

EXAMINING THE EXPERIENCES FOR DIVERSE WOMEN IN SETTINGS OF
HIGHER EDUCATION: AN INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract
of
EXAMINING THE EXPERIENCES FOR DIVERSE WOMEN IN SETTINGS OF
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Sociologists have examined the barriers that students of color, in general, experience in higher education, as well as how campus climate can be improved to be more inclusive for the increasingly diversified student population. However, few researchers have examined college students' experiences across race, gender, and class, particularly the intersectional effects on women in various college settings (McCabe 2009). Therefore, this study examines the intersectional experiences of women from different racial and ethnic groups at California State University, Sacramento. With the use of three focus groups, this study will explore Black, White and Chicana women's experiences in different settings of higher education. This study will employ the theory of intersectionality to guide the analysis and to explore the differences by race, gender and class.

_____, Committee Chair
Manuel Barajas, Ph.D

_____,
Date

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Acknowledgements.....	v
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Purpose of the Study.....	2
Importance of the Study.....	3
2. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	5
Overall Women in Higher Education.....	5
Chicanas in Higher Education.....	8
Black Women in Higher Education.....	11
Campus Climate.....	13
Racial and Gendered Microaggressions.....	15
Class Microaggressions.....	17
Theoretical Framework: Intersectionality.....	19
3. METHODOLOGY.....	22
Sample Type.....	22
Data Gathering.....	23
Participants.....	23
Measures.....	25

4. RESULTS.....	27
Sense of Belonging.....	28
Improvements for the University.....	33
Experiences inside the Classroom with Peers and Professors.....	37
Navigating Support with Faculty.....	50
Representation in the Classroom and Curriculum.....	59
5. CONCLUSION.....	65
Discussion.....	65
Conclusion.....	74
Limitations.....	75
Appendix A. Informed Consent Form.....	77
Appendix B. Focus Group Interview Protocol.....	79
Appendix C. Demographics Questionnaire.....	81
References.....	82

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

Prior to examining the campus climates in college campuses, researchers looked at factors such as impacts from the changes to financial aid and lack of academic preparation as to why students of color were lacking behind in higher education (Nora and Cabrera 1996). Since the 1990s, studies have explored racial climates in higher education institutions, and how the perceptions of hostile climates and discrimination may push students of color out (Nora and Cabrera 1996).

Research has examined the unique experiences of students of color and women of color in higher education. Women of color, especially, are more likely than their male counterparts to experience micro-aggressions and discrimination from professors, administrators, and peers. These micro-aggressions---the constant insults, invalidations and indignities---marginalize minorities by individuals who may be well intentioned and unaware of their biased behaviors. The invisibility of the bias to the perpetrator forms the power of micro-aggressions (Sue 2010). Although racism and sexism can occur blatantly, subtle sexist and racist micro-aggressions are more common (Sue 2010).

Past research stresses that gender biases are often subtle and that students and faculty may sometimes be unaware of their behaviors (Hurtado and Carter 1997; Hurtado 1994; McCabe 2009). Thus, female students have noted the different ways their professors and male peers often discourage and minimize them, as well as question their competence (Allan and Madden 2006). Higher educational institutions generally claim to be inclusive and equitable to all students; however, women of color are still more likely

to experience exclusion, isolation, minimization, invisibility and victimization of sexist and racist jokes (Allan and Madden 2006; Feagin, Vera and Imani 1996, McCabe 2009; Smith, Allen, and Danley 2007; Willie 2003).

Although the gender gap in college enrollment and achievement is nearly absent among those entering college directly out of high school, social inequalities prevail in higher education. Thus, it is critical to look at the historical context to understand why these inequalities continue in these academic settings (Corbett, Hill, and St. Rose 2008; Jacobs 1995). Particularly, it has not been too long (just a generation ago) since Black and Chicana women were allowed access to higher education.

Recently, their college enrollment has increased, and though a stride, the number of Black and Chicana women graduating from a four-year institution is much smaller than White women (McCabe 2009). Research shows how campus climate plays a huge factor in these educational inequities, warranting significant improvement of educational institutions to increase success rates of historically underrepresented students by being more inclusive on college campuses (Allan and Madden 2006; Feagin, 1996; Nora and Cabrera 1996; Soloranzo, Ceja, and Yosso 1998).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The objective of this study is to explore the academic experiences of Black, White and Chicana and the ways they navigate higher education, while highlighting their intersectional factors that ultimately may influence their overall experiences at California State University, Sacramento. Moreover, this study examines the experiences of Black, Chicana and White women across gender, race and class and explore the ways colleges

can better support and provide resources for historically underrepresented minorities, specifically for women of color. This study seeks to illuminate the participants' standpoint experiences. Their experiences provide the opportunity to deeply understand how women's complex intersectionalities—race, gender, and class— shape their overall success at the university.

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

Studies have looked at the impact of race and gender on psychological and educational development; however, there is still a need for research on the intersecting oppressions of race, gender and class and how that may influence the college experience for women of color. (Morales 2014; McCabe 2009). Recent work has started to analyze the intersections of race, gender and class in higher education (Perez-Huber 2010). Specifically looking the university, this study provides the university greater insights on the realities of women students on campus and advances understanding on what more is needed to support women, specifically those from historically underrepresented backgrounds.

Women's experiences are not all the same in settings of higher education; therefore, it is necessary to look at the variety of social inequalities that influence the academic success of women. This study employs intersectionality theory to guide the analysis and to explore the different experiences along race, gender, class and other factors that could influence the college experience for Black, Chicana, and White women. Research that compares students' experiences, particularly female students, across race, class, and gender is rare. Without such comparisons, scholars cannot answer how these

intersecting oppressions uniquely influence these groups of women in their college journey.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will be organized into eight sections to examine closely the past studies in this area of research to help set a better understanding and context of the research question. First, the researcher will present literature of women overall in higher education, their historical achievements, and areas of support. The second and third section of this chapter will examine the research of Chicana/Latina and Black women in college, achievements, and continuing struggles. These sections will also provide historical context to understand how structural conditions have shaped their experiences in higher education. Next, will follow the section on campus climate, which will also include how different racial groups experience campus climate to set context for this study, as it will also be examining campus climate. This chapter will also present literature on racial, gendered and class microaggressions, in order to help recognize the historical meaning behind such insults, as experienced by some of the women in this study. Lastly, the theoretical framework of intersectionality will be discussed, and this will also encourage more intersectional research in higher education.

OVERVIEW OF WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Since women were given access to higher education, their college enrollment and graduation rates have increased at an accelerated pace. In 2000, the baccalaureate enrollment and graduation rate for women was close to 60 percent overall and remains constant (Morris 2011). Looking at the overall academic achievements of women in

higher education, room for improvement exists particularly in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), which remains a male-dominated field. Although women earn the majority of master's degrees and nearly half of all doctorate degrees, women are still underrepresented in STEM disciplines in both the undergraduate and graduate levels (King 2010). Past research shows that women continue to dominate fields in education and human health, fields that are often viewed as feminine (Morris 2011).

Although underrepresented in some academic areas, women have had many academic achievements throughout the last few decades. However, looking at the success rates of women in higher education, research must unpack the success rates of women by exploring race, gender, and class to see how that may shape their academic achievement. Since women of color were allowed access to higher education in the 1960s, the success rate of women of color in universities has not matched White women's success. Women cannot be generalized as having the same experiences in settings of higher education, where race, class and other identities/positions play a factor in women's success. Exploring these unique inequities is essential for future studies.

To have a better understanding of the higher educational experiences of women of color, this study reviews past research that examines students of color in higher education. Over the last 30 years in colleges and universities in the U.S, students of color have experienced an increase among the student population. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2016), between 1993-2013, the college enrollment rate increased for several racial and ethnic minority groups. Latina/os and Black college enrollment show the largest percentage point increase, with Latina/os enrollment

increasing from 11 percent to 17 percent, Black student enrollment increased from 10 percent to 15 percent (National Center for Educational Center 2016). Over time, the change in increased racial and ethnic minority students' representation in colleges and university campuses reflects the change in demographic composition of the U. S. population (U.S. Department of Education 2006). Specifically looking at the college enrollment for female students, the enrollment increased for Latina women from 55 percent in 1990 to 59 percent in 2005 and then decreased to 57 percent in 2013. Black women increased from 61 percent in 1990 to 64 percent in 2005 and then decreased to 62 percent in 2013. White women today make up 55 percent of the total White college enrollment (National Center for Educational Statistics 2016). Looking at the graduation rates, Black and Latina women lag behind White women with 45 percent and 55 percent, respectively, compared to White women's graduation rate at 65 percent (National Center for Educational Statistics 2016).

According to O'Keeffe (2013), though there has been an increase in college enrollment for racial and ethnic minorities, including women, these groups continue to struggle more in college as they are not often provided with a comfortable, supportive and engaging environment that supports them both socially and academically. Retention concerns usually lie primarily with administrators of predominantly White institutions, since those institutions fail to provide effective resources for academic success for underrepresented minority students. Minority students attending predominantly White institutions often experience alienation and chilly campus climates. These students tend to have distant relationships with White faculty and often experience racism,

discrimination, ethnocentric curriculum, lack of support and validation, and less access to resources (Ramirez 2011). Some minority students experience racial micro-aggressions and become discouraged, resulting from unconscious forms of racism by White faculty who may not be able to understand them in terms of ethnicity, gender, and class background (Hurtado 2001).

Looking at research on women in higher education as well as students of color, it is clear though women have been enrolling and graduating from universities at an accelerated pace, this does not mean that all women are at this same pace. O’Keeffe (2013) noted students of color are at higher risk of college attrition, as well as more likely to feel disconnected from the larger university and experience microaggressions. Evidently, success rates for women of color, specifically Black and Chicana women, are not as high as those of White women. These trends and unique experiences warrant further scholarly investigation

CHICANAS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Today, Latina/os make up 38 percent of California’s state population; however, they remain underrepresented within the educational system, particularly Chicana/os (National Center for Educational Statistics 2016). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2016), Chicana/os and Latinos are projected to reach 98 million by 2050, representing 25 percent of total U.S population, as they currently represent 18 percent of the nation’s population. Therefore, increasing the educational attainment for Chicanas/Latinas in higher education is critical and will help close the achievement gaps of future generations.

During the Chicana/o movement of the 1960s and 70s, educational equity was a main objective, including access to higher education (Acuna 2000). Although their college enrollment increased within the decades, Chicana/os students continued to be underrepresented in college graduation rates. Chicana/os make up the largest ethnic group within the Latina/o umbrella, and they still continue to have one of the lowest educational attainment in higher education (Espino 2008; Gramlich 2017) . According to Espino (2008), 44 out of every 100 Chicana/o elementary school children will graduate from high school; seven will graduate with a bachelor's degree; and less than one will receive a doctorate degree. Furthermore, the share of all degrees awarded to U.S. residents earned by all Latina/os increased from 7 to 11 percent from 2002 to 2013. The shared earned by Black students increased from 10 to 11 percent. For White students, they make up 76 percent of all earned degrees in the U.S (National Center for Educational Statistics 2016).

Although there has been an increase in college enrollment and graduation rates for Chicanas/Latinas, some questions remain: Why are Chicanas are still underrepresented? Why do they struggle in higher education? What processes might be pushing these women out? Yosso (2006) observes that educational settings are set up to racially segregate, marginalize and push out Chicana/o students. When entering institutions of higher education, a Eurocentric paradigm conflicts with Chicanas' lived experiences, and can often weaken their sense of belonging in academia (Espino 2008). Once in college, some Chicanas/os confront the challenge of navigating an environment that marginalizes their essence. When Chicana/o students come into contact with direct experiences such as prejudice and social exclusion, this can create emotional and social conflict. This

eventually leads to them abandoning college (Gloria, Castellanos, and Orozco 2005; Oseguera, Locks and Vega 2009). In effect, a hostile campus climate can ultimately affect Chicana's success in higher education and how it leads to educational inequities (McCabe 2009). In addition, isolation, discrimination, and exposure to negative stereotyping hurt academic and learning outcomes for Chicana/Latina college students (Hurtado and Carter 1997; Hurtado, Carter, and Spudler 1996; Richardson and Skinner 1992; Smedley, Myers, and Harell 1993).

Chicanas also face stereotypes from outside of academia throughout their journey in higher education. Soloranzo (1993) found that while all the students in his study were exposed to some kind of discrimination during their undergraduate and graduate studies, women encountered greater discrimination than their male counterparts. Women reported to experience overt forms of sexism and more likely to experience different forms of discrimination than their peers, faculty and administration. Particularly, Chicana participants felt devalued by the sexist-racist academic environment (Yosso 2006). Such hostile and negative experiences push out students from college and can make Chicanas question their ability to succeed in higher education.

Given Chicanas/Latinas' greater and continued challenges in higher educational attainment, this study will examine the gendered experiences of Chicanas in different settings across higher educational institutions, exploring their experiences with a sense of belonging at the university, faculty-student relations, classroom experiences, and perceived discrimination. The researcher will also compare the experiences of Chicanas with those of Black and White women to see how intersecting oppressions impact the

college experience for each racial group. Understanding the gendered experiences of these groups of women can guide better university policies and practices to serve historically underrepresented minorities in higher education.

BLACK WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION

According to Collins (1990), education is considered a factor for self-improvement and empowerment for Black women. Historically, there have been formal and informal barriers to higher education for Black women. They were denied access until the Civil Rights Acts of 1964, specifically Title VII that prohibited discrimination on the basis of race, gender, national origin, or disability. Without doubt, Civil Rights impacted the college graduation rates for Black students. Today, 15 percent of the Black population is enrolled in college, and 45 percent of Black women students in college earn a degree (National Center for Educational Statistics 2016). Nonetheless, Black students in higher education still experience educational barriers. Black students enter college with educational disadvantages due to lack of college preparation in primary and secondary schooling, as well a lack of community resources which were much more limited than those of their privileged counterparts. Once in college, Black students are more likely to have higher drop-out rates, lower academic achievement, are underrepresented throughout college campuses, and are less likely to pursue graduate studies. It has also been found that Black students report greater distress and have a more negative perception of their college campus compared to their White peers and other more privileged counterparts (Allen 1988).

In order to understand the challenges Black students on college campus

experience, one must place their experiences within their long historical oppression and also as a product of larger systemic problems. Allen (1992) argues that universities must first understand the very complex relationships that end up with few Black individuals being eligible to apply to college, being accepted and completing college.

Nonetheless, the achievements of the Black community should not be minimized, particularly those of women. Although Black women have had their successes in academia, they still earn less than their counterparts, except Chicanas, who have the same level of education (U.S Census Bureau 2010; National Center for Educational Statistics 2016). Considering the academics strides of Black women throughout the years, Kaba (2008) argues that Black women are the new ‘model minority’ because they are among the most productive members of society. Although Black women still lag behind their male counterparts and other groups, they are performing better than other women in the U.S. However, while Kaba (2008) looks at the overall success of Black women in higher education and in other sectors, the study misses several factors that contribute to this success and over generalizes Black women in such settings e.g., stating they are a ‘model minority.’ This minimizes the very real struggles faced by many Black women in higher education and other institutions and does not examine those challenges and consequences. Researchers note that the campus environment plays a major factor in predicting the success of Black students in higher education (Dorsey and Jackson 1995). They also found that students’ perceptions on faculty-student relations, nurturing environment, and feeling welcomed in the university affects their academic performance. According to Dorsey and Jackson (1995), internal factors, such as self-concept,

aspirations and motivation, contributed to Black students' academic progress. Other researchers have similarly found that social development, social adjustment, and college preparation had a significant influence on academic persistence for Black students, particularly women (Kemp 1990).

In regards to examining Black women, this study examines the intersections of Black women to have a better understanding of how those factors could influence their college experience.

CAMPUS CLIMATE

The concept of campus climate is closely tied to the experiences of racism and discrimination in settings of higher education. Such campus climates create hostile and chilly environments, and lead to negative experiences for students, particularly students of color. According to Hurtado (1992), the concept of campus climate refers to an institution's commitment, responsiveness and attitude towards its students. Furthermore, campus climate can be defined as the racial environment of the university that fosters academic achievement and graduation rates for all students, regardless of race and gender. However, normative campus racial climates are unwelcoming to students of color, leading to their poor academic performance and lower persistence rates (Soloranzo, Ceja, and Yosso 2000). According to Yosso, Ceja, Smith and Soloranzo (2009), a positive campus racial climate would be inclusive of all students, faculty and administrators of color, have curriculum outside of the Eurocentric lens, have supportive programs to help historically marginalized students in higher education and have a university mission committed to diversity. However, universities promote diversity and

equity, but not do so in practice. When universities do not take initiative to have a positive campus racial climate, hostile campus climate become normalized and do not address and support the issues of students from different backgrounds (Yosso et al. 2009).

Different racial/ethnic groups view campus environment differently. The varied perceptions of the campus racial climate are consequential for students of color (Hurtado, Clayton-Pederson, Allen, and Milem 1998). According to Hurtado et al. (1998), the various perceptions of the campus climate across race and gender are not thoroughly analyzed. Research must look at the differences across these two identities to see how campus climates treat students based on gender and race, as well as other intersectional factors that are often minimized in educational and sociological research. Past research has developed ways to assess campus racial climate and culture; however, contemporary scholars note there is still more to be done (Cabrera, Nora, Terezini, Pascarella, and Hagedorn 1999; Hurtado et al. 1998).

Scholars built on Tinto's (1987/1993) earlier work on student persistence, which points to full social integration of the campus life as one of the key factors for persistence. According to Tinto's model, if students of color feel disconnected from their campus environment, they are less likely to persist than their White peers. Students of color tend to have lower persistence rates than White students, and this is documented in past research using Tinto's model. However, scholars have also criticized Tinto's model of integration. For example, Hurtado and Carter (1997) finds Tinto's model as exclusionary and notes that integration may have different meaning to students who have

been historically marginalized in higher education. Even with a revised Tinto's framework of integration, there is still a need for researching the concept of membership by identifying the activities students of color participate in to have a greater sense of integration and sense of belonging within the campus environment (Hurtado and Carter 1997). Again, it is necessary to look across intersections of race and gender and how their experiences can lead to distinct perceptions of campus climate.

RACIAL AND GENDERED MICROAGGRESSIONS

Sue (2010) defines microaggression as constant slights, insults, invalidations and indignities directed at marginalized groups by well-intentioned, otherwise moral individuals from all spheres of life. In the setting of higher education, microaggressions are experienced by students of color, in particular women, from other peers, males and professors. Many racial and sexist microaggressions are so subtle that neither target nor perpetrator understands what may be occurring. This is how microaggressions hold their power because they are invisible and normalized, and therefore dominant group members do not see how their actions and attitudes may be discriminatory.

More specifically, microaggressions have been used to examine the experiences of Chicana/o scholars and Black students at predominantly White campuses (Soloranzo et al. 1998; Soloranzo et al. 2000). Such studies find that microaggressions are directed toward Chicana/os and Black women and men on college campus, leading to feelings of isolation and being disconnected from the broader campus (Soloranzo et al. 2000; Smith, Allen, and Danley 2007). According to Soloranzo, Ceja, and Yosso (2002) members of marginalized groups, such as Chicanas, are subjected to countless microaggressions on a

daily basis by the media, friends, teachers, and co-workers and this continues once in college.

Looking at the microaggressions experienced by Black individuals, Smith et al. (2007) find that Black male students face racial microaggressions and policing tactics that suppress them on campus. However, the study does not look at the race and gender, thus limiting the understandings of the extent to which microaggressions are tied to certain racial and gendered groups, as well as how they are experienced differently (McCabe 2009). Similarly, McCabe (2009) analyzed and uses Critical Race Theory to look deeper into the intersections of Black, Latina/o and White undergraduate students at a predominantly White institution and how they experience discrimination and microaggressions across race and gender. The study used a multi-methodological approach by conducting in-depth 68 one-on-one interviews and four focus groups from racially diverse undergraduates. There were four patterns that emerged: Black males were viewed as dangerous, Latinas were viewed as being sexually available and exotic, Black women frequently experience microaggressions, and White women are more likely to experience microaggressions in male-dominated discipline. McCabe (2009) notes how these microaggressions have an impact on students' self concept and sense of belonging, making minorities feel like outsiders on their own campus. Perceptions of racial prejudice and discrimination on campus and in the classroom are expected to have a direct impact on withdrawal decisions, while at the same time affecting a student's academic performance and his or her social and academic experiences at the institution. Overall, these perceptions lessen commitments to both the institution and to the goal of college

completion.

Specifically looking at Black women, McCabe (2009) found that just like Latina and Black males, microaggressions were closely tied to their race and gender identities. However, rather than being tied to a specific stereotype about their group, Black women's accounts of microaggressions were tied to the classroom. Among students of color and White women, Black women were more likely to be a target of micro-aggressions. Overall, racial and gendered microaggressions can create severe stress and take a toll on students' mental and emotional well being (McCabe 2009; Soloranzo et al. 2002). As prior research has shown, microaggressions and other forms of more overt discrimination can lead to higher dropout rates for students of color (Soloranzo et al. 2002). According to Sue (2010), if racial, gender, and sexual discrimination present a hostile and invalidating learning climate, these groups are more likely to suffer. Sue (2010) also lists how microaggressions make an appearance in the larger educational setting such as in the curriculum, lack of faculty diversity, hostile campus climate, resources offered at school, and how policies and practices may be oppressive and unfair to many marginalized groups.

CLASS MICROAGGRESSIONS

Social class and its relation to race have been examined through educational research, specifically looking at its relationship to the dominant cultural capital (Carter 2005). Particularly looking at higher educational research, scholars have explored class and cultural capital in relation to first generation college students and their adjustment (Oldfield 2007). According to Morales (2014), microaggressions that are racialized and

gendered stereotypes are inherently linked to dominant notions about class. When looking at the racial/ethnic stereotypes of Black and Chicana/Latina women in society, it is also critical to remember that these racial and gendered assumptions of a marginalized group manifest microaggressions experienced by students of color in college campuses. Cole (2005) notes that there are racialized notions of Blacks that are rooted in gender and class. For example, Black masculinity is stereotyped as violent and threatening, and the criminality is rooted in historical dehumanizing images of Black men as "the brute" (Cole 2005). As a result of these stereotypes, Black men's behavior has been closely monitored, penalized and criminalized throughout their lives (Ferguson 2000; Lopez 2003). In order to understand the root of this surveillance, it must be understood how this policing is connected to low-income and working class Black communities and how they are the ones most likely to end up on the criminal justice system (Rios 2011).

When looking at Black women, they have historically and continue to be viewed as loud, angry and intimidating and this image is linked to working class, low-income Black women (Cole 2005). Black women have also been constructed as hypersexual and more specifically, promiscuous; and today, Black women, especially those from low-income and working-class backgrounds are stereotyped as being overtly sexual (Anderson 2012).

This study will also examine how gendered and racial stereotypes experienced by participants are ultimately tied back to class oppression and class assumptions. To understand the contributing factors leading up to the experiences of the women in this study, one must also examine class to fully capture all complexities. As this study will

use intersectionality theory to analyze these experiences, it will also bring insight on the relationship between racial and gendered microaggressions and class, as class remains a social context that still lacks research in most intersectional work (Morales 2014).

THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK: INTERSECTIONALITY

Intersectional perspective guides this study because it encompasses a more comprehensive framework for understanding the experiences of marginalized communities along the social constructs of race, class, gender and other and social factors that contribute to a particular outcome. This framework was constructed by feminist women of color and it cross-examines multiple and interlocking structures of inequality (Collins 1990; Crenshaw 1991). Although race, class, and gender are distinct systems of inequality, these systems intersect and are experienced simultaneously by individuals. Dominant assumptions include that race and gender are separate, however intersectionality challenges that assumption. Crenshaw (1989) reports, that by tracing categories by their intersections will allow to disrupt the ideologies that race, gender or any other identities or social factor are exclusive. Intersectionality theory also refrains in giving more privilege to one aspect of oppression over another, particularly because all three major forms of inequality are interrelated (Ramirez 2014). This framework holds that an individual cannot be fully understood only under the basis of a single identity such as race and gender, nor can any individual be understood as only the sum total of their identities. Intersectionality theorizes that we are the interdependent intersections of our race, gender identity, class, culture, language, ancestry, sexual orientation, etc. While Black and Chicana women share a common racialized identity, there are other social

factors that play an impact on their academic achievement. Though intersectionality is often considered a perspective of empowerment particularly for marginalized groups, it can also help highlight the intersections of White women aside from looking at just their racial privilege.

As this study delves into the experiences of three different racial/ethnic groups of women, we ultimately see the microaggressions unravel, as well as overt indirect and direct insults. When we use intersectionality to examine racial microaggressions, what we find is that the intersectionality of race, class and gender occurs in a more subtle way. Race, gender and class serve as layers that meld together to shape people's experiences. For example, the types of racial microaggressions that Black and Chicanas in particular encounter operate in different ways based on race and gender.

As with any societal institution, access to higher education is mediated by race, class, and gender. Intersectionality complements many other commonly used theories to explain the underrepresentation of historically underrepresented minorities in higher education. For instance, cultural and social capital theories focus on how group specific knowledge and networks advantage some people and disadvantage others. The overall impact of these theories is to frame the absence of minorities from higher education as an outcome of deficiencies within racial-ethnic minorities. Intersectional theory centers on the institutional context, its hegemonic culture, and the interactions it promotes as a way of revealing how racial, gender, and class hierarchies get reproduced at those different levels. In addition, intersectionality gives voice to those who higher education marginalizes, and in doing so, one attains insight about how the institution is not a

neutral, value-free, and objective space promoting a universe of knowledge, but a political one that perpetuates social stratification in society (Greyerbiehl and Mitchell 2014).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This study explores three different focus groups, and gets each group together separately based on racial identity to hear their experiences at once. This form provides the opportunity for the researcher to identify themes and different forms of communication within the focus groups (McCabe 2009). When focus groups work well, participants are more likely to work better with the researcher and help take the research in new directions. Though more convenient, the researcher will also be looking at group interactions as part of the method. This is one advantage of hosting focus groups. Participants are given the opportunity to bounce ideas of each other, interact and ask each other questions. This is not possible through one-on-one interviews. In addition, focus groups can be more encouraging for participants, considering there may be more reluctance from them to be interviewed on their own and may feel they have nothing to contribute. Focus groups allow participants to share things they may have not said in private (Kitzinger 1995). Research recommend for focus groups to be homogenous in order capitalize on people's shared experiences. Such homogenous groups can lead to a natural occurring discussion among participants (Kitzinger 1995).

SAMPLE TYPE

The study used a purposive sampling method, which allowed for a targeted representation of undergraduate participants by their race, ethnicity, gender, and also diversity of majors. Fliers calling for undergraduate women participants who identify as Black, White and Chicana were posted and distributed throughout campus. All

participants were informed of the purpose of the study and expectations from their involvement prior to their consent to participate. They also understood that they would not be compensated.

DATA GATHERING

Women for the study were recruited through fliers posted across campus in various public boards. The fliers used language encouraging Black, White and Chicana women to share their experiences as women in a group setting to contribute to higher educational research in hope of creating more inclusive spaces on campus. Fliers were also distributed to student organizations' emails, specifically women and ethnically-identified organizations on campus. The researcher also emailed faculty to share the study with their students and majority of the participants were recruited through announcements by professors in their classes. The researcher ensured that the participants recruited for the study were not peers or acquaintances in order to prevent any conflicts of interests. All interviews were held at CSU, Sacramento in private rooms and each interview averaged one hour and a half. Participants received a hard copy of the consent form that had previously been sent to them via email to review before the initial meeting. They were also handed a demographics questionnaire to answer confidentially, as well as a copy of the questions that would be asked during the interviews.

PARTICIPANTS

The researcher conducted three-focus groups with each group focusing on the White, Black and Chicana women experience. The study took place at CSU, Sacramento, where 58 percent of the student population are racial and ethnic minority

students and where women make up 55.9 percent of the entire student population (Office of Institutional Research 2016). The first groups of Chicana/Latina identified women consisted of five women from five different majors, which will not be identified to ensure confidentiality for all participants. However, the colleges of these majors include the College of Social Sciences and Interdisciplinary Studies, College of Arts and Letters, and College of Health and Human Services. All but one woman in the Chicana/Latina group were first-generation college students, daughters of immigrants, bilingual, and working class from low-income communities throughout California. The highest level of education for their parents was some college for one student, and the rest of their parents had a high school diploma or less. All participants in this group were in junior or senior status and were full-time students. Two of the five women were also community college transfer students. All participants are also student workers and one was a mother and wife.

In particular for the Chicana/Latina group, it is also important to note that this group of women is not as comparable to the White and Black women in this study. Colorism is an issue for both Black and Latina/o communities; however, in the Latina/o group there is racial diversity where individuals can identify as White, Black, Indigenous, etc. Therefore, some of the experiences of the Chicana/Latina group can also vary on their race, though the women in the group were not asked in specific to provide an exact racial identity.

The Black women group consisted of two women from the College of Social Sciences and Interdisciplinary Studies and College Health and Human Services. One was

a junior and the other women a senior. One of the women was a first-generation college student, Sacramento native, and was a returning student. She reported she is oftentimes one of the oldest students in her classes. Her parents' educational attainment was a high school diploma. The second participant had a college-educated dad who was CSU, Sacramento alumni and grew up in a White conservative town in the Sacramento area. Both participants are community college transfer students and are also student workers.

The third group consisted of two White-identified women both from the College of Social Sciences and Interdisciplinary Sciences. One of the participants was a first-generation college student and both participants' parents educational attainment included some college. Both participants were also student workers and community college transfer students. One participant grew up in the Central Valley and the second one in Sacramento. It is also important to recognize the struggle of all participants in needing to survive as college students and working more than one job and up to 62 hours a week. All participants in the study identified as workers with little financial support from their families due to their low-income backgrounds.

MEASURES

The main objective of the study is to examine the experiences of Black, White and Chicana women in settings of higher education. Since this study explores the experiences shared among women, focus group interviews were the most appropriate methodology. The benefits of this study include gaining a better understanding of women and how their intersections of social inequalities can influence their college experience. The findings on the experiences of women across race, gender and class can

aid in better accommodating historically underrepresented minorities. As past research has shown, women of color's experiences are unique to that of White women in higher education. Therefore, it is essential for studies focused on higher education to look across gender, race and class. Being aware of the distinctions between these groups can better accommodate and create more inclusive educational spaces for a multi-racial and cultural society.

The research seeks to answer the following questions: 1) How do Black, Chicana, and White women experience different settings of higher education? 2) How do race, gender and class shape their experiences in various locations of the university?

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This study examines the experiences of women from different racial/ethnic backgrounds to see the unique ways in how they navigate and cope throughout their time at the university. As expected, each group of women views the university climate very differently and interestingly each group finds their unique ways in surviving their college journey. Every women regardless of race/ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, etc. had their own struggle that impacted them in numerous ways. Without minimizing the lived experiences of these women, this study also provides an opportunity to highlight the realities of different groups of women on campus. While some more positive than others, these findings give an insight on how differently groups of women on campus experience college in one of the most diverse cities in the nation.

This chapter provides the results of the interviews of three different racial/ethnic groups: Chicanas, Black and White women at a California State University. All focus groups were asked the same questions in the same order. The findings, presented below, are organized according to five different themes based on the questions asked (see appendix B). In each thematic section, the researcher includes the findings for each racial group to be able to see the shared and unique experiences of each group. The organizing themes include the following: sense of belonging, views on improving campus climate, classroom experience with both peers and professors, ways of navigating support and

resources and representation in the classroom and curriculum. These themes are exemplified by quotes and further analysis of the social context.

SENSE OF BELONGING

The researcher asked a set of questions on the sense of belonging to explore unique group experiences with the overall campus climate. More specifically, the researcher looked at what made them feel connected or disconnected on campus, their views on the campus climate, areas on campus where they feel more and less comfortable and what they think would create a better campus climate.

Social Context on Campus and Influence on Belonging or Not

When asked if they felt a sense of belonging on campus, two out of the five Chicana/Latina women reported they only felt a sense of belonging in certain classes such as those in ethnic studies or sociology because they felt more represented with faculty, classmates and curriculum. These two women, Ruby and Genesis were in majors in the College of Health and Human Services and College of Arts and Letters. In their majors, they are one of the only women of color in their classes. Ruby mentioned before taking ethnic studies classes, she did not realize how diverse some classes actually were. Genesis reports her major is predominately white, masculine, and conservative; and she did not participate in class to avoid conflict with her classmates. Disturbingly to this date, women of color feel very uncomfortable in white dominated majors and fields. For some Chicana/Latina women, this experience was the case. Both Ruby's and Genesis' experiences reflect the need for fuller inclusion in academic spaces where all students can feel safe and welcomed.

Other students—Maribel, Isabella, and Ilene— reported more positive experiences and felt a greater sense of belonging in their major classes. All three of these women are in diverse student majors where majority of the faculty are women and where they report feeling represented among other students as well. Their majors are housed in the College of Arts and Letters, College of Social Sciences and Interdisciplinary Studies, and College of Health and Human Service. Their positive experiences may related to the environment that they are in. If they are more represented amongst their peers and faculty and within the curriculum, they more likely feel a greater connection with their academic programs. For example, Ilene reports her job on campus has contributed to her greater sense of belonging because of the several opportunities offered to her. Based on these Chicana/Latina women’s experience, it is critical to recognize how the social context of these women and their majors can influence their sense of belonging. Women in more inclusive majors felts overall more comfortable, supported and more likely to feel like they belonged. However, Ruby and Genesis, in predominately white majority majors, felt underrepresented and were more likley to report less levels of comfort and sense of belonging in their major classes.

Black Women and Awareness of Racial Identity

Examining the Black women’s focus group sense of belonging, they are more likely than the Chicana/Latina focus group to feel disconnected with the campus both in classes and the greater campus community. When the researcher asked Monica if she felt a sense of belonging on campus, she took a few seconds to really think about her response.

A sense of belonging in some instances yes and in some no. Basically, looking at intersections, so as a woman I feel represented here, as a black woman I do not. As a returning student, I feel represented here. But, yet, just looking at all the different intersections of self being, an older person, being of a Black person, being a woman, being queer, like not all of those are really centered here. So yeah, at times it can be uncomfortable.

The second participant, Andrea reported that in comparison to her former community college that was predominantly White and conservative, she feels greater sense of belonging on campus. However, she reports feeling uncomfortable and not belonging when her classmates minimize or dismiss her Black perspective.

The most I feel uncomfortable is really in a classroom if a professor asks an opinion that needs a Black perspective, and then I get another White person or someone that will like try to tell me I'm wrong or something like that. So that's when I feel the most uncomfortable. I'm like, 'You know, they're asking about like a certain perspective, and then my perspective is not valid enough for you.'

Monica wanted to know why Andrea felt invalidated when providing a Black perspective in classes and asked her if she think it is because she is half Black. Andrea identifies as a Black woman who is also half White.

...Typically the only people that ever don't accept my opinions are people that are not Black. I've never had a Black person, well I've had Black people joke around and say "I'm not Black enough" and "I'm not that," but I've never had a Black person like not take my opinion or perspective seriously because they do understand that when I go out in the world, they don't see the other half of me (White half). They only see one part of me. So they understand that.

Both Monica and Andrea were clear that their lower sense of belonging has a larger connection to their racial identity. Both these women appear to be aware of their racial identities and recognize how their race can determine and influence uncomfortable situations for them. As Monica mentioned that her several identities are not being reflected on campus, higher education institutions need greater efforts to create

comfortable campus environments both inside and outside the classroom. It is important to understand the complexities of students as their intersecting identities can subject them to more hostile and unwelcoming environments in college. For Monica, she is aware of her several identities throughout different locations on campus and knows which places are friendlier than others. As for Andrea, she identifies as a Black woman who is bi-racial, but also reported she is aware that others only see her as a Black woman.

Belonging on Campus with Mixed Feelings of Isolation

The White women in the third focus group both reported a sense of belonging at greater levels compared to the both Chicana/Latina and Black women, as it will be later discussed. However, overall White participants still reported feeling isolated due to factors not relating to race/class and gender. Though they admit feeling welcomed and feel like they ‘belong’ both women also faced personal challenges that could have contributed to their isolation. Caitlin overall feels represented as a woman on campus:

I'd say generally I feel that I belong. I mean, representation, I can see people that look like me, who I identify with, so there's always that aspect of it. And even people of other different groups I mean, just having people that are my age and are women, specifically, that is my representation.

Bridgette agreed with Caitlin’s response of feeling a sense of belonging due to seeing other women “like her.” Both women are in majors in the College of Social Sciences and Interdisciplinary Studies; Bridgette’s major is made up of predominantly White women, whereas Caitlin’s major is more diverse. As both students identify as transfer students from community colleges, Brittany emphasized one reason she really felt a sense of belonging was because she has met several other transfer students and she has often connected with them. Looking at the social locations of these women as well is

also important because it helps explain why they may feel a stronger sense of belonging in their majors at higher levels than Chicana/Latina and Black women. Overall, Bridgette's experience in her major classes has been positive; she is satisfied with her all her professors, and feels comfortable as a student and White woman in her classes. However, both Caitlin and Bridgette reported to feel more sense of belonging in their classes, though Bridgette still reported feeling isolated and questions whether it may be her major or the overall campus climate. Bridgette has only been in Sacramento for nearly a year. Bridgette reports:

I think for me, because I moved here from a completely different city, is making friends and trying to connect with people that have the same interests as me. So I kind of feel isolated in that way, because I feel like even though you're surrounded by all these people, it's hard to make friends-like it's hard for me to make friends. And so I think that's kind of like what I feel isolated from. I don't know if it's my major or if it's, I don't know, maybe I talk too much and it scares people away. I don't know, but I feel like that's how I feel at least. Isolated, in a way, is it's harder for me to connect with people and make good friendships. It's nice to have those friendships so you can create study groups and stuff.

Overall, the White women in this study reported a higher sense of belonging but one reported feelings of isolation on campus. Feelings of isolation can be found in all three racial groups but specifically for Black and Chicana/Latina women, depending in the location they are in campus can contribute to them feeling isolated as part their identities. For Black women, this isolation is closely tied to their racial identity as perceived by others and for Chicana/Latina, their ethnic ties also creates a sense of isolation and lower sense of belonging when in classes where they are a minority. For White women, their isolation was contributed to factors that did not include their race and gender in specific ways as it did for the Black and Chicana/Latina women. Factors

perceived that contributed to feelings of isolation included questioning if it may be their particular major that creates isolation.

It becomes clear that social location is a major factor when it comes to sense of belonging on college campuses. At the university, Chicanas/Latinas have more student representation than both White and Black women, as Chicano/Latinos makes up close to 30 percent of the student population, whereas Black students make up around 5 percent and White students make up 27 percent (Office of Institutional Research 2016).

As Black women in this study reported most likely to feel isolated, examining their social location is critical understanding why. As they have the least representation, they are more subjected to overall campus isolation. The Chicana/Latina participants overall felt greatly represented in terms of student representation and in some instance faculty and curriculum representation depending on heir major. This group of women was less likely to feel isolated on campus as they were reported feeling welcomed on a campus where they saw many people who looked like them. For the White participants, one of the women reported feeling isolated at times. Though the participant reported feeling represented on campus and welcomed, it is also important to note how diverse settings for White individuals coming from predominantly White cities, may cause discomfort and make them feel isolated.

IMPROVEMENTS FOR UNIVERSITY

All three groups were also asked what they thought the University could do to improve the overall campus climate both socially and academically. Among the Chicana/Latina women, Ruby and Isabella reported that the culturally based

organizations on campus need to do more outreach for students and should do more to make students of color more connected. They mentioned that organizations will typically promote themselves during “rush week” during the first three weeks of school but then their efforts to meet more students slowly disappear and can become more like “cliques,” often pushing out newer members out. For Maribel and Ilene, they expressed the need for faculty representation throughout college classes in order for students like them to feel like they have more in common with their professors instead of being intimidated by them. Ilene reports:

I think that in the classroom setting it would help if you get more representation, like people who look like you or in the textbooks, like for one of my classes we are reading books that have been published by women of color so that’s great.

Black participants Monica and Andrea emphasize the need for a larger Black presence on campus both in terms of students and faculty. Currently, Black students on campus make up around 5 percent of the student population and 5 percent of the full-time faculty on campus are Black. Looking at Latino students on campus, they make up 30 percent of the total student population, while Latino faculty make up 7.5 percent of the total faculty population, yet have the lowest percent of full-time jobs (65 percent are part-time professors). White faculty make up 66.7 percent of the faculty and White students make up about 27 percent of the student population (Office of Institutional Research 2016). Monica reports that when she is in her major classes, she rarely sees another Black student.

...There are really no Black faculty in my college and none in my major, which is really concerning to me. So again, I think if there was more representation on campus than I would feel more comfortable.

Monica admits to counting the number of Black people in her classes and reported she is always able to count with one hand. Particularly in her major, which is made up of predominantly White women, Monica is sometimes the only Black student in her classes, which she finds “ off-putting.” She is concerned to see such little representation anywhere on campus for individuals such as herself.

...In one of my classes, I am the only one (Black student). And then in another one of my classes, I'm one of two. So to be in a room of 120 students and have myself and two other Black people, like that needs to change.

Andrea also has a hard time finding out Black women on campus and specifies that in order to find larger groups of Black students, she would need to find an organization because other than that, only a handful can be found inside classes.

I couldn't really just walk into most classes and just talk to, you know, another Black person because there isn't any. Just socializing with people in general, I actually don't really socialize with Black people here because I probably don't see them too often unless I really try to get involved and join a Black based organization.

For Black participants, they emphasized the importance for more representation in the classroom and felt it was more critical and beneficial for students of color. As Andrea mentioned that in order for her to feel more connected she would need to join an organization, and she felt this should not be her only option as she should be welcomed and represented throughout campus not just a few selected organizations. Monica would also like to see more Black students on campus but reports she has a problem with the way Black students are recruited to the university.

I think that you can always do more as a university. One issue that I have with the university is how they recruit black students. It's very dichotomous. So they look for Black athletes or they have this thing call Black Sunday where they go into

Black churches. So we're either an athlete or a Protestant, which is eliminating a very wide, diverse group of Black folks. So I don't know. It just feels like respectability politics to me. So I don't agree with that.

In speaking about what they thought the university could do to create a better campus climate, White participants reported greater efforts to make students feel welcome on campus through more resources and outreach of organizations to include students. However, it is also interesting to note when they were asked if they had any recommendations to improve the overall campus climate, both women responded that they could not think of anything or have not noticed anything that 'needs improvement in terms of the actual campus.' Their recommendations included what they thought could make students feel more welcomed. Both Bridgette and Caitlin reported that student organizations and extra curricular activities taking place on campus are not widely promoted. Similarly to the Chicana/Latina group, White participants expressed that 'rush week' was not enough and organizations, along with the university, should put greater efforts in bringing people together. However, unlike Chicana/Latina women, race/ethnicity/gender played a bigger role in the need for more advertisement for social life on campus, where as for White participants they reported just a need to bring more students together without emphasizing how race/class and gender can impact that. Caitlin reported her concern with the little social organization outreach:

... I don't feel like there are a lot of opportunities to—I mean, extracurricular, just something to get to know—I mean, I know they're always pushing these during quad week and stuff, but I never feel like I see advertisements for groups or just events to get people together. I feel like everyone's in and out.

Bridgette shared her recent feelings of isolation, though these feelings were not contributed to race, gender, or class. However, even more privileged White students on campus are still reporting a disconnection from campus, and this mostly results from the campus being a commuter campus in where students come and go, and also them being from outside of the city and experiencing a sense of culture shock when exposed to more diverse settings. Bridgette reports:

I still do feel isolated. I feel a lot better. I would say that now that I'm going to be going into my senior year, I feel like I have enough confidence and experience now at this school and the environment to reach out to people or get involved more. Versus when you first get here, it's kind of scary. Well, for me at least, it's a new city. It's a big city. So it was harder for me. That's the only reason why I think I felt isolated.

EXPERIENCES INSIDE THE CLASSROOM WITH PEERS AND PROFESSORS

This study also explored the interactions and experiences of women with peers and professors at the university. The research questions focused on the classroom experience and their views on their professors. Such questions explored hostile experiences while in class, and if their peers and professors made them feel comfortable and safe in class. Overall, Chicana/Latina participants reported feeling comfortable in their classes, but did emphasize how a certain experience in the classroom impacted them and illuminated to some that their classroom norms were not inclusive and affirming to all students.

Chicanas/Latinas in the Classroom

The five women came from five different majors in the College of Health and Human Services, College of Social Sciences and Interdisciplinary Studies, and College of

Arts and Letters. Though the name of the majors will remain confidential, it is also critical to look at the context of each of these different majors to better understand the kind of environment these women are in and who they are surrounded by to see how that impacts their experience with peers and professors. Two of the Chicana/Latina participants are in a discipline that consisted of predominantly white students; white women in one major and white males in the other major.

Genesis reports that the majority of her classmates are White males who often take over classroom discussions and invalidate the thoughts of students of color who critique the system of inequalities and challenge their professors.

Minimizing of voices in White and inclusive spaces. Maribel reports that even in classes that are meant to be more inclusive can be problematic when taught by White professors or even just professors who may be insensitive. Some professors may be well intentioned when they are teaching classes focused on race and ethnicity but can easily become controversial when they begin to minimize the actual experiences of a group of people in which the class is based on. Maribel recalls an experience in a Mexican culture class:

The only negative experience (with faculty) at Sac State that I can recall was when I took my first it was a Mexican culture class and it was being taught by a White woman and she would shut down a lot of the Latino's experiences and she was very hypocritical like you know they were 'your' experiences..."

Maribel's use of the word hypocritical is important. The erasure of a Chicana experience is a norm in university classrooms. With the long efforts of creating and sustaining ethnic studies courses and racial/ethnic courses in different majors, Maribel's experience exemplifies how White faculty often invalidate the experiences of students of

colors (Allen 2006; Cabrera and Nora 1996). However, beyond minimizing minority women's experiences, this type of treatment from professors can lead to negative relationships with faculty. This denies students positive relationships with their professors, which have been strongly associated with motivating them academically (O'Keeffe 2013; Komarraju, Sergy, and Gargi 2010). It becomes clear to students of color that teachers may not be 'rooting' for them and can damage student's academic success. Moreover, White professors form a great majority of the faculty, and more critical professors who actually understand the struggles of all students are needed to take over the classrooms.

Genesis is one of the few Chicana/Latina in her class, and one of the few with more radical ideas in a historically conservative major. With the recent killing of unarmed Black male, Stephon Clark by Sacramento Police and the national debate it caused, Genesis found herself having to critique the wrong doings of the police. Two White male students in her class justified the killing of Stephon Clark as Genesis argued that running was not a crime and does not justify his killing. Whenever she spoke against police brutality or a social justice issue, she reports she is never backed up by anyone and is most likely to be questioned by more than one peer. This experience exemplifies how oftentimes students of color have to be in defense when the majority of the class has opposing views. Overall, Genesis reports she feels comfortable and finds herself challenging her classmates and professors though sometimes will not speak up due to feelings of invalidation and intimidation.

Post Trump election and sense of entitlement. Since the presidential election of Donald Trump in 2016, it has become clear through mainstream media that people of color are being targeted, including immigrants and Mexicans, as Trump has directly insulted the Mexican and immigrant community. His rhetoric has inspired his supporters and has ultimately incited violence on communities of color, with the immigrant community being hit hard as deportations rise as well as hate crimes against anyone looking indigenous, Brown. Since the election, participants reported classrooms becoming more hostile as students, particularly White male students, developed a sense of entitlement and students of color on campus became victims of racial/ethnic insults.

Participants were asked if they ever had a negative experience with a peer or a professor in the classroom. Four of the women reported incidents that the women believe happened due to the election of Trump because it has given certain individuals a sense of entitlement to mistreat their peers. Ruby reported that after the election, a professor allowed the class to take a while to discuss the elections. A peer then made a comment that can be seen as an overt racial/ethnic insult to a minority. She reports:

Everybody was talking and they were sharing their experiences and this student decided to say, "I'm chilling. I'm not worried because I'm not a person of color so I don't have to worry about any of that." And it was just like "wow." You have actual peers who are actually scared for their parents, scared for what might happen to them.

Ruby said that after the student made the comment, nobody said anything. The professor changed the topic of the discussion and moved on. When racial tensions arise in a classroom, it can be difficult for a professor to redirect the class and mediate the situation. However, being dismissive of racialized comments towards a group of people

in a classroom contributes the norms of ‘acceptance’ of hateful language and inhumane behaviors in society.

As students practice their freedom of speech, it also impacts others. Ilene reported that after the elections she started seeing more students in her major classes showing up with Trump pins, hats, and shirts that said ‘build that wall.’ The Trump pride exploded nationally the following days after the election, but for others, they saw that pride as discriminatory towards communities of color and marginalized groups. It symbolized racist patriotism to minorities.

Ilene is a first generation college student from Southern California. During her time at CSU, Sacramento, her father was deported back to Mexico causing her to miss a year of school. For people like Ilene, U.S. patriotism and pride for Trump symbolized state terrorism. She was alarmed to see students in her classes began wearing Trump shirts, pins, and hats. One might think that a student practicing their freedom to speech is nothing offensive; however, for communities that have been under attacked since before Trump’s election, that pride symbolizes the terror brought to many families across the world. Ilene reports one of her major professors wanted to check in with the class but quickly had to redirect the conversation as tensions rose.

Maribel also described an experience in where she was in one of her major classes speaking in Spanish to another classmate, a White woman, overheard and made a comment.

(She) just asked us ‘why do you guys always have to speak in Spanish?’ With a judgmental tone, not in a curious way. I just told her well, ‘I’m bilingual and I feel really comfortable.’ I switch languages like that.

Maribel mentioned this experience occurred recently and was surprised to hear this coming from a classmate she already had previous classes with. She was especially shocked to know someone in her major would ask something like that, especially considering that her major and field typically is made up of more ‘culturally aware’ individuals. It is also interesting to see how comments critiquing individuals speaking in their native language is viewed as problematic for some in the U.S.

Silencing in educational spaces. Another common theme among Chicanas was that when students made racial jokes or comments in the class, the professor would move past it and other students would usually remain silent. In both majors that are more conservative and those that are more progressive tend to equally ‘accept’ inappropriate remarks from peers. While Genesis believes that some individuals are “lost hopes” as in they have already made up their mind, Ruby also reports she is genuinely afraid to want to speak up just because she feels unsafe around those who speak in such way and is unaware of what may happen if she speaks up.

I feel like it’s just a little bit scary because you never know what might happen. Cause some people are in your classroom and let's say you want to speak up about something, and they might find it offensive. They might do stuff, I don’t know. With everything you see nowadays, like in media, it’s just, you never know what might happen so it’s just like I feel a little bit scared...let’s say I sit next to them (Trump supporter) or sit front of them, I don’t know something might happen.

This fear Ruby reports is valid and has a long lasting impact on her comfort level in the classroom. Being in a hostile classroom influences a student’s success in that class and also have affects on their mental health. Students must feel welcomed and safe and should feel comfortable to speak up against someone when they are being attacked either

directly or indirectly, however; it appears Chicana/Latina student such as Ilene, Genesis and Ruby sometimes feel that saying nothing is better in order to protect themselves.

Black Women in the Classroom

Both Black participants overall experienced more direct and overt insults directed towards them in comparison to the Chicana/Latina group. These women were less likely to view the campus as ‘friendly and welcoming’ as their experiences in the classroom has contributed to their lower levels of comfort on campus. As found for Chicana/Latina participants, most of their negative experiences reported more likely to occur post-election. The Trump election magnified the devaluations and biases normalized for Chicanas/Latinas such as their low educational attainment, and least political representation, lowest per capita income, among other systematic inequities. For the Black women participants, their experiences of direct micro-insults is something they have experienced prior election.

Intellectual inferiority. Both Monica and Andrea faced micro insults during their classes by both peers and professors. One theme that was common in this group, particularly for Monica, was how peers and professors would question Monica’s intellectual abilities as if she was incapable of doing outstanding work and as if that kind of capability was only possible by certain people.

I had a person ask me about a class that we have both taken a semester previously, like how I did in the class. And I told her that I did well and she told me her grade, and she's like, “oh, you did better than me, like how?” Which I was sort of taken aback like, well, why? Why wouldn't I be able to do better than you?”

She further explained how comments like that are not rare and she is often questioned how she achieves academically. She was also questioned by her professors

and described an experience in which a professor questioned her credibility in front of the class:

I wrote a paper for one of my classes, and I got a pretty decent grade on it, but the professor questioned if I wrote it. It was extremely offensive. They asked me a definition of one of the words that I used

Monica reported she was 'not polite' with her response and told her professor questioning her in front of her peers was inappropriate. Monica's experience is an example of the ongoing assumptions that Black individuals are intellectually inferior. Adding to this myth, many have believed that White culture has been more advanced than other minority cultures. Even today in higher education, Monica's experience is a clear example of racial/ethnic prejudice in the classroom. This also shows how professors will also rely on stereotypes to form their perceptions of their students. It is also critical to examine the social location. Monica reports to have consistently been one of the few or only Black students in her classes, and is targeted by classmates and professors inside the classroom. These experiences warrant more efforts by the university to recruit more professors with diverse backgrounds to truly represent the needs of all students not just a select. It is also important to see how this experience can ultimately hurt Monica's academic experience and overall success on campus. When students of color are racially targeted in their classrooms and perceive their campus environments as unwelcoming, they may be more likely to face challenges throughout their college journey as they may feel isolated and marginalized by their college community. Monica adds she has also been questioned about being accepted into her discipline's honor society and how she was able to work on research with a professor. She states she is

doubted by classmates and believes it is connected to racism.

For Andrea, she reported sometimes feeling uncomfortable to even ask questions in class due to past experiences of professors dismissing her questions or answering her questions rudely. Andrea also reports she believes it may be related to racist stereotypes of intellectual inferiority.

...There's been times where I've asked a professor to rephrase something and they've just treated me like I was stupid. And it was like, 'well, it's not that I'm stupid. I just need you to rephrase that for me.'

Andrea believes her major may be responsible for her experiencing more hostility or discomfort in her classes. Like Genesis from the Chicana/Latina group, Andrea is also in a predominantly White male and conservative major and field, where a woman of color can easily become uncomfortable in class where they will often be invalidated.

Invalidation of the Black perspective. The stereotype of intellectual inferiority in the classroom was common for Monica and Andrea. These women were often invalidated when participating in classroom discussion. As Andrea noted above, whenever a Black perspective is needed and she provides one, other non-Black students quickly challenged her ideas. She reports she is often 'over-talked' and the males in her classes mostly do it:

I've been over-talked. I've been talked over by males. Because a lot of the classes I take can be super political and binary, so you're either on one side or the other. And so if I'm talking about one thing, I can be really like over-talked, "Oh, what she has to say is not valid."...And sometimes when they're asking for African-American female (perspective), or even just females, I feel like I've been talked over by guys before, that I shouldn't feel that way, or I'm being overdramatic, or something like that. So it has been uncomfortable to even say my opinion, because I don't want someone that doesn't even know to really chime in.

Andrea sees the college campus as very ‘binary’ in terms of politics. Considering she is in a ‘political’ major, she often finds herself challenging the normative notions; and whenever she has spoken up, she is debated, causing her to feel uncomfortable. Even if the majority of the class is also challenging the class, she is still most likely to be talked over and believe it has tied back to her being a Black women in a majority White male dominated field. Monica also reports that whenever she states her opinion or even when she is asked to state her experiences, “the mood in the room changes.” Being aware that this happens, she also becomes uncomfortable in sharing her thoughts as a Black woman when she feels she will be invalidated due to her past experiences in the classroom. She reports every class can be unpredictable and her feeling of comfort can vary day by day:

...It depends on the circumstance, and the day, and the lecture, and what's being discussed. And like you said (to Andrea), if somebody is looking for an opinion from a person of color, they'll look to you if you're not saying anything. So it really just depends on the environment. Sometimes yes I feel comfortable. Sometimes no. But it depends.

For Black women such as Andrea and Monica, their experience in the classroom is less welcoming and more hostile and these women believe these experiences are related back to their racial identity and the University not providing effective resources and enough representation for all students, specifically those from marginalized backgrounds. Both Monica and Andrea have experienced being questioned for their academic achievements by professors and students, and have been often invalidated in the classroom overtly and subtly.

White Women in the Classroom

Both Caitlin and Bridgette had overall positive experiences in the classroom with both peers and their professors. As they described their classrooms, their classroom experiences made their environment comfortable for them. Interestingly, Bridgette said the only time any kind of tensions rose or made things uncomfortable in the classroom is when the professors bring up certain topics such as cultural and racial topics. When asked how her experience in the classroom has been so far, she responded:

I would say for the most part positive. However I feel like in some classes, like my cross-cultural class, for example, I'm taking from psych, we learn about different cultures and stuff, I feel like it's really interesting to learn about other cultures. But then when the teacher brings up certain topics I feel like the room gets really tense which is normal.

Bridgette admits such conversations on race can bring up tensions and debates amongst classmates. When asked if any of the participants had any negative experiences with any peers in the classroom, Bridgette reported a classmate questioned her capability of getting good grades:

"...One time I was in class and I think with me just being a blonde, White girl sometimes I get a lot of stereotypes. One time someone said to me like, "I can't believe you passed the test with an A, you're blonde." I was like, "What does that mean?" So and it wasn't from someone that was blonde. But I'm like, "Okay. I don't know how that makes sense." But I feel like I do get comments like that.

The intellectual inferiority stereotype is racialized framing Whites as intellectually dominant. As in the case of Monica in the Black women focus group, her experience of being 'called out' in front of her class and given the social location, it can be interpreted as a form of an intellectual inferiority because of her Black racial identity and gender. Bridgette's experience of being questioned because she was 'blonde,' can be

seen as her intellectuality being questioned mostly due to her gender in this case. Historically, Black individuals have been categorized as 'inferior' in academic capacities and this stereotype has impacted their experience in education and the way they may view academia. Looking at the experiences of White individuals, historically, they have not been restricted from educational opportunities as much as minority groups. However, the women's struggle for access to higher education should not be overlooked, but should also be understood that historically White women are at an advantaged in comparison to other groups of women. The stereotype of the "dumb blonde," is often heard and assumed that "blonde" women are somehow incapable and 'not smart.' Bridgette reports this phrase of 'dumb blonde,' is something she has heard in other classes. Though she believes this phrase is a joke, she still finds that term offensive. Aside from this experience, Bridgette reports overall, she finds all her classes as respectful environments. She admits to running into people who may be problematic, but for her it has been rather easy to move past along it and does not feel it has impacted her educational in any negative way.

Caitlin acknowledged her major has created much more different experiences for her than before entering that major. Caitlin's diverse major and vast topics of discussion have contributed to a more inclusive and positive experience for her compared to

Bridgette:

I feel in the classroom we're all like-minded peers. There are certain societal things that are kind of just given. You know what I mean? So it's fun to move past that and discuss it further. So I feel like since I've been in the major, it's been really cool. And the type of people in the class, I feel that I can relate to a lot. It's just been fun.

However, Caitlin also reports that even in her more progressive classes, there are individuals who will create debate. She mentioned how the topic of the ‘wage gap’ was discussed and critiqued by a White male classmate who often played the role of ‘devil’s advocate:’

...The example that he was giving was about the wage gap wasn't real and how we don't need feminism. I think it was just discouraging how the other guys in the class were starting to agree. And you're just kind of looking around like, "What?!"

As Caitlin reported, she has not had a negative experience in the classroom, but sometimes feels a responsibility to speak up when others are being attacked or someone says something problematic. She reports her professors encourage open discussion, but she still feels hopeless in the end. Similarly to how many of the Chicana/Latina women felt about speaking up, Caitlin also reported feeling that speaking up can be pointless if individuals have made up their minds. Caitlin emphasizes that the students she has viewed as being more problematic in classes were males:

...So there's always a place for constructive conversation about these issues. So we always do, and I never feel like it matters. They (debaters) just like to argue. And I don't know, but they're just not open to actually learning a different side of the issue. So that's why I feel like it's difficult to have those conversations because I don't feel like they're ever going to go anywhere or that they're even listening. And I don't feel that way with other female peers because they have the same or very similar experiences that I've had,

In regards to their experiences with professors in the classroom, both women reported to have positive experiences with their professors. Neither women reported any issue with their professors during their time at the university. Caitlin did report that one of her major professors had one used a derogatory slur without realizing it was. The class corrected her and she was receptive and apologized for her used of the word. Aside from

this experience Caitlin had witnessed, both women reported feeling satisfied with their professors and felt respected in the classrooms.

NAVIGATING SUPPORT WITH FACULTY

Aside from understanding the experiences of these women in the classrooms, the relationships these participants had with their professors outside of class was also examined. As past studies have shown the importance of student-faculty relations in the overall experiences and academic success of students, this study will examine how these groups of women each connected with their professors and to distinguish the areas of supports.

Chicana Women

Chicana/Latina participants relationships with their professors varied from being very close and connected to feelings of hostility. As noted above with their sense of belonging, Chicana/Latina women's reported negative experiences most likely occurred in majors and/or classroom where there was a majority of White and/or male presence. Historically, these majors have had low representation of students of color. However, overall all women reported finding faculty who supported their academic success, even though some women did experience discomfort in a classroom and being let down by professors. For those Chicanas/Latinas with higher levels of sense of belonging, they were in majors and classrooms with more student and faculty diversity. Genesis used to frequently participate in class and asked questions, but since a particular experience with a professor, she now remains silent in his class due to feeling intimidated:

‘There was one professor who I had gone into his office and it was ten minutes before class started, and I came to his office, and I had my baby too. I was like

my, “My baby sitter just left. I can’t go to class because of my baby.” He was like, ‘Ok.’ But I had my assignment, and I was handing it to him. He was like, “I only accept it in class but you can’t go to class because you have your baby.” And so I was mad because it took me about two hours to do that essay that day and for him not to take it, it hurt my grade.”

Aside from being a full-time student, Genesis works 62 hours a week, is a wife, and a mother to an infant boy. She gets little sleep and is constantly overwhelmed balancing her different roles. Though she believes her major offers support and opportunities to students, she reports mixed feelings as she has also experienced hostility with peers and a particular professor. She understands that she is in a historically White male dominated major and field who are often very conservative. For this reason, she also admits her negative experiences in this major may be a result of her being a woman of color and acknowledges she may not have felt some hostility if she were to be in a more progressive and inclusive major. Genesis was the only Chicana/Latina reporting a negative experience with a professor outside of class.

All Chicana/Latina participants reported that they feel their professors care about their academic success and put in an effort to show them they are supporting them. However, it is also interesting to note how these women emphasized that the professors they felt most supported by were professors of color, specifically women of color. Isabelle generally felt her professors have cared and ‘have stressed the importance to represent in all fields of education,’ and Isabelle especially felt that representation with other Latina/o professors whom she has made close connections with. She also reports feeling more empowered by faculty who share similar backgrounds as her. She talks about a certain professor who is from her same hometown:

... We're both from (city) and he just knows the struggle and he grew up there so he just talks to me about what he can do for you and I thought that was really great. With White professors or other professors, I don't really relate to. I feel like (faculty of color) see your color and you just want to do more for them to empower them (students of color).

The other participants also felt supported and cared for by their professors and feel comfortable about visiting them during their office hours. Though all Chicana/Latina women express that overall they have 'good' relationships with their professors, they also ended up emphasizing how those professors they are closer to are professor who are also Chicana/Latina/o or another person of color. Maribel reports she find herself feeling more comfortable approaching professors outside her major due to the closer personal connections and that she has seen those professors put in more effort in assisting their students and making themselves available to them outside of office hours. Maribel states:

Mostly my ethnic studies professors mention their office hours and they try to tell you they're available. And they make you feel more comfortable to approach them. I haven't really had a need to unless it was to turn in a paper but I have gone in to certain professors' offices to just talk about personal stuff or they have written me letters of recommendation. And because we make those personal connections, it makes me feel more comfortable outside of the classroom.

Maribel further explains professors of color are most likely to 'make it a point' to inform students of opportunities or offer support even outside of class in comparison to White faculty. She believes this may be the case because professors of color have had similar experiences and put more of an effort to show students of color they believe in them. Maribel states that professors of color 'know that no one has really told students of color' the feedback they should be hearing to be better equipped both academically and socially. In Ruby's case, he has had to seek a mentor outside of her White dominated major because she has been unable to make close connections within her discipline:

The only professor I was really close to was not in my major sadly, but I feel like she was a good mentor. She really cared and she really wanted me to get good grades and move forward with school, and she was person of color. I have not had any Latina or Latino professor up to this semester.

Ilene also reported that being supported by her professors, but also explained that professors of color were also most likely to provide her with more effective feedback:

More Latina/o professors have given me feedback. Like (professor), I have her as well. This semester. I wrote something and she left me a note that we should go running sometimes because I was writing how I like to run when I'm stressed. We have mutual friends, we know the same people, and when I went to go visit her during office hours, she was like, "Oh, when we go visit her (mutual friend) we should grab lunch." I was like, "Ok." It kind of seemed weird at the time because you're not used to having a professor telling you that and connecting with you on a more personal level. And I said yes. It took me a second to say yes, but I think they (professors of color) do try a little more because they probably know we (students of color) don't get it a lot.

Overall, Chicana/Latina women did report they felt supported and cared for by professors, but when further discussing their experiences, it can be seen these women only reported positive experiences with other Latina/o professors and other professors of color. Many of these women reported feeling better supported by professors of color outside their majors because for some of their majors, they felt intimidated in approaching the majority White faculty.

Black Women

Both Monica and Andrea reported feeling supported from their professors in terms of their academic success, however this support is limited. As Monica finds herself in a predominantly White women major where she is often the only Black person in her classes, she reports her professors are supportive in her success but she still has a hard time in actually connecting with them at a more personal level:

I have connected with a few professors that I feel are supportive of me in my success, but it's been really trying. I have found that I've had to go through several different people, and even considered changing my major just because I was having such a difficult time making that connection. There's one person now that I'm comfortable with and that I really feel like she's rooting for me, but others, I [laughter]-- I feel like they don't really understand what it's like for students of color. They don't really understand our experiences, and when you try to explain it, I feel like it's just been sort of washed over. Like, "Oh, are you sure that it was meant that way?" Or, "Could you have taken it the wrong way?" Like you said (to Andrea), I don't feel like my experiences are seen as valid by certain people.

For Monica, being supportive is something professors should already be doing, and she feels she is receiving that from her professors in her major, but there is not much of an effort from them to understand her as a Black woman. She describes professors' understanding on student of color's experiences as 'washed' over,' as they tend to minimize the realities of marginalized students. Monica's racial identity is a big part of her life, and she is aware that wherever she goes the first thing people see is her Black skin. Understanding her experiences as a queer, working class, Black woman means much more to her to feel like she belongs. Monica also does a lot of work with the local Black community. She shared that when she talks about the work she does with her White professors, they often tell her she should try working with other communities as well. Monica has perceived this as if they are telling her to "desegregate" herself from the Black community, and she views this as problematic as they recommend for her to be more 'diverse' in her community work, yet she believes those same professors have no clue what diversity actually is. She reports:

With faculty, I am having an extremely difficult time finding an advisor. I do a lot of work in my community. And I was speaking to someone that I was trying to, I guess, just form a relationship with, and telling them about the work that I'm doing. And they told me that they felt that for me to be competitive to get into a

grad program, that I needed to work in a more diverse environment. And I thought that somebody with that level of education had a very limited viewpoint of what diversity looked like, so. That was my experience.

For Andrea, she also feels disconnected from the majority of her White professors. This semester, she reports the majority of her professors are Black and/or of color, and she states it may be due to the fact she is taking race/ethnicity based classes. She mentions this semester is different in terms of faculty and says she is 'lucky' to be in those classes, where she has felt more support by those professors than faculty from past classes. Though she does feel supported by her professors, she is clear which professors are showing more effort. When asked if she felt if her professors care and were supportive of her academic success and well-being she responded:

I feel like my Black professors are. My other professors, I would say they don't really care, and they've kind of made it obvious that they don't really care. I mean, I know my Black professors, they are really, really supportive. That's why I feel comfortable going to them, because they are supportive and understanding. They understand where I'm coming from. And sometimes I think because there's not many Black faculty, that when you find a Black faculty advisor, they really, really try to help you because they know there's not many of them. They know students like me don't have as many resources as someone else who may be more privileged on campus. So I feel like they make an extra effort compared to all my other professors to help me, because we share that kind of common thing.

As Monica reports feeling disconnected from her professors, she does feel comfortable in approaching them during office hours. She visits her professors regularly during their office hours and each time she goes, she cannot connect with them on a more personal level. When asked if she visits her professors often, she responded:

I do it quite regularly, and that's why it's taken such a long time to really find somebody that I connect with. Because that's what they tell you to do when you get here, that you need to meet people and make connections. And so I go, and I

try to do that, and it's just really difficult to connect with people on whatever level.

This semester, Andrea is satisfied with her professors and reports the faculty have been the most diverse she has ever had. Though she has made great personal and cultural connections with her professors this semester, she does not visit her professor's office regularly. She reports she does feel comfortable visiting them.

Monica who is in a majority White women major, feels most disconnected from peers, professors and curriculum, yet she still puts an effort to find someone to connect with. As a Black woman on campus, Monica emphasizes how she has been on the search for a mentor. This effort shows, the need for professors to understand the struggles of their students and not to ignore the realities of students of color. As students such as Monica who put great efforts in making connections on campus, it is critical there are professors who are ready to really understand their students and their complexities rather than treating all students as they have similar experiences.

White Women

White women participants felt greater connections with their professors both in and outside of class and felt supportive by all their professors. Throughout discussing their satisfaction with their professors, both participants reported support from professors in terms of challenging and encouraging them in their classes and helping them out when they are points away from a getting a better grade. They are also able to rely on their professors on academic support, as well as having an overall good connection with them. Bridgette reports how one professor helped her out to achieve an A in the class. She states that is why she puts an effort in visiting her professors during their office hours, in

order for them to see that she is really trying in the class and to earn more support from professors:

For every class, I like to go (office hours) at least a couple of times a month. If I ever did need letters of recommendation, it's always nice to have a connection with professors. I want my professors to see that I do care about my grade. So if I needed something that was going to put me on the break between one grade or the other, I could go and speak with them and say, "Look, I've been coming to office hours." They can see that you're trying. And maybe they'll work with you because that's happened to me in the past. I was 1% away from an A and my professor just gave me that A. She's just like, "I'll just give it to you," because she sees that I was trying. So I think just having that connection with them and being able to show them that you care, they'll work with you, like I was saying, a lot more.

Caitlin also reports similar thoughts and mentions she makes it a point to at least have her professors know her name because she believes that 'can go a long way.' She further explains that if professors see students 'trying' they are willing to work with students and can be more welcoming:

I think that's important to make the relationship, even if it's small, with a professor. And it should feel comfortable for you. So I feel, like I was saying, all my professors are very open and make it comfortable for you to come to them.

Both Caitlin and Bridgette's experiences with professors have been rather positive. They feel like they can 'trust' their professors in helping them out and report all they need to do is put in some effort to go to office hours to show professors that you do care about your success in their classes. Though both Chicana/Latina and Black women group had some mixed feelings in terms of feeling supported by their professors, both groups also emphasized the importance of feeling supported by their professors in the sense of them better understanding their struggles as women of color. Some of the

women reported wanting to see more of an effort from professors to get to know their backgrounds and understand where they are coming from as both Black and Chicana/Latina. Caitlin and Bridgette's 'trust' with their professors is what all women and students should report.

When asked if professors overall made them feel comfortable, both women reported that majority of their professors have good relationships with them but did mention there have been times where professors said something inappropriate unintentionally or has made one of them 'feel stupid.' For Bridgette, she admits there are professors who will just always 'come off as intimidating.'

There are some professors that if you ask a question, they kind of make you feel stupid for asking it, so you're kind of scared to ask them again; they're intimidating to talk to. You'll see them on campus, and they don't smile or anything, or they're just like, "Don't talk to me." And there are some professors that are amazing, and I go to their office hours just because I want to talk to them. So it just really depends on the person. But I think, so far, I've had really great professors, and they're really encouraging.

Caitlin reports that her major is more progressive and typically the students and professors in her classes have similar ideologies and for the most part, more radical. However, she knows professors who sometimes are unaware that certain words are not used and who are not 'caught up' on the 'current terms.' Ultimately, these professors can come off as being rude, but Caitlin believes they have no intention of offending and are willing to learn from their students.

Participants were also asked if they had a 'mentor' in their major or anywhere on campus. Though both women said no, they still reported if they needed anything, they

already knew which professors to go to:

I know for sure I have one that I would go to. I've asked her about courses to take in the future and what I should look into, and if I'm interested in a specific field within (my major), who should I speak to? And she'll guide me in the right direction.

Caitlin reported sometimes feeling uncomfortable approaching certain professors to just have a conversation with because she feels she may be 'overstepping boundaries.' However, she is also able to name professors she can go to if she needs anything but expresses a feeling of nervousness in forming a relationship with them.

REPRESENTATION IN THE CLASSROOM AND CURRICULUM

Chicana/Latina women levels of comfort really depended in the environment they were in. For some of the women, they feel a sense of belonging and connected to their classes, and say it is possibly due to being in more progressive majors. Isabelle knew she would feel 'represented' in her class and does not think anything needs to be changed in the curriculum so far that she see but then again mentions it is because her major makes her feel very well represented as a woman of color and is taking classes that relate to her. However, it is important to note that this is not the case for the majority of underrepresented students on campus. As Isabelle is in a major with more representation and diversity, it is expected for her to feel more represented and connected than the average Chicana/Latina student on campus. She further explains that having other Chicana/Latina professors adds to a better experience for her:

So far all my professors this semester are Latina women and one Latino male. All these professors hold women to such a high standards and all of my Latina professors. They are just strong and independent women, so of course they're

going to speak great about women.

Maribel is also in a major with a more diverse student population and faculty and reports she can also relate to her classes. She feels most represented when some of her professors share their background stories and realizes they have gone through very similar experiences. She feels a greater connection and representation when some of her professors speak Spanish to her. Maribel reports, “Speaking Spanish makes things more intimate for me. When they speak Spanish, I feel like I am home. This is where I belong.”

Like Maribel, Ilene and Genesis also emphasize the importance of all disciplines having more representation and providing students with more than one perspective. These women report that outside of classes such as ethnic studies, it is really hard to find diversity and representation and that contributes to being left out. Ilene states, “I think that in the curriculum it is always good to have different types of perspectives. We’re taught to see one perspective k-12th. In college we can see that it is different so maybe adding a variety in the textbooks.”

For most of the Chicana/Latina women, they emphasized wanting more representation in terms of curriculum. For Black women, considering the majors they are in are White dominated, they really felt the need for more quality professors who better represented the needs of the increasingly diversified student population. Their view of diversity were mixed between women, as Andrea reports she is only somewhat satisfied with the level of diversity when comparing it to her previous White

conservative community college where she rarely saw another person of color. For Monica, she reports she is not pleased with the level of diversity on campus because there needs to be more efforts in representing all students. Monica reports:

I think it's top-down. There needs to be a greater push to hire people from different backgrounds. I know that my college last semester hired new faculty and they were both queer, but it's a very white major. So it would be nice to see some other folks in there.

Monica further explains since her time on campus, she has only had one professor of color and finds that to be a major problem. She said it terms of what is discussed in her major classes; people of color are always an after thought. Very Eurocentric research is presented as the 'norm' of the field and when scholars of color work are presented, it comes as secondary information. She reports, " So it's like it's always sort of the majority leads, and then you feel like an afterthought, if you're mentioned at all. So I guess that would be my one-- well, one of my criticisms." Andrea also has a problem with lack of faculty diversity in her major, but it also bothered by the curriculum being very binary and normative. She describes her major as being 'just filled with White guys' and believes it is dominated by them, that even the curriculum is centered from their perspective. She describes an experience in where the class was having a discussion on implicit biases and one White male student raised his hand and admitted to being a 'racist.' This student mentioned he eventually wanted to work as a correctional officer. What Andrea found most problematic was the fact that her professor just said 'oh okay,' and was 'dismissive.' She explains that professors should have a role in ensuring that all students feel safe in a classroom and should not allow for

students to feel entitled to spew racist ideologies in classrooms:

And I don't really like how professors are just kind like, "Okay." That's not okay. Someone's being talked over or someone's saying an excuse for them, and I don't think that's okay. So that's why I don't really talk in my (major) classes much, because especially if you try to talk about Black Lives Matter or something like that, oh, that's just the craziest thing. Like, you'll hear "All lives matter. All lives matter." And it's like, we never said all lives didn't matter. I'll explain to them, "Nobody ever said all lives don't matter. We just want our lives to matter, too." And they (students) disregard everything. So that's one thing I don't like about my major, is how the White male can just say whatever, and everyone else is disregarded and given an excuse.

The toxic behavior of many of the males in Andrea's class has led to her questioning why she is in that major to begin in. She reports she has thought about changing majors because she 'could not deal with it,' and would often leave her classes 'too riled up.' These experiences ultimately led Andrea to lose focus in class as she would grow uncomfortable, especially when it was rare when someone would speak up. Andrea's experience is a clear example of how women of color in predominantly White majors can be detrimental to them as both the curriculum and views of professors are very White and masculine, marginalizing people like Andrea. She emphasizes that professors have a greater responsibility in shaping the perspective of their students and is concerned when professors do not speak up when a student has clearly said something inappropriate. Andrea reports, "Professors are not actively encouraging these students, but when you don't stop that behavior, you're reinforcing that behavior."

White women were more likely to report feeling represented on campus and felt all students were represented. Both Caitlin and Bridgette spoke how students were very diverse and also saw that with professors. Bridgette reports:

I feel like for the most part everyone here has a spot and purpose and can feel like they belong. Like nothing here is really making everyone feel excluded or at least not intentionally. Like I've never seen anything to intentionally make anyone feel out of place.

Bridgette adds that in her major she sees diversity amongst faculty. She further discusses how this is beneficial and helpful in getting students to relate to them. Interestingly, Bridgette is also in the same major as one of the women of color in the study, who reported feeling excluded in her major due to the lack of representation in faculty. Interestingly for White women, any kind of 'diversity' can be satisfactory but for some women of color, the bare minimum is not enough and expects more in terms of diversity and efforts from the university.

Caitlin adds that there is also good representation on campus and agrees that professors are also diverse. It is interesting to see how both White women reported satisfaction with the diversity on campus and felt that even other students got representation. Bridgette adds that there are several options for students to get their needs met on campus and a variety of organizations. As Chicana/Latina and Black women both reported that there is a greater need for more representation in curriculum and all throughout campus, evidently the realities of students of color go largely unnoticed. Both women also report how they believe the university, for the most part, does a 'good job' in making sure that classes are planned out in a way to best fit students' needs. Bridgette also reports in regards to the curriculum in her major, she feels it is not very catered to one specific group and can be broad enough for all students to feel included. Bridgette added that before her current major, she was also in a White and

conservative major and admits that she could not align with the curriculum and found it very problematic, which is why she made the switch. She is now in White women dominated major and states she feels represented as she sees people who 'look like her.'

For Caitlin, she reports she feel very connected to the curriculum in her major as it touches on several intersections and has way of challenging students' way of thinking.

She points out that what she learns in her classes is relevant to the current realities:

... I can always relate it to real life experiences, so like the curriculum, I think about ethnicities and gender and sexuality are just super relevant. And the kinds of readings that we do, it's interesting and relevant, and it's showing examples of these interactions and stuff that is going on with people that are like us and historical examples.

Though Caitlin admits to really enjoying her classes and feels that all students in that major are represented, she does note there is a need to update the curriculum to more current issues. However, aside from this critique, she feels within her major all students have a voice.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

Chapter four specifically looked at the different university experiences of three racial/ethnic groups of women: Chicana/Latina, Black and White. As each group responded to the research questions, distinctions between each group becomes clear, as expected, and also serves as a way to understand the realities of how different groups of women navigate their college journey.

The goal of the study was to examine the experiences of Black, Chicana and White women across gender, race and class; and explore the ways in higher educational institutions can better support and provide resources for historically underrepresented minorities, specifically for women of color. As also mentioned in chapter one, this study is not intended to minimize any one woman or group. This study, however, highlights the experiences of these women from their standpoint while also providing insights on how certain intersectional inequalities lead to microaggressions and insults. The privilege experienced by some women and groups can also be clearly distinguished in the previous chapter as it also become evident that some groups have overall better experiences and opportunities on campus. Experiences from these participants also offers the opportunity to really look into how women and their complexities and intersections can play a factor in their overall success at the University, and also provides insights on what is and what is not working for certain groups of students.

Out of the total of nine women interviewed in all three focus groups, they represented seven different majors in three colleges on campus. As found in the previous

chapter with the experiences of Genesis and Andrea in their male dominated majors. Both these women similar experience to feeling devalued in the classroom and felt like no one has their back. Interestingly, for participants in the rest of the groups who reported being in more diverse majors and classrooms, they also reported experiences of White males using classroom discussion as an opportunity to secure their privileges and sense of 'entitlement.' As reported by Ruby from the Chicana/Latina group and Andrea from the Black Women group, White men in their classes have admitted to being 'racist' and commented that they were 'chilling' and did not care about the current political climate in the U.S. because he was not a person of color. These observations clearly show that men in classrooms continue to take advantage of classroom discussion as a form of sense of entitlement. More disturbing for the women who experienced negative comments from males in their classes was the complicity of their professors. When the topic of race or anything political related was discussed in class, it was most likely to result in inappropriate comments from peers. Those comments would include racial and sexist insults. For those women who did report such an experiences, they also reported their professors dismissing their peers' behavior and felt they just 'brushed it off.' When reported by Chicana/Latina and Black women, they did recognize how their race ultimately had an impact.

In male dominated majors such as those that Genesis and Andrea are in, women, regardless of race, do not feel safe; however, can be very much more detrimental and unwelcoming for women of color. As found in Caitlin's experience of males in her class agreeing that there is no 'wage gap' and that 'feminism is not needed', also shows that

even in more progressive majors such as the one Caitlin is in also exposes that men in even more 'progressive majors' can be problematic and sexist. Also seen in Andrea's major, she reports her male-dominated major classes have exposed her to toxic masculinity, as well as their racist beliefs, making Andrea feel unsafe and unwelcomed.

Though women from all three focus groups reported negative experiences with males in their classes, it is also important that different impact it had on women. For Black women such as Andrea and Chicana/Latina women such as Ruby, Genesis, and Ilene, they emphasized how they understood these comments from peers in relation to their racial and gender identity, and for some women such as Ilene, she also reported interpreting inappropriate comments from peers in relation to her family immigration status. For White women such as Caitlin, when reporting her experiences with patriarchy in the classroom, she solely reported finding offense to it in regards to dismissing the struggle of overall women. While for Chicana/Latina and Black women on campus, they closely connect their negative experiences with male, in particular White males, to their racial and gender identity together. Therefore, it can be seen how for certain groups of women, they are less protected in classroom from toxic patriarchal ideologies that are still spreading throughout college campuses. Regardless of race, all women are impacted by this behavior; however for women of color, they are more likely to consistently experience or witness such behavior and more likely to have more negative impact, as in comparison to White women in the study.

To add to the some of the comments heard in the classroom by participants of they study, significantly the language used is a reflection of the current political climate

and representations of the mainstream media. As reported earlier in this section, women from the Chicana/Latina and Black women focus groups, were more likely to report classmates sharing inappropriate comments towards other racial/gender groups. White participants Caitlin and Bridgette did not report anything related to the impacts of the Trump election. When the researcher asked all groups about their specific experiences in the classroom, Chicana/Latina and Black women reported negative experiences relating to post-election and what was currently being reported on the media, whereas White women reported more positive classroom experiences. The majority of what was reported in the previous chapter, regarding the participants' experiences with their peers and professors in the classroom, demonstrates the power of societal reflections on certain racial/ethnic groups in this country, as this is also reflected in the classroom. With the current Trump presidency and concerns that society that is 'moving back in time,' Trump's dangerous and racist ideologies are also prevalent in college, and participants of this study have unfortunately experienced the damaging realities.

Chicana/Latina and Black women reported experiences post-election that reflected the current political climate and media representation of groups most targeted by Trump. For Chicana/Latina students Maribel, Genesis, Ruby and Ilene and Black participants Andrea and Monica, they all reported inappropriate comments by peers, mostly White peers that was a reflection of the current controversies. With attacks on the Mexican, Black and immigrant community, participants reported hearing rude and racist comments from other peers about them speaking Spanish, a peer admitting to being a racist, a peer informing the class that he did not care about groups being affected by the

Trump administration because he was White, and constant critiques of the ‘Black Lives Matter’ movement and support for ‘all lives matter,’ instead. With the Latino, Black and immigrant community being targeted the most harshly by racist and classist policies, it also becomes clear how some Black and Chicana/Latina women on campus are also impacted by that more directly.

It is also interesting to point out how both Bridgette and another women of color in the study are in the same major, and both women have reported very different experiences. Though both did mention they have caring professors and both put in great efforts in visiting their professors’ office hours to get extra support, for Monica she sees her major as failing students like her because there is no representation. As for Bridgette, she is satisfied with the level of diversity in her major and sees that as a benefit for all students. Evidently, there are particular majors on campus that offer more support to certain groups of students than others. Though it may be unintentional, this demonstrates the need for more inclusive spaces so all students can benefit, not just the most privileged. This also puts minority students like Monica at an disadvantaged to succeed academically, as it appears only certain groups of students are equipped with resources to help them feel better supported and represented; something that students of color still need.

These reported experiences by these women has influenced their overall connection and level of comfort with the campus community and these insights provide the opportunity to see how educational institutions need to improve to ensure safe spaces even when at a time when an entire system is failing the most vulnerable people.

As Yosso (2006) notes, Chicana participants in her study reported to feeling devalued by the sexist-racist academic environment and this is also something found amongst both the Chicana/Latina and Black women in the study. Sexism and discrimination can make women of color question their ability to succeed in higher education and lower their retention rates. Specifically looking at the Black women in this study, they were more likely to experience microaggressions in relation to their racial identity. Sue (2010) defines microaggressions as a constant reality of slight insults, invalidations and indignities directed at marginalized groups by well-intentioned, moral individuals from all spheres of life. In the setting of higher education, microaggressions are experienced by students of color and female students from other peers, males and professors, as noted in the previous chapter. Many racist and sexist microaggressions are so subtle that neither target nor perpetrator understands what may be occurring. All women in this study, regardless of race, reported some kind of negative experience in which they recognized immediately what might have triggered that experience. The White students did report some experiences in the classroom that made them feel uncomfortable and they related it back to them being women, e.g., Bridgette being perceived as ‘dumb blonde,’ by her classmates. Many times, microaggressions are invisible that the perpetrator does not realize how their actions can be discriminatory. Many of the women in the study, however, were able to distinguish that certain experiences in and outside the classroom were micro-aggressions and knew they were wrong.

Microaggressions were more clear and consistent with the Black women in the

study. Microaggressions have been used to examine the experiences of Chicana/o and Black students at predominantly White campuses (Soloranzo 1998; Soloranzo et al., 2000). Past studies find that microaggressions directed toward Chicana/os and Black students in college can ultimately lead to feelings of isolation and being disconnected from the broader campus (Soloranzo et al., 2000; Smith et al., 2007). According to Soloranzo et al. (2002), members of marginalized groups are targets of microaggressions on a daily basis by the media and the larger society, including college campuses. It is noteworthy to see the intersections of this constant struggle experienced by Black women. Though Chicana/Latina women also reported microaggressions on campus, it was noticed their experiences were most likely to take place post-election, and for the most part this focus group reported feeling more comfortable and welcomed on campus than Black women. Of course, social location for both these groups should also be considered, and it is necessary to understand why Black women view the campus as less welcoming and more hostile. Latinos on campus make up over 30 percent of the total student population, and Chicanas/Latinas in the study reported feeling more representation on campus in terms of students as expected. This can be seen as an advantage for them as they have more opportunity to make connections and feel more welcomed in an environment where there are other students like them throughout campus. As for Black students only making up 5 percent of the student population, it is more of a struggle for them to find any representation since there are so few of them, especially in some colleges and departments.

The researcher is not indicating that Black women on campus are more likely to

experience different forms of discrimination than any other group, but considering the social location of the women in all three focus groups, it helps better understand why certain groups may be having more negative experiences than others. Both Monica and Andrea reported being in White dominated majors: one White-women dominated and the other White-male dominated. They admit their experiences in college so far could be different and perhaps more positive if they were in a major that was more diverse in terms of students, faculty and curriculum. Both these women felt isolated from their overall education in comparison to the Chicana/Latina and White women in the study. Specifically Monica, she was unsatisfied with the levels of diversity, critiques the university's efforts, and wishes to see more representation in her major.

Though Chicana/Latina also did report some experiences of microaggressions in the classroom, their social location also mattered. For some Chicana/Latina women, they described themselves as being 'saved' due to being in more diverse and progressive majors. For the Chicana/Latina women in majority White majors, aside from their experiences in the class post Trump election, reported overall feeling comfortable in the classroom. Black women in the study reported microaggressions both in and outside the classroom being more consistent and something they had grown used to over the years in college in White dominated areas. McCabe (2009) notes how these microaggressions have an impact on students' self-concept and sense of belonging, making minorities feel like outsiders on their own campus. This is very real for both Monica and Andrea and they admit to constantly having to fight to find a place to belong.

Specifically looking at Chicana/Latina and Black women, microaggressions were closely tied to race and gender identities. It is also important to note while examining the microaggressions experienced by the women of this study, that they can also be linked to class assumptions. Morales (2014) argues micro-aggressions are racialized and gendered stereotypes that are inherently lined to dominant notions about class. In other words, the racial and gendered microaggressions and insults the women in the study experienced was ultimately formed as part of a top-down power structure where women of color are often found in the bottom. These kinds of stereotypes have a longer history connected to class and patriarchal oppression, and it is noteworthy to understand how racist and sexist comments relate back to classism. For Black participants Monica and Andrea, they were more likely to report being questioned for their academic success both by peers and professors. This idea that Black women cannot be more successful than their 'more dominant counterparts' is an example of the assumption of intellectual inferiority by the dominant group, relating back to the idea of intellectuals belonging to a more affluent class. This disregards the very capability of Black individuals, specifically women as being academically capable.

Aside from this notion, many of the microaggressions experienced by both Chicana/Latina and Black women can also be linked back to classist assumptions of Latina/o and Black communities. Gilmore and Harris (2008) note that classism involves stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination based on socioeconomic status and can involve change in behavior directed toward individuals based on their socioeconomic status. This also demonstrates how powerful such assumptions and narratives can have on women of

color in higher education spaces. The stereotypes of Black and Chicana/Latina women in society manifest microaggressions experienced by students of color on college campuses. Ultimately, dominant assumptions include that race and gender are separate, however intersectionality challenges that assumption. Crenshaw(1989) reports, that by tracing intersections, it will allow to disrupt the tendencies that race, gender or any other identities or social factor are exclusive.

CONCLUSION

As this study examined the experiences of three different racial/ethnic groups of women, we ultimately see the microaggressions unravel, as well as overt indirect and direct insults and overall experiences of women differ based on their intersections. When we use intersectionality to examine racial microaggressions, what we find is that the intersectionality of race, class and gender occurs in a more subtle way. Through this study, we can see that out of the three groups interviewed, it is the most dominant group of White women who feel better represented in all aspects, satisfied with the level of diversity on campus, have greater connections and relate more with professors, felt safe in nearly all areas of campus, and do not really see a need for much improvements to make the University a better space for all. As for Chicana/Latina women, they reported lower connections and levels of comfort in the classroom and with professors but all depending on the major, feel a greater need for academic representation and were only somewhat satisfied with the level of diversity in terms of student diversity, their social location influenced whether they felt safe or not, and had more critical suggestions to improved the University. As for Black women in the study, they were more likely to

report feeling disconnected by the overall campus, not satisfied with the level in diversity in any level; emphasized the need for more representation in all aspects, more likely to not feel safe even in areas that were meant to be ‘multicultural,’ and had critical recommendations for the University to ensure better spaces for all students.

It becomes clear in this study that what the university is currently doing is only really working for some groups of students. As women are assumed to be leading the way in education, as they make up more than half college students and graduates, it is essential to really examine how college is different for certain racial/ethnic groups and how more efforts are needed to really represent the needs of all students. Ultimately what this study hopes to reveal is the much-needed support for women on campus, specifically women of color. In creating better educational spaces for historically marginalized groups in higher education, this study also reveals the need for professors to play a role in doing more to prevent hateful and racist ideologies in the classroom that are hurting students of color who make up the majority of the campus population. To allow a space for dominant groups to spread already problematic perspectives denies students and women of color a better and safer quality education that they have still to yet to achieve.

LIMITATIONS

This study was not meant to be generalizable to the larger population but is intended to provide insight to better understand the complexities of women in higher education. This study only explored experiences and identified thematic trends amongst these groups of women.

It is also necessary to point out the imbalance of participants in the focus groups. The researcher had intended to have at least four women for each group. Also, the researcher identifies as a Chicana, and there is a possibility of having more Chicana/Latina participants come forward than Black and White women. In terms of numbers, Chicanas are the largest group of women in California and CSU system. Possibly, these Chicana/Latina participants may have felt more comfortable in approaching a researcher they felt they could connect to, particularly true when they have the least academic representation by far given their numeric majority. As this study does dwell into how participants make connections on campus, it was clear that for some participants representation was a huge factor in making them feel more comfortable in approaching and navigating resources.

Appendix A:

Informed Consent

Examining the experiences of gender for Black, Chicana and White women in settings of higher education: An intersectional analysis

You are invited to participate in a research study which will involve Black, Chicana and White women sharing their experiences of gender in different settings of higher education, as well as exploring how these groups of women, if so, experience different forms of racial and gendered microaggressions. My name is Daisy Aguilar and I am a graduate student at California State University, Sacramento, Sociology Department. The purpose of this research is to examine the intersections of women from different racial/ethnic groups in higher education in order to bring needed insights on the intersecting oppressions of race and gender influence on higher educational experiences.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to answer both open-ended and demographic questions in a focus group including six to eight other women students. To ensure confidentiality from other participants as well, when signing below you are agreeing to maintain the privacy and confidentiality of other women involved in the study. Your participation in this study will last approximately two hours. Risks associated with this study are not anticipated to be greater than those risks encountered in daily life.

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary. You have the right not to participate at all or to leave the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled. However, once data has been collected and audio recordings used in the focus groups are transcribed, you will not be able to remove any data. During the two-hour focus group, I will provide pizza and drinks. No other compensation will be provided.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Measures to ensure your confidentiality include giving you pseudonyms to protect your identity. Any data obtained will be maintained in a safe, locked location for a period of three years after the study is completed. Only the researcher will have access to the audio-recorded tapes from the focus group interviews. Once the focus groups have been completed, the researcher will then transcribe all recorded data from the audiotapes onto a word document in a secure laptop only accessible to the researcher. After all audio recordings have been transferred to that laptop, the researcher will erase original recordings and store the notebook where data was also collected in a locked file cabinet.

If you have any questions about the research at any time, please contact me through email at dda58@csus.edu, or my thesis advisor Dr. Manuel Barajas at barajasm@csus.edu. If

you have any questions about your rights as a participant in a research project please call the Office of Research Affairs, California State University, Sacramento, (916) 278-5674, or email irb@csus.edu.

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above.

Signature

Date

Appendix: B

Part I: Focus Group Interview Protocol

A. Sense of belonging

1. Do you feel a sense of belonging on campus? Why or why not? What areas feel more welcoming and which don't?
2. What makes you feel connected or disconnected?
3. What would make you feel more connected both socially and academically?
4. Would you say your experience on campus has been welcoming and friendly? Why or why not?
5. What do you think the university needs to do to create a better campus climate?

B. Social involvement

1. Are you involved in organizations on campus? Which?
2. What have been your experiences as a woman in these organizations?

C. Classroom experience

1. Do you feel comfortable in your classrooms?
2. Have there been any experiences with peers that made you feel uncomfortable?
3. Do your professors make you feel comfortable in the classroom? Why or why not?

D. Professors

1. Do you feel like your professors care about you and are supportive of your academic success?
2. Do you feel comfortable visiting them during office hours? Why or why not?
3. Have any professors on campus served as a mentor? Do you feel you can connect with your professors on campus?

E. Discrimination

1. Do you think discrimination is an issue on campus?
2. Do you think you have been discriminated on campus? If so, what factors do you think played in this act?

F. Challenges

1. What are some challenges you have faced during your time on campus?
2. What do you think could have helped you during those times?

G. Social support

1. Do you feel comfortable with seeking support on campus?
2. What kind of support do you find? From where do you find it (peers, centers, family...)?
3. How often do you seek support on campus?

H. Diversity on campus

1. How would you define diversity?
2. Are you satisfied with the level of diversity?
3. Do you feel represented on campus?

I. Curriculum

1. Do you relate to the curriculum taught on campus? In a major? What are some examples?
2. What do you think needs to be improved in curriculum?

Appendix C

Part II: Demographics Questionnaire

1. What is your major? _____

2. How many years have you been studying at CSU, Sacramento? _____

3. What is your gender identity? _____

4. What is your racial/ethnic identity? _____

5. What are your language skills? _____

6. What is your family income?
 1. \$10,000-\$29,000
 2. \$30,000-\$49,000
 3. \$50,000-\$69,000
 4. \$70,000-\$89,000
 5. \$90,000 or more

7. What is your parents' educational attainment?
 1. Below high school
 2. Some high school
 3. High school diploma/GED
 4. Some college
 5. Bachelor's degree
 6. Graduate degree
 7. Professional Degree

8. Are you a first generation college student? _____

9. Are you a transfer student, if so what community college did you transfer from?

10. Where did you grow up? _____

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