thus marked as "other," Gilman notes that in a gynecological handbook a doctor concluded that the "malformed" labia and clitoris of the Hottentot led to lesbian desire which he considered "excessive" sexual desire. Thus, the Hottentot woman's protruding buttocks and genitalia were portrayed as outward manifestations of her innate lower moral status according to polygenists.

To be clear, all Black sexuality had been depicted as deviant by the eighteenth century and yet the attention turned toward the Hottentot woman reveals a shift in the focus toward women in general and Black women specifically. Prior to the eighteenth century, women had been characterized as a deficient version of man by theologians, folklorists, and philosophers (Russett, 1989; Tavis, 1984) but the science of this era particularly shaped conceptions about women. Russett (1989) argues that in addition to the sexual science that came out of that period being more precise and driven by experimental research rather than theory like previous science, it also incorporated information from the life sciences which helped position its expertise in the field.

Like scientists who believed that physical attributes revealed character in terms of race, scientists who studied sex differences believed that women's physical differences reflected their inner nature. Scientists constructed women as fragile and weak because their bodies differed structurally from men's. Her fragility and weakness, however, were simultaneously constructed as strengths because they eased the process of mate selection. That is, women's "natural" fragility and weakness complemented men's "natural"

strength. Their inherent natures made them ideally suited for each other as romantic and sexual partners while also clearly demarcated what roles they would assume in domestic matters such as labor (Russett, 1989).

Carol Tavris (1984) discusses other constructions of women in *The Longest War*. She notes that men depicted women as animal-like in nature to juxtapose them to men who were more refined and intellectual. She also examines the contradictory depictions of women. She refers to the ways that women have been characterized as the “pedestal-gutter syndrome” (Tavris, 1984, p. 3). According to Tavris (1984), women have been characterized as sinner and saint, as someone with the capacity to send a man to hell or rescue him from it. She further argues that source of women’s deficiency has generally been found to be located in her reproductive system. Again, early scientific examinations of women’s pelvises and genitalia reflect those same desires to link sex difference to inferiority. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries brought two prevailing ideologies into public view, namely, the inferiority of both women and Black people. Slavery provided the perfect opportunity to enact these beliefs.

Scholars disagree about whether slavery came before “race” as a construct or whether the construct “race” came before slavery (Jordan, 1968; Smedley, 2007) but obviously note the impact of slavery on Black people. Noting the particular ways that slavery impacted Black women, bell hooks (1981) argues that while slavery was certainly rooted in racism, that the harsh treatment Black women received was partly because of its intersection with sexism. She contends that Black women felt the sting of the “anti-woman” bite of the colonial period more harshly than White women. White women were

being idealized and protected as Black women were simultaneously being degraded sexually as well as economically.

One particular form of humiliation occurred through the sale of slaves. Considered property, slaves were frequently sold from one slave owner to another. This often took place in open arenas with slaves being required to undress for their prospective owners. By withholding clothing, slave owners helped further the perception that Black people were less than human. And, for women lack of clothing had particular significance because “women” of the era were usually layered in clothing and being naked conveyed sexual availability.

Depictions of Black women as inferior, animal-like, and lustful fueled the treatment of them as objects. For instance, White slave owners raped Black women and produced children that were considered the property of the slave owner and not the child of the Black mothers. Barbara Omolade (1995) referred to this when she remarked:

...to him [the slave owner] she was a fragmented commodity whose feelings and choices were rarely considered: her head and her heart were separated from her back and her hands and divided from her womb and vagina. Her back and muscle were pressed into field labor where she was forced to work with men and work like men (p. 366).

In order to justify the rape of Black women, slave owners capitalized on earlier portrayals of them as loose and in need of control. This creation of the Jezebel stereotype helped to justify the treatment of Black women as property.

Not only did the creation of “Jezebel” justify treating Black women like property, it also served to illuminate, yet again, just how distinct from White women they were. Kelly Brown Douglas (1999) says, “The Black woman as a Jezebel was a perfect foil to the White, middle-class woman who was pure, chaste, and innocent” (p. 39). The Black

woman, because of her wanton behavior and undomesticated work, that is, because of her work in the fields, was simultaneously masculinized and sexualized. In short, she was a loose sexual object because she fulfilled the sexual needs of men and yet she was also “masculine” because she did not meet the standard for womanhood established and maintained by White women and men.

One of the major ideological influences of the nineteenth century to which Kelly Brown Douglas (1999) and Sander Gilman (1985) allude that shaped the construction of womanhood, for any woman, was an ideology known as True Womanhood. Captured by Barbara Welter (1966), those standards to which women were expected to conform have become known as True Womanhood. True Womanhood, as an ideal, provided a moral and cultural blueprint for women to follow. In the ideal of True Womanhood, a woman found her identity as a human being. In it, she found her relationship to herself, to other women, to men, and to God. Its benchmarks were sexual purity, religious piety, domesticity, and submission to men.

Sexual purity was exemplified by sexual restraint. Heterosexual marriage was the presumed outlet for any sexual expression; thus Black women who were enslaved and engaged in sexual activity with White male slave owners were deemed sexually impure and loose. They were so loose that they needed to be raped in order to be subdued. White women were complicit in these characterizations also. While White men depicted Black women as loose to justify raping them, White women depicted them as loose so that they could continue sitting on the moral and social pedestal on which they had been placed. Both groups relied on racist depictions to maintain White supremacy and White men

relied on sexism to regulate women's conduct. From either vantage point, purity was a moral obligation Black women had failed to fulfill.

An equally important moral obligation that went unfulfilled was Christian piety. Welter (1966) maintains that piety and purity were both essential in defining womanhood. Piety was a virtue associated with closeness to the Christian conceptualization of God and because Black women engaged in sexual activity outside marriage they could not be pious. The fact that sex was nonconsensual between Black women and White men was irrelevant because the depiction of White women as paragons of virtue relied on the depiction of Black women as the antithesis of virtue. The prevailing thought was that women were "naturally" more religious than men thus adherents to True Womanhood believed that a woman could bring a man who went astray back to God. A Black woman, however, could not bring a man who erred back to God because she was considered the cause of the errant behavior.

"True Women" concerned themselves with matters in the home, the space in which a woman performed her most important work. That work consisted of taking care of the home, tending to a husband and instilling Christian values in children. Therefore, a woman who deviated from her God-given roles was not a woman. Black women, however, by necessity worked outside the home throughout the centuries that slavery lasted often worked alongside men in fields. In some instances, as hooks (1981) contends, Black women worked longer than men doing work in the fields. When slavery ended, the majority of Black women did not tend to work primarily in the home out of economic necessity as well as desire to work to advance the Black race.

A “True Woman” was sexually restrained, close to a Christian God, naturally interested in and willing to confine herself to domestic life, and submissive to men. Black women could not, by virtue of their lack of agency reserve sex for marriage, exhibit a religious piety characterized by sexual restraint, or limit their work to the home. Consequently, they never could become “True Women.”

In the period following the end of legalized slavery and reacting to these constructions of themselves as biologically inferior, sexually immoral, and outside the bounds of womanhood, Black women launched a public and a private campaign using a variety of strategies to defend and define themselves. Referred to as the ideology of racial uplift, this broad array of strategies were all aimed at raising the Black race from its social and economic status and its so-called depravity. Although more commonly-used resistance strategies like petitions and boycotts (Higginbotham, 1993), advocating for voting and education (Cooper, 1892; Hine, 1995), and writing (Carby, 1987) were critical to racial uplift, the primary focus here will be on the public and private strategies that were aimed at shaping individual behaviors and attitudes as they relate to Black women’s sexuality. For instance, one of the strategies of racial uplift used by middle-class Black women to counter racist stereotypes was what Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham calls the “politics of respectability” (p. 14). Higginbotham (1993) defines the “politics of respectability” as a medium through which middle-class and elite Black Baptist women sought to “earn their people a measure of esteem from White America”. They earned that esteem by striving “to win the Black lower class’ psychological allegiance to temperance, industriousness, thrift, refined manners, and Victorian sexual morals” (Higginbotham, p.

14). Uplifting the race and thereby earning respect from White people had both public and private demands.

Racial uplift ideologues required that “respectable” women dress as (White) women did in the dominant culture. Public speeches, written articles, etiquette manuals, artwork, and even toys conveyed messages to Black women about how to be a “lady” (Gaines, 1996; Higginbotham, 1993; Wolcott, 2001). Clothing was to be neither too flashy nor too plain as it was a symbol of one’s social class and morality (Higginbotham, 1993; Wolcott, 2001). By presenting a public self that exhibited qualities of womanhood espoused by White people, Black women challenged the notion that they stood outside the definition of womanhood. There were other public guidelines as well.

Public behavior, which Blacks perceived to always be under the watchful eye of Whites, was also regulated as a way of countering stereotypes and offering alternative images of Black women (Higginbotham, 1993; Hine, 1995; Jenkins, 2007). Baptist churchwomen, clubwomen, and Black clergy all believed it was their job to help educate the masses of Black people (Gaines, 1996; Higginbotham, 1993). Officers of Black Baptist women’s organizations like the Women’s Convention, who were largely middle-class, insisted that women of their race who were “respectable” did not chew gum, talk loudly, or stick their heads out of train windows. Such unladylike behavior was frowned upon using vehicles like pamphlets and by going door-to-door through Black communities. Unladylike behavior reflected not just the individual’s rude temperament, in this case, but upon the entire Black race and Black womanhood.

Early education for Black women reflected the same concern with public image. Black administrators at an early training school for girls evaluated girls’ appearance and

body odor just as they did the students' academic work (Higginbotham, 1993). Another major influence in shaping the public persona of the "respectable" Black woman was the National Association of Colored Women's (NACW) clubs which at one point had a membership of fifty thousand (Higginbotham, 1993, p. 384). Hoping to present Black women as "supermoral" (Hine, 1995, p. 386), the NACW taught Black women, through religious and social organizations, to avoid such behavior as having too many children or having children out of wedlock by stressing the incompatibility of those actions with Black female respectability (Hine, 1995). While middle-class and elite Black women led the charge to present an image of respectable womanhood, working-class women often complied with conformity to White standards of respectability. Fully aware of stereotypes of Black women as sexually loose and not wanting to avoid adding fuel to the racist and classist fire, Victoria Wolcott (2001) notes that working-class women frequently socialized in same-sex-only venues to prevent even the appearance of (hetero)sexual impropriety in public. Wolcott calls attention to the fact that while racial uplift ideologues and working-class Black women were divided on some tenets of "respectability," they were united in defense of their sexual selves.

Defending their sexual selves in public and private was imperative. Clubwomen created and advocated a "culture of dissemblance" as a means of protecting themselves. Darlene Clark Hine (1995) describes it as a self-protective measure created by Black women that was a façade that gave the illusion that Black women were open about their sexuality when in fact they were keeping their sexual lives secret. That is, women who were "respectable" did not talk about sex or even give the appearance of sexual impropriety. Modesty and chastity were posed as the only options for "respectable"

women. Choosing any other option had ramifications not just for the individual woman but for the larger Black community.

Home was an area in which the public and private converge. Not only did the exterior of the home reflect one's morality in terms of its cleanliness and appearance, but the interior of a "respectable" woman's home conveyed significant messages about morality as well. Marriage was part of that message. Because marriage was so tightly connected to the ideal of True Womanhood and a way to refute claims of sexual immorality, Black people saw it as a vehicle for racial advancement. Marriage, while a public act, carried private connotations. Thus, for proponents of racial uplift ideology, marriage was a powerful weapon in the battle to defend Black women's honor and uplift the race. History professor Kevin Gaines (1996) says:

[A]bove all, marriage, as a sign of monogamous sexual purity, conferred status on Black men and women, especially women, reflecting the extent to which their reputation was under siege. Marriage, so closely associated with moral superiority, could seemingly neutralize all the misogynist insults hurled by the dominant culture. Thus a stable home and family life were often viewed as panaceas for the problems facing the race. (p. 78)

Social and Historical Context of the Founding of Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Education of Black Women

Although there is a large body of literature on the founding of HBCUs and the history of Black women's education from which to draw, the central aim of this section of the literature review is to illuminate the historical, cultural, and social contexts of higher education for African Americans as well as discuss how those contexts shaped institutional curricula, policies, and practices for Black women.

James Anderson (1988) details the education of Blacks, particularly in the South, immediately preceding the end of the Civil War and just after it ended. In the thirty years

prior to the emancipation of enslaved Black people, Southern legislators had made it illegal to teach enslaved children to read or write. However, by the time of Reconstruction a majority of states had created public school systems that began formally educating Black children.

Black people valued education from their earliest days of freedom and saw it as a vehicle for self-improvement as well as communal uplift. Accordingly, they pursued it relentlessly. Their attempts and their success at acquiring education for Black people were often contested by legislative efforts to maintain Black legal, political, and economic subordination. Federal and state governments both undermined their efforts to establish educational institutions and to establish those institutions outside White control. However, African Americans persisted and developed a system of education for themselves. In fact, Anderson (1988) shows that years before systems of education on the part of Northern missionaries and the Freedmen's Bureau were established, African Americans had already systematically developed and operated their own educational systems. Some sources indicate that schools were opened as early as 1833. And there is evidence that such schools, which operated unbeknownst to slaveholders, were not isolated occurrences.

Determined not to rely on Northern benefactors or teachers and critical of those who suggested that they had, African Americans reportedly sent their children to more expensive schools maintained by African Americans rather than send them to schools that were less expensive because they were headed by White people. In other instances, Blacks started Sabbath schools that were church-sponsored and primarily maintained and supported by them. Anderson notes that Sabbath schools were routinely left out of reports

by the Freedmen's Bureau but that their influence was far-reaching. In one year alone, Sabbath schools run by the African Methodist Episcopal Church (A.M.E.) had 40,000 students enrolled (Anderson, 1988). The significance of the establishment of educational systems for Black people is that it shows their passion not just for education but also for the freedom and mobility it offered.

There was little agreement about the benefits of education for African Americans. In fact, in addition to the roadblocks set up by federal and state governments, debates raged about whether Blacks had the intellectual capacity to handle the demands of education. Even within the Black community, leaders disagreed about whether to pursue industrial education or a classical liberal arts education. For Black women, the arguments were double-pronged; neither Blacks nor women were thought to be equipped to handle education. Early curricula, policies, and practices reflect the struggles and motivations of both Black and White people in educating Blacks.

The impact of racist depictions of Black people as biologically and thus intellectually inferior, lascivious, and morally bereft on the education of Black race cannot be exaggerated. Northern missionaries who went South to aid in the development of educational systems, went with preconceived ideas about who and what they would find when they got there. Believing Blacks to have been further impoverished from the effects of slavery, missionaries aimed to instill values and morals commensurate with New England sensibilities like purity, piety, domesticity, and submissiveness (Butchart, 1980; Perkins, 1983; Woodson, 1999).

Butchart (1980), in particular, chronicles how missionary societies like the American Missionary Association (AMA) used education as a means of controlling

Black people through inculcating them with White middle-class values. He recounts how material published by the American Tract Society extolled the virtues of piety, used evangelical jargon, and presented Christian themes such as temptation, prayer, temperance, and personal demeanor. Through illustrations, missionaries depicted Whites as pious and well-behaved, while the images of Blacks were demeaning. Their material was “geared toward a group of people they thought to be intellectually, morally, and culturally inferior (p. 143).” Although Butchart’s material is not taken from higher education textbooks, it nevertheless shows how the prevailing sentiments infiltrated and influenced curriculum for newly freed people.

A review of higher education literature reveals that curricula developed by aid societies tended to perpetuate the idea that Christian education was the antidote to the immoral and uncivilized disposition of Blacks. Christian education was also a necessary requirement for women to fulfill their God-given responsibilities as wives and mothers. With proper guidance and education, Black women could assume a role in society befitting their “natural place”, skill and temperament. The curricular emphasis for Black women on the necessity of Christian education to fulfill roles associated with womanhood mirrored that of White women. However, by the 1850s, Farnham (1994) contends, it was rare for people to still believe in the intellectual inferiority of women although beliefs about the intellectual inferiority of Blacks persisted. Therefore, with the exception of preparation for teaching careers, lessons on practical domestic skills were incorporated into the curriculum to prepare women for lives as domestics and housewives and were stressed more often than the liberal education option, particularly in the South (Guy-Sheftall, 1990; Noble, 1956; Woodson, 1999).

Black women, on the other hand, argued for an education that would equip them with skills to work outside the home. This did not mean, however, that they did not appreciate the courses that imparted knowledge about and reflected Christian values and ideals of womanhood. On the contrary, Beverly Guy-Sheftall (1990), in her exploration of attitudes about Black women during the Progressive Era shows how one graduate of Spelman College expressed her belief that Spelman offered the ideal education for Black women. She said:

Spelman Seminary stands for a trained hand in domestic science, for a cultured brain in liberal education, for a pure heart in biblical morality and for a consecrated life in the battle of life for the womanhood of the race...She [Spelman] has proved to the world that Negro womanhood when properly treated and educated will burst forth into gems of pure brilliancy unsurpassed by any other gems among any other race. (p. 142)

The Spelman curriculum reflected both the moral education thought necessary for Black people in general and the emphasis on racial uplift which Black women espoused. The policies and practices mirror the curricular emphasis.

Snapshots of early institutional life at HBCUs demonstrate the impact of racist and sexist ideology on the policies and practices (Anderson & Moss, 1999; Williams & Ashley, 2004; Gasman, 2007; Noble, 1956). Williams and Ashley (2004) claim that it was the directive of an abolitionist and attorney in Boston in 1918 who believed that former enslaved people were dirty and in need of New England values that influenced social codes at HBCUs for at least 50 years. They record bans on “dating, dancing, and stylish dressing” (Williams & Ashley, 2004, p. 109). For example, incorporating widely-held beliefs about the sexual immorality of Black people, Fisk University President McKenzie instituted policies that limited interaction between female and male students; required faculty or administrators to supervise student activities; instituted a curfew; and

established a strict dress code for students. Fisk was not alone in its implementation of such policies.

According to Anderson and Moss (1999),

Strict Victorian codes of behavior were the norm at most academic and industrial schools as well as Black colleges. Students were discouraged from all forms of unsupervised association between females and males. Dress, language, and manners that deviated from a 'genteel', 'Christian' norm were both unacceptable and grounds for dismissal. (p. 25)

Other scholars report that during the early years of HBCUs, that Black female students were sheltered by the administration in ways that Black male students were not. For example, Evans notes that it was typical in the late 1880s for Black female college students to be prohibited from leaving campus without a member of the administration escorting them. Men, however, were free to come and go as they wished (cited in Gasman, 2007).

Other policies reveal the extent to which student's lives at HBCUs were scrutinized. For instance, administrators at HBCUs were allowed or required to, in some cases, inspect students' rooms, clothing, and baggage. They were also permitted to discipline them if they did not meet the institution's standards (Evans, cited in Gasman 2007; Slowe, 1933). The policies and practices outlined here, which were established during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, bear a striking resemblance to contemporary policies and practices at HBCUs which illustrates the profundity of the impact of racist stereotypes. Contemporary policies and practices will be discussed more extensively in the next section.

Larger Black Cultural Context for HBCUs

The purpose of this section of the literature review is to situate HBCUs within the broader cultural context as it relates to Black sexuality in general and same-sex sexuality in particular. The broader cultural context includes other institutions in Black communities including families, churches, and other historically Black colleges and universities.

In the introduction to *Private Lives, Proper Relations*, Candice Jenkins (2007), an alumna of Spelman College tells the story of how she heard the rumor that the founders of Spelman were a lesbian couple. Despite having been made to memorize facts about Spelman's history as a rite of passage during her first year, Jenkins had not ever heard this particular "fact." The details of Spelman's founding otherwise conspicuously relayed to first-year students, she could not recall even a whisper of speculation about their relationship being a romantic or sexual one. She mentions another Spelman alum who says that at other women's colleges in the U.S. this information is not news nor is it hidden. Jenkins (2007) goes on to say that she "bristled" when she read that the other alum had articulated her thought that the Black community was behind the rest of the "civilized world" when it came to sexuality (p. 2). She then acknowledges that Spelman and the rest of the African American community have been silent about lesbianism and other "so-called deviant" intimate behavior. She describes that silence as an attempt "to gain access to the respectability of 'civilized' status by ignoring or suppressing any so-called deviance" (Jenkins, 2007, p. 3).

Earlier in this chapter, I outlined how White culture has constructed Black women's sexuality and how Black women have responded to those constructions. Jenkins' story is instructive because it underscores the continued impact of racist

constructions of Black women's sexuality on the behavior of Black people as well as on their psyche. The original racist depictions of Black sexuality are centuries old, but Jenkins' story itself and the response to it suggests contemporary significance for Black women. Several themes in Jenkins' story mirror other data about sexuality in the larger Black cultural context that will be illuminated.

One of the themes expressed in Jenkins' story about Spelman was silence about sexuality. Silence has often been a response from Black people about sexuality (Hammonds, 1994; Higginbotham, 1993; Hill Collins, 2005; Hine, 1995). Darlene Clark Hine (1995) referred to it as the "culture of dissemblance" (p.380), which Black women used to shield themselves from effects of racist depictions of their sexuality. Similar to the ways that Hine argues Black women used silence as a weapon to uplift the race, Jenkins says that silence is part of the "salvific wish." The "salvific wish" represents Black middle-class women's desire to lift the Black community through espousal of and adherence to bourgeois values.

Jenkins and Hine both argue that Black women offer their silence as a sacrifice for the sake of the Black community. Whereas the Black community is the beneficiary of their benevolence, Hine suggests that Black women are rewarded with the Black community's respect in return for their sacrifice. It is arguable whether the sacrifices are experienced equally among Black women or whether all Black women are rewarded equitably. One could argue that heterosexual women who marry men and conform to gender expectations in other ways earn respect for their silence. E. Frances White (2001) contends that although silence is a popular option for Black women, it has not countered

the racist narrative of Black women's sexual lives. Other scholars discuss silence and its effects in their work as well.

Jewelle Gomez (1999) and Horace Griffin (2006) discuss "passing" as a form of silence. In African American communities, passing has several connotations. The first describes the way African Americans who had light skin "passed" as White in order to escape the discrimination that those who were identifiably African American faced. Passing on the basis of race, for African Americans, has been a sensitive subject because many African Americans believe that passing reflects a rejection of one's color which lies at the core of self-acceptance. The second connotation describes the way that African Americans who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual "pass" as heterosexual persons. While there were people within the African American community who disparaged other African Americans for passing racially, passing on the basis of sexual orientation seems to be accepted and encouraged in some instances.

Gomez (1999), who is a lesbian, and Griffin (2006), who is gay, both argue that they believe that Black community would prefer that they pass. Gomez says that when she is in a community of Black people, the implicit message is that she should not be open about her sexual orientation. She also argues that Black heterosexuals' request that she pass is a "demand for self-hatred" (Gomez, 1999, p. 162). And, Griffin essentially claims that passing is an unwritten contract between Black heterosexual people and Black lesbian, gay, and bisexual people wherein heterosexual people dole out rewards for lesbian, gay, and bisexual people who agree to pass, particularly in the Black Church. Despite claims that there are rewards for passing, Griffin discusses the psychological

damage done to LGB people who pass and Gomez (1999) calls it “an obscene form of salvation” (p. 164). Passing is as much about silence as it is about invisibility.

One of the other themes about Black sexuality in Jenkins’ (2007) story and in several other works is the theme of invisibility (Hammonds, 1994; Hill Collins, 2005). Considering the ways that Black sexuality has been maligned, it is not surprising that invisibility is a conscious decision among some Blacks. In other instances, such as the ones mentioned by Gomez and Griffin, invisibility is seemingly less a choice and more a type of forced imprisonment. Hammonds (1994) notes that discussion and theorizing about Black women’s sexuality in general has been lacking in the academy and that discussions about Black lesbians (and I would add Black bisexual women) have done little to highlight their unique experiences or create possibilities for theorizing.

Tackling the issue of invisibility of LGBT families in research on Black family structures, Bennett and Battle (2001) maintain that Black LGBT people are seen in popular culture more and more but are not heard. They point to the Black community’s history of suppressing intragroup difference as a reason for increased visibility yet decreased participation of LGBT people in Black family life and research. Their contention is that internal conflicts due to difference in the Black community are squelched in support of the group’s overall advancement. Bennett and Battle’s claim that suppression of difference for the benefit of the group is reminiscent of racial uplift ideology of the nineteenth century and of Candice Jenkins’ “salvific wish.” Bennett and Battle’s claim about suppression of within-group difference is prominent in other literature about Black communities in general (Billingslea-Brown & Gonzalez De Allen, 2008; Cohen, 1999; Harris-Lacewell, 2004; Higginbotham, 1992; Hill Collins, 2005).

In a study conducted with faculty at historically Black Spelman College, researchers studying diversity efforts within higher education discerned “instances of suppression and sublimation of difference among students and faculty” (Billingslea-Brown & Gonzalez De Allen, 2008, p. 43). In their book chapter, they suggest that the term “sisterhood” has become a way to promote unity as it relates to race and gender. Bonnie Thornton Dill (1983) shares an analysis of the concept of sisterhood. She says that sisterhood is mostly understood as a feeling of attachment that is nurtured and has grown out of a shared experience of some aspect of oppression. Sisterhood formed on the basis of shared experience as Black women will not encompass the myriad oppressions Black women face. By subsuming all forms of difference under the single umbrella of “sisterhood,” it also effectively serves to deny the privilege of “sisterhood” to anyone deemed not sister-like. Sisterhood, when viewed from this perspective, can be revoked seemingly at will. Sisterhood in this sense suggests more than simply a familial connection; it suggests a political stance.

Signithia Fordham (1986) discusses the relationship between “fictive kinships” in Black communities that recognize all Black people as “sisters” and “brothers.” The kinship bond, she claims, is not solely based on skin color. The bond is also based on a mind-set of people who are considered “Black” and is used by Black people to define who is “family” and who is not. Membership in the family, Fordham argues, can be denied by the group if one’s “behavior, attitudes, and activities are perceived as being variance with those thought to be appropriate and group-specific, which are culturally patterned and serve to delineate “us” from “them” (p. 56). Within Black communities,

being part of the “family” and being removed from the “family” can have real consequences.

The historic Black church has filled a particular niche in the life of the Black “family” since slavery. As one of the few, if not the only, formal institutions in the Black community, Black churches were in unique positions as purveyors of Black “family” communal values. In addition to providing help with reading skills, Black churches provided moral education, social opportunities, and recreational opportunities. A major role the church has played, historically, is in the socialization of Black children. Black clergy and laity alike have provided moral and social education. In short, Black churches have provided a “family” for members of the Black community and have always been places where Black people could be affirmed and accepted according to Lincoln and Mamiya (1990). Although Lincoln and Mamiya’s book was published in 1990, results of a survey conducted in 2007 by the Pew Forum indicate that the Black church still wields considerable influence in the Black community.

Patricia Hill Collins (2000) and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham (1993) both attest to the role the Black church has played in offering a safe space for women to define themselves historically and contemporarily. Offering an opposing view of the Black church as a safe space, Higginbotham recounts the ways that, historically, the church has also called to public account those people who it perceived had violated the norms of “respectability” (1993). And, it has silently expected Black people who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual to “pass” as heterosexual or punished them for not being silent (Griffin, 2006). Horace Griffin details his own struggle with being accepted as a gay man in the Black church as well as the psychological damage done to Black Christian males whom

he interviewed in 1989. He says that within Black families and the Black church, there are multiple reasons to hide one's sexual orientation.

Anthony Pinn (2002), an African American religious professor, says that identifying a standard of Black Christian sexual identity has been challenging because of the ways that Black sexuality has been demeaned and stereotyped in dominant culture but also because of the seeming inability of the Black church to honor its traditions while celebrating Black bodies and the sexualities they inhabit. In a statement that harkens back to nineteenth century's standards, Pinn observes that the Black church, in trying to rid Black bodies of their lustful desires, expects certain dress standards of its members, expects "respectable" presentation, and restricts activities it deems inappropriate. Acknowledging the history of racist constructions of Black sexuality, Pinn seems dumbfounded by the church's failure to address sexuality head-on. Instead of frank conversation about sex, Pinn says, the church offers discussions about masculinity and femininity.

Kelly Brown Douglas (1999) reasons that it is precisely because of the racist constructions of Black sexuality as well as patriarchy that Black people respond as they do about sexuality. She argues that because slaveholders used the Bible to justify the institution of slavery, Black people do not always approach study of the biblical text with an openness that other racial groups might. They make interpretations on their own of what the Bible says in light of their experience as Black people in a world that demeans Blackness. This means that Black people who are Christian tend to hold onto biblical texts that they believe are compatible with their struggle for freedom and equality and that they give little credence to what they perceive to be White interpretations of the

Bible. Brown Douglas says that this approach to the Bible means that White interpretations of the Bible that affirm same-sex behavior and relationships carry little sway among many in Black communities.

The phrase “love the sinner, hate the sin” is a commonly-used one in Black churches and Pinn (2002, p.108) suggests that use of the phrase invokes a “comfortable silence” for those who use it. The other frequent alternative to silence is condemnation not acceptance. In either case, Pinn says, the implicit mandate that Black lesbian, gay, and bisexual people publicly deny a part of themselves is still in place. Pinn even goes so far as to say that the Black church must address sexuality if it intends to “maintain credibility” (p. 115). To be sure, the Black church is an institution which sends conflicting messages- it gives as much as it withholds; it supports as much as it opposes as the literature illustrates. Cornel West argues that the Black church has evaded a full engagement with sexuality but also acknowledges that the difficulty is not the church’s alone (as cited in Pinn, 2002, p. 105).

Similar to the Black church- and in some cases in keeping with their religious origins- historically Black colleges and universities have not fully engaged sexuality either. Historically Black colleges and universities, mirroring the larger Black community, have tended to use the same strategies of condemnation, silence, and invisibility in addressing sexuality among its students. In a study that examined facets of institutional life of twelve HBCUs, researchers found evidence of more traditional and conservative policies regarding sexuality (Harper & Gasman, 2008). At one institution, the authors reported written policies that defined acceptable sexual behavior. According to this particular institution, unacceptable sexual behavior included sexual intercourse,

rape, adultery, sodomy, and heterosexual acts. This policy reflects a conservative stance toward sexuality in general but also evidences a bias toward sex between members of the same sex by equating it with illegal and socially unacceptable acts. In several of the other documents that researchers reviewed, same-sex was listed as unacceptable at other institutions as well. Some of the other relevant findings were that students perceived that administrators and faculty were resistant to same-sex relationships which they felt mirrored the resistance of the larger Black community; that lesbian, gay, and bisexual students were marginalized by being excluded from predominantly heterosexual spaces; and that HBCUs attempted to restrict the sexual activity of its presumed heterosexual students by implementing restrictive visitation policies.

Restrictions were not limited to sexual activity. Researchers found that both public and private HBCUs had dress codes that restricted certain types of attire. Male students reported being thrown out of class for wearing hats or baggy jeans and women were reprimanded if they were thought to be inappropriately dressed. At some institutions, administrators, staff, and faculty are expected to monitor students' compliance with the dress code and report violations to the proper authorities. The dress restrictions are regarded by the implementing institutions as necessary for students' educational and moral development.

Summary

Situating historically Black colleges and universities within the larger Black cultural context has highlighted the various strategies Black people have employed in responding to racist characterizations of them as sexually immoral, lustful, and loose all with varying consequences or ramifications. In the next chapter, I present written artifacts

from the institutional website and historical data from literature on the larger Black culture.

CHAPTER 4

DATA: ARTIFACTS AND HISTORICAL DATA

Introduction

This chapter presents the themes that I analyzed from the historical data and the artifacts from the institutional website. The web address is intentionally being excluded as another measure to protect the anonymity of the research participants. The data presented in this chapter is comprised of data that is solely about women. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section presents the data and the second section presents a summary of the data using a dominant narrative. A dominant narrative is a way of constructing reality, through storytelling, that helps to maintain the dominance of groups over others (Stanley, 2007).

Data Analysis

Five themes and four subthemes emerged from the data at Stacker College. These include: 1) Defining Black Womanhood (Resisting Domination, Respectability, and Relationship to Men); 2) Politics and Necessity of Family (Othermothers) ; 3) This is a Safe Space; 4) Difference is Valued; and 5) (Pre) Dominant Christian Values and Beliefs.

Defining Black Womanhood

Defining Black Womanhood refers to the ways that Black womanhood is characterized. The subthemes, Resisting Domination, Respectability, and Relationship to Men are discussed further.

Resisting domination refers not only to an acknowledgement that Black women are oppressed because of their race, gender, and sexuality but also to the issuance of a call to resist being controlled by the oppression. As previously noted, Black womanhood has

been depicted as the antithesis of “True Womanhood.” That is, Black women have been stereotyped as sexually immoral, impure, and masculine. Black women have commonly reacted to this form of oppression by resisting others’ definitions. Patricia Hill Collins (2000) says, “Self-definition speaks to the power dynamics involved in rejecting externally defined, controlling images of Black womanhood” (p. 114). The artifacts from Stacker College provide examples of Black women’s resistance to stereotypes. In one speech, the president communicated to students who are women that they should not limit themselves because of their gender. She said:

We challenge you to define your space, not to allow the notion of “knowing your place,” of living within boundaries, define you. Indeed, I dare you to transcend the boundaries of any limitation, to color outside the lines if you will, to give yourself full permission to explore this campus, our scholarship, activities, and opportunities.

In another speech, she addressed the intersection of race and gender when she implored Black women not to allow themselves to be limited by other people’s perceptions of them. She told them, “Women, especially women of African descent, have too frequently had to accept limitations. We have been shackled by stereotypes that no longer serve us. To be sure, we have seen stereotypes shatter in our time.” Then she mentioned other women who have “shattered” stereotypes about women and about what women could do. She noted:

Hillary Clinton shattered stereotypes by earning almost enough electoral votes to be nominated president. She stood strong and firm against the commentators who regularly exhibited their ignorance by saying that she reminded them of the kindergarten teacher, the nagging wife asking them to pick up their socks, the annoying ex-wife. Why place a presidential candidate in such gendered terms? It was an attempt to restrict her territory.

In that same speech, she touched on the impact of stereotypes on Black women’s sexuality. She admonished the students:

And we can't reinforce the stereotypes. I cringe when I turn on a television and watch music videos with the half-clad sisters gyrating across the screen. These are images that are being broadcast all over the world, influencing others to think of us stuck inside the territory of video girl. But as India Arie says, "I'm not the girl in the video."

When she referenced stereotypes based on race and gender, she communicated that Black women should rise above other people's perceptions. When she referenced stereotypes based on sexuality, she communicated that Black women should not bolster other people's perceptions. The president's admonition reflects the concerns of the larger Black community documented earlier with respect to resisting sexual stereotypes in general and in the media specifically (Higginbotham, 1993; Hine, 1988; Jenkins; 2007)

Respectability is characterized by the belief that Black women who are "respectable" dress and behave in certain ways. The institution is committed to assisting its students who are women with enhancing their appearance and developing their character as necessary parts of the educational experience. Accordingly, the College has instituted a dress code that forbids female students from wearing items deemed inappropriate. Those items deemed inappropriate include articles of clothing that reveal too much of a woman's skin such as her stomach or her legs and thighs. Articles of clothing that reveal a woman's undergarments are also forbidden as well as pants that sag and are loose around the waist. The dress code stipulates that a woman not wear a blouse that is tight or cut low. Further, many formal events on campus require a woman to wear dresses and skirts or skirt suits. For events that provide academic credit, credit will only be granted for women wearing dresses and skirts. Stacker's dress code is commensurate not only with other policies at historically Black colleges (Harper & Gasman, 2008; Patton & Simmons, 2008) which enforce conventional rules about dress, but also with the

ideology of “respectability” (Gaines, 1996; Higginbotham, 1993; Perkins, 1983; and Wolcott, 2001) discussed in Chapter 3. chapter three.

Not only do HBCUs have policies that enforce “respectable” attire, they have a history of enacting policies that outline behaviors that are appropriate as well. Gasman (2007) notes that the policies enacted by HBCUs in their early years tended to reflect a need to shelter female students and control their behavior. Stacker continues in that tradition. For instance, students are allowed to have guests spend the night only with prior approval from an administrator such as the Director of Campus Life. Also, first-year students must sign out when they leave campus and sign in when they come back to campus. They can be disciplined for not signing in and out. First-year students also have a curfew by which they must abide and are not allowed to spend the night in upperclass students’ rooms. While upperclass students do not have a curfew, their residence hall closes every night at midnight.

Relationship to Men conveys an assumption of heterosexuality. The College has a policy on male guests in residence halls for women. Male guests are allowed in public reception areas and in lobbies of residence halls only. The policy further informs female that they will be in violation of College policy for inviting or escorting a male guest to a woman’s room, to the bathroom, or to any area that is not a public space in the residence hall.

Politics and Necessity of Family

Politics and Necessity of Family refers to the beliefs that the community at Stacker College is a family, that Stacker is part of the larger Black community, and that Stacker College is also part of a larger global family. In one campus address, the

President emphasizes that the community is a family-one that is intertwined, interconnected and interdependent upon one another for their success. On another occasion, she communicated that Stacker is a family by sharing an instance where she, along with some other leaders examined a group of sayings and their meaning. She shared the meaning with the Stacker community when she said, “That which is important to me is important to you. That which uplifts me also uplifts you. That which strengthens me also strengthens you. In acknowledging and appreciating you I also appreciate myself.”

She uses familial language at other times as well. She shared an anecdote in a speech linked to the website that detailed the arrest of a Sudanese woman who had violated her country’s Islamic law that forbade her from wearing pants. In the speech, the president argued that the law should be overturned and that Stacker should stand in solidarity with the woman who had been arrested. Stacker, as a family, should stand with the woman because they are connected. She said:

There is a sister listening, wondering what Lubna Hussein’s life has to do with hers. A sister who, perhaps, rejects the connection. Yet we are the world, we have the opportunity to allow our space to stretch or shrink depending on the choices we make and the things that we choose, or choose not, to embrace.

The president’s referral to Stacker and larger communities as “family” is not uncommon among African Americans. African Americans have commonly developed and maintained familial ties that existed outside the bounds of traditional notions or understandings of family (Dill, 1983; Fordham, 1986; Hill Collins, 2000). African American women have often referred to other African American children as their children despite not being biologically related to them. Patricia Hill Collins notes one reason for this when she states, “The use of family language in referring to members of

the African American community also illustrates the socially responsible individualism of Black women's community work" (2002, p. 190). Community "othermothers" are an extension of the notion of family in African American communities. "Othermothers" in education have been lauded for the types of relationships they build with students, for building a unique sense of community, and in providing support for African American students particularly at historically Black colleges and universities (Hill Collins, 2000; Hirt, Amelink, McFeeters, & Strayhorn, 2008).

This is a Safe Space

This is a safe space denotes the belief that the Stacker College community is a safe place for the female students who attend. This belief is transmitted through presidential speeches when the president refers to Stacker as an "oasis" She communicates that Stacker is a place where students can flourish. The idea of "safe spaces" has resonance at Stacker and in the larger African American community. "Safe spaces", in Black communities, are places designed to help women define and thus empower themselves. Hill Collins (2000) argues that these spaces, which have often been educational institutions, have been essential in providing Black women a refuge from the assaults of the dominant ideologies of race, gender, and sexuality. Evans and Boyte (1986) describe them this way:

Free spaces are the environments in which people are able to learn a new self-respect, a deeper and more assertive group identity, public skills, and values of cooperation and civic virtue. Put simply, free spaces are settings between private lives and large-scale institutions where ordinary citizens can act with dignity, independence, and vision. (p. 17)

Difference is Valued

Difference is valued refers to the idea that difference is a value of the College.

This is communicated by the administration in a variety of ways. For instance, the student handbook explicitly articulates that it values and respects every member of the Stacker community. The Office of Student Activities lists “embracing diversity” among its values. Similarly, the institution’s mission statement indicates that the school welcomes people from different backgrounds who will enhance the educational experience and environment. Further, the president asserts that difference is an institutional value when she says:

We are strengthened as a community when everyone is committed to excellence, to doing her best. You have to embrace the lovely differences in each of us, differences in intellectual leanings, differences in religion, looks, dress, and upbringing; we have to make our differences strengths.

(Pre) Dominant Christian Values and Beliefs

(Pre) Dominant Christian Values and Beliefs describes the College’s adherence to and espousal of dominant Christian values and beliefs. It also describes the predominance of Christian values and beliefs at Stacker. Examples include the president of Stacker opening several college addresses with Christian scriptures, inserting Christian scriptures into portions of speeches, or making references to Christian symbols. On one occasion in which she was asked to provide inspiration, she remarked:

When I am personally seeking inspiration, I go to the ancestors, to folk like W.E.B. DuBois or Ida B. Wells, to the African proverbs that never fail to strengthen. Or I go to the Bible, to the Proverbs or the Psalms, where inspiration flows... And sometimes I just look to nature, to the proverbial sparrow, to remind myself that if God would protect a sparrow, a lily in the field, or an ant, then surely Fathermother God is protecting and inspiring me.

Also, the institution further highlights its adherence to the predominance of Christian values and beliefs by requiring students to commit to and sign an honor code

that recognizes Stacker College's affiliation with a Christian denomination as a condition of attendance at Stacker.

One other indication of Stacker's adherence to dominant Christian values is the residence life male guest policy previously mentioned. In it, students are forbidden from having male guests in their rooms or any other rooms that are not in public areas. This policy implies that women and men would visit one another in private spaces for sexual purposes. The implication reflects a dominant view of Christianity that assumes heterosexuality is the natural outlet for sexual expression. Anthony Pinn (2002) references such a view when he argues that the Black Church "fosters a world in which only heterosexual contact is appropriate" (p. 111).

Dominant Narrative

Stacker College, a microcosm of the larger Black community recognizes that Black women have been oppressed because of their race, gender, and sexuality. Thus, resistance to external definitions of self is crucial to the development of a positive identity. The dominant ideology on race and gender must be resisted by rising above other's perceptions. Because of the virulent nature of stereotypes about Black women's sexuality, however, those stereotypes must not be strengthened.

To that end, the College takes its responsibility seriously to teach Black women the proper way to present themselves. Black women should be dressed and behave in ways that are "respectable." "Respectable" attire, which helps refute racist and sexist stereotypes, is feminine, mostly form-fitting but not tight or low, and comprised of skirts and dresses. Behavior that falls within the guidelines of acceptable behavior is outlined as well.

The policies reflect a desire to show students what appropriate behavior is as well as to protect them. For instance, students are allowed to have overnight guests only with the permission of an administrator. Younger students need to sign in and out of when leaving campus and failure to do so will result in some form of disciplinary action. Also, younger students have a curfew by which they must abide. They have not matured yet, so they need extra attention and protection from the larger world. And, upper class students' dorms close at midnight. The administrators seemingly view themselves as guardians of Black women and Black women's virtue at historically Black colleges and universities.

Stacker College assumes that women at Stacker date men. The guest policy prohibits visitation of men in private spaces.

The administration conveys the message that Stacker College is a family, is part of the larger Black community, and is part of a larger global community. Students know that Stacker is a family because the president refers to them as a family in her speeches and communicates the importance of family in protecting each other. One way that families protect each other is through people known as "othermothers." "Othermothers" build relationships with students that are supportive and provide a way of advancing Black culture.

Stacker is a safe place for Black women. It offers a respite from the oppression in the larger racist and sexist dominant culture. It is a place where Black women grow and develop into well-rounded mature adults. The idea of the "safe space" originated, for Black women, in Black women's circles and Stacker is continuing that tradition. The message that Stacker is a safe place for Black women is communicated in presidential speeches and institutional literature.

Difference is a value of Stacker College. Like the idea of a “safe space”, the institutional website and presidential speeches give evidence of Stacker’s commitment to a diverse student body. Differences are not only acknowledged; they are appreciated.

Stacker is a Christian community that recognizes a variety of religious faiths. As a community, they adhere to Christian values and beliefs because they offer inspiration and guidance for moral development. Through weekly Bible studies, presidential speeches, cultural events, and housing policies students are shown the benefits of Christianity and the proper codes of conduct.

CHAPTER 5

DATA: VOICES AND CLIMATE INDEX

Introduction

In this chapter, I present the themes that emerged from the data analysis of the focus group interview and from the campus climate index. The chapter is similar to chapter four in that it is divided into two sections. The first section presents the themes that emerged from the data analysis and the second section comprises a summary using the genre of counter-narrative. A counter-narrative is a narrative that challenges the “natural” order of the universe. Counter narratives offer critiques of the dominant version of reality and thus provide a view into the lived experiences of marginalized populations necessary to deconstruct dominant worldviews (Stanley, 2007). Demographic information is presented first. Seven students participated in the focus group and completed the index. All seven students identified as African American or Black; one of them identified as bisexual and the remaining six as lesbian; and all seven were “out” on campus to some extent. All seven had attended the institution at least two years.² All participants are identified through pseudonyms.

Data Analysis

There were five themes and five subthemes that emerged from the data analysis. These include: 1) (Re) Defining Black Womanhood (Resisting Domination, Respectability, and Relationship to Women); 2) Politics and Ambivalence of Family (Stepsisters, Othermothers); 3) (Is) This is a Safe Space?; 4) (Some) Difference is Valued; and 5) Challenges to (Pre)Dominant Christian Values and Beliefs.

² Although I collected demographic information related to the length of time each participant had attended the institution, it is presented here in aggregate to maintain confidentiality and anonymity.

(Re)Defining Black Womanhood

(Re) Defining Black Womanhood refers to the ways that students at Stacker College conceptualize Black womanhood. The subthemes Respectability, Resisting Domination, and Relationship to Black Women are discussed further.

Respectability connotes a challenge to the definition of respectable dress and behavior. Participants reported receiving messages from a variety of sources about how Black women should present themselves and how they should behave. When I asked what it meant to be a Stacker Doll³, there was a collective hesitation to answer the question. When they did respond to the question-Elizabeth remarked about a former administrator at Stacker, “She made me feel like being a Stacker Doll wasn’t the whole like hat and gloves lady, sit perfect. It was just a woman, period.” She went on, “When I first met her, she hugged every single person that came in that door, like kids, dads, moms, grandmamas, cousins, everybody that came in the door. She just was a Doll, and that’s what made me wanna come here when I first saw her.”

Michelle and Tonya commented that they believe being a Stacker Doll is about carrying oneself well. Commenting further on Stacker Dolls, Kelly stated:

They consider the Stacker ideal to be a lady that’s upfront, classy, always up to par, not gay, I guess you could say. Because gay girls are open about it, and we’re blunt, and we’re respectful at times, but then at other times we don’t care. We’ll do us no matter what. Stacker ideals – I don’t know too many of them here. I think that’s only Tatiana.

While they receive messages that equate womanhood with wearing skirts and dresses almost exclusively, they hold disparate beliefs. Michelle said:

And my parents always stress to me, “You’re not gonna get a job because you’re gay.” That’s not the case – so what if I’m gay – so what if I prefer to wear pants and a shirt. The world is evolving and it’s not about how you look – no, in some

³ Stacker Doll is a pseudonym used to describe a group of women at Stacker College

cases, it is about how you look. But it's about what you can do, what is in your head, what you can bring to the table. It's not about who...so what if I'm a lesbian, so what if I choose to date women, so? That doesn't matter. But people in this community, especially this school, don't see that.

Similarly, Briana vented her frustration about Stacker's expectations for dress at campus events. As she put it:

My thing is, Stacker tells you what to wear all the time. That's the only time I have a problem with them... for Honors you gotta wear White skirts, Black heels. I haven't worn heels since Easter when I was five. They say it's harder to get jobs the way we dress. I get jobs fine. I get offered things – very nicely, the way I'm dressed, and probably my personality is what's important – not that I'm wearing slacks and a button down and not heels and a dress.

Not only did the participants hold different definitions of respectable dress and behavior, they also actively resisted conforming to Stacker's expectations.

Resisting domination describes the acknowledgement that Black women are oppressed because of their race, gender, sexuality, and gender expression as well as the ways that the students at Stacker resist the oppression. Resistance took on different forms. Three of the participants stated that they do not attend certain required cultural events because of Stacker's expectations that they wear dresses and skirts. Rather than conform, they do not attend. Tonya responded differently. She asserted:

I feel like it's discriminatory. How you gonna tell me to the point where like my mother doesn't tell me to do these things? How do you feel like it's your place to tell me? I'm a grown woman and I buy my clothes. If you're gonna buy me a skirt, fine, I *might* consider wearing it!

Briana, one of the participants who does not attend any of the cultural events because of the requirements to wear dresses and skirts, said, "I'm not gonna consider it. I'm gonna give it back to you." Kelly suggested that a particular administrator would try to bribe students with money or a gift card to wear a dress to which Ebony replied, "I'd be like, no. I'd take this \$50 gift card and go get another pair of slacks, a shirt and a tie. I

don't understand why I'm being forced – that's why I don't go to those events.”

Elizabeth's resistance took yet another form. She recounted how she got dressed in a dress shirt and bowtie to wear to a required campus event because the administration wanted “the studs to stop wearing ties and looking so manly.”

The participants described the ways in which they were subjected to stereotypes. Students most commonly reported refuting the stereotypes or feeling the need to. When I asked participants to describe the experience of being lesbian or bisexual at Stacker Briana said, “A lot of girls think that you want them because you're gay.” The rest of the participants verbalized agreement with Briana's contention. She went on, “I'm a really friendly person and I hug everybody and stuff. They're like, ‘Do you like her?’ No.” Marie added, “I don't want every girl I see.” Kelly said, “It's like just how other people have standards, so do we.” Tonya noted students' discomfort when they find out that their roommate or someone in their dorm is gay, “It's like [they] can't take a shower – I'm uncomfortable. Girl, ain't nobody looking at you.”

Tonya also recounted an incident that occurred at an organizational fair for student organizations. “When we had our organizational fair, people were coming over and asking what it was. I explained it and people were like, ‘Oh, oh okay.’ You know. They're uncomfortable with it but it's not...” Ebony completed her sentence, “It's not like they're gonna turn you out.” Michelle agreed, “Right. That's the connotation.” Tonya thinks that's how student at Stacker feel. Michelle said, “All these girls come in and they're like, ‘Oh, no, she's a lesbian, she's gonna try to turn me out.’ No, that's not the case.” Tonya also shared that she had spoken with prospective students of Stacker who are heterosexual who were afraid to attend because they wondered if the lesbian and

bisexual students would “be aggressive and listen to them when they say no [if approached].” She felt the need to tell the students that, “I’ve never experienced somebody forcing themselves on me.”

Relationship to Women refers to the acknowledgement that there are a variety of types of relationships among Black women at Stacker. Not only did participants report having to resist stereotypes from other Black women at Stacker, they also reported a range of interactions and relationships with other female students. They contended that, while it is a common stereotype that lesbian and bisexual women are sexual predators, they have frequently been approached by other women at Stacker College for sexual relationships who do not necessarily identify as lesbian or bisexual. They referred to some instances of this as “gay until graduation.”⁴ Michelle said, “Yes, in all actuality, the girls that are questioning or curious are the ones that approach us. I’ve been in three situations like that. Situations where the girl comes to me, and it’s like, ‘Oh but I’m not gay.’” Elizabeth described her experience:

It’s my fault too because I fold and indulge and then at the end of the day, I wouldn’t do it again though. But they come and they’re like, “I don’t want you to think that I want you or anything like that.” Or they’re like, “I don’t have no problem with it. I don’t have a problem with gay people” and that’s how it started, and then it just escalated, and I was just like, “Are you gay?” And she was like, “I mean I’ve dated, I’ve liked, I’ve met” – “Okay, so you’re gay.”

They also shared other experiences. I quote at length:

Elizabeth: It’s like everybody comes out. I always get the straight roommates who automatically wanna come out.

Kelly: Talk about it.

Group Response: Laughter

Elizabeth: I seem to get all the straight roommates – they suddenly wanna come out.

⁴ Gay until graduation is a phrase used here to describe women who engage in sexual relationships with other women for convenience or because they are experimenting but who would not necessarily claim a lesbian or bisexual identity.

Kelly: Preach, Elizabeth!

Elizabeth: But it feels like...it's either they think you want them, or they feel that they can tell you their whole life story about every girl they've ever messed with. Or they wanna try stuff.

Group Response: Laughter

Ebony: "Can you teach me? You're my roommate, can you teach me?"

Briana: I hate when they ask, "So, tell me how you do it?"

Ebony: I hate that question.

Politics and Ambivalence of Family

Politics and Ambivalence of Family conveys a belief that the students at Stacker College are part of the larger Black community. It also describes the contradictions inherent within the Black family. The two subthemes Stepchildren and Othermothers are explained further.

The term "*stepsisters*" depicts one type of relationship between students at Stacker and the larger Black community. In addition to being stereotyped as previously mentioned, two of the participants also discussed the stigma associated with being lesbian. They discussed the stigma in relationship to Stacker and the larger Black community. Tonya and Michelle said that they live by the "don't ask, don't tell policy." Tonya explained that she's never told her father that she is a lesbian because he has not ever asked. Michelle agreed. Tonya elaborated by sharing an incident that happened during a visit from her mother and grandmother. I quote at length. She shared:

I said I talk to girls and my mother just gave me a dirty look and my nana hit the fan. She just went crazy. And the context it was said in was kind of jokingly. My mother told me she was going on a date, and I said, "With who? A girl?" And my mother was like "No, I don't talk to girls," and we were all laughing. And I was like, "Well, I do." And my mother cut her eyes and my nana is just cussing me out and everything. And then I kinda...I don't wanna say I took it back, but I said, "Well, darn, this is really a shock to me. If I really was then you really would hurt my feelings. I would not tell you." And she said, "Well, I'm glad because I wouldn't wanna know."

Michelle concurred:

Yeah, a lot of parents are like that. If you ask me, I'm not gonna lie to you. I'm not ashamed of it. But I'm also not going to go home with a big rainbow painted to my back that says I'm a lesbian.

She went on to describe her family dynamic and the challenges of being at home:

I went through a situation this summer with some family members who didn't...it's like they knew, but they didn't know. I didn't hide it, but I didn't talk about it. I wasn't myself. When I'm here, I am myself. I am a lesbian. I'm out and I'm proud. I don't care. If you ask me, I'm gonna tell you. If you don't like it, that's your business – it's not your life to live. But when I'm at home it's a different story because it's just – it's all right. You might have religious family members or whatever the case may be, it's just not okay to be out and proud at home. It's not like you're going back into a closet, but it's kind of like you're hiding.

Tonya agreed and said, “Your shell kind of closes a little bit.” They both felt as if they closed off parts of themselves when they go home because they are afraid of the loss of family. Tonya added, “Your family tells you, ‘I'm gonna love you regardless,’ but you tell them something they don't wanna hear and they quick, fast, and in a hurry.” Michelle completed her sentence by saying, “Do the reversal on you and say ‘I don't wanna hear it.’”

Othermothers represents the dynamic between African American administrators and students at Stacker College. Participants described the ways that administrators relate to students. Tonya perceived that administrators are protective of first year students and that they “...try to, I guess, play the super-mommy role in trying to keep them in and keep them from everything that's around them almost.” She cited a couple of examples. She recounted that an administrator said in a meeting that, “I'm gonna do everything in

my power to keep these these lesbian and bisexual people out of my dorms because I don't want them turning out my girls.”

And, on another occasion an administrator who thought Tonya was lesbian or bisexual found out that she and a first year student were visiting each other frequently and late one particular night. She said the administrator started giving her strange looks because she thought she was involved with the younger student and told her that she needed to go back to her own dorm. Then, the administrator said to the first year student, “What’s your relationship with Tonya? Why is she always over here in your room? I heard she was bisexual. You should watch out for her.” Tonya believed that the administrator overstepped her bounds. The issue for her was not just that she did not understand why the administrator needed to know why she was visiting the other student. She continued, “The fact that staff is going to students having these conversations, what the hell? For real? Are you serious?”

Briana and Kelly shared Tonya’s sentiments. Kelly told a similar story. She described a situation where a group of female students were having a conflict in one of the dorms. They went to the residence hall director to discuss it. After discussing the conflict, the residence hall director asked one of the women to step out of the room and asked Kelly and her then-girlfriend to stay in the room. She asked, “Are you guys dating?” Kelly said she was shocked by the question. The residence hall director continued, “You know you can get kicked out of the school if you have sex inside the dorms? And then she asked, ‘Are you guys having sex inside the dorms?’”

(Is) This is a Safe Space?

(Is) This is a Safe Space? reflects the psychological climate (Hurtado, et al., 1999) for lesbian and bisexual students who attend Stacker College. The data points to a complex view of the psychological safety for the study participants. For example, in the campus climate index in response to the question about whether faculty are knowledgeable about and receptive to lesbian and bisexual student's issues in class, six of the seven respondents answered, "Yes." However, in response to the question about whether students perceive that faculty treat students the same who are lesbian, bisexual, or perceived to be as students who are or are perceived to be heterosexual most students (four of the seven) answered, "No." Two people answered 'some' and one person answered 'yes'. One student shared a specific example about classroom experience. Elizabeth described how she writes about lesbian politics and lesbian relationships in one of her classes and her instructor's response. She said, "He's so open. He won't comment on it...he won't be like, well, you know, 'How did you feel?' but he'll let me express it." For Elizabeth, her instructor's willingness to allow her to share her opinions in class is evidence of a level of psychological safety.

I asked students whether they felt safe living in the residence halls as a lesbian or bisexual person and the responses were mixed. Three of the respondents indicated that they feel safe. One of the respondents who felt safe remarked, "There are a lot [of lesbian and bisexual students] in her hall and we're open and it's like a family." Three other respondents did not feel safe living in the residence halls. They did not feel safe because of "bigotry" and "people are still ignorant at times." One person commented that her reason for not feeling safe was, "I'm not liked at this school no matter what my grades or g.p. a. look like."

The interview provided more evidence of the complexities. When I inquired about the messages that students at Stacker get about what it means to be a Black woman, a couple of them needed clarification. Elizabeth asked, “A regular Black woman or a lesbian Black woman?” Ebony echoed Elizabeth’s confusion, “Just a Black woman period?” After I responded that I was referring to Black women, Ebony’s response revealed a distinction. She said, “Oh, they uplift Black women here. They’re very supportive. They’re on high around here. We’re an oasis for Black women.” When I questioned them further about whether Stacker feels like an oasis, Ebony said that it does at times. Elizabeth’s response was:

When we’re together outside of the school. Like here, just chilling here in the dorms, it’s not an oasis. But when we have to go against somebody else, we come together and it makes sense – it seems like it’s okay.

One of the more frequent subjects that the women in the study mentioned that is related to the notion of a “safe space” was the fear associated with being open about sexual orientation. They referred to people as being “gay behind closed doors” or “undercover”. They distinguished these women from women who are experimenting or are involved with women sexually for convenience. These women, they claimed, are lesbian or bisexual and are afraid to admit it sometimes even to themselves. Michelle shared her perspective that several of the past College queens have been gay but “behind closed doors.” Kelly agreed. Elizabeth added that her past roommates have hidden their sexual orientation as well. All of them seemed to think it was because of fear. Michelle said, “They’re scared to be...I don’t know. It’s like a psychological thing...you don’t wanna look in the mirror and be like ‘I’m gay.’ They’re scared to be who they really are.”

Kelly attributed the fear of disclosure to “not being the Stacker ideal.” Marie attributed it to “being stigmatized and stereotyped.”

The fear of being open about sexual orientation was evident among the participants as well despite the fact that all of them indicated on the demographic sheet that they were “out” and several of them are active in the student organization for LGBT students. For instance, Tonya said, “I’m almost positive they don’t know about me. It’s not that I fear them finding out, but I’m here on a scholarship...” She shared that an administrator had told her that, “We do expect you to do certain things, to look a certain way, to present yourself in a certain light.” The administrator’s comment left Tonya feeling afraid. She elaborated, “It’s almost like I’m walking on thin ice. I don’t mind people knowing, but is my scholarship in jeopardy if you think that I’m not representing Stacker because I’m not straight or heterosexual?”

(Some) Difference is Valued

(Some) Difference is Valued describes the prejudice lesbian and bisexual students experience because of their sexual orientation and gender expression. Data from the campus climate index revealed that all seven students reported both a lack of regular campus activities to increase awareness of the experiences and concerns of lesbian and bisexual students and the absence of regularly held social events for lesbian and bisexual students. The interview uncovered a myriad of ways in which students report being treated differently. A large number of incidents that students referenced reflected a bias because of gender expression. Examples included the LGBT student organization not being allowed to have a “masculine lesbian” as a student organization representative in the school’s ceremony that crowns a campus queen, administrators remarking that they

would not allow “any more studs to come in here”, and administrators referring to them as “brothers”. Briana shared this incident, “Miss Thompson says, ‘Yeah I know how you brothers are...’. And I said, ‘I’m not a brother.’ She said, ‘I’m sorry.’ ‘I’m like yeah. My mom raised a girl and a boy.’” Elizabeth added that she overheard the director of residence life say publicly, in reference to a student, “That girl or boy or whatever she consider[s] herself to be...”

Tonya, who presents a more “feminine” gender expression and thus was not perceived as lesbian or bisexual was privy to conversations among administrators. She overheard administrators say that the alums wanted the admissions office to “better select” the students because there are a lot of gay students at Stacker.

Other incidents reveal the extent of the differential treatment. Michelle recounted:

The director of student activities made a[n] out lesbian president of a club give up her position to a straight girl. They made her give up her position...not even in advance, at the last minute, when it was supposed to be announced that she was taking over her title. They gave it to someone else.

In response to hearing this Elizabeth said, “They screw over lesbians here, let me tell you.” Ebony replied, “They really do.”

Campus safety data results were mixed in the climate index. Four respondents marked that the campus does not provide a clear and visible procedure for reporting bias incidents and hate crimes involving sexuality while three indicated that they did not know. When asked about whether Stacker provides training for public safety officers on sexual orientation, the results were the same. During the interview, three of the participants described being harassed by campus police. Michelle relayed an incident that involved three lesbian friends who were visiting. The friends, whom she described as “masculine with shaved heads”, were forced to walk around campus rather than through

it and told to leave. Ebony reported being stopped by campus security repeatedly and being asked where she was going or to show her ID. Elizabeth shared that a campus security guard came over to her car and asked, “Are y’all Dolls?” We said, “Yes.” Then, the woman asked, “Who are the boys in the back seat?”

The students also discussed the disparities with which the guest policies are applied. For example, female students at Stacker who are heterosexual who had admitted to administrators that they brought males to their rooms to have sex with them were allowed to remain at Stacker without punishment. Kelly, however, was told by a residence hall director that she could be kicked out for having sex with a female student in the dorm.

The differential treatment extended to campus events as well. When I asked the participants how they thought Stacker deals with lesbianism and bisexuality, as a group they responded, “They don’t.” They went on to share an incident that occurred when the LGBT student organization invited a lesbian to speak on campus. The event was held in the chapel. Ebony noted that a lot of people didn’t come to that program and Tonya said that a lot of people walked out. Ebony elaborated, “It didn’t even open up in prayer. Every other [name of event] opens in prayer.” Michelle added:

We had no prayer, nothing. It was terrible. Any other [name of event], they’ll let you...they will wait until whoever the speaker is has concluded their speech. Our speaker – they cut her off and they told them at 12:00 you gotta wrap it up.

Challenges to (Pre) Dominant Christian Values and Beliefs

Challenges to (Pre)Dominant Christian Values and Beliefs depicts the College’s adherence to and espousal of dominant Christian values and beliefs as well as the

predominance of Christian values and beliefs at Stacker. It also describes the way Stacker students challenge the dominant discourse about Christianity.

The incident described above reflects not only the difference in how sexual orientation is treated but also the institution's adherence to the dominant Christian belief that same-sex behavior is incompatible with Christianity. Tonya explained:

Because I'm in the student affairs offices a lot, I hear what they're talking about. And it's like...I mean they [the administrators] were going ham on that [name of event]. All of them...they were just like, "In the chapel?" And, "How could they talk about this in the chapel? And why are they talking about this period?" I mean, they don't want it.

The participants in the study acknowledged the influence of dominant Christianity on this incident and in general at Stacker. They noted the prevalence of Christian practices and values. For instance, Tonya observed that every [name of event] opens and closes with prayer and that every formal convocation open and closes in prayer. Ebony noted that Christian scriptures are read at campus events. Tonya said, "Most organizations have a chaplain. I've never heard of that before. Every school has an SGA, but how many have a chaplain?"

While the students noted the prevalence of dominant Christian values and beliefs at Stacker, they also challenged those and noted others who do as well. For instance, when I asked if they thought that the Christian influence on campus impacted how people think about lesbian and bisexual people, Michelle answered, "Yes, because they think if you're gay, you're going straight to hell. I don't understand where in the Bible it says it. Point out to me where it says that because I'm a lesbian, I should burn in hell." Tonya said, "It's okay for you to be an adulterer or murderer or whatever you are..." Elizabeth felt similarly. The participants who identified as Christian challenged the dominant

perception in Christianity that same-sex relationships are incompatible with the tenets of the faith in other ways, too.

Tonya, who is Baptist, asserted, “I love my Jesus”. And Michelle added, “Me and my Jesus, we talk every day.” Briana’s remarks showed her beliefs as well. She commented, “My family goes to church and all that, and they accept me. You’re saying it as holy as that...God doesn’t judge, so why are you guys judging?” Kelly, whose parents are “the most religious people you will meet”, agreed and said that she tried to tell her parents not to judge as well. Briana went on, “Why judge? I tell it to a lot of people that ask me why I’m gay. If God doesn’t judge me, why do you judge me?” Ebony agreed, “Exactly. Why are you straight? That’s like asking me why I’m Black – because I am.”

One administrator the participants noted who did not appear to adhere to or espouse dominant Christian beliefs about same-sex relationships was the chaplain. Despite the fact that there were a range of answers in response to the questions in the campus climate index about religious life that indicated a mix of perceptions about the chaplain’s services offered to lesbian and bisexual students, the participants viewed the chaplain positively. For instance, three of the respondents indicated that the Dean of Religious Life or Chaplain does hold worship services that are welcoming to or affirming of lesbian and bisexual students, three of them said, “No,” and one person answered, “I don’t know.” Five participants also reported that the Dean of Religious Life or Chaplain does not publicly speak out against homophobia and biphobia while two of them “did not know.” In the interview, when I asked the students if they would feel comfortable going to the chaplain to talk about being lesbian or bisexual they said yes. Briana commented, “Yeah, she’s wonderful. I love her.” And Michelle replied, “Yeah, she doesn’t

necessarily discriminate. She'll come and talk to you and ask you how your life is and if you need her to pray for you. She's real cool..."

Counter-Narrative

The students who participated in this study experience a Stacker College that is different from the one described in the college catalogue, in speeches, or on the website. Their experience, as expressed in the interview and in the campus climate index is characterized in the themes presented in the first section of this chapter and synthesized here. The students report having different and broader definitions of womanhood; needing to resist stereotypes about their sexual orientation; various types of relationships among Black women; Black families giving contradictory messages about belonging; not being certain about their psychological safety; being treated differently; and holding disparate views about Christianity.

Students at Stacker College's definitions of what it means to be a Black woman are broader than the dominant culture's definition or the view presented by the College. The women I interviewed did not want to be confined to what they perceived to be traditional definitions of womanhood. They think that Stacker, as an institution, is trapped in traditions that are outdated and is therefore unable or unwilling to evolve. For example, Stacker's expectation that a woman's professional attire be primarily confined to dresses and skirts did little to inspire them to reach for Stacker's heights of ideal womanhood. Instead, they contend that a woman in a dress shirt, tie, and dress pants is as much a woman as a woman in a dress and heels. In addition to challenging what "respectable" attire is, the students believe that the way a woman carries herself and how she develops her personality are more important than wearing "feminine" attire.

They resisted domination in their behavior as well. Students resisted the administration's attempts to have them conform to hegemonic expectations of dress in a variety of ways. Examples include refusing to attend events and wearing what they wanted to wear to campus events despite being told to dress a certain way.

The Black women in this study acknowledged feeling the need to resist stereotypes. The stereotypes they resist, at Stacker however, are about their sexual orientation. They recognized, as Black women who are lesbian and bisexual, that they face multiple and intersecting oppressions but the stereotypes they most often refuted or felt the need to refute were because of their sexual orientation.

The data suggests that same-sex relationships are common among women at Stacker. Those relationships take a variety of forms, and in so doing challenge the presumption of heterosexuality at Stacker and by extension the larger Black community. Some students have long-term dating relationships at Stacker while others experiment one time or are "gay until graduation."

Lesbian and bisexual students who are women at Stacker consider themselves part of the larger Black community and yet are treated like "stepchildren" in the family. Their experiences illustrate the tensions in African American communities with regard to sexual orientation. They understand the idea of "family" differently. In the campus community, they are treated with suspicion by administrators who feel compelled to protect younger students from them. The students did not report stories of "othermothers" whom they viewed as supportive or caring. They perceived "othermothers" as intrusive and inappropriate.

The women I interviewed expressed a mix of contradictory answers with regard to their psychological safety. On one hand, they felt like they could be out on campus yet they also expressed fear of being out because of what they thought they could lose as a result of being out. They also reported instances of actual loss that other students who were out had experienced which impacted their sense of Stacker as a “safe space.” Women who were perceived as lesbian or bisexual because of their less feminine gender presentation reported feeling less safe than those who presented a more feminine gender expression which is often associated with heterosexuality. In addition, the students, generally, did not trust the administration which could also impact their sense of psychological safety.

The data from the interview and climate index suggest that people of different sexual orientations and gender expression are not valued members of the Stacker community. They are not offered the same resources, services, or activities as heterosexual students nor are they treated equally. Lesbian and bisexual students who are women who do not conform to traditional gender expectations report being harassed by campus police and administrators alike.

Students at Stacker College reported the predominance of Christian values and beliefs on campus in events and student organizations. Not only did they note the predominance of Christian values and beliefs, but also the dominant view of Christianity that same-sex relationships are incompatible with Christianity. While the students noted it, they disagreed with it citing their personal faith as examples. They also noted the chaplain as someone who challenged the dominant Christian view of lesbian and bisexual people.

In the next chapter, I present my analyses of the dominant and counter-narratives of culture as well my analysis of culture and climate at Stacker College.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of lesbian and bisexual female students at historically Black colleges and universities and the relationship between the culture and the students' perceptions of the campus climate. A mixed method approach was used to explore three questions. First, I explored what can be characterized as the culture at HBCUs. Second, I explored the lesbian and bisexual female student perception of the campus climate for lesbian and bisexual female students at HBCUs. Third, I examined how, if at all, the HBCU culture impacts the campus climate. In this chapter, I summarize and discuss the answers to these three research questions and discuss implications for practice and future research.

Research Questions

Characterization of Culture of HBCUs

Five themes and five subthemes emerged from the historical data and the artifacts from the institutional website that characterize the historical and institutional view of the culture of historically Black colleges and universities. They are 1) Defining Black womanhood (Resisting Domination, Respectability, and Relationship to Black Men); 2) Politics and Necessity of Family (Othermothers, Sisterhood); 3) This is a Safe Space; 4) Difference is Valued; and 5) (Pre) Dominant Christian Values and Beliefs.

The historical data and institutional artifacts reveal that one key feature of the culture at HBCUs is defining Black womanhood. Given that Black women have historically been oppressed because of their race, gender, and sexuality, defining themselves for themselves has been an important communal value. Part of defining

oneself, at least for Black women, is resisting others' definitions of them and resisting the restrictions placed on them by others. Thus, when the president of Stacker warns students not to confine themselves or allow themselves to be limited by other people's perceptions, she is drawing from a past replete with women who, during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, resisted domination by using a tactic of a "politics of respectability" (Higginbotham, 1993).

Not only is she standing in line with other Black women who resisted other people's definitions of them, she is also demonstrating that a defining feature of Black womanhood is presenting a respectable self to the world. This resistance to the stereotyping of Black women, however, means conforming to traditional gender norms dictated by proponents of nineteenth century's standards of "respectability." Those gender norms require that women wear "feminine" clothing that is conservative and not too revealing; that women comply with rules that allow their "femininity" to be protected such as curfews and restricting male visitors to certain parts of the dorm; that women refrain from talking about sexuality, and that women date the sex which "corresponds" to their biological sex. Data from other historically Black colleges reflects this same tendency (Harper & Gasman, 2008; Patton & Simmons, 2008).

Another key component of Black culture is the belief in the connectedness of African Americans to one another at Stacker, to the larger African American community, and to the global Black family. This facet of culture is exemplified in the speeches given by the president who exhorts Stacker students to recognize their connectedness and stand in solidarity with other Black people who are oppressed. Usage of terms like "sister" and "family" connote the belief in a familial connection as well as a belief in a shared

experience of oppression as Black people that have been documented by scholars which necessitates the creation of an extended “family”. (Dill, 1983; Fordham, 1986; Hill Collins, 2000; Hirt, Strayhorn, Amelink, & Bennett, 2006; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). An additional and important member in the larger Black family network is the “othermother.” Othermothers” have been noted as being a source of support to students at HBCUs because of the care and attention they provide to African American students (Hirt et al., 2008).

Third, the theme, This is a Safe Space, reflects a belief that Stacker offers a respite for Black women from an often hostile racist world. “Safe spaces” like HBCUs and Black churches have afforded Black women space where they could seek refuge as well as claim space to define themselves (Evans & Boyte, 1986; Higginbotham, 1993; Hill Collins, 2000). It assumes that all Black women experience the safety it purports to offer.

The fourth component of Black culture, noted in the data, is the belief that difference is valued. It is a stated value of Stacker College in its student handbook and in the institution’s mission statement. The president also states that differences are a value in speeches.

Fifth –and one of the more influential aspects of Black culture-is the adherence to and espousal of dominant Christian values and beliefs. Christianity also tends to be a dominant faith practice among those African Americans who practice a religion. Through presidential speeches, the institution’s honor code, and the guest policy which limits male visitation to common areas of the dorms the dominance of Christianity is present. There is one chaplain on campus who is Christian, and there are no chaplains of other religious

faiths on campus. The Black Church, one of the major outlets for Christian expression and transmission of values in Black communities, promotes a heteronormative view of sexuality and relationships.

Variations on these themes and subthemes emerged from the focus group interview and presented a counter perspective to the culture embraced by historically Black colleges and universities. They are: 1) (Re) Defining Black Womanhood (Resisting Stereotypes, Respectability, and Relationship to Women); 2) Politics and Ambivalence of Family (Stepsisters, Othermothers); 3) (Is) This is a Safe Space?; 4) (Some) Difference is Valued; and 5) Challenges to (Pre)Dominant Christian Values and Beliefs.

The first aspect of this culture, from the perspective of the students at Stacker, is based on a redefining of Black womanhood. Part of Black culture involves resisting oppression, particularly for women (Hill Collins, 2000). In order to resist oppression based on their experience as lesbian and bisexual women, these women refuted the stereotypes prevalent at their HBCU that they were sexual predators. While other Black women have tended to resist others' definitions of them in terms of conventional stereotypes that demeaned their race or gender (Hill Collins, 2000), these women resisted being dominated by other people's stereotypes of them based on their sexual orientation. Their resistance reflected an understanding or acknowledgement that resistance is part and parcel of what it means to be a Black woman.

The other facet of culture represented under the broader theme of Redefining Black Womanhood is a belief that the larger Black culture, including Stacker College, is adhering to an outdated standard of womanhood. To these students, Black women represent themselves "respectably" in a wider variety of ways than is considered

acceptable by their HBCU and the larger Black culture. For example, the students I interviewed believed that a woman who wears “men’s” clothing is as respectable as a woman who wears clothing marketed toward women. “Respectability,” to them is not simply a matter of wearing “feminine” attire. Being respectable connotes carrying oneself well regardless of what one is wearing.

These students challenged the adherence to traditional gender norms in one other crucial way as well. They challenged the assumption that to be a woman is implicitly to be heterosexual. By engaging in relationships outside the expectations for women in general and Black women in particular, they challenged fundamental constructions of womanhood. And, importantly, this group of students expressed less interest in conforming to traditional gender norms in order to be accepted by the dominant society.

Second, it was clear that belonging to the larger Black family is important to the women I interviewed and they note that Black women are uplifted at Stacker. However, they also note that one of the unwritten rules in the Black family at Stacker and in the larger Black family is the expectation that a lesbian or bisexual person not talk about their sexual orientation and that no one in the “family” will ask. There is an unspoken agreement. Not only is silence an expectation, but invisibility is as well. They also note that even when “family” members are aware of their sexual orientation, there is an implicit understanding that they do not want to “know”. That is, they do not want to have their suspicions confirmed. In other words, the Black “family” endorses passing for heterosexual among its lesbian and bisexual “family” members. The acceptance given by the Black “family” on the basis of their racial identity is conditional when sexual orientation is considered.

Othermothers help perpetuate the sense expressed by these lesbian and bisexual female students of being “stepsisters” in the Black family, possibly because of a belief that they play a role in uplifting the race (Hirt et al., 2008). Othermothers are protective as illustrated by the student’s descriptions of them in chapter five, yet they are also perceived as being intrusive by students at Stacker partly because they enforce restrictive policies regarding sexuality and sexual behavior and apply them inconsistently.

This aspect of culture reflects the inclusion of Black women into the larger Black “family”, yet also exposes the contradictions lesbian and bisexual women face as members of the “family” who are not fully embraced because of their sexuality.

A third aspect of Black culture, embedded in the theme (Is) This a Safe Space?, is the belief that safety from racism does not imply safety from other forms of oppression. While institutions like Stacker and Black churches provide safety from racism, they do not, in the view of these students, necessarily provide refuge from heterosexism and gender oppression. This aspect of Black culture, from the student’s perspective, does not assume that a safe space created because of one’s racial identity provides an umbrella of safety for all of one’s identities.

Fourth, difference is an espoused value in Black culture. Data from the interview suggests that the students’ lived experience, as lesbian and bisexual women, does not bear that out. Students’ responses indicate that some but not all differences among Black people are valued. Students who deviate from the expected gender norms either because of their gender expression or because of their sexual orientation experience the gap between what is espoused and what actually happens at Stacker. There is a disconnect for students when they are told that difference is a value yet they were denied the opportunity

to have a student who was more “masculine” as their student organization representative in the school’s coronation.

A fifth aspect of Black culture gleaned from the interview data is that Christian values and beliefs dominate on campus and that students perceive that a dominant view of Christianity negatively impacts how they are treated. They noted that people have expressed to them that they believe they are going to hell based on a traditional dominant interpretation of scripture. While students recognize that that is the dominant interpretation, they, as Christians themselves challenged that view and noted that other Christians on campus do as well.

The counter-narrative presented by the students confirms the account of the culture at Stacker College as typical of an HBCU and of themes in Black culture that play out at Stacker College.

Perceptions of Campus Climate

The lesbian and bisexual female students’ perception of the campus climate for lesbian and bisexual female students at HBCUs is grouped into three categories. Those categories reflect three measurements of campus climate. They are 1) psychological climate/indicators; 2) behavioral climate/indicators; and 3) institutional resources.

In terms of the psychological climate, students reported being afraid to openly express their sexual orientation. The reasons given were 1) because of the stigma associated with being lesbian or bisexual; 2) because they felt that being a lesbian or bisexual person did not measure up to the Stacker ideal; or 3) because they were afraid to lose a scholarship due to not conforming to the Stacker standards of womanhood. Study

participants were all “out” and yet expressed concerns about people on campus finding out about their sexuality.

These findings illustrate the seeming conflicting understandings Stacker students have expressed about their safety. While all climate studies to date that examine the experiences of LGBT students have found that students are afraid to be “out”, my findings differ from those studies that have found that fear of being out is often related to fear of physical violence (D’Augelli, 1989, 1992; Rankin, 2003, 2005; Waldo, 1998). It does, however, correlate with other studies conducted at an HBCU that found that students shared concerns about how their lack of gender conformity impacted the quality of their collegiate experience (Patton & Simmons, 2008) and with the study that found that women tended to be less physically violent but more emotionally violent (Evans & Broido, 2002).

Some of the students reported not feeling safe in the residence hall while one person reported that because her hall had lots of other lesbian and bisexual students in it felt like a family. Their responses also indicated that they did not think they were wanted at Stacker despite the fact that they performed well academically. Students also reported feeling that Black women, as a group, are affirmed at Stacker and in the larger Black community but that they are not as lesbian or bisexual people.

Additionally, students, on occasion, self-sanctioned because of the institution’s requirements to look a certain way. That is, sometimes students would opt not to participate in or attend a campus event or run for a student office because they did not meet the College’s expectations for clothing that was “feminine”. And, one student reported feeling like she “wasn’t herself” when she was home among her Black family

partly due to her family's religious beliefs. She did, however, note that Stacker was a place where she could be open about her sexual orientation.

A couple of the responses indicated both a psychological and behavioral component of climate. For instance, students perceive that the administration at Stacker College does not deal openly with the presence of lesbian and bisexual students. Their response could indicate a general sense that administrators are not dealing with them or it may indicate that there have been incidences that resulted in their feeling that way. Similarly, students reported feeling as though "they really screw lesbians over here." This response may suggest a feeling or may reveal incidences or both.

Students at Stacker College did not report any physical violence as previously noted in campus climate literature (Rankin, 2003, 2005), but they did report other behavioral indicators of a negative climate toward lesbian and bisexual women. Those include the incident, described above, in which a student who was "out" was forced by administrators to resign from a leadership position reportedly because being an "out" lesbian did not match the image Stacker is trying to project. Similar instances have been reported at other HBCUs (Harper & Gasman, 2008). Students have been prohibited from participating in other ways as well. The student group for LGBT students wanted to have a "masculine" lesbian as their representative in the school-wide coronation ceremony and their request was denied.

Participants in the study described how they got the impression that one administrator, in particular, would offer them bribes if they would purchase clothing that is "feminine" to wear to campus events. Students believed that Stacker wanted them to dress in more traditionally "feminine" attire to maintain a public image with parents and

alums of the College. In addition to these experiences, there was an account of one of the participants being threatened to be expelled from school for having sex with a woman in the residence hall while her heterosexual counterpart who had admitted to having had sex with a man did not receive the same threat. Students also shared that women who are not gender conforming are frequently verbally harassed by administrators and campus police. This differs from other findings that the majority of harassment came from students (Rankin, 2005). The other example students relayed was that alums would like there to be fewer “studs” at Stacker and are pressuring admissions officers to adjust their selection and recruitment process.

The third category includes institutional resources. In the climate index, students noted that the faculty is knowledgeable about and receptive to lesbian and bisexual student’s issues in class but that there are no courses with specific content that would display a substantive interest in their experience. Administrative support did not offer much more. Several of the key administrators discussed were responsible for the threat of expulsion, the refusal to allow a “masculine” lesbian to participate in the coronation ceremony, and being upset about a lesbian guest speaker giving a talk in the chapel. The chaplain was an administrator who students perceived to be a resource despite the fact that she does not publicly denounce homophobia and biphobia.

The response to questions about training and services offered was negative. Participants did not know of any training or services offered on behalf of lesbian and bisexual women at Stacker College. If there is a campus-wide procedure for reporting bias incidents related to sexual orientation, study participants did not know about its existence. Neither residence life staff nor campus police staff, are trained on issues that

specifically address the needs of lesbian and bisexual students. Mental health staff and medical staff do not receive any training that addresses the particular health needs of lesbian and bisexual students. And, as was noted in chapter one, there is no professional staff person employed at Stacker to meet the needs of this population.

Impact of Culture on Climate

I developed a three-part model to understand and explain how the culture at historically Black colleges and universities impacts perceptions of the campus climate for lesbian and bisexual female students. The first part I refer to as *strivings toward respectability*. *Strivings toward respectability* comprises a set of regulations prescribed by African American women for African American women. Deriving from the “politics of respectability” employed by African American women in the nineteenth century as a technique for uplifting the race and surviving racist depictions of them as biologically inferior, sexually immoral, and outside the bounds of womanhood, *strivings toward respectability* represents a contemporary endeavor by African American women to earn the respect of White people.

Black women who advocate *strivings toward respectability* seek to regulate the public and private gendered and sexual behavior of other Black women. They seek to regulate their behavior in the following four ways. They expect Black women to dress in attire that conveys “femininity” yet potentially confers respect. They expect Black women to practice Christianized heterosexism. That is, they are expected to practice heterosexuality that views heterosexuality as the only proper way to be sexually oriented because it is considered sinful if sexual desire is expressed through another outlet. They require them to maintain the facade of practicing heterosexuality even if one does not

actually practice it. And, they discourage them from speaking publicly about or openly acknowledging any sexual activity because to do so would eliminate the possibility of being considered “respectable” and might validate racist stereotypes of them as sexually immoral.

The second element of the model is a *system of rewards and punishments*. I theorize that there are rewards for people who conform to these regulations and there are punishments for those who do not conform to them. Rewards are a way of positively reinforcing desired behavior that also serves to confer racial acceptance by the regulator. Punishments, however, are designed to decrease the likelihood of subsequent violations while making a racial distinction between the violator and the regulator. In the same way that middle-class Black women in the nineteenth century tried to disprove theories of racial inferiority by distancing themselves from working-class Black women to show [White] people a different class of Black people, heterosexual women punish non-conformists who they believe bolster Whites’ claims of sexual immorality.

The rewards and punishments, which are meted out by fellow African Americans, police the behavior of African Americans in general and women specifically in this study. Every African American, by virtue of their race, has been implicitly authorized by earlier and successive generations to police dress and behavior. People who police dress and behavior include members of one’s own family and members of the larger Black “family” including “sisters,” “othermothers,” and Black ministers. Some of the rewards include students being allowed to keep leadership positions, acceptance by the community, potentially receiving gift cards, and being affirmed in one’s racial identity. Some of the punishments for students include being shunned by “family” members, not

being able to participate in school events, and being forced to resign from leadership positions.

The third piece of the model is contingent upon the first two parts being enacted. The third piece is the contention that *strivings for respectability* and the *system of rewards and punishments*, when combined, *create a climate* in which places that are touted as being places of safety for African American women because of their racial identity actually serve to oppress Black women based on their sexual identity and gender expression. In this climate, which is fostered at HBCUs, students are afraid of being open about their sexual orientation; they are harassed for expressing gender in a manner that is consistent with who they are yet inconsistent with the culture; they feel like they are not wanted at the institution; restrict themselves from participating in activities; face threats of expulsion; and have little to no social or institutional support.

Implications for Future Research

This study found that the culture of historically Black colleges and universities has a significant and unique impact on the campus climate for lesbian and bisexual female students. Accordingly, there are several research implications.

1. Heretofore, studies that examined campus climate for LGBT students were primarily conducted with men and on predominantly White institutions. This study expands the understanding of how the climate is shaped. The findings in this study differ from previously published research on campus climate in several ways. First, it highlights the distinctive ways that the historical and social contexts of HBCUs shape the culture of the institution. Traditional campus climate studies have not focused as intently on the context in which educational institutions are situated and how that influences the climate

for that particular population. Campus climate studies conducted at religiously-affiliated institutions would probably come closest to uncovering a particular ethos that would impact campus climate for lesbian and bisexual students. Expanding research into the potential relationship between the culture and climate of other HBCUs is essential. Further research on the components of Black culture and the potential relationship between culture and climate for LGBT students is needed to explore whether my model would bear out at other HBCUs. Also, what would account for differences in lesbian and bisexual female student's experience at another HBCU that is rooted in the same larger social and historical context as Stacker and yet has a climate that is more affirming? These are questions future research could address.

2. Second, previously published research on campus climate has noted the frequency with which LGBT people are harassed, who is harassing them, and the type of physical violence they are experiencing. This study also found that students are being harassed and noted who the perpetrator of the harassment is but there were no instances of physical violence which suggests that perhaps there are differences in the way women experience homophobia and biphobia. This difference would potentially impact their perception of the climate. This finding also has significance for future research.

3. A third implication of this study is that it offers insights into how other social identities such as sexual orientation impact an African American student's experience of an HBCU. Students who attend historically Black colleges and universities have, historically, been found to have greater satisfaction with their college experience, have greater support socially and from faculty, develop a more positive self-image, have stronger racial pride, and be better adjusted psychosocially (Allen et al., 1991; Berger &

Milem, 2000; Fleming, 1984; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Terenzini et al., 1997). This study shows that while HBCUs have done a wonderful job educating some African American students, there is room for improvement as it relates to creating an educational environment in which all African American students can thrive. New research could explore the experiences of students from varying socioeconomic backgrounds or students who have disabilities at HBCUs. Relatedly, this study captured some of the experience of one bisexual woman. While this is important given the scant literature on Black bisexual women, more research needs to be done to explore how this particular population experiences HBCUs.

4. Lastly, the findings from this research can inform future research on institutional change efforts. Organizational theorists disagree about whether organizational culture can change (Hatch, 1997; Martin, 2002) or about whether culture changes as easily as climate. Historically Black colleges and universities are part of a larger educational culture that is generally more accepting of its lesbian and bisexual students but they co-exist are within a larger racial culture that is not welcoming for lesbian and bisexual students. How do these realities shape efforts to create change in policy for sexual minorities at HBCUs? How do HBCUs keep up with their peer institutions? Should they keep up with their peer institutions? These findings suggest new research into the impact of culture on organizational change at HBCUs.

Implications for Future Practice

The findings in this study have import for student affairs practitioners as well.

1. This study found that the culture of historically Black colleges and universities has a distinct impact on the climate for lesbian and bisexual female students. Practitioners

working with lesbian and bisexual female students at other HBCUs will need to find a way to offer programs and services that acknowledges cultural influences of HBCUs but is not hampered by them. For example, a student affairs practitioner organizing the institution's orientation schedule could consciously create activities that did not have specific dress requirements or develop programs that offer the option to wear something nontraditional and promote that as a new cultural norm.

2. The second implication for practitioners is that there are new opportunities to tailor their counseling techniques or intervention strategies due to the possibility that there may be differences in how lesbian and bisexual women experience homophobia and biphobia. This finding could have import for how residence life staff trains their student staff as well.

3. Finally, the implications for practitioners are similar to the last in that they offer practitioners new insights about how students with multiple social identities experience an institutional setting. Practitioners should aim to provide programming and offer services that recognize a multiplicity of identities and do not appear to require students to choose one identity over another. Staff in residence life, campus activities, or college judicial boards could partner to develop activities that meet the needs of students. Or given that literature found that faculty tended to be less involved in creating a welcoming environment, perhaps student affairs staff could partner with them to develop co-curricular programming. Additionally, since the students seemed more open to challenging norms at Stacker College maybe student affairs staff could develop a peer educator program to do programming on sexuality and gender.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. First, I only collected data at one institution. That limited the amount of data I gathered. Had I collected data at several institutions, I might have yielded different data or more variance among the data. For instance, other lesbian and bisexual female students at HBCUs may have different experiences of the climate at their institution. Second, the sample size was small which limited the variance within it. Similarly, there was one student who identified as bisexual and there was little in the questions that could have illuminated her experience more. Accordingly, the data may not be generalizable to other institutions examining student experiences. Third, I limited my interviews to students' voices. Perhaps if I had interviewed administrators or faculty, I would have gotten different results.

APPENDIX A

CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS E-MAIL

Date

Dear Participant:

My name is Donique McIntosh and I am a doctoral candidate in the Social Justice Education Program, in the School of Education, at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. I am writing to invite you to participate in my dissertation research, which examines the experiences of lesbian and bisexual students at historically Black colleges and universities.

As part of my research, I plan to conduct group interviews. Accordingly, I am seeking participants for the group interviews that I plan to conduct this fall at an HBCU. I am looking for participants who 1) identify as African American/Black; 2) identify as lesbian or bisexual women; 3) are attending a historically Black college or university; and 4) have attended the institution at least two years prior to participating in the study. As a participant, you will be asked to be part of a 2-hour-long group interview with other participants from your institution. The interview will be audio-taped and transcribed. I will provide written assurance protecting your identity and maintaining confidentiality.

If you are interested in participating in the study, I can be reached at this email address. Also, I would appreciate you forwarding this e-mail to others whom you think may be interested in participating and who meet the criteria for the study.

Thank you for your attention to this request. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Donique R. McIntosh
Doctoral Candidate
University of Massachusetts Amherst

APPENDIX B

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: _____

Email Address: _____

Name of College You Attend: _____

1. How do you identify racially? (select one)

____ African American/Black

____ Biracial or Multiracial

____ Other Racial Category

2. How do you identify in terms of your sexual orientation? (select one)

____ Lesbian

____ Bisexual

____ Same-gender loving

____ Gay

____ Other

3. How many years have you attended this college? (select one)

____ Less than a year

____ 1-1 ½ years

____ 2- 2 ½ years

____ 3 or more years

4. Are you out (acknowledged and disclosed your sexual orientation) on campus?

____ Yes

____ No

APPENDIX C

HBCU CAMPUS CLIMATE INDEX

Please read each question and type Yes, No, or I Don't Know in the space provided

Support and Institutional Commitment

1. Does your campus have an office or a student resource center (i.e. an institutionally-funded space specifically for students who are lesbian or bisexual)? _____

If no, does your campus have another office or resource center that deals actively with and comprises lesbian and bisexual issues and concerns (e.g. Women's Center)? _____

2. Does your campus have a Safe Zone, Safe Space and, or Ally program (i.e. an ongoing network of visible people on campus who identify openly as allies/advocates for LGBT people and concerns)? _____

3. Do senior administrators (e.g. president, provost, dean of students) actively use the words "sexual orientation" and/ or "lesbian, gay, bisexual" when discussing community, multicultural and/or diversity issues on campus?

Academic Life

1. Does your campus offer courses that specifically focus on lesbian and bisexual women in various academic departments and programs?

2. Does your campus integrate issues that lesbian and bisexual women face into existing courses when appropriate? _____

3. Are faculty knowledgeable about and receptive to lesbian and bisexual women's issues in class? _____

4. Does faculty treat students who are openly lesbian or bisexual or perceived to be lesbian or bisexual the same as students who are or are perceived to be heterosexual? _____

Student Life

1. Does your campus regularly offer activities and events to increase awareness of the experiences and concerns of lesbians and bisexual women?

2. Does your campus regularly hold social events specifically for lesbian and bisexual students? _____

3. Does your campus offer lesbian or bisexual students a way to be matched with a LGBT-friendly roommate in applying for campus housing?

4. Are the residence life professional and student staff supportive of lesbian and bisexual students? _____

5. Does your campus provide on-going training on LGBT issues and concerns for residence life professional and student staff? _____

6. Do you feel safe, as a lesbian or bisexual student, living in residence halls? If not, why?

Campus Safety

1. Does your campus have a clear and visible procedure for reporting bias incidents and hate crimes that involve issues of sexuality? _____

2. Does your campus provide training for public safety officers on sexual orientation issues and concerns? _____

Counseling and Health

1. Does your campus offer support groups for students in the process of coming out and for other sexual orientation issues/concerns?

2. Does your campus offer individual counseling for students that is sensitive to and supportive of sexual orientation issues/concerns?

3. Does your campus provide training for health services staff to increase their sensitivity to the special health care needs of lesbian and bisexual students? _____

Religious Life

1. Does your Dean of Religious Life/Chaplain hold worship services that are welcoming to or affirming of lesbian and bisexual students?

2. Does your Dean of Religious Life/Chaplain offer religious counsel that is supportive of or affirming to lesbian and bisexual students?

3. Does your Dean of Religious Life/Chaplain publicly speak out against homophobia and/or biphobia? _____

APPENDIX D

FOCUS GROUP QUESTION GUIDE

1. Opening question (something quick)

Tell me your name and one thing you enjoy doing.

2. Introductory questions (introduces general topic of discussion)

What made you decide to come to Stacker College?

3. Transition questions (link between introductory questions and key questions)

What are the messages you get here about what it means to be a Black woman?

Where do you get those messages?

4. Key questions (2-5 that drive the study)

What does it mean to be a “Stacker Doll”?

What’s it like being a Black lesbian or bisexual person here at Stacker College?

How do you think your school deals with lesbianism and bisexuality?

Your school was founded by Christian religious leaders. How much of an influence do you think Christianity has had and currently has on campus life?

5. Ending questions (designed to bring closure)

Considering all that we’ve talked about today, if a prospective student who was lesbian or bisexual wanted five minutes of your time to talk about coming here to school, what would you say to them?

If you could have a face-to-face conversation with President (insert name), what would you recommend that Stacker College do to make this a welcoming place for lesbian and bisexual students?

Have we missed anything?

APPENDIX E

FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM

My name is Donique McIntosh and I am a doctoral candidate in the Social Justice Education Program, in the School of Education, at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. I am conducting this research study as part of the requirements for my doctoral dissertation. The purpose of my research project is to explore and understand the experiences of lesbian and bisexual students at historically Black colleges and universities. I appreciate your interest in participating in this project. I have listed the consent protocols below.

I agree to participate in this qualitative research study based on the following understanding:

1. I will be part of a 2-hour group interview with other students from my institution during the fall semester, (year). During the group interview, I will be answering questions that focus on my experiences as a lesbian or bisexual student at a historically Black college or university.

2. The researcher will use data from the group interview to fulfill the requirements for her doctoral dissertation and may also use it in conference presentations and/or manuscripts prepared for professional publication. For any other purposes, the researcher is required to contact me to obtain permission.

3. The potential benefits of participating in the study include my having the opportunity to discuss a topic of interest of me and gain insights into my own and others' experiences.

4. The potential risks of participating in the study include 1) discomfort from discussing a topic that may be uncomfortable for me; 2) discomfort from disclosing my identity to other participants; or 3) disclosure of my identity by other group interview participants.

5. The interview will be audio-taped using a digital recorder and transcribed. My name will not be used, nor will I be identified personally in any way. I will be given a pseudonym to protect my identity. The memory card used to record the group interview will be kept in a secure location in the researcher's home. The transcript of the interview will be destroyed after the data has been compiled.

6. The researcher will take precautions to protect my identity and privacy; however, it is possible that other participants may repeat comments outside of the group interview. I agree to keep the information discussed in the group interview confidential.

7. I have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) and do not have to specify a reason for my refusal. My refusal to answer any question(s) will not result in any penalty or loss to me.

8. I have the right to withdraw my participation from this study at any time.

9. I have the right to review the group interview transcript for the purpose of clarifying my words prior to it being published.

10. I have the right to request that a summary of the findings be made available to me at the conclusion of the study.

11. I may contact Donique McIntosh at 413-230-9027 or hbcuclimatestudy@gmail.com to discuss any concerns that I have about this form or the research study. If there are additional questions, I may contact her dissertation chair Dr. Maurianne Adams at 413-253-3479 or adams@educ.umass.edu

Participant's Signature

Date

Donique McIntosh
Researcher

Date

APPENDIX F

QUESTIONNAIRE CONSENT FORM

My name is Donique McIntosh and I am a doctoral candidate in the Social Justice Education Program, in the School of Education, at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. I am conducting this research study as part of the requirements for my doctoral dissertation. The purpose of my research project is to explore and understand the experiences of lesbian and bisexual students at historically Black colleges and universities. I appreciate your interest in participating in this project. I have listed the consent protocols below.

I agree to participate in this qualitative research study based on the following understanding:

1. I will take a questionnaire during the fall semester, year. The twenty-five questions I will be answering focus on my experiences as a lesbian or bisexual student at a historically Black college or university.
2. The researcher will use data from the questionnaire to fulfill the requirements for her doctoral dissertation and may also use it in conference presentations and/or manuscripts prepared for professional publication. For any other purposes, the researcher is required to contact me to obtain permission.
3. The potential benefits of participating in the study include my having the opportunity to reflect on a topic of interest of me and gain insights into my own experiences.
4. The potential risks of participating in the study include my possible discomfort from reflecting on a topic that may be uncomfortable for me.
5. The questionnaire will be mailed electronically to me and I will return it electronically. The questionnaires will be kept in a password-protected email account to which only the researcher has access. My name will not be used, nor will I be identified personally in any way. I will be given a pseudonym to protect my identity.
6. I have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) and do not have to specify a reason for my refusal. My refusal to answer any question(s) will not result in any penalty or loss to me.
7. I have the right to withdraw my participation from this study at any time.

8. I have the right to review the data from the questionnaire for the purpose of clarifying my words prior to it being published.

9. I have the right to request that a summary of the findings be made available to me at the conclusion of the study.

10. I may contact Donique McIntosh at 413-230-9027 or hbcuclimatestudy@gmail.com to discuss any concerns that I have about this form or the research study. If there are additional questions, I may contact her dissertation chair Dr. Maurianne Adams at 413-253-3479 or adams@educ.umass.edu

Participant's Signature

Date

Donique McIntosh
Researcher

Date

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