The Black Feminist Scholar Collective: Empowering Black Women in Higher Education

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THESIS

The Black Feminist Scholar Collective: Empowering Black Women in Higher Education

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May 2021
The Black Feminist Scholar Collective: Empowering Black Women in Higher Education

A Thesis

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Degree of

Master of Science

By

Mariama Quist

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Dedication

To everyone Black woman who has ever doubted their capabilities. It is time to be confident and empowered by our brilliance. This is for you.
Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank Allah SWT, without him and his guidance I would not be the individual I am today.

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Abstract

This thesis addresses how a Black feminist approach in higher education institutions can contribute to the success of African American women students at predominantly white institutions. More specifically, I examine the barriers African American women students face and their strategies to seek support at their university. I utilized the methodology of Critical Action Research to analyze the interlocking systems of oppression that affect African American women as they navigate their undergraduate careers. In this thesis, I propose an organization, the Black Feminist Scholar Collective, that will empower African American women attending PWIs through mentoring, workshops, and smaller programs. The Black Feminist Scholar Collective will rely on the principles of Black Feminist Thought to provide encouragement to Black women student during their college journey and in their future professional roles. Strong leadership of this programmatic intervention will be transformative, dedicated to African American women reaching their fullest potential. This topic is significant because it highlights the persistent oppression and marginalization that African American women continue to face in the field of higher education. There are simply not enough spaces dedicated to ensuring African American women’s’ adjustment and success. Higher education professionals, policy makers, and stakeholders must begin implementing strategies to not only retain African American women students, but also equip them with skills important for their college experience and beyond.

Keywords: Black College Women; Black Feminist Thought; College Success
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Chapter 1

My life experiences and the evolution of my identity has led me to my thematic concern, Black Feminist approaches in higher education at Predominately White Institutions (PWI). In this chapter, I will discuss the development of my racial and ethnic identity. Next, I will explain how the African American Women educators I encountered made me aware of my identity as an African American Woman. Then, I explore how moments during my undergraduate career made me cognizant of the struggles Black Women collectively endured in higher education. Finally, I will explain the knowledge I have gained from these experiences and how they relate to the dire need of a Black Feminist approach to promote the success of African American women at PWIs.

Racial and Ethnic Identity

My family consists of my father, mother, and brother who are all natives of Ghana. Around thirty years ago my parents made a decision to move to America because it was known as the land of endless opportunities. As for myself, I was born and raised in Southwest Philadelphia. Growing up, I was constantly exposed to the teachings of the Ghanaian culture and traditions. The one lesson that resonated with me the most was to “receive an education and take care of your family.” Yet, there was never much discussion about my racial identity. The journey of coming to terms with my racial and ethnic identity is very complicated and challenging. My parents never considered themselves to be African American or Black. The stereotypes that my family members had about African Americans left me perplexed about my racial identity. For example, during my adolescence, I found myself split between either being Black or African. Nevertheless, I was not cognizant of the daily obstacles that came with being an African

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1 The words “African American” and “Black” will be used interchangeably throughout the thesis. Also, the capitalization of these words is done intentionally to highlight the identities and power of this group who are often portrayed to be inferior.
American Woman. It was during elementary and middle school where I began to be surrounded around more African American girls my age.

**Lessons from Black Women Educators**

Having Black Women teachers taught me what it meant to be present as an educated Black woman in society. Since my parents did not identify with being African American, I never received any affirmations about being a strong Black Woman. However, it was through my teachers and peers where I became inspired to embrace that part of my identity. Every Black women educator I encountered displayed confidence and power in their positions. Often overlooked by their male colleagues, my teachers demonstrated that they earned their spot in the profession. The Black Women educators that taught me all shared similarities in the way they interacted with their students. There was this sense of motherly connection, all of them were stern but truly wanted the best for us. Also, these black women educators would push us to our fullest potential. My sixth-grade teacher, Mrs. Craig especially would constantly remind myself and the other young girls in my class to strive in order to achieve success. We were taught to remain focused, be articulate, and be confident in our academic abilities. My grade school experiences would soon reveal a lesson that the Black Women educators were trying to instill in their Black female students which was, “Black Women have to work twice as hard to get what they have.”

**Home Away from Home: West Chester University**

From grade school to high school, I would persevere and excel academically to achieve my main goal, attending college. Being the first one in my family to attend college was a major accomplishment. Nevertheless, my undergraduate career would consist of defining moments as due to my intersecting identities. West Chester University of Pennsylvania is a public and
predominately white institution (PWI). West Chester University was my top choice for colleges in high school. The atmosphere on West Chester’s campus was very welcoming and peaceful. West Chester is located in an area where it was far enough from my home in Philadelphia, but still close. I was excited to call West Chester University my home away from home for four years. I had several conversations with my high school peers prior to attending West Chester University about it being a predominantly white institution. Initially, I never considered going to a specific college over another because of its history of rejecting students of color. Some of my peers decided to go to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU). Yet, I did not evaluate the importance of being at an institution with mostly African Americans. My perception of state schools was that they were “diverse” although they were considered to be PWIs. Moreover, I mentioned to my peers that it was essential to attend an institution with people with different races because our future work environments would be the same way. However, the portrayal of “diversity” at in West Chester’s marketing materials would be different from my experience there.

During my first semester at West Chester, it was very difficult for me to connect with other African American students. Many of the African American students had already developed friendships during the Academic Development Program in the summer. However, my roommate who identified as a Black woman, was in ADP and introduced me to many of the African American students. Eventually, I found myself attending different organization events that focused on being a minority student at college. Black Student Union, Sisters United, and the African Student Association were a few of the organizations that reminded me of my purpose as a first-generation Black woman at West Chester University. I was often empowered to preserve as I pursued my bachelor’s degree.
Despite my empowerment, I would feel the effects of attending a PWI. Classes would contain a different energy than the organization programs I attended. Most of the introduction courses would have about a hundred students in them, and that meant a minimal number of Black students in the class. For each of my classes, I would try to establish a support system with the Black students that were present. Creating these connections were easier with Black women because we shared similar identities. Although, the number of Black women in some of my classes were limited, I was able to rely on the ones who became my roommates and best friends. Despite these connections, I could not escape the awkwardness during class discussions that focused on politics and race. Often these discussions would have many of the Black students feel as if they had to speak on them. Sooner rather than later I experienced moments that made my home away from home at West Chester University feel unwelcoming.

**Black Lives Matter Movement: Dedicated to the Liberation of Black Lives**

Attending West Chester University was instrumental in assisting me to become more confident as an African American woman. My freshman year was marked with the increasing appearance of the Black Lives Matter movement around different parts of the nation. After the death of Trayvon Martin in 2013, the movement was established online to speak on the violence against African Americans. There were two different incidents where an African American man was killed by a police officer. First was 18-year-old Michael Brown, who was unarmed and fatally shot in Ferguson, Missouri. The second incident was Eric Garner, who was placed in a chokehold by New York police. On the video you could hear Garner repeating “I can’t breathe” until he died (Black Lives Matter, 2019). At the time both incidents involved African American males, yet I was very aware that this could also happen to an African American woman. The atmosphere on campus was tense, anyone could feel the raging anger shared among Black
students. The Black Student Union organized several demonstrations on West Chester’s campus. The first thing that was held was a “die in” at Sykes Student Union. I was not present during the die in, but it was very captivating to watch through social media. The students that participated wore all black, held signs, and chanted sayings like “We are Mike Brown.” As students proceeded to lie down on the ground, bystanders could not help but to ask what was taking place. A protest happened after the die in, which started from Sykes and led into town. Thankfully, I was able to join the protest because it is a memory that I will never forget. Along with the other students I shouted “no justice, no peace” while walking in the streets. This time during my undergraduate experience is when I truly knew that I had to be dedicated to achieving success as an African American woman. Many of my African American ancestors sacrificed their lives to receive an education. To know that I was one of the many who received an opportunity to attend college meant a lot. I knew that I had to use this opportunity to raise awareness about the inequalities that African Americans, especially African American Women experienced at predominately white institutions.

Uplifting Black Women in Predominately White Spaces

The journey to raising this awareness continued to present challenges. I would still be the only Black woman in a few of the organizations that I joined. For instance, I was the only African American woman who held an executive position in the Psychology Honor Society. As I discussed these issues with my roommates and friends, we all began to realize that there was a lack of African American women faculty on campus. We started to list the number of times we met a Black woman faculty member and at what year we met them. For me, it was near the end of my undergraduate career where I encountered African American women faculty. The Women of Color Day event was held in 2018, and that was the first time I had seen and met so many
African American women faculty at West Chester University. After this conversation, we all expressed feeling confined at West Chester University because there was a lack of African American women faculty.

My senior seminar class pieced together all these experiences and emotions I was feeling. This class was called “Intersectional Inquiry in Psychology: Research and Practice Implication.” It was the first time that I heard the word *intersectionality*, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989). Intersectionality is a theoretical framework that is utilized to capture the fact that the different aspects of an individual’s identity – race, gender, religion – can overlap to create systems of oppression. My senior seminar focused on applying intersectionality to psychological research and practice to understand individuals with one or more marginalized identities. However, learning about intersectionality allowed me to consider my own identities and how I and other Black women were experiencing oppression in society. As an African American, I knew that I would probably experience discrimination because of my race. While as a woman, I knew that I would face inequalities because the United States was established as a patriarchy. Yet, as an African American woman these experiences would be overlap and intersect.

Furthermore, I began to contemplate the other parts of my identity that were not visible for others to see. For instance, I am Muslim, but I do not wear hijab on a daily basis. If I were to wear Islamic clothing, I would then experience Black racism, misogyny, and Islamophobia. This illustrates that there is not always a physical marker that indicates parts of our identity. Learning these important concepts motivated me to bring awareness to how difficult it is for African American women students to navigate through Higher Education.

These experiences have led me to be confident and proud as an educated Black Woman. As an African American woman, I always thought about the African American women before
me, who fought long and hard to obtain educational opportunities. These were the thoughts that constantly motivated me to achieve academically during college. Moreover, the connections I made with other African American women students and faculty encouraged me to persist when I was questioning my intellectual abilities. At the Women of Color Day in 2018, I was able to connect with a few faculty members prior to graduating. One of those faculty members was Dr. Juanita Wooten who worked with the Academic Success Program. There were several times where Dr. Wooten and I had genuine conversations. She would often ask me about my classes and if I was facing any challenges with them. From our interactions, I always cherished how she asked me about my future aspirations. Another individual I connected with on campus was Jazmin Wright. Jazmin served as a Graduate Assistant for the Dowdy Multicultural Center. I met Jazmin through several events that were held at West Chester. Jazmin was supportive and kind, and she truly cared about seeing me succeed. I could speak to Jazmin about anything that was graduate school-related. She was also one of the many individuals who inspired me to apply to the higher education program at West Chester University. The support that I received from Dr. Wooten, Jazmin, and other Black women continued to inspire me as I was finishing my undergraduate coursework. These women were my support system and kept me grounded until I complete my degree.

After reflecting on these experiences, I believe that there should be approaches and resources available to empower the Black women at PWIs. Black women should not have to privilege their identities — race over gender, gender over race — in order to find support at their institution (Ricks, 2014). Frequent conversations focused on the Black women’s college experience would reveal that they continue to flourish academically although they endure microaggressions (Chambers et al., 2012). Higher education professionals have an obligation to
make sure that Black women at PWIs are no longer overlooked. The establishment of an organization grounded in Black Feminist Thought (BFT) will not only center the experiences of Black women at PWIs but will also validate them. That is the intervention I will present in this thesis.

**Thematic Concern**

This thesis examines the necessity of a Black Feminist approach implemented at PWIs to contribute to the success of African American women students. The population addressed in this thesis will be third-year African American women. In college, a student’s third year is usually focused on obtaining internships and looking towards graduation. There should be spaces dedicated to fostering the growth of these Black women as they begin to embark their professional careers. In Chapter 2, I discuss my philosophy of education and the Critical Action Research approach that I take in this work. In Chapter 3, I present and connect a series of key understandings from the Students Affairs and Higher Education literature to my concern. Chapter 4 presents the intervention itself, and Chapter 5 considers evaluation, assessment, and leadership necessary to make this intervention a success.
Chapter 2

In this chapter, I articulate my philosophy of education which focuses on theories of transformative education, multicultural education, and Black Feminist Thought (BFT). Next, I discuss the purpose of higher education and its impact on students. I examine the significance of the co-curricular experience for college students in higher education. Then, I discuss the role of student affairs and the professionals in that field. Finally, I examine the purpose of Critical Action Research and its relation to the student affairs and my thematic concern.

In society today, education is known for contributing to an individual’s success. Many believe that through an education, the majority of the hardships individuals experience will not exist. However, education serves a much larger purpose than just leading to a dream career. Education is powerful and has the ability to provide several opportunities to enhance a person’s quality of life (Idris et al., 2012). For instance, gaining knowledge through education contributes to personal development (Dewey, 1983). As we acquire information by being educated, we gain the ability to make impactful life decisions. Receiving an education is a lifelong process (Power, 2015) and is not only defined by an academic setting or a degree. The experiences we undergo are filled with lessons that provide us with knowledge. Some of these lessons are something that may not be provided in the classroom. This demonstrates the power of education; it comes in several forms and is endless.

Since my thesis focuses on the realm of higher education for Black Americans, it’s important to contextualize the role of formal education for this community. Education serves as a liberator and is significant to African Americans (Anderson et al., 2009; Span, 2005). Since slavery, many of my ancestors and other enslaved African Americans were prohibited from learning because it was a threat to their captors (Williams, 2005). Yet, they found several ways
to gain knowledge in order to come closer to their freedom. At the time, becoming a literate slave was not only a crime but also revolutionary (Williams, 2005). For example, enslaved women would put themselves in life threatening situations in order to educate others (Ricks, 2014). In the Civil Rights Era, African Americans protested and continuously advocated for an equal opportunity to education (Daugherity, 2016). Unfortunately, many laws were put in place to continue the discriminatory practices to try and deter African Americans from receiving an education (Newman, 2004). To the African American community, being educated meant collectively uplifting the race.

**Philosophy of Education**

My philosophy of education is built on the concepts of critical pedagogy, multicultural education, and BFT. In this section I discuss these concepts in detail and how they relate to African American women in college.

**Transformative Education (Critical Pedagogy)**

First, I introduce Freire (1970) concept of the banking model versus problem posing. This is the basis of transformative education. Freire (1970) inspired the work of Mezirow (1978), who would later coin the concept of transformative education (Mezirow, 2009). Mezirow (1978) transformative learning theory is significant to this thematic concern because it applies to higher education.

The traditional concept of education is defined by teachers just providing their students with information (Freire, 1970). Teachers were less concerned with student’s comprehension of information and more concerned about their ability to regurgitate it. Unfortunately, the education system has continued to utilize this approach to learning, which Paulo Freire refers to as the banking model. He describes teachers as narrators and students as receptacles because they are
being filled with information. Freire (1970) explains:

Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiques and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the "banking" concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits. (p. 72)

Freire offers an alternative to the banking model —problem posing — suggesting that education consists of shared knowledge, arrived at through dialogue between students and teachers. This provides students an opportunity to critically think and question traditional ideas. Moreover, he expresses the importance of conscientização, which is gaining consciousness for liberation (Freire, 1970). This is a developmental process that allows the student to derive understanding of the world they live in. Therefore, students can begin to identify oppressive structures that exist in society and develop ways to critique and deconstruct them (Freire, 1970).

Nevertheless, Students that gain conscientização are able to express their view on educational concepts, rather than having information imposed on them. The concepts Freire presents in his work, is a form of a transformative education.

Jack Mezirow was a sociologist and professor who developed transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1978). Transformative education is an empowering learning experience where students acquire knowledge through dialogue that will result in them making a positive impact in their society. Meizrow (1997) describes transformative learning as “critical reflection on the assumptions upon which our interpretations, beliefs, and habits of mind or points of view are based.” (p. 7). Mezirow mentioned that through effective discourse, learners will either advance or challenge their beliefs and become open to learning the viewpoints of others. It is crucial that
students receive this type of education because they make meaning of their role in society and make an impact by challenging structural forces (Dirkx, 1998). For example, students are able to become autonomous thinkers, which allows them to feel comfortable with expressing their views rather fearing any repercussions from their teacher. Students have the opportunity to combat any ideas they feel being exerted on them. Another characteristic of a transformative education is the learners create meaning from the information they receive. In order for learners to achieve this, Mezirow (1997) explained:

Transformative learning requires a form of education very different from that commonly associated with children. New information is only a resource in the adult learning process. To become meaningful, learning requires that new information be incorporated by the learner into an already well-developed symbolic frame of reference, an active process involving thought, feelings, and disposition. The learner may also have to be helped to transform his or her frame of reference to fully understand the experience. (p. 10)

Transformative education allows students to making sense of their experiences and relate them to their role as learners. Through transformative education students gain a new insight about concepts they felt they already knew everything about. Transformative education is essential.

When it comes to the topic of higher education for Black women, transformative education is critical because it gives them the opportunity to challenge ideas and advocate for their selves. Since African American women are a part of two minoritized groups, that affects their classroom interactions, especially at PWIs. For instance, due to their race, Black women are often either given under attention or over attention (Moses, 1989, p. 4). Thus, Black women’s perspectives are ignored by their teachers unless the topics in classrooms are about race. Black
women speaking out on race issues may cause them to feel uncomfortable. This demonstrates how there is an accustomed power dynamic between the teacher and student. However, a teacher providing a transformative education would do the opposite. This would involve the educator giving Black Women the opportunity to explain why they dislike speaking out on issues of race. Ultimately, Black Women students would feel empowered by expressing how they feel. Through the challenging of traditional educational practices, Black women are able to affirm their intellectual capabilities (Johnson-Bailey & Alfred, 2006).

**Multicultural Education**

Multicultural education, as articulated by bell hooks, is another component of my philosophy. I use it to supplement transformation education because it specifically incorporates practices that acknowledges the different demographics of students. Students that attend schools come from various backgrounds and cultures. The identities of students enrich the learning spaces by creating an educational community that recognize the importance of diversity. The diverse experiences and perspectives of students creates a newfound awareness that combats occurrences that results in prejudice and racism (Gay, 2013). Being in this type of educational environment teaches students how to positively engage in a diverse workforce. Moreover, learning from diverse individuals allow students to identify their prejudices and explore ways to prevent them. Lessons that promote cultural diversity in educational spaces are significant. Nevertheless, there are educators that struggle with ensuring that their classrooms reflect the cultural diversity and its significance. bell hooks (1994) asserted that classroom environments have to be transformed to create a learning experience that is inclusive and introduces the concept of multicultural education. A multicultural education challenges the educator to consider how they are presenting cultural diversity to their students. Many teachers often fear
multicultural education because they believe that they will lose control over their classroom. However, recognizing the value of students from different backgrounds contributes to intellectual development. Many educational entities must transform their methods to encourage diversity. For instance, educators could begin to include work by authors with different identities. Encouraging a multicultural education can present challenges. Lessons that focus on how dominant ideologies are perpetuated in society and education can cause students to questions their own experiences (hooks, 1994). Yet, they start to develop the ability to critically think and freely express their thoughts. As hooks (1994) simply states, “When we, as educators, allow our pedagogy to be radically changed by our recognition of a multicultural world, we can give students the education they desire and deserve” (p. 44). Every student should experience a multicultural education.

Representation is significant for African American women in the field of education. This is emphasized in literature because there is a lack of African American women faculty and professionals. Yet, representation is essential in educational curriculum as well. A multicultural education would promote the inclusion of Black Women intellectuals in classroom lessons. Moreover, this will encourage African American women to express their experiences based on their diverse identities (hooks & West, 1992). Black Women are able to successfully thrive in an environment that is inclusive and acknowledges their varied identities.

**Black Feminist Thought**

Black women have historically and repeatedly played a vital role in disrupting several forms of oppression and discrimination. For instance, African American women were in the forefront of movements such as Women’s Suffrage and the Civil Rights Movement (Gyant, 1996). However, the common narrative of these movements often either minimizes or ignores
the role of Black women altogether. Unfortunately, African American women continue to endure situations that devalue their experiences. Due to the different identities of African American women, they deal with instances of racism, sexism, and classism in their daily lives. African American women have utilized their experiences to provide knowledge on how oppression is structurally embedded (Collins, 2009; Patton et al., 2016). African American women were the first to connect how the intersections of identities result in multiple oppressions. Collins (2000) acknowledges that for years the ideas of Black women have been suppressed. The purpose of BFT is to empower African American women to rearticulate their consciousness of their daily experiences. Through this consciousness, they understand how to resist the injustices endure.

BFT is composed of six tenets, which provides insight on why it is needed for African American women. Collins (2000) defines these tenets by stating that first, Black women have a dialectical relationship connecting their oppression to activism. Since African American women experience intersectional oppressions, Black feminism is the activist response to that oppression. African American women develop a group consciousness on how to survive racism, classism, and etc. Second, BFT develops from the communal experiences and ideas. Black women face similar challenges as a group, but their individual responses produce group knowledge or standpoint. Standpoint is defined as “group knowledge, recurring patterns of differential treatment such as these suggest that certain themes will characterize U.S. Black women’s group knowledge or standpoint” (Collins, 2000, p.26). BFT communicates the significance of Black Women’s standpoint. Third, BFT connects Black women’s experiences as a heterogenous collectivity and the resulting in group standpoint. Collins (2000) explains that as dialogical relationship among Black Women contributes to a shift in consciousness. Ultimately, as a collective African American woman strive to achieve a self-defined standpoint and engage in
In the fourth tenet of BFT, the contributions of African American intellectuals are explained. Black women intellectuals are “from all walks of life” and each one of their perspectives are essential. Their role within BFT is critical because they provide insights into Black womanhood that others are unable to provide (Collins, 2000). The fifth tenet of BFT is that it highlights the value of change. Therefore, for BFT to remain operative as a social justice initiative, it must continue to develop knowledge and practices as social conditions change. As social conditions continue to change there should be an encouragement of new BFT analyses. The sixth and final tenet is the relationships between BFT and other social justice projects. African American women intellectuals have expressed that Black women’s struggles are also a part of the wider struggles for empowerment and social justice (Collins, 2005, p. 41). This tenet acknowledges that BFT is in solidarity with the social justice efforts for every individual. It is obvious that the tenets of BFT are critically needed in the daily lives of Black Women.

*Black Feminist Thought for Black Women Students*

The perspectives of Black women and the themes in BFT are essential in education in three particular ways. First, BFT critiques traditional education practices which often promote patriarchal ideas. Many Black Feminist scholars discuss the ways that BFT can lead to student liberation in ways that traditional education does not. For instance, Omolade (1987) demonstrates the utilization that a Black feminist pedagogy allows. Understanding the experiences of African American women fosters “intellectual inclusion and expansion that stands in contradiction to the Western intellectual tradition of exclusivity and chauvinism” (p. 32). The teachings of BFT allow students and educators to engage in a learning process that promotes various perspectives. Joseph (1988) argues that BFT in a classroom setting can act as a pedagogy
of liberation and any denial of its practices helps maintain America as a racist society. With this form of education students are able to understand how other minority groups were gaining rights in the United States, while structural forces continue to work to suppress the ideas of African American women (Henry, 2005).

Second, BFT allows students to critically analyze concepts related to the oppression of African American women. Through collaborative classroom activities, educators are able to actively engage their students to discuss racism, sexism, and classism. hooks (1994) explicate the importance of building community with the students and allowing their voices to be heard in class. It is imperative that this type of critical analysis causes discomfort among students who are unable to relate to Black Women’s experiences (hooks, 1994). Nevertheless, critical assessment of topics within BFT and pedagogy creates an opportunity for growth in students. They can begin to understand how systems of oppression operate and to figure out how to dismantle them (Henry, 2005).

Finally, education incorporating BFT is critical for the empowerment of African American women students. As previously stated, historical narratives of Black women have omitted their perspectives. In academia, Black Women continue to face obstacles that cause them to question their intellectual abilities. Yet, Collins (2000) describes African American women as agents of knowledge. BFT depicts African American women as self-defined and self-reliant individuals. Therefore, Black women are validated by their experiences and reject any knowledge that perpetuates other claims. The progressive perspectives and practices within BFT contribute to the transformation of the field of education.

Any one of these philosophies on their own is valuable and important I bring the three of them in conversation because they are much more impactful together when discussing Black
women in higher education. All of these philosophies combined creates an opportunity for Black women to become empowered through each of their identities. Whether it is their identity as a student or as a Black woman, these educational philosophies center their experiences. Black women’s narratives in academia have been disregarded, however through these philosophies they are valued. Next, these philosophies contribute to expanding the intellectual development of Black women in higher education. Black women are able to gain critical thinking skills from these diverse educational philosophies. For instance, educational philosophies engage their minds to determine how oppression works even in a classroom setting. These philosophies will inform aspects of my intervention to ensure that it does not maintain any structural inequalities. Together these philosophies will allow the participants in my proposed intervention to prosper.

**The Purpose of Higher Education**

Higher education has been credited with preparing students for their future careers. According to the Student Personnel Point of View (1937), the basic purposes of higher education are “the preservation, transmission, and enrichment of the important elements of culture—the product of scholarship, research, creative imagination, and human experience” (p.1). Educators took on a parental role that would help students focus on receiving intellectual knowledge. Education was seen as a mental discipline and it was the duty of faculty to control the experience these students had at institutions (Rentz & MacKinnon, 2004). This interpretation of education was mostly concerned with the acquisition of knowledge. Nevertheless, higher education should contribute to all aspects of the student. It should be focused on contributing to the development of students. Students that attend higher education institutions should receive both intellectual and personal expansion. Higher education institutions have a duty to ensure that all students gain the most of their experiences in order to become a more enlightened and outstanding individual.
Education does not just take place in a formal classroom; The co-curricular experience is also essential to the development of students (Stirling & Kerr, 2015; Waterman et al. 2016). Co-curricular experiences consist of various programs and initiatives that provide students with knowledge outside of the classroom. Students gain skills through joining student organizations that they probably would not be a focal point in their classes. For example, a student who is involved with an organization gets the opportunity to meet other students. This presents networking opportunities and creating connections with others which encourages a meaningful college experience. Additionally, co-curricular activities help students gain skills that are crucial in the workforce. According to Astin (1984), student involvement theory, “the greater the student’s involvement in college, the greater will be the amount of student learning and personal development” (p. 520). The co-curricular experience allows students to learn how to think critically, effectively communicate, and collaborate with others (Suskie, 2015).

The Role of Student Affairs and Student Affairs Professionals

The role of student affairs in higher education is to create spaces to promote the intellectual and personal growth among students (Dungy & Gordon, 2011). The student affairs division was previously referred to as “student personnel services” when it was created in 1937. Student personnel services were established due to the development of new educational functions at colleges (Student Personnel Point of View, 1937). At that time, faculty realized that they could not handle the pressure of contribute to academic and personal growth of students own their own. Thus, student personnel workers were hired to assist students with extracurricular activities. The philosophy of the student personnel services is still exhibited by the student affairs professionals today. Many student affairs professionals assist students adjust to the college environment and provide them with educative experiences. Moreover, student affairs professionals help students
combat some of the obstacles they endure as they pursue their degree. The student affairs field and its professionals continue to make a difference in students’ lives.

The diversity of college students in higher education has evolved. In the 17th century, higher education institutions were established to educate and serve the white male children of upper-class families (Brock 2010; Thelin, 2019; Wilder, 2014). In other words, the initial purpose of these institutions was designed to cater to white males. Higher education institutions excluded many minority groups, including white women and all non-white persons. It took several centuries for institutions to allow minority groups access to higher education. In 1824, the first African American man attended college, and twenty years later, the first African American woman was admitted (Haynes, 2006). Over the decades, many other diverse groups of students have enrolled in postsecondary institutions, and their numbers constitute a significant effort in reforming the composition of higher education (Chen, 2017). Since students are diverse when it comes to their identities, student affairs professions must support them and understand their experiences. Although, the opportunities to access to higher education increased, minoritized students still deal with barriers while attending college. Student affairs professionals learn about these challenges and how they affect students (Long, 2012). Through several student development theories, student affairs professionals are able to figure out the best practices to provide support to students.

**Critical Action Research**

In this section I will explicate the purpose of critical action research (CAR), the framework used in this thesis. This is achieved by comparing the aspects of CAR to traditional research. Next, I delve into the connection between my philosophies of education and CAR. Finally, I discuss how CAR and BFT are important to my thematic concern and intervention.
Critical action research differs from the quantitative research in that it takes into account the expertise of participants and the local community; it also aims for social change. Critical action research is a systematic approach that designed to create effective change. Through critical action research, individuals are able to find solutions to the issues they effect in their lives (Stringer, 2014). This framework also explicates the significance of the role’s each individual has in the research. Traditional research approaches usually present the researcher as the expert, since they are the ones conducting the research. However, critical action research relies on the researcher to be a collaborator with the population they are working with. The participants would be considered the expert because they are enduring the issue in their daily lives. Critical action research allows me to assess the extra steps traditional research could have taken to further implement change. The cycle displayed in Figure 1 describes how Critical action research should be conducted.

**Figure 1**

*Action Research Interactive Spiral*

![Action Research Interactive Spiral](image)

Note: Critical action research process. Retrieved from Stringer, 2014

The spiral presented by Stringer (2014) demonstrates that the action research focuses on the researcher constantly reviewing each step in the process. The goal of Critical Action Research is to create social change, if that is not achieved then the research is not considered to be
successful.

**Connection between Philosophy of Education and Critical Action Research**

There are multiple connections between my educational philosophies and CAR. The main connection is the mission to increase social justice. First, the practices between my educational philosophies and CAR promotes social justice for individuals in everyday settings. Each of my educational philosophies are dedicated to giving those who have been oppressed equal opportunities. For instance, BFT expresses the importance of Black women’s experiences as central to knowledge production (Collins, 2000). Both transformative education and multicultural education give students the opportunity to express their viewpoints freely without worrying about the authority of teachers (hooks, 1994; Meizrow, 1997). Next, in both my philosophy of education and in the approach of CAR, the experts are the participants, and the researchers serve as facilitators or collaborators. In transformative education it is emphasized that teachers and students collaborate with one another. The teachers are no longer the individuals with the expertise they receive knowledge from the students (Freire, 1970). Similar to CAR, BFT highlights that African American are the experts of their experiences. Collins (2000) explained this by stating:

> For most African American women those individuals who have lived through the experiences about which they claim to be experts are more believable and credible than those who have merely read or thought about such experiences. Thus lived experience as a criterion for credibility frequently is invoked by U.S. Black women. (p. 257)

This demonstrates the importance of placing the population who is being affected by the problem at core of the research. Without the expertise of the individuals experiencing the hardship, the findings from the research will not be as authentic. CAR respects the knowledge and experiences
from individuals that will result in a positive social change (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003).

**Connection of CAR to my Thematic Concern**

There are two specific concepts of CAR that relate to my thematic concern and that will be implemented in my intervention. First, CAR engages in practices that will promote knowledge and understanding about social groups. This is achieved through the use of dialogue. In CAR, researchers assist participants to participate in dialogue to express the issues they are facing (Stringer, 2014). bell hooks (1989) stress the importance of Black Women being active in dialogue with one another to understand the oppressions they face. While Collins (2000) mentions that use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims allow for the empowerment of Black women to confront oppression. In my proposed intervention that will be introduced in Chapter 4 will incorporate several opportunities for the participants be a part of an on-going dialogue. Through the intervention’s components, the African American Women participants will be able to describe their experiences and consider methods to resolve them.

Next, CAR and BFT is committed to ongoing inquiry. As previously mentioned, BFT must be dynamic and utilize practices that suit the changing social conditions (Collins, 2000). CAR emphasizes systematic inquiry to solve specific problems. Both of these frameworks exemplify what the constant process of observation, reflection, and action. The intervention described in this thesis is intended to accomplish more than providing a Black Feminist approach at a PWI. My intervention will analyze the issues that affect African American women at PWIs and utilize BFT to engage in systematic inquiry. Thus, the practices established from the intervention will be effective solutions to the difficulties Black Women encounter. The next chapter delves into more specific content from the field of Higher Education and Student Affairs.
Chapter 3

In this chapter, I will discuss the historical context of my concern, which explores the attainment of education for African Americans. It is crucial to understand that there are several points of time that played a critical role in shaping education for African Americans. However, for the purpose of this thesis, I will analyze three particular moments in history that are essential to African Americans in gaining equal education in the United States. Next, I discuss intersecting higher education concepts in relation to my thematic concern and its current state. These concepts focus on student development theory and power and privilege. Then, I explore the insight I have received to inform my intervention, which is to assist African American women at PWIs. Finally, I detail how my internship and work experiences will contribute to establishment of my intervention.

History of Education for African Americans

The history of education for African American began with slavery. During that era, slave masters wanted to keep their slaves illiterate to prevent them from gaining any type of freedom. The majority of slave masters realized that once slaves became literate, they would find ways to resist (Williams, 2005). African American slaves understood that education was their path to freedom. Nevertheless, slaves figured how to read and write despite the anti-literacy laws that forbade them to do so (Williams, 2005). In the Northern states, African Americans were not prohibited from receiving an education and many of them were able to attend college. After the Civil War, the Freedman’s Bureau created several opportunities for African Americans in the South to receive an education. Eventually, several of Freedman’s schools were established for African Americans (Anderson, 1988). The Freedman’s schools would receive assistance from missionaries and teachers from the North. However, most of these Freedman’s schools lacked
the proper resources to keep them successful (Lieberman, 1994). Nevertheless, African Americans began taking on roles to sustain their educational opportunities, including teaching and purchasing land to build schools. This time period is the basis of African Americans advocacy for an education. African Americans would continue to stress the significance of education to be free from oppression. This rhetoric still has a profound impact on African American students currently.

As access to education became more available to African Americans, they faced discrimination during their educational experiences. The “Separate, but Equal” doctrine was a law that allowed several segregation practices. Due to the Separate but Equal doctrine, as long as equal facilities were provided to African Americans, they could remain segregated. The Supreme Court case Plessy v. Ferguson decision upheld the idea that segregation did not violate the U.S constitution (Ficker, 1999). Thus, African Americans would continue to endure racial discrimination when trying to gain opportunities in employment, education, and housing. This Supreme Court case decision along with other laws, gave states the jurisdiction to determine how their education systems would operate (Ficker, 1999). Therefore, the schools that were established for African Americans were not equal to the ones for white people. Schools for African American received less funding and limited resources. Furthermore, African American teachers received lower salaries compared to white teachers (Daugherity et al., 2008). Segregation was often promoted as if it would benefit both African Americans and Caucasians. Nonetheless, segregation continued to advance inequality in the United States.

**Brown v. Board of Education**

The end of the segregation of public-school education would begin with many court cases. The most notable case was Brown v. Board of Education. In 1954 a class action suit was
filed against the Board of Topeka (Bickel, 1998). The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was a civil rights organization that was organized to ensure that all African Americans had rights in United States. Prior to the Brown v. Board case, the NAACP was deeply committed to assisting Africa Americans to receive equitable educational opportunities (Jonas, 2005). Therefore, the NAACP campaigned to end segregation in public schools declaring that it was unconstitutional. The NAACP would play a pivotal role by bringing the lawsuit against the Board of Education of Topeka in fruition.

The schools in Topeka, Kansas were equal when it came to their resources. Many of the children were not able to attend the schools closer to their homes due to the “separate but equal” school system. For instance, Linda Brown and her father had to travel six blocks in order for her to catch the school bus to her school (Brimner, 2017; Patterson, 2001). The NAACP approached Linda’s father, Oliver Brown and twelve other parents to be plaintiffs in the class action lawsuit (Patterson, 2001). When the Supreme Court justices heard the case, they were divided on how to rule. The justices tried to determine whether segregation was unconstitutional (Klarman, 2006). In May of 1954, the Supreme Court decided unanimously in favor of Brown v. Board. This decision revoked the decision made in Plessy v. Ferguson and determined that racial segregation of public education violated the rights African Americans (Jonas, 2005). In the opinion of the decision – read aloud by Justice Warren — it stated, “We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of "separate but equal" has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal " (Brown v. Board of Education, 1954). The Brown v. Board decision was a landmark decision that progressed the efforts of equal education for African Americans.

Civil Rights Activism: The Fight for Desegregation

The Brown v. Board decision gave African Americans a sense of hope when it came to
education. There was opposition to *Brown v. Board* in several states. The Supreme Court did not implement an official desegregation plan for the schools or its administrators. School districts carried out desegregation efforts at their own pace, which meant they could prolong the desegregation efforts as long as they could (Bell, 2005; López & Burciaga, 2014).

Due to these slow changes, individuals of several Civil Rights movements continued to advocate equal education for African Africans along with other rights. In most of the southern states, no desegregation occurred. However, the tactics of organizations within the civil rights movement galvanized school desegregation (Klarman, 2006). Although these organizations had different strategies, they had common goals, which involved the end of discriminatory practices and racism of African Americans. Black students at several schools still endured segregation in their surrounding areas (Newman, 2004). These students who attended schools during the Brown era, eventually became activists to implement change. The NAACP initially wanted effective efforts towards ending segregation of education. Nevertheless, the sit-ins that occurred during the 1960’s demonstrated their frustration of the lack of progress (Newman, 2004).

**Black Women Leaders and Black Feminist Organizations**

The role of Black women during the Civil Rights movement was paramount. Several Black women worked endlessly behind the scenes in organizations such as the NAACP and the Southern Christian Leadership Council (SCLC). For instance, Septima Clark, an educator and member of the NAACP, established Citizenship Schools in the south. These schools provided illiterate African Americans with an education to be able to register to vote and understand citizenship tests (Rouse, 2001). Collier-Thomas & Franklin (2001) described the extent of Black women’s role in the civil rights movement by stating:

They sometimes placed themselves in dangerous positions and questioned nonviolence as
the most appropriate strategy to bring about social change. At the same time, however, in a movement full of contradictions about “proper” gender roles, the talents of many women were underutilized and unappreciated. (p. 171)

The treatment of Black women in these organizations displayed the beginning of other organizations that addressed the concerns of Black women as a collective. Thus, Black feminist movements were formed. Several of these organizations gave African American women the opportunity to express their views on social change without being silenced. Civil rights activism continued to be an integral part of the identity of Black women’s groups. African American women were also involved with desegregation efforts of United States higher education systems.

The Black Campus Movement (BCM) occurred at both PWIs and HBCUs in the 1960s through the 1970s. Black students demanded Black studies, Black faculty, and the creation of Black student organization (Kendi, 2012). The Black campus activists planned to transform the higher education system. Black women involved with movement had to deal with both sexism in the Black organization and racism on the campus. Nevertheless, those barriers did not prevent Black women from being engaged with Black feminist initiatives. African American women began to organize events that focused on Black womanhood and feminism (Kendi, 2012). Their role in the BCM demonstrates how Black feminism began to reconstruct higher education.

The National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO) and the Combahee River Collective (CRC) were the first two organizations formed during the Black feminist movement. Founded in 1973, the NFBO purpose was “to address ourselves to the particular and specific needs of the larger, almost cast-aside half of the Black race in Amerikkka, the Black woman” (National Black Feminist Organization, 1973). One of the goals of the National Black Feminists Organization was to make the Black liberation movement more inclusive of Black women to strengthen it.
Thus, African American women became dedicated to combating the levels of oppression they were experiencing. For example, this meant Black women would take leadership roles in the community. The NBFO and CRC emphasized that racism could only be dismantled if Black women and men worked together. The objectives of these organizations focused on creating educational opportunities for Black women. Consequently, the individuals of Black feminist movement have had a profound influence in the education advancement of African Americans.

These events in history have shown how Black women have been in the forefront of the pursuit of gaining an education. Along with widening the access to education, Black women have fought against racial oppression and discrimination (Gyant, 1996). The educational advancements made throughout this time period demonstrates empowerment for Black women (Collins, 2000).

**Literature Review**

There are several concepts in the higher education and student affairs scholarly literature that intersect with my thematic concern. These include student development theory and power and privilege. Below, I will explain the concepts of the Model of Identity Development for Black Undergraduate Women and Astin’s (1984) Student Involvement theory.

To address the challenges that affect African American woman at PWIs, it is essential to consider their identities (Miller, 2017). Student development theory is comprised of theories related to college students and their development processes while they are enrolled in college (Patton et al., 2016). Many of these theories provide insight on different aspects of development, such as cognitive and moral development. Student development theory is a guiding practice utilized by professionals in higher education. Through student development theory, student affairs professionals are constantly informed on the ways to better assist students (Patton et al.,
Model of Identity Development for Black Undergraduate Women

The concept of socialization has been discussed in its relation to college student identity development. According to Brim (1996), socialization is defined as an individual acquiring knowledge and skills to make them less or effective members of society. Weidman (1989) developed a socialization model that focused on the student’s experience. Through this model, student affairs professionals are able to understand how social relationships in higher education settings contribute to identity development. Porter and colleagues (2020) highlighted that various scholars explained that racial and gendered experiences can impact student’s socialization processes. For this reason, Black women enter colleges with experiences that influence who they are and how they will develop. Porter and colleagues (2020) provided the model of identity development in Black undergraduate women (MIDBUW) to explicate the socialization processes of Black women in college. The MIDBUW explains how the socialization and identity process of black women are influenced by personal foundations, intersecting identities, influence of media, and more (Porter et al., 2020). The authors found that applying this identity model revealed that the creation of spaces for dialogue, interaction, and intentional relationships were critical for Black women to flourish in a college environment.

The use of MIDBUW is essential when exploring the experiences of Black women at PWIs. This model was selected over Cross’ (1991) Black Identity because a Black women’s development is not solely based on race. Cross’s (1991) model would provide insight on how being Black contributed to their racial development and disregard the aspect of being a woman. Louis and colleagues (2014) expressed that higher education professionals can utilize both Cross’ (1991) Black Identity Model and Belinsky and colleagues’ (1997) Intellectual
Development of women to gain insight of African American experiences. However, the use of these separate models does not consider how both race and gender – along with other identities – contribute to the Black woman’s experience. Bailey-Fakhoury and colleagues (2014) described the isolation of race and gender in these theories by stating:

Unfortunately, studies of racial identity development have yet to adequately take gender into account, neither have studies of gender identity development adequately taken race into account. Existing theories and models of racial and gender identity development often seem to operate in a vacuum. Adequate consideration is not given to race as being gendered nor gender as being raced. (p. 217)

Porter and colleagues’ (2020) MIDBUW examined “the varied intersections of identities” that are significant to the development and interactions of Black women in college. This model informs my thematic concern by demonstrating how socialization processes can assist in the growth of Black women. The MIDBUW is grounded in BFT, similarly to my proposed intervention. Thus, the insight received from the model is critical when forming my intervention to ensure that is enhancing to the development of Black women.

**Astin’s (1984) Theory of Involvement**

In this section, I explicate the theory of involvement. The theory of involvement is essential with my thematic concern and intervention. The theory of involvement has assisted in determining how African American college women achieve success.

Astin’s (1984) theory of involvement is utilized by higher education professionals to create a productive learning environment for students. According to Astin (1984), student involvement is “the quantity and quality of the physical and psychological energy students invest in the college experience” (p. 528). In this longitudinal study on student involvement, it was
revealed that academic and social experiences are integral to involvement.

The theory of involvement differs from other student development theories because it focuses on factors that facilitate development. Thus, higher education professionals are directly involved with establishing transformative opportunities that will assist student’s developmental growth (Porter et al., 2019). The theory involvement has been a guiding theoretical framework to understand how involvement contributes to the success of African American women at college. Miller (2017) explored the factors that contribute to the success of Black college women at PWIs. The qualitative study provided insight on factors of success for Black college women along with the relation of self-reported gains, social integration, and student involvement. Results indicated that social integration had a stronger relationship to self-reported gains than student involvement. However, Miller (2017) explains that since majority of the participants were in the first-year, further research should consider student involvement among African American women upperclassmen. This suggestion from Miller distinctly supports what Astin (1984) expressed in the involvement theory, since upperclassmen students have had more time on campus to be involved.

Involvement is consequential for African American women at PWIs. African American women’s involvement with different initiatives on campus can alleviate the challenges they endure as they pursue their degree. Scholarly literature emphasizes the establishment of various forms of support systems for African American women at college. The mentoring experiences of Black women contributes to their personal and professional success (Walkington 2017; Patton, 2009). The mentors of Black women serve as role models which can encourages them to pursue their graduate degree (Louis et al., 2017). Additionally, workshops and other co-curricular programs that concentrate on historical Black women leaders can teach Black women on how to
display leadership qualities. This allows for Black women to be motivated to become leaders on campus themselves (Domingue, 2017). Furthermore, spaces designed for African American women allow them to build relationships and network with their peers. These are forms of involvement that will be incorporated into my intervention.

**Power and Privilege**

In this section, I analyze power and privilege in higher education. First, I explicate the idea of power by utilizing Patricia Hill Collins’ concept of the matrix of domination. Next, I delve into how power affects African American women in higher education. Then, I discuss strategies of resistance against power structures at higher education institutions. Finally, I explicate how these strategies connect to my intervention.

Power is the ability to influence others behavior directly or indirectly. Usually when power is thought of, it is attributed to a specific individual or place. From the moment students enter the education system we are constantly reminded that “knowledge is power” and “college equals success” (Staley, 2018). This is a concept that is familiar with African American women. For many African American women, they work to achieve these ideologies rather than question where these ideologies came from. However, there are individuals and social institutions that continue to create ideologies to maintain hegemony (Collins, 2000).

The university is an institution that maintains power to influence individuals. For instance, the idea that pursuing an education leads to success is an ideology created to motivate others to attend college despite how expensive it is (Shields et. al, 2017). This is power’s first influence on students at the university, because instead of defining what success means personally to them, they follow society’s idea. It is essential to recognize that the university is a place that thrives off power and privilege.
The Matrix of Domination

Since the population focused on in this thesis is African American women, it is essential to analyze power from the perspective of a Black feminist scholar. Collins (2000) describes the matrix of domination, which explains how power is organized in society. The domains are comprised of different forms of oppression which mutually establish one another. Also, this concept is described as being historically established in order to influence social groups. The matrix of domination consists of four domains. First, the structural domain explains how social institutions have contributed to the subordination of African American women. For instance, the policies of U.S schools have historically excluded Black women. These social institutions rely on several forms of segregation to achieve this type of exclusion.

The next domain is disciplinary, which manages power relations. Surveillance is a distinguishing feature of this domain. Collins (2000) explained that different bureaucracies feel the need to watch Black women. Through surveillance, the domain of power continues to keep Black women as an inferior group in society. Third, is the hegemonic domain which justifies the practices that function as a result of power. This domain encompasses of “ideology, culture, and consciousness” (p. 284). According to Collins (2000), dominant groups use this domain to maintain power. Many of these ideologies, such as racism, have been around for a while that individuals are unable to resist its practices. Finally, is the interpersonal domain. The interpersonal domain consists of the experiences that emerge from intersecting oppressions. Collins (2000) mentioned that individuals are aware their own victimization, but they may not realize how they sustain someone else’s subordination. This type of power occurs on a daily basis to a point that it goes unnoticed.

Power and African American Women in Higher Education. For several years, power
has been exerted over African Americans to the point where they subconsciously reproduce ideologies such as the education gospel (Collins, 2000). The education gospel is the belief that social and economic problems are solved through receiving an education (Grubb & Lazerson, 2007). This belief is an example of the matrix of domination. Although educational institutions have prevented African American women from access, this ideology continues to demonstrate the power of receiving an education. Therefore, African American women were tasked with uplifting the African American race through receiving an education (Collins, 2000; Thomas & Jackson, 2007). This rhetoric of receiving an education to alleviate hardships has been constantly repeated to African American communities (Thomas & Jackson, 2007). In *Lower Ed: The Troubling Rise of For-Profit Colleges in the New Economy*, Tressi McMillian Cottom (2017) analyzed the power of the educational gospel by stating:

> Based on the education gospel, we increasingly demand more personal sacrifice from those who would pursue higher education: more loans, fewer grants; more choices, fewer practical options; more possibilities, more risk of failing to attain any of them. We justify that demand by pointing to the significant return in higher wages that those with higher education credentials enjoy. And we imply that this wage premium will continue in the "knowledge economy," where twenty-first-century jobs will require everyone to have some post-secondary education to do highly cognitive work. (p. 11)

African American women experience these personal sacrifices that McMillian Cottom describes. For instance, African American women have accumulated more student debt after attending college. In relation to the wealth gap, African American women have misconceptions about their anticipated and actual income (AAWU, 2018). These barriers that African American women face when attending college and after college graduation pose as detriments to their future success.
The ideal outcome for African American women is to be successful because they invested in their education. The educational gospel is an example of how an ideology can contribute to the oppression of Black women.

**Strategies of Resistance.** Although power exists in various ways at higher education institutions, there are strategies of resistance. First, it is essential for individuals to be aware of the way power is produced and how it influences behaviors. Collins (2000) explained that it is essential for Black women to oppressive structure to lead to empowerment. The insights gained from Black women’s experiences provides new opportunities for social justice. Therefore, the creation of organization that addresses the effects of power on Black women in higher education institutions can further advance this social justice effort.

Forming community is a method often utilized by African American women to resist oppression. According to Collins (2000), “while individual empowerment is key, only collective action can effectively generate the lasting institutional transformation required for social justice” (p. 290). Thus, it is necessary to form an organization where African American woman can connect with one another. Creating this type of organization for Black women would providing them with knowledge on structural power forces (Minnett et al., 2019; Robinson 2013; Walkington, 2012). This is the type of organization I will be proposing as my intervention to assist Black college women to be empowered.

**Current state**

In this section I discuss what is currently available as resources for African American women at universities. The two resources are sister circles and Historically Black Sororities. Both of these organizations have all provided support to African American women in some
capacity. Finally, I explicate why the BFSC implementation differs from these organizations and serves as a better alternative.

**Sistah Circles and Networks**

The scholarly literature about African American women in higher education has suggested the establishment of social support spaces that will allow them to thrive. An example of this support space is known as either a sistah circle or network. These spaces apply from Black undergraduate women to Black women faculty. According to Allen and Joseph (2018), the sistah network is a group that helps advance both the educational and social experiences of Black women. This network is known to advance empowerment and academic success due to its effective mentoring. Patton and Harper (2003) stated that African American women faculty should reach out to African American graduate women to initiate the sister circles. Sistah circles allow Black women to receive motivation from one another.

**Historically Black Sororities**

The Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLO) were established to contribute to the good of the African American race. Their mission also included serving their community and doing so collectively (Parks et al., 2012). Historically Black Sororities have also been highlighted as a benefit to the experiences of African American women at PWIs. Black Sororities provide African American women the opportunity to network and build new meaningful relationships (Patton & Harper, 2003). Black women who join black sororities at PWIs were compelled to join because they either knew someone in their family or had role models who were a part of one. Moreover, Black women have expressed that Black Sororities foster a space that celebrates their identities and leadership opportunities (Greyerbiehl &
Mitchell, 2014). Sororities have provided Black women an opportunity to resist oppressive institutions for group survival (Collins, 2000).

**The Need for the Black Feminist Scholar Collective**

Although sister circles and Historically Black Sororities offer many opportunities for African American women, these options alone do not suffice. First, sister circles may be organized on a more personal level. Challenges are present if the obligation of forming these sister circles are left up to the African American women faculty. These faculty members may serve in other positions already (Walkington, 2017).

Furthermore, BFT has been used as a framework to describe the importance of sister circles (Allen & Joseph 2018), but there are no details on how the lessons of BFT could be included in the sister circles to further contribute to the success and empowerment of Black women. While Historically Black Sororities have demonstrated social support for Black women, they have limitations. There are several requirements and behind the scenes work done in order to gain membership into a sorority. The majority of Black sororities have national and chapter requirements of a specific GPA and hours of community service (Parks et al., 2012). This indicates the academic pressure and culture of high standards that comes with being in a sorority. Furthermore, I have personally experienced the dedication it takes to join a sorority. Joining a sorority requires persistence and getting to know the members. My journey to Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority Incorporated took five years before I became a member.

The BFSC aims to provide a space for African American women to gain qualities that contribute to both their academic and personal development. The BFSC will include specific elements and strategies from BFT in its workshops to teach its participants how to deal with challenges they endure at PWI. The use of BFT to provide knowledge to the participants is
powerful because it was theorized by a Black woman. Moreover, participants will be able to learn about other Black women intellectuals.

Additionally, the BFSC has made membership requirements more open. The participants requirements will not require a high GPA. This was determined because some students may have a period where they struggle academically. Most importantly, as previously mentioned in Chapter 2, Black women usually are ignored in classroom environments which cause them to not seek help if they are facing difficulties. The BFSC will ensure that the participants transition into the organization smoothly and easily. More information on how this will be achieved is detailed in Chapter 4.

**Internship and Professional Experience Relation to Intervention**

My internship and work experiences have helped shaped my thematic concern and intervention. During my master’s program I have had the opportunity to work with a different population of students. My first work experience was with the Athletic Mentoring program. In this role, I worked with student athletes to ensure their success at West Chester University. My second internship experience was with the Center for Women and Gender Equity. This position allowed me to develop programming for the center that creates a co-curricular experience. Although I did not work directly with that many African American women, both of these experiences provided me with significant information that could be applied to my thematic concern and intervention.

The Athletic Mentoring Program was designed to serve student athletes who are academically at-risk or need assistance navigating college. The student athletes in this program are paired with a graduate student mentor. The student and their mentor meet weekly to discuss their classes and any issues that they have. During each meeting, the mentors focus on a
specific topic such as goal setting or time management with their athletes. Working as an athletic mentor has taught me that students that excel academically run into challenges that they may not mention. However, this does not mean that they would not benefit from the services that are offered by the Athletic Mentoring Program. These students learn more from this experience than what they would from a regular academic advisor. As mentors we often share our personal experiences with the student athletes, informing with the lessons we learned during them.

Moreover, we teach the student athletes how to advocate for themselves. The student athletes in the program end up making the decisions in college that they believe are best for them and can articulate why they made them. As I previously mentioned, African American women at PWIs are not identified as an at-risk population. Nevertheless, these women would gain insight from an organization that is focused on their experiences.

The Center for Women and Gender Equity (CWGE) offered me an experience that involved creating programming for students. One mission of the center includes creating a co-curricular experience to educate others about the issues that affect individuals from historically marginalized groups. Working with the CWGE staff taught me to be intentional when creating programming. When I was developing program ideas or content for the CWGE, I often thought about what message would it send to students, faculty, and stakeholders. It was very important to create events that featured members from these historically marginalized groups to display the need for systematic changes. My involvement in the EqualiTea speaker series allowed me to understand the significance of dialogue on race, inequality, and social justice. The programs I plan to incorporate in my intervention will generate the same meaningful conversations. In order to advocate for systematic changes affecting historically marginalized groups. The Black Feminist Scholar Collective will also provide knowledge to those at PWIs who are unaware of
the issues that affect African American women. Both of these experiences have provided me with knowledge that I will reflect within my intervention, the Black Feminist Scholar Collective, which is described in Chapter 4.
Chapter 4

In this chapter, I present the design of my intervention, the Black Feminist Scholar Collective (BFSC). First, I will introduce the BFSC and how it will contribute to the success of junior level of African American women at PWIs. Next, I reveal my program proposal and the specific components of the BFSC. Then, I explicate how the theoretical frameworks and scholarly literature in the previous chapters inform my intervention. Furthermore, I consider possible challenges that may impact my intervention. Finally, I articulate the ACPA/NASPA competencies that relate to my thematic concern and intervention.

The Black Feminist Scholar Collective (BFSC)

As described in Chapters 2 and 3, the experiences of African American women have been discredited (Patton et al., 2016). This has caused Black Women to question their intellectual capacity, especially in predominately white spaces. Additionally, there have not been programs or spaces specifically designed for Black Women at PWIs. The organizations that are offered for African American Woman focus on one of their identities over the other. For example, an organization such as the Black Student Union would have African American women focus on their race over gender. Therefore, I propose the implementation of an organization referred to as BFSC. The BFSC is dedicated to supporting undergraduate African American women at PWIs based on principles of BFT. This organization aims to acknowledge the complex experiences of African American women due to their intersecting identities. The goal of the organization is to implement practices based on BFT, that other higher education professionals can utilize to assist Black women at PWIs. Through workshops and mentoring, participants of the BFSC will receive the resources to become successful in their undergraduate career and in their future professional roles.
Purpose of the BFSC

The purpose of the BFSC is to provide exclusive assistance to Black Women at PWIs. The BFSC will provide several opportunities where African American women are able to express their experiences without feeling undermined. The organization will be geared towards junior level (or third-year undergraduate) African American women to begin presenting them with information that will ultimately allow them to achieve success academically and professionally. The BFSC will consist of two components. The first component will include several workshops that will focus on some of the teachings of BFT. Additionally, the workshops will create an atmosphere where the participants can discuss they some of the challenges they endure as Black women. The second component of the BFSC will be a mentoring program between the employed staff of the organization and participants. Here, I will outline the goals and learning outcomes that relate to the purpose of the BFSC. Furthermore, each component will have measures that will indicate success.

Goals: Educate, Empower, and Embrace

1. Educate others on the experience’s African American women through their narratives and Black Feminist scholarship.

2. Empower African American women by providing resources on ways to combat negative stigmas placed upon them.

3. Embrace African American women by creating supportive spaces for them to engage in dialogue about their experiences within higher education institutions.

Learning Outcomes

1. Participants of the BFSC will be able to describe how the themes of Black Feminist Thought appear and relate in their daily experiences.
2. After learning about different strategies of resistance, participants will identify which strategies of resistance they will utilize when they are facing challenges in predominately white spaces.

3. Participants will analyze various support strategies that higher education professionals can use while assisting African American women students.

Educational Workshops

The educational workshops of the BFSC will be structured to educate the participants about themes and literature that discuss the experiences of African American women. The BFSC will mostly rely on the teachings of BFT, yet still incorporate other concepts by Black feminists and scholars. BFT emphasizes the knowledge that comes from African American women. Collins (2000) explicates this idea by stating, “As members of an oppressed group, U.S. Black women have generated alternative practices and knowledges that have been designed to foster U.S. Black women’s group empowerment” (p. 30). It is essential for the BFSC to be an environment that fosters the knowledge of Black women. As a collective, African American women have the opportunity to inform each other (Collins, 2000). In order to foster the knowledge of Black Women, it is essential for the BFSC to be an environment where they comfortable express their viewpoints.

My educational philosophies express that education should be transformative and multicultural. A transformative education allows students to think critically without having ideas imposed on them. The BFSC will provide numerous opportunities for the participants to reflect on the ways BFT provide ways to critique traditional ways of education. The educational workshops will be designed in ways where the facilitator and participants learn from one another. The participants will be able to express their viewpoints on the workshop topics. Next,
the educational workshops will always provide a space for dialogue to occur. Dialogue which is an important aspect of BFT to cultivate knowledge from one another. Although the participants all identify as Black Women, they also have different identities. This allows each participant to explain their perspectives based on their experience and identities. Each educational workshop will be designed to constantly reflect my educational philosophies.

*Mentoring and Othermothers*

Mentoring has been highlighted as an important resource for African American women. Mentoring is described as a process that contributes to the student’s professional and personal development (Louis et al., 2014). The mentoring relationships fostered between African American women provide opportunities for them to receive support, especially in unsupportive environments (Johnson-Bailey, 2015). It is essential to acknowledge that there is lack of African American women faculty at higher education institutions. Therefore, African American college women seek mentorship relationships outside their institutions (Patton, 2009). Some of these connections are made with individuals who are known as *othermothers*. Othermothers are women who support children that are not their own. Collins (2000) explains the significance of othermothers by stating “Unlike the traditional mentoring so widely reported in educational literature, this relationship goes far beyond that of providing students with either technical skills or a network of academic and professional contacts” (p.191). Along with the other benefits, the mentoring experiences of African American causes them to become mentors for others (Patton, 2009).

The BFSC will incorporate mentoring because it is known as a strategy of resistance. In BFT, it is essential for African American women to gain consciousness to achieve resistance to oppression (Collins, 2000). In higher education institutions, African American women
experience this oppression as “outsiders within.” This concept articulates how African American women can contribute new perspectives based on their identities, yet their ideas are usually dismissed (Collins, 2000; Henderson et al., 2010). Although they are students at an institution, these experiences of constantly being questioned and dealing with microaggression cause Black Women to feel isolated. Black Women who engage in mentorship learn how to combat these situations.

Co-mentorship is highly suggested to promote the empowerment of African American Women. This type of mentorship does not consist of hierarchies, both individuals learn and contribute to the development process of one another (Baldwin & Johnson, 2018). Mentoring provides African American women to gain skills that allows them to be vulnerable and express their difficulties. Once they are able to express their feelings about their experiences without a filter, they then are able to critically think about how to dismantle barriers they endure (Baldwin & Johnson, 2018). These are the types of skills that the participants will be gaining through the BFSC mentoring component.

The BFSC will included African American women faculty and graduate assistants to provide the participants with insight based on their college experiences. Moreover, the participants will be able to receive professional advice. The co-mentorship style will be adopted for the mentoring component to remain consistent with the ideas of BFT and my educational philosophies.

**Program Proposal**

The BFSC will be a yearlong program. The organization will be comprised of three African American women faculty, graduate assistants, and 15 participants. The size of the organization will be kept small in order for everyone to get to know each other personally, as
relationships among Black Women results in new knowledge. The BFSC will host 12 educational workshops throughout the academic year. These workshops will consist of topics that relate to Black women’s experiences. In the fall, there will be an introductory workshop where participants will take a pre-survey to see how aware they are of the concepts related to BFT. Mentors will get an opportunity to meet the participants at the workshop before being paired up. Everyone involved with the BFSC will be able to establish personal connections with one another at the introductory workshop.

**Recruitment of BFSC Staff and Participants**

The recruitment of BFSC staff and participants will begin to occur a year prior to the introductory workshop. The selection of the African American women faculty will be based on their experience with mentoring, willingness to participate, and their familiarity with BFT concepts. There have been several instances where African American women faculty members participated in initiatives and receive minimum or no compensation. Therefore, honorarium will be provided to the three faculty members selected for the BFSC. The honorarium amount will be $400 per semester, which will be a total of $800 for the academic year. These faculty members will be recruited by email (see Appendix A).

There will be two African American women graduate assistants selected to be a part of the BSFC staff. The graduate assistants will be required to apply for the position with the BFSC. The position will provide the graduate assistants with 12 waived tuition credits. Also, they will be required to work with the BFSC for 20 hours a week. The job description and application for the prospective graduate assistants can be found in Appendix B.

To keep the size of the BFSC small, the 15 participants will be nominated by campus faculty. Faculty will be asked to provide the names of students they believe fit the criteria of the
BFSC. Participants must be students in good academic standing with the university, have at least a 2.0 grade point average, and faculty must state how their nominee would benefit from the BFSC. Participants will be compensated for their involvement with the BFSC.

**BFSC Introductory Workshop**

The introductory workshop will be the first session of the workshops for the BFSC. This workshop will explicate the details of the BFSC components. First, the staff of the BFSC will introduce themselves and discuss the purpose of the organization. The participants will then be provided an opportunity to introduce themselves as well. During the introduction of the staff and participants, each individual will state their purpose for being part of the organization. This will start to develop the connections between their experiences and knowledge they are going to gain from the organization. Next, the participants will be provided a schedule of when the educational workshops during the year will take place. Next, there will be an opportunity for the participants to meet the staff by engaging in an icebreaker activity.

After everyone is acquainted, the participants will be asked to take a pre-survey which will ask them how well they understand concepts related to BFT. This survey will allow the staff of the BFSC to determine which topics are a priority to cover during the workshop sessions. The staff of the BFSC will then provide the participants with a preview of what Black Feminist scholarship will be discussed in the remaining workshops. Finally, the participants will be able to suggest what programs they would like the organization to host. A table is provided below to describe the remaining workshops and programs for the academic year.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WORKSHOP TOPIC</th>
<th>WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>READINGS AND RESOURCES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introductory Workshop</td>
<td>Introductions, Purpose and Objectives of BFSC. Pre-survey of BFT knowledge.</td>
<td>Pre-survey on BFT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of BFT</td>
<td>Participants will begin to learn about the origins of BFT.</td>
<td>Black Feminist Thought by Patricia Hill Collins Aint I a Woman by Sojourner Truth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BFT Tenet 1: Dialectical Relationships Connecting Oppression to activism</td>
<td>Participants will learn how BFT group consciousness allows Black women to survive different oppressions.</td>
<td>Black Feminist Thought by Patricia Hill Collins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BFT Tenet 2: Black Women’s Standpoint</td>
<td>Participants will discuss the concept of Black Women’s standpoint.</td>
<td>Black Feminist Thought by Patricia Hill Collins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BFT Tenet 3: Black Women’s collectivity producing group standpoint</td>
<td>Participants will gain insight on how the collective experiences of Black Women fosters a group standpoint. Also, they will understand how collective experiences are expressed through dialogical relationships.</td>
<td>Black Feminist Thought by Patricia Hill Collins Race, Gender, and the Black Women’s Standpoint by Catherine E. Harriotes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BFT Tenet 4: Black Women Intellectuals (Academia &amp; Community) BFSC Check In</td>
<td>Participants will understand the concept of Black Women intellectuals. Participants will take a check in survey to assess learning about BFT.</td>
<td>Black Women in the United States: An Historical Encyclopedia by Elsa Barkley Brown A voice from the South by Anna J Cooper Check in survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intersectionality</td>
<td>Participants will review materials that discuss the concept of intersectionality</td>
<td>Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics by Kimberlé Crenshaw Sister Outsider by Audre Lorde</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matrix of Domination</td>
<td>Participants will learn about the matrix of domination. They will then compare it with intersectionality.</td>
<td>Black Feminist Thought by Patricia Hill Collins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BFT Tenet 5: Black Feminism is Dynamic</td>
<td>Participants will gain insight on the ways Black Feminism constantly changes as social conditions change.</td>
<td>Black Feminist Thought by Patricia Hill Collins Black Women in the Field: Experiences Understanding Ourselves and Others Through Qualitative Research by Gretchen Givens Generett and Rhonda Baynes Jeffries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BFT Tenet 6: BFT and other Social Justice Projects</td>
<td>Participants will connect BFT to other social justice movements of the past and present.</td>
<td>Black Feminist Thought by Patricia Hill Collins But Some of Us Are Brave by Akasha (Gloria T.) Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith Black Feminist Approach Toward Engaging Social Work Students in Social Justice Collaboration by Erica Campbell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultivating Dialogical Relationships</td>
<td>The participants will engage in dialogue to express their experiences as students at a PWI.</td>
<td>BFSC Discussion Topics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BFSC Banquet End of year reflection</td>
<td>Participants will share learnings from BFSC with other student affairs professionals and stakeholders. Participants will also take a final survey to assess how much they have learned from the educational workshops.</td>
<td>End of year survey</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
BFSC Mentoring Program

The BFSC mentoring program will commence a week after the introductory workshop. The BFSC will host a program for the mentors and mentees to meet one another. Three participants will be assigned to each staff member of the BFSC. The participants will be assigned to their mentor randomly. As mentioned earlier, the mentoring component will be based on co-mentorship. Both the mentor and mentee are responsible for establishing when their meeting times will occur and how frequently they will occur. Mentors are to develop some activities or topics that relates to BFT. Mentees will also have an opportunity to express what they would like to discuss. To keep progress of the mentees, mentors will complete a brief report on their meetings. During staff meetings, the mentors will provide updates on how mentoring is going. The mentees will be given an opportunity to discuss their mentoring experiences in a focus group which will be explained in further detail in Chapter 5.

Challenges

There are a few challenges that I anticipate affecting my intervention, the BFSC. First, I realize that the purpose of the BFSC must be articulated clearly to explain its need on campus. There are other organizations that provide membership to African American women such as the National Council of Negro Women and Historically Black Sororities. Individuals may assume that there is no sense of urgency for the BFSC to be established because these organizations exist. It is essential that stakeholders understand that the BFSC utilizes BFT as a framework to educate its participants and others on experiences of Black women.

Next, obtaining funding for the organization presents a challenge. Newer organizations implemented on campus have to ensure that they are successful to receive funding. This involves trying to secure funding from stakeholders and other departments. The total amount for the
Budget is high because it was important to compensate both staff and participants. There may be a possibility that the BFSC receives a large amount of funding for the pilot but if it does not prove to be successful or if participation rates drop, the budget could be cut.

The last potential challenge of the BFSC is obtaining the Black women faculty to serve as staff. Many African American women faculty members may be involved in other roles on campus. According to Harley (2008), African American Women faculty that work at PWIs are known as “maids of the academy.” This concept highlights how African American women overextend themselves in many positions, which causes them to be fatigued. Moreover, Black women faculty are usually overburdened with diversity tasks, organizing social functions, and mentoring (Henderson, 2010). Thus, it will be essential to consider other ways to include Black women to serve as staff, if the ones on campus are occupied in other positions.

BFSC and Professional Competencies

In this section I discuss the ACPA/NASPA competencies that directly intersect with my thematic concern and intervention. These two competencies are Social Justice and Inclusion and Advising and Supporting.

Social Justice and Inclusion

First, the BFSC is grounded in BFT which committed to achieving social justice. The BFSC consists of educational workshops that creates an environment to inform the participants on oppression, privilege, and power. The organization is also committed to providing opportunities for its participants to evaluate ways to combat the hierarchal systems are present in higher education institutions (ACPA/NASPA Competencies, 2015). Although, this a pilot program, the BFSC would eventually hold other programs open to other populations and student affairs professionals to educate them on the issues that affect African American women at PWIs.
My thematic concern reveals the systemic barriers that African American women endure in their daily lived experience. Ultimately, the BFSC is an organization that will empower its participants by being a supportive space where Black women can engage in dialogue about these hardships.

**Advising and Supporting**

The second competency that concerns my programmatic intervention is that of Advising and Supporting. This competency consists of providing feedback and guidance to others, and supporting their growth and development. Scholarly literature has expressed the difference between mentoring and advising. Nevertheless, the duties of both roles are intertwined (Jones et al., 2013). The mentoring component of the BFSC has been included to assist participants with their goal-setting and decision-making. The mentors have a specific purpose in acknowledging the different identities of the students. Also, they can provide their expertise on how to navigate predominately white professional spaces as an individual with intersecting identities. One of the foundational outcomes of this competency is to “facilitate reflection to make meaning from experiences with students, groups, colleagues, and others” (ACPA/NASPA Competencies, 2016 p. 35). The activities the mentors engage in with their mentees will allow them to reflect on their college experiences and time in the BFSC. This competency is significant to my thematic concern because African American women gain knowledge that will ensure them to achieve success as they pursue professional careers.
Chapter 5

In this chapter I discuss the implementation of the BFSC. In detail, I will describe the anticipated timeline of the BFSC, plans for obtaining funding, and marketing strategies. Next, I will explore leadership styles in higher education and student affairs, and how they will be included within the BFSC. Then, I will delve into the assessment and evaluation plan of the BFSC program components. Finally, I examine the limitations of my intervention and future considerations for my thematic concern.

BFSC Timeline

To ensure the effectiveness of the BFSC, the program will be established a year before the first workshop session. The fall semester will be used to look for the African American women faculty who will serve as the staff of the BFSC. As previously mentioned, they will be selected based on their experience as mentors, familiarity with BFT concepts, and their willingness to participate. Also, the fall will be used to connect with other stakeholders and departments who would be willing to collaborate with the BFSC. This collaboration is important for the establishment of the program.

Along with the faculty, the search for two graduate assistants will commence in the spring semester. The graduate assistants will be selected based on the requirements that are listed in Appendix B. Next, the selection of participants of the BFSC will occur during the spring semester as well. Students will be allowed to participate in the BFSC based on the requirements listed in Chapter 4. By the spring semester, the positions of the faculty, graduate assistants, and potential participants should be solidified.

In the summer, the detailed planning tasks of the BFSC will take place. First, there will be a final count of the students. The final count is to verify that the students are still able to
participate in the program. The staff of the BFSC will send out emails to each participant asking them to confirm their participation. Next, this time in the summer will be used to plan out the educational workshops for the academic year. This will be an opportunity for the staff of the BFSC to gather materials and resources needed for each workshop. For instance, a possibility would be for the staff to develop something similar to a course reader which would include all the reading resources needed for each workshop. Moreover, the staff of the BFSC will receive a brief training on the purpose of the BFSC, BFT concepts, and effective strategies for being a mentor. Furthermore, the staff will plan the introduction workshop that will take place in the fall. They will determine a location where the workshops will take place. The timeline which was detailed in Chapter 4 will contribute to the success of the BFSC.

**Budget and Funding for the BFSC**

The BFSC is dedicated to empowering African American women at PWIs. For the BFSC to be successful and maintain longevity, it must receive adequate funding. The majority of the expenses in the budget are designed to compensate everyone who is a part of the BFSC. African American women faculty are usually compensated less than white men and women (AAUW, 2019). Black college women students usually work one or more jobs in addition to being a student to support their institutional debts (Arroyo et al., 2018). The BFSC will strive to make everyone’s involvement worthwhile, which is the reason for their compensation. The rest of the budget will go to programming and supplies. For the monthly workshop programs, some of the costs include food, giveaways, and decorations. Additionally, other expenses incorporated into the budget are for marketing materials and school supplies. A table reflecting the budget of BFSC can be found in Appendix C.
There are several ways that BFSC will try to obtain funding for its initiatives. First, the BFSC would try to obtain funding from the university budget. Another source of funding would be from the student activities fees. Since the BFSC aims to serve the African American women students on campus, once it is established as a student government organization, it will be eligible to receive funding. This is also a way for the BFSC to receive money from other organizations that have been established earlier and thus have a larger budget. For instance, the Black Student Union (BSU) were implemented on campuses starting from the 1960’s and have long-standing sources of funding. This type of organization may be able to donate to $1,000 or more to the BFSC.

Next, the staff of the BFSC would reach out to campus stakeholders and departments. Multicultural centers and offices for gender equity may be interested in co-sponsoring the BFSC, because they both work with the African American woman student population. The BFSC would then prove how its organization is critical to the success to of Black Women on campus. The staff of the BFSC could host a series of presentations on the purpose of the organization and how it’s components will assist Black women on campus. This presentation would clearly communicate more specific details, such as the program timeline and estimated budget to persuade the stakeholders. Furthermore, the members of the BFSC may consider hosting events with these other departments to have a greater impact on campus.

One of the final ways that the BFSC can acquire funding is through African American women alumni. The BFSC may positively appeal to these African American women alumni who did not experience an organization that was specifically designed for them. Through a letter, the BFSC could explain how their contribution is positively helping African American women achieve success. An example of this alumni donation letter is located in Appendix D.
Leadership Style in BFSC

In this section, I explain the leadership styles that will be incorporated in the BFSC. First, I explain the importance of leadership in the BFSC. Next, I expound the idea of leadership and its characteristics in higher education. Then, I describe the several types of leadership models and competencies that contribute to leadership style. Finally, I explain how my own leadership style and experiences with leadership will inform the BFSC.

The Importance of Leadership and BFSC

The BFSC creates several opportunities for leadership roles for both the Black women students and faculty. The mentoring component of the BFSC is where the staff will be able to guide the Black Women students to progress in their educational and career development. Findings in literature support that having an African American women mentor empowers the college experiences of African American women students (Patton, 2009). Next, the participants of the BFSC will be able to provide input on the initiatives the BFSC hosts. They will be given the chance to help organize some of the programs that occur through the academic year.

Characteristics of Effective and Transformative Leadership in Higher Education

The idea of leadership is multifaceted and can be interpreted in multiple ways. According to Northouse (2013), leadership is “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (p. 5). Leadership is needed within higher education to facilitate its main purpose, which is assisting students to achieve socially and academically. In higher education, leadership is more than influencing students. Student affairs professionals should have the characteristics of both effective and transformative leadership.

In the 1950’s, effective leadership was described as an individual that influenced group effectiveness. (Northouse, 2013). The characteristics of an effective leader include consideration,
fairness, and trustworthiness. An effective leader understands the strategic vision of the university department they work in (Bryman 2007). Transformative leadership or—as Burns (1978) titles it—transformational leadership occurs when a person is dedicated to advancing others to higher levels of motivation and morality. The transformative leader is motivational, inspirational, and proactive. In higher education, a transformative leader is dedicated to helping students reach their fullest potential.

These two leadership styles are similar because they both focus on achieving change in higher education. However, transformative leadership surpasses the minimum of executing the university’s vision. Although both leadership styles are important, my intervention will incorporate mentors that embody transformative leadership. The goal for the mentoring component of the BFSC is for the mentors to prepare the African American women participants to “break the glass ceiling” and provide them with the skills that will allow them to challenge the existing barriers in their educational and professional roles (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Ultimately, the BFSC is committed to bringing African American women in higher education together to encourage and create opportunities for the next generation of African American women leaders.

**Leadership Models**

There are many elements to leadership models that cause an individual to make decisions based on a student’s social, interpersonal, developmental and academic success. The Social Change Model (SCM) of Leadership Development was created to augment students’ experiences through social change. According to the SCM, leadership is a process rather than a position (HERI, 1996). The seven C’s of the SCM mentions how a student can understand their ability to become a leader on different dimensions. For instance, the consciousness of self, asks any
participant – in formal leadership positions or not – to be aware of their selves and examine their personal values. The collaboration dimension provides everyone with a learning experience since leadership becomes a shared experience (HERI, 1996). This demonstrates how two specific leadership elements focus on making decisions about student success on an interpersonal and social level. Kouzes and Posner’s (2017) leadership model consist of five practices. Leaders receive assistance and make accomplishments with the help of others. They inspire individuals who will be the next set of leaders. Next, with the “challenge the process” practice, individuals find innovative ways to improve and take risks (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). In regard to students in higher education, these leadership approaches allow students to develop by applying these skills in an academic and co-curricular settings.

**The Influence of Leadership Competencies**

ACPA and NASPA leadership competencies highlights the outcomes for student affairs professionals. The leadership competency addresses the concepts of education, training, development, and engagement (ACPA & NASPA, 2015). An integral part of my leadership style involves learning how to improve myself to contribute to a greater purpose. This is the same type of leadership that should be displayed within in the BFSC. The leadership competencies serve as a guide on how student affairs professionals can advocate for the success of every student. Under the engagement foundational outcomes, it states “Think critically, creatively, and imagine possibilities for solutions that do not currently exist or are not apparent” (ACPA & NASPA, 2015). This directly relates to my both my thematic concern and BFSC. My understanding of Black women’s experiences has allowed me to identify the resources that could be provided to assist them during their time at PWIs. There are many initiatives that are dedicated to African American men. Yet, much more needs to be accomplished in the mentoring work of African
American women (Patton, 2009). The leadership competency can be utilized as a form of assessment when determining the effectiveness of the BFSC. Reflecting on the ACPA/NASPA competencies continuously ensures that all student affairs professionals are equipped in any role they are involved in at their institution.

**Personal Leadership Approaches and BFSC**

The different leadership styles and approaches have enhanced my own leadership style. My first concept of leadership involves appreciating the input of the people that work with you towards a common goal. This type of leadership style is described in the common purpose dimension of the Social Change Model (SCM) of Leadership Development (HERI, 1996). The SCM has allowed me to understand the reason why I have certain leadership approaches. After recognizing that my personal belief is that Black women need supportive spaces in PWIs, I began to constantly advocate about this matter. Moreover, my personal experiences as a Black woman at my undergraduate institution have greatly influenced me to evaluate how to facilitate change at the institutional level. Thus, the approaches of BFSC must be conducive to African American women’s success at PWIs.

Based on my previous leadership experiences, I have learned that leadership styles can either negatively or positively affect my intervention. During my undergraduate career, I held an executive position on a campus organization. The president displayed an autocratic leadership style. Autocratic leadership style is characterized as a leader who makes and controls all the decisions (Northouse, 2013). The other board members rarely contributed any of their ideas. This experience revealed that I did not want to be that type of leader. When I became president of my own campus organization, I included my board member’s ideas in every decision. It was essential that the organization had an atmosphere where we practiced and displayed
transformational leadership.

My personal experience reflects the BFT views on leadership. According to Collins (2000), “Black women routinely reject models of authority based on unjust hierarchies” (p. 218). This clearly explains why the staff and participants will be able to contribute their ideas to the BFSC. Although there is staff for the BFSC, it is imperative that they do not display authoritarian leadership styles. The BFSC will foster a collaborative leadership experience where the BFSC participants and staff can learn from one another.

**Assessment & Evaluation**

Assessment and evaluation are integral for program development success. Both assessment and evaluation are used on smaller and larger scales. In the field of higher education, programming is essential to the education of students outside of the classroom. Through programming, student affairs professionals can help in the development of students and contribute to their sense of belonging (Aiken-Wisniewski et. al, 2021). Student affairs professionals then assess whether the program was successful by meeting its goals and objectives.

According to Upcraft and Schuh (1996) “assessment is any effort to gather, analyze, and interpret evidence which describes institutional, departmental, divisional or agency effectiveness” (p.18). Upcraft and Schuh describe effectiveness by stating that it is measured when an intervention or program achieves its goals. There are several forms of assessment; some of them include formative and summative assessment. Summative assessment is receiving feedback on the program to improve it for the future.

Assessment in higher education is also significant to prove the program’s effectiveness to avoid budget cuts. Suskie (2009) positions evaluation as a means to interpreting assessment
evidence and using the results to connect to program outcomes. Furthermore, evaluation determines the quality of the whole program. With both assessment and evaluation, student affairs educators are able to understand how to continue to create and implement programming that will better serve students.

To assess and evaluate the BFSC, I will be utilizing a mixed methods approach to measure the success of BFSC. After reviewing scholarly articles about African American college women, it is significant to capture their experiences using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Using mixed methods will allow a comparison between data and the personal experiences of the participants in the BFSC. There will be a few areas assessed of the BFSC. These areas will be knowledge on BFT, mentoring experiences, and student success.

The participants' knowledge on BFT will be assessed by a series of surveys throughout the educational workshops. During the introduction workshop, the participants will receive a pre-survey asking them if they are familiar with the concepts and themes of BFT. As mentioned in Chapter 4, this survey aims to understand how much the participants know and then identify concepts that should be included in the following workshops. The quantitative data will provide the BFSC staff insight on what they need to do to help the participants understand BFT. At the sixth workshop, the participants will be able to take another survey to see how much they have learned about BFT since the first survey. After the next set of workshops, the participants will take a final survey at the end of the academic year. An example of the surveys can be found in Appendix E.

Mentoring

To understand the impact of the BFSC mentoring component, a focus group will be used to engage participants. A focus group is a qualitative research method where more insight is
provided on a topic through the participants experience. The focus group is conducted by interviewing a group of participants (Morgan, 1998). The questions developed for the focus group should consist of language that will allow the participants to express themselves freely (Stringer, 2014). This form of acquired information will be utilized by the BFSC because it reflects the essential aspects of Critical Action Research (CAR) and BFT. First, focus groups demonstrate the ongoing effort of making the participants to be the experts. BFT has continuously stressed the use of dialogue among Black women to produce knowledge. The focus group will be held with the participants of the BFSC. The majority of the questions will be open ended in order to capture the students mentoring experiences. A description of the focus group and the questions that will be asked can be found in Appendix F.

After the participants complete their year in the BFSC, staff will track their academic progress. Staff of the BFSC will track their GPA and whether they persist to graduation to evaluate their progress. The BFSC will follow up with previous participants to learn how the components of BFSC has helped them achieved success.

Limitations & Looking Ahead

The establishment of the BFSC was intentional by being designed specifically for Black women only. Many scholarly articles have highlighted that there is a lack of African American women faculty (Patton et al., 2016). The under-representation of African American women in administrative and faculty positions was previously referred to as the “pipeline problem.” This concept explains that women with appropriate education were not hired for jobs. However, the “pipeline problem” has evolved into the glass ceiling, that is barriers that prevent the advancement of women in a profession (Carli & Eagly, 2001). This presents challenges for the BFSC.
Although there is research presented to provide cross-cultural competence among non-African American faculty members in mentoring, African American women college students connect to faculty of the same race (Louis, 2014). One aspect to consider to is to seek assistance from other Black women from other universities or organizations to be involved with the BFSC.

Moving forward, it would be possible to consider how the BFSC could be expanded to other women of color. As indicated earlier, the sixth tenet of BFT is concerned with other social justice projects. There are other populations of women of color that may endure hardships at higher education institutions. Collins (2000) highlighted that advocating for others include joining the organizations that support their efforts. After reflecting on this possibility, the BFSC could collaborate with other campus organizations for women of color. Moreover, the BFSC could dedicate some of the workshops to these organizations and bring awareness to their initiatives.

**Conclusion**

In this thesis, I proposed the intervention of the Black Feminist Scholar Collective to address the lack of support resources for Black women students at PWI institutions. There has been a long occurrence of Black women have been marginalized due to their identities. More specifically, their views have been dismissed and silenced as they pursue their college education. Through the Black Feminist Scholar Collective, Black women students will be able to collaborate in a space where they are empowered as they embark in their educational journey. Their involvement in the BFSC will hopefully lead them to several professional fields, where they will advocate for social justice and equity in their roles.
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Appendices

Appendix A

BFSC Staff Recruitment Email

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To:</th>
<th>Higher Education Faculty and Staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cc:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject:</td>
<td>Black Feminist Scholar Collective Staff Recruitment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dear higher education faculty and staff, The Black Feminist Scholar Collective (BFSC) is a new organization being established on campus. The BFSC is looking for three African American women faculty who are dedicated to supporting junior (third year) level African American women. The requirements of this position include, experience with mentoring and familiarity with a few concepts of Black Feminist Thought (BFT). The prospective staff will collaborate with graduate assistants on educational workshops throughout the year and mentoring program. The staff of the BFSC will receive financial compensation for their service. For more information or to express your interest please contact Mariama Quist. Please see below for information about the organization and staff requirements:

The Black Feminist Scholar Collective (BFSC) aims to educate, empower, and embrace Black college women in higher education institutions. The organization is involved with hosting educational workshops that are focused on Black Feminist concepts and scholarship. The BFSC also offers a mentoring program between the staff and participants. The mentoring aspect allows the participants to gain skills from their mentor that will allow them to achieve educational, personal, and professional success.

The staff for the BFSC are expected to contribute 30 hours a week to the organization. Mentoring sessions and program planning will count towards the hour.

- Develop, coordinate, and implement program content for educational workshops
- Help write and design educational and promotional materials for BFSC
- Serve as a BFSC mentor
- Oversee BFSC graduate assistants
- Attend BFSC staff meetings to discuss program progress
- Collaborate with members of the BFSC to set weekly, semester, and long-term goals

Mariama A. Quist
M.S. Candidate, Higher Education Policy and Student Affairs
Organizer of Black Feminist Scholar Collective
Member of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority Inc.
Appendix B

BFSC Graduate Assistant Job Description

POSITION TITLE: GA for Black Feminist Scholar Collective

The Black Feminist Scholar Collective (BFSC) aims to educate, empower, and embrace Black college women in higher education institutions. The organization is involved with hosting educational workshops that are focused on Black Feminist concepts and scholarship. The BFSC also offers a mentoring program between the staff and participants. The mentoring aspect allows the participants to gain skills from their mentor that will allow them to achieve educational, personal, and professional success.

The Graduate Assistant for the BFSC is a 20 hours per week position, that offers a tuition waiver and stipend. The GA will assist with the planning and implementation of the educational workshops. They will also serve as mentor to the BFSC participants and cultivate productive working relationships with the participants.

The prospective GA must be an African American woman accepted into a Graduate Program at the institution

SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITIES

The BFSC GA will work 20 hours per week during each semester

- Develop, coordinate, and implement program content for educational workshops
- Help write and design educational and promotional materials for BFSC
- Write, design, produce, and distribute educational and promotional materials
- Serve as a BFSC mentor
- Attend BFSC staff meetings to discuss program progress
- Collaborate with members of the BFSC to set weekly, semester, and long-term goals

PREFERRED QUALIFICATIONS

- Experience with writing and designing social media posts and managing social media accounts
- Experience in event planning, programming, and /or marketing student events at college/university level
- Strong organizational and collaboration skills/experience
- Experience with mentoring or working with students from diverse backgrounds

APPLICATION PROCESS

Please send, in a single Word or pdf file, a cover letter, a resume, and the names and contact information for three academic or professional references to the staff of the BFSC by email message (before 4:30 pm on June 22, 2021. Your cover letter should include your contact information, your graduate program of study at the institution, an explanation of your interest in and qualifications for the position, and the applicability of this graduate assistant position to your course of study/career.
# Appendix C

## Budget for Black Feminist Scholar Collective

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXPENSE</th>
<th>JUSTIFICATION</th>
<th>COST</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PERSONNEL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| 3 Faculty members   | Oversee the organization. Serve as mentors; Deal with stakeholders.          | Honorarium for three faculty members  
                       |                                 | $400 each semester  
                       |                                 | $800 per academic year        | $2,400 |
| 2 Graduate Assistants | Assist with logistics of program; Serve as mentors. Oversee committees for events. | Full time graduate assistantship  
                       |                                 | 12 credits                    | $40,000|
| **PARTICIPANTS**    |                                                                               |                               |        |
| 15 participants     | Participants will be compensated for their participation in the program. Participants will be required to fulfill certain requirements to receive the stipend. | $500/participant each semester  
                       |                                 | $1000 per academic year  
                       |                                 | (stipend will only be given to the participants once as juniors) | $15,000|
| **PROGRAMMING AND EVENTS** | The Black Feminist Scholar Collective will have 12 events during the academic year. Funding will be used for food, guest speakers, apparel etc. | The personnel in the organization will work with these amounts for all 12 events.  
                       |                                 | Food - $6,000  
                       |                                 | Giveaways- $2,000  
                       |                                 | Guest Speakers- $2,000  
                       |                                 | Decorations - $1,000 | $11,000|
| **MARKETING AND SUPPLIES** | Advertisement of events (banners, flyers, invitations) supplies needed for the organization (books, paper pencils). | Advertisement- $1000  
                       |                                 | Supplies - $1000 | $2,000|

**Total Amount of Expenses** $70,400
Appendix D

BFSC Donation Letter

BLACK FEMINIST SCHOLAR COLLECTIVE

Black Feminist Scholar Collective
2021 Black Feminist Lane
Philadelphia, PA 19142

Dear Prestigious Alumnae,

The Black Feminist Scholar Collective (BFSC) is a new organization being established at the institution. This initiative is dedicated to creating an atmosphere where Black women can come together and share their experiences. The BFSC will consist of two components, educational workshops and a mentoring program. Our mission is to Educate, Empower, and Embrace those who are involved with our organization.

To ensure that our participants are flourishing while in the program, we are providing them with resources and a stipend. We are hoping that you may be able to make a contribution to this effort. Any donation made would be greatly appreciated and would help support these women while they are on their educational journey.

Sincerely,
Mariama A. Quist, M.S.
Organizer of the Black Feminist Scholar Collective

DONATION FORM

Donor Information

Name (First, Last)

Street Address

Phone Number

Email

Donor Information

Check One:  [ ] Cash  [ ] Money Order  [ ] Check

Amount

Date

Donations can also be sent to our cash app $BFSC2021
Appendix E

BFSC Pre-Survey

Please Indicate your age:

- Under 18
- 18-24
- 25-30

Race (Ethnicity):

- Black or African American
- Latino or Hispanic
- Asian
- Native American
- Two or more
- Other/ Unknown

What is your gender identity? ______________________________

What is your religious background? ____________________________

What is your socioeconomic status?

- Lower class
- Middle class
- Upper class

How familiar are you with the following concepts?

(1=Unfamiliar, 5=Extremely familiar).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 Unfamiliar</th>
<th>2 Slightly familiar</th>
<th>3 Somewhat familiar</th>
<th>4 Moderately familiar</th>
<th>5 Extremely familiar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>History of Black women in higher education</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept of Collectivism</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

(1=Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1 Disagree</th>
<th>2 Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>3 Neither Agree or Degree</th>
<th>4 Agree</th>
<th>5 Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dialogues are important for Black women’s experiences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black women endure similar challenges such as racism, sexism, etc.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
BFSC Check In/Final Survey

**How aware are you with the following concepts?**

(1= Unaware, 5= Extremely Agree).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Are you aware of the strategies that can assist Black women combat racism sexism etc.?</th>
<th>1 Unaware</th>
<th>2 Slightly Aware</th>
<th>3 Somewhat Aware</th>
<th>4 Aware</th>
<th>5 Extremely Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

(1= disagree, 5= Strongly Agree)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Black women face similar challenges as a group, but their individual responses.</th>
<th>1 Disagree</th>
<th>2 Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>3 Neither Agree or Degree</th>
<th>4 Agree</th>
<th>5 Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue among Black women results in group consciousness.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black women intellectuals hold roles in both the academy and community.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black Feminist thought is constantly changing as social condition changes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black Feminist Thought continues to be involved with other social justice efforts.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix F

BFSC Mentoring Program Focus Group Questions

1. Please introduce yourself by stating your name, major, and year. Then speak on how your semester has been going.

2. Based on your mentoring experiences, in what ways have you grown as an individual and a student?

3. What themes from Black Feminist Thought have you seen appear during your mentoring experiences?

4. Have you learned any valuable lessons on how to navigate predominately white spaces as a Black women scholar?

5. If you could describe your mentoring experiences with the Black Feminist Scholar Collective in three words, what would they be?