University of Nevada, Reno

First-Generation Low-Income (FGLI) US Black College Women's Social Capital

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
Education

by

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December 2023

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We recommend that the dissertation
prepared under our supervision by

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entitled

**First-Generation Low-Income (FGLI) US Black College Women's
Social Capital**

be accepted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract

Black college students' social engagement navigation in higher education is met with challenges at many colleges and universities. Students from racial minority backgrounds and low-income families face a disparity in social capital gain during their enrollment at higher education institutions. This reality has led to constant reproduction of social difficulty for first-generation low-income Black students that are enrolled in higher education. The first-generation low-income (FGLI) US Black college women in this study overcame many obstacles to obtain their self-developed social networks and individual connections to the four-year public predominately White institution (PWI) they attended. This study explored ten FGLI US Black college women perspectives on bridging and bonding social capital while participating in collegiate fitness programs at a predominately White Institution (PWI). The participants identified social networks within collegiate fitness programs and on campus as whole and discussed how their race, gender and social class intersected in those. The study participants' race, gender, and social class shaped their engagement experiences in higher education and their opportunities to connect with peers who shared similar interests and valued identities. Utilization of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Social Capital Theory as theoretical frameworks to investigate the participants' networks, relationships, community, educational outcomes, brought to light campus structural inequality, power dynamics, and experiences of marginalization, coupled with calls for social justice. The findings of this study indicated that study participant's racial, gender, and social class status did result in racial and gendered experiences in campus fitness programs and on campus as a whole. Study

participants found solace in campus support programs and with their peer support groups.

Implications for post-secondary administrators and professors are discussed.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the Black women that have come before me, who trekked

beside me, and for those who will come after me. I also would like to dedicate this work

and research to my dad who left us too soon. You instilled in me to never give up even

when things got tough. As you would always say, "If it were easy, everybody would be

doing it too."

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I'd like to start off by thanking my heavenly father. Without God, none of this would be possible. Holding tight to the words found in Isaiah 41:13, my fears to embark on my doctoral journey was pushed down beneath my feet as I poured my heart and soul into this study. I am deeply thankful to my dissertation committee members, Dr. Nora Constantino, Dr. Jafeth Sanchez, Dr. Lynda Wiest, and Dr. Melanie Duckworth. Your time, commitment, and collective guidance to help me complete my doctoral journey has greatly enriched the quality of my research. To my advisor and chair, Dr. Eleni Oikonomidoy, I am forever in debt to you for your time and commitment towards me during my time as a graduate student. Your mentorship and unwavering support not only shaped me into the researcher that I am today, but also into the leader I have become for my peers and to those who will come after me. It's not every day that someone gets to write or conduct research about Black women enrolled in higher education, and because of you, I was able to do this.

Thank you to my peers, colleagues, mentors, and mentees that have been a part of my life during my educational journey. It is from all of you that I gained inspiration to dream big and to learn new things every day. To the campus community where I learned to listen, ask questions, challenge myself, and learn, the environment created by campus administration allowed me to obtain and build social capital to construct meaningful relationships as a first-generation low-income college Black college student in predominately White spaces. Serving as a student leader in cultural clubs and participating in recreational sports attached me to campus life and unforgettable experiences that will live on in my memories forever.

To my sister circles, small and large, thank you. Thank you for pouring into me, for seeing me, and for encouraging me to me unapologetically me. We must continue the collective responsibility to address the impact of harmful stereotypes of Black women, and to not question our relevance in our culture, in the media, and in society as a whole. To my family, to be the first but not the last to carry this educational torch to mark and leave an imprint on our family history, I am honored. Thank you to my parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces, nephews, and fictive kin, you all mean the world to me, and I thank you for all of your love and prayers. Mom, Dad, Tresa, Desmond, and Edna, I love you all to the moon and back.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Black college students' entry into college is encountered with challenges and obstacles as they navigate predominately White spaces and seek to find connections. For most Black students enrolled at a predominately White institution (PWI), college attrition is influenced by their experiences of racial isolation and the lack of social support. In 2018, Allen at al. reported that Black college students made up about 13% of the overall college student population. According to the 2018 United States (US) Census estimate, the US population of Black or African Americans was 14.6%, with the Black-only (not representing any other race than Black) population being 13.4% (US Census Bureau, 2018). Although college and university campuses are becoming more diverse, US Black college student progression in higher education has often been hindered by experiences of racial microaggressions and racial battle fatigue while navigating the path to degree completion (Franklin, 2019). Black college student experiences are not homogeneous, and the experiences of Black men differ from those of Black women enrolled in colleges and universities. Black college women endure different forms of oppression, such as, sexual harassment, stereotypical ideals of Black womanhood, invisibility, and microaggressions (Williams et al., 2020)

Colleges and universities have been successful in recruiting and enrolling students of color, but their retention and graduation rates continue to be lower than the overall student population (Adams & McBrayer, 2020). At the same time, Black students are overrepresented in for-profit institutions where students are paying higher tuition, more frequently default on student loans, and graduate less often (Iloh & Toldson, 2013).

Despite the expanded access to college prepatory courses and college entrance exam support to get to racially diverse underrepresented PWI, US Black college student opportunities continue to be limited by structural disadvantages that are closely related to systematic racism and oppression (Allen et al., 2018). Challenges for Black students at PWIs are encompassed by institutional factors, such as campus-wide internalized oppression, negative classrooms experiences, and underdeveloped support systems (Hannon et al., 2016).

Black College Women

It has been known that both Black men and women enrolled in PWIs experience stress because of racial discrimination, prejudice, and culture shock (Shahid et al., 2018). However, Black women experience difficulties for both race and gender, unlike Black men, who can often abandon their Blackness in favor of their masculinity and manhood (Williams et al., 2020) while navigating higher education environments. Allen et al. (2018) explain that compared to Black men, Black women are more likely to be enrolled in higher education. At PWIs, Black women find themselves often encountering everyday microaggressions, and the privilege of abandoning gender in the higher education setting is not afforded to Black college women due to them carrying more than one visible minoritized identity: one being Black and the other being a woman. It is imperative that US Black college women's perspectives are communicated in differing and compelling ways that center their combined identities as meaningful to help understand the diversity of their experiences (Williams at al., 2020). Winkle-Wagner et al. (2019) indicate that Black women face high expectations about who they are supposed to be on college campuses, and they often experience pressures to live in multiple worlds. Black women

have to overcome systematic impediments that pose unique challenges to their race and gender and place them in a double jeopardy as targets of oppression while they are enrolled in higher education (Hotchkins, 2017). Focused support systems can help Black women analyze and respond to the unique challenges they may encounter.

Historically, US Black women have been denied broad access to post-secondary education having to choose between a small number of exclusively Black Women colleges and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) (Williams et al., 2020). More specifically, experiences of US Black women college goers have not been in the forefront of research at higher education institutions as much as US Black men college goers (Miller, 2017). Lack of research on Black college women could be due to lack of knowledge or interest in their lived experiences. Experiences in institutions of higher education are beneficial for individuals and for society through knowledge production, leadership development, and cultural and economic development (Allen et al., 2018). In the aftermath of historical events like the Jim Crow era and the Civil Rights movement, the disadvantaged position Blacks have had in American society is undeniable. (Grier-Reed et al., 2016). Yet, there is still not much in research literature that highlights the true needs and support structures of FGLI Black women students while they are enrolled in college or university. Generally, Black students are presented as a homogenous group with the assumption that all students in this populace share similar social, cultural, and economical characteristics (Winkle-Wagner, 2019).

First-Generation Low-Income Students

Low-income and first-generation students are more likely to have trouble with social integration in college (Adams et al, 2016). Research trends continue to report first-

generation students as being from historically underserved racial and ethnic groups, as well as being from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Tobolowsky et al., 2017).

First-generation and low-income status is often held by students of color, and research (Jensen & Jetten, 2015) shows that a student's socioeconomic status (SES) and social capital prior to entering the university setting affects their ability to obtain a social identity within a peer group in higher education. Research studies (Williams et al., 2020) often discuss first-generation status as an identity to overcome rather than a source of inspiration, power, and advocacy. In a unique setting, with no parental or guardian connection or perspectives of the higher education experience, first-generation Black college women at PWI's are challenged with navigating multiple layers of hypervisibility. As Jones et al. (2021) explain, higher education institutions often expect Black women to exude a symbolic and superficial showcase of minority representation, which fosters the growth of racial tokenism. Experiencing hypervisibility has led to stress-related physical and mental health concerns of Black college women who have been enrolled at historically White colleges and universities (Kelly et al., 2021). College campus norms, standards, and expectations surrounding academic performance and social engagement success, pose a threat to Black college women, especially those who have first-generation status (Williams et al., 2020). The microagreessive behaviors towards Black women is detrimental to their success, especially in a higher education setting.

According to Hotchkins (2017), "racism and racial microaggressions are psycho-pollutants in social environments and add to the overall race-related stress for Black men, Black women, and other racially marginalized groups enrolled in higher education" (p. 147). Black women specifically find themselves on the defense when encountering

everyday racial microaggressions that are subtle and sometimes non-intentional in White spaces at higher education institutions (Corbin et al., 2018; Martin, 2018). Williams et al. (2020) reported that race and gender gave meaning through interactions with people that represented different, social structures, racial groups, gendered groups, and first-generation status have been seen to affect student retention rates.

Social Capital

Fuller (2014) expressed that in more recent years there has been an increased interest on the role of social capital in education and the ways it can promote reciprocal relationships and reinforce the value of school to impact positive outcomes for college students. Social capital is relationships built on trust (Luedke, 2017), and the greater an individual's social capital, the greater their ability to access institutional resources (Fuller, 2014). Reviewing the inequalities that may exist in social capital for racial minority populations reveals that social capital is not always equally distributed among all people. Social capital can be acquired through social networks (Fuller, 2014) and through the experience and social connections one accumulates throughout life (Bourdieu, 1986), or while enrolled in higher education (DeRosa & Dolby, 2014). Brooks (2008) highlighted that an important element of Bourdieu's social capital theory supports the notion that stable social relationships are based on the membership make-up of a group. Social networks, primarily with students from racially marginalized populations, are said to help structure the educational aspirations for students' access to social capital in the higher educational settings.

Concepts connected to the definition of social capital show that social capital can potentially mobilize itself and be deemed accessible through direct or indirect ties with the support of institutional agents and can help individuals achieve their educational goals (Claridge, 2018; Elliot et al., 2018; Mirsha, 2020). Elliot et al. (2018) discussed institutional agents as powerful socializing representatives situated within a student's network to help transmit resources to students, and Claridge (2018) expressed that the role of social networks, social capital, and social support play in connecting individuals to gain access to resources that may heighten their experience while enrolled in higher education. As an aggregate, social capital links itself to the construction of a durable network and can be utilized to explain educational attainment for students enrolled in higher education (Mirsha, 2020).

Not all social capital yields positive benefits for students enrolled in college (Chu & Yang, 2019). Theories of social capital have been seen to assist institutions of higher education in creating policies and practices that promote success for underserved populations, including first-generation students (Peabody, 2013). The role and significance of various *capitals* is consistently framed as a key factor when exploring theory and practice. There has been considerable evidence in the literature that suggests an uneven distribution of social capital in society is organized along such dimensions as social class, gender, age, ethnicity, and locality (Fuller, 2014). The concepts of bonding and bridging social capital are associated with network theories and both are important and distinctive components that support the mobilization of social capital (Claridge, 2018; Fuller, 2014).

Bonding social capital is an inward-looking notion and reinforces exclusive identities that promote homogeneity, while *bridging* social capital is structured as an outward looking concept that promotes links between diverse individuals (Claridge, 2018). Resources that an individual derives from relations with others and membership in social groups that allow for the perception of shared identity, connect to the concept of bridging social capital (Jensen & Jetten, 2015). Bridging social capital denotes connection to those who are different (Claridge, 2018). Bonding social capital is based on networks that are similar in terms of certain demographic factors, such as age, ethnicity, or education (Ferlander, 2007). The concepts of bonding and bridging social capital are often used synonymously with strong and weak ties, and although the distinctions are closely related, they are not synonymous. Given its nature, when social capital is bonded, it's characterized by high levels of similarity and is not conducive to a tolerance of difference. Bonded capital also remains an important source of social support while also having some negative outcomes by only benefiting groups that have a common value system maintained in a specific group (Claridge, 2018; Chu & Yang, 2019). For example, a common value system could be one's spirituality or looking out for one another if you are from the same racial group.

Bridging social capital is different from bonding social capital and is characterized by dense networks with people feeling a sense on shared identity and connection with the results of networking outside normal social groupings (Claridge, 2018; Jensen & Jetten, 2015). A bridging social capital perspective is connected to the operationalized and generalized trust towards others who are different and attend to diversity in personal networks (Chu & Yang, 2019). According to Jensen and Jetten

(2015), the ties of bridging networks aren't as strong as those that characterize bonding relations. However, bridging social capital is essential in building tolerance, acceptance, and understanding of different groups (Chu & Yang, 2019). Bridging capital helps support the explanation of social relationships of exchange and between people with shared interest or goals (Claridge, 2018; Clopton, 2011). Some of the major benefits of bridging social capital is the increased ability for individuals to gather information, to gain access to power or better placement within the network, and to better recognize new opportunities to get involved with social networks in an outward direction (Claridge, 2018; Clopton, 2011, Jesnen & Jetten, 2015).

For example, Park & Bowman (2015), focused on religion as a bridge for cross-racial interactions (CRI) for college students. The researchers examined whether religious observance, religious identification, and participation in a religious student organization had a significant relation to CRI. In this case, CRI was utilized as a form of bridging capital through the linkage between different racial and ethnic groups, the alleviation of group divisions, and the exposure to different formats of information for the students involved. Bridging social capital can be measured through questions about connections across different social groups, such as race, gender, and levels of education. In higher education, students interact with others with whom they do not necessarily share an identity, and those interactions form important building blocks for the formation of bridging capital (Jensen & Jetten, 2015).

Research studies that have explored race, gender, and class within a sociocultural dynamic specific to Black women indicate that opportunities to acquire social capital, which is attained through social networks, are limited in higher education (Carter-

Francique, 2011; Mirsha, 2020; Wells et al., 2011). Social capital relies on an individual's evaluation of the resources and benefits they gain through connections and involvement in college (Lee et al., 2018). Social capital is something that can be used to achieve individual gain, along with the opportunity of being a resource within social networks that produce individual returns for others (Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, 2014).

Campus Support Structures

Student affairs and student services divisions across institutions of higher education have encouraged a holistic learning and student development experience. This approach considers both in-classroom and out-of-classroom experiences (Miller, 2017), formulating opportunities for students to build social capital while enrolled. Key components of social capital and social integration experiences for college students who are FGLI and racially underrepresented are held within their encounters and connections to campus support structures and their entrance into institutional structured campus environments. Colleges and universities have continued to improve the introduction of environments such as campus fitness centers by creating strategic locations, facility designs, and orientations to those spaces that have influenced physical activity and exercise for college enrolled students (Wilson et al., 2021). In some cases, racially marginalized students that navigate White environments and spaces are often repleted with gendered racism, blocked opportunities, along with mundane, extreme, and environmental stress (Linley, 2018). Campus fitness and recreation facilities create opportunities for students to enhance their social relationships with others by centering community and functioning as a place for people to meet friends (Henchy, 2011). This study will seek to understand US Black college women perspectives of the relationship, if

any, between collegiate fitness center program participation and bridging and bonding social capital at a four-year higher education institution.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical frameworks to be utilized to examine US Black FGLI college women students' perspectives of collegiate fitness program's role in bonding and bridging social capital are Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Bourdieu' s (1986) Social Capital Theory. Intersectionality is one of the main pillars of CRT. Although the term is often used to frame marginalization of Black women in anti-discrimination law, the origins of intersectionality date back much further (Harris & Patton, 2019). The use of the intersectionality framework acknowledges the centering of unique perspectives of Black women in the United States, highlighting the pervasiveness of racism through society while including gender, and emphasizing the impact of their lived experiences (Williams et al., 2020). Intersectionality is a fundamental term that helps support the exploration of Black college women experiences at PWI's. Utilization and application of an intersectional lens on this specific population assists in assessing how women of color face the complexities of oppression and highlights the various markers of their identity and experiences (Harris & Patton, 2019). Williams et al. (2020) noted that intersectionality allows one to pursue a broad analysis of lived experiences of Black first-generation college women with respect and attention to the structural, political, and representational differences they endure given the trifecta of subordinated identities.

In addition, centering race, and racism, and counter spaces two more pillars of CRT will be utilized. Centering race and racism brings to light the racial experiences of Black women who experience intersectional oppression and expended emotional labor,

while enrolled in higher education (Kelly et al. (2021). In 2018, Harwood et al., explained that counter space creation on college campuses is done for students of color as an act of resistance or survival, and the spaces themselves also face opposition. Though they often face intense opposition in the higher education setting, counter spaces examine interpersonal change and expose social relations (Harwood et al., 2018). The use of these theoretical lenses aims to enhance understanding of how race and gender intersect and shape the experiences of US Black college women who identify as FGLI. This study aims to elucidate a few major points related to the intersection of Blackness, being a woman, along with bridging and bonding social capital in a higher education.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Bourdieu's Social Capital Theory are widely used by scholars to better understand inequities in education, and Black scholars often use CRT and concepts of Bourdieu's work to analyze Black students' unique racialized experiences at historically and predominately White institutions (Tichavakunda, 2019). Bourdieu's view of social capital, and the strength in his work helps reveal why some groups engage in specific behaviors, while others do not (Tichavakunda, 2019). Bourdieu posited that the volume of capital possessed by an agent was a function of social network size that one is connected to (Museus & Neville, 2012). Social capital is intrinsically linked to educational ambitions and is connected to the interconnection between economic, cultural, and social capital (Fuller, 2014). Soria and Stebleton (2012) discovered that social capital is privileged knowledge, resources, and information attained through social networks, and it is important within higher education because it can be used to make beneficial decisions related to creating social engagement and integration-related activities for students.

Black women enrolled in colleges and universities are often framed as being highly successful and resilient, which positions institutions and practitioners to believe that they do not need to provide Black women any support systems (Winkle-Wagner et al., 2019). This view and myth denote the production of Black college women having to be a certain way based on progressed stereotypes, which can lead to depression and lack of self-care while enrolled in higher education (Tichavakunda, 2019; Winkle-Wagner et al., 2019). Collectively using CRT and social capital as theoretical frameworks can bring focus to the intersections of race, gender, and social class in the lives of US Black college women student and as they navigate their networks.

Statement of Problem

A student's race and ethnicity shape their engagement experiences in higher education and their opportunity to connect with peers who share similar interests and/or valued identities (Billingsley & Hurd, 2019; Means & Pyne, 2017). Racial and ethnic minority students often report experiencing racial discrimination on college campuses, which affects their persistence as early as their first year of college (Tobolowsky et al., 2020). Racial minorities and students from low-income backgrounds have less social capital and are sometimes seriously disadvantaged. These realities lead to the reproduction of social difficulty while enrolled in higher education (Fuller, 2014). According to Chu and Yang (2019), little is known about whether racial minority college student deficit in building social capital contributes to inequality. Specifically, Black college women experience loneliness while being bombarded by racial and gendered microagressive environmental indignities that hamper actualizing degree completion and navigating campus spaces (Hotchkins, 2017). While studies surrounding Black college

women have focused on degree attainment, involvement on campus, and their feeling of connection (Mwangi, 2016), attention to their experiences with racial battle fatigue due to microaggressions has not received much attention.

Schools and educational settings have been recognized as environments that are vital for promoting healthy behaviors for college enrolled students (Fried et al., 2020). The utilization of collegiate campus fitness centers as welcoming spaces for underrepresented student populations has seen to be beneficial. A campus fitness center is a physical space on campus (Harwood et al., 2018.), that has had an impact on college students' decision to attend and stay at an institution (Milton & Patton, 2011). Literature supports the notion that participation in campus fitness and recreational sport related activities correlate with students staying and experiencing social integration on campus (Struts & Ross, 2013). Forrester et al. (2018) highlighted in their study, which was based on a multi-institutional analysis, the benefits of campus fitness and recreational sport programs and services. They found that students do benefit from program participation in multiple ways, including gaining overall improvement of their emotional well-being, reducing stress to handle academic workloads, and improving self-esteem. A differing perspective suggests that though several demographical groups enter campus fitness and recreational sport spaces, significant differences are revealed in gender and class standing of users (Milton & Patton, 2011).

University students encounter a great deal of stress, anxiety, and other mental-health related symptoms (Fried et al., 2020). Campus fitness and recreational sport engagement can be seen as a catalyst to help improve students' socioemotional development by offering experiences that deepen social belonging to campus (Dugan et

al., 2015). Collegiate fitness and recreational sport involvement have been linked to higher grade point averages, higher retention rates, reduction of stress, sense of campus community, and a positive overall satisfaction with the college experience (Sturts & Ross, 2013). Not much is known about how US Black college women develop social capital in PWIs.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of first-generation low-income (FGLI) United States (US) Black college women on the relationship of collegiate fitness programs in bridging and bonding social capital at a four-year predominately White institution (PWI). One social resource that may serve as a promotive factor for underrepresented US Black college students experiencing perceived discrimination, is involvement in on-campus extracurricular activities which have been found to promote feelings of inclusion and social connectedness (Billingsley & Hurd, 2019). Simultaneous membership in both racially and economically minoritized groups, first-generation college students of color from low-income backgrounds experience the dance between race and class in education (Sarcedo et al., 2015). Students of color who attend PWIs tend to perceive the campus climate differently than their White counterparts (Lewis et al., 2021). First-generation students of color have more difficult experiences than their White peers, such as a sense of culture shock, isolation, and individual and systemic racism that effects their college-going experience (Havlik et al., 2020). This study examined the experience of FGLI US Black college women and utilized tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Bourdieu's social capital theory. Methods included semi-structured interviews to examine the experiences of ten FGLI US Black college women at a four-year PWI.

The focus of this study was to collect information on study participant experiences in collegiate fitness that bond or bridge their social capital not only in fitness, but in their overall campus experiences.

Research Questions

This research investigated the following questions:

1. What are FGLI US Black college women perspectives on the relationship between participating in collegiate fitness programs and bridging and bonding social capital?

   a. How did they describe their social networks within collegiate fitness and on campus as whole? How did race, gender and social class intersect in their descriptions?

   b. How did their collegiate fitness experiences relate to their bridging and bonding social capital experiences outside of fitness?

Significance of Study

With limited evidence in recent literature about social integration perspectives of FGLI US Black college women students in predominately White institutions (PWI), their experiences remain unknown. It is important to learn more about the social capital within and beyond fitness for this population, in order to inform practices. This research aimed to provide insight to student affairs professionals that work in student life centered departments and programs. The knowledge obtained from this study could inform the recruitment and retention efforts of higher education institutions looking to drive and bridge participation and social engagement in campus fitness programs to support student peer and social environment connections.

Definition of Terms

Various terms were used in this study. This section provides definitions of key terms.

African American: Is an American of African and especially of Black African descent (Merriam-Webster, 2021). Interchangeably utilized with the term Black, African American in scholarly literature.

Black: Individuals of or relating to any various population groups of especially African descent (Merriam-Webster, 2021). For this study, the term US Black will be utilized to identify individuals who identify as Black and were born in the United States.

Campus Fitness Centers/Recreation Centers: Campus fitness center environments have been created to present a climate and allotted spaces with positive outcomes associated with fitness recreational sports participation in a variety of areas including club sports, intramural sports, and fitness and recreation center facility use (Sturts & Ross, 2013).

Critical Race Theory (CRT): A theoretical framework that evolved out of critical legal studies in the 1980s as a movement seeking to account for the role of race and persistence of racism in American society (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015). It is a perspective that emphasizes the centrality of race and racism and challenges white supremacy in law, education, politics, and other social systems (Patton et al., 2016).

Counter space(s): Campus counter spaces are sites where deficit notions for can be challenged and where positive collegiate racial climate can be established and maintained (Grier-Reed, 2010).

First-generation college students (FGCS): First-generation college students are historically from underserved racial and ethnic groups along with being from a lower

socioeconomic background. These students are also categorized within underrepresented student populations (Tobolowsky et al., 2020), such as African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic or Chicanos/Latinos, and Native Americans.

Low-income (LI) college students: The term low-income is used to discuss a student's social class and the experiences with social class during their time in college (Williams & Martin, 2021). Though the terms first-generation and low-income are often used to identify a population of students, these identities are not inextricably bound (Williams & Martin, 2021).

Fitness: The quality or state of being fit (Merriam-Webster, 2021).

Intersectionality: Intersectionality explores and acknowledges the overlapping identities of gender, race, class, and sexuality and was first used as a theoretical construct by Kimberlè Crenshaw in 1989 (Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, 2014).

Recreational Sports: Recreational sports are provided to offer a variety of options for physical activity, exercise, and sport program participation for students on college campuses (Vasold et al., 2020). Recreational sports are also used to enhance student learning, social development, and increased engagement opportunities for students (Sturts & Ross, 2013).

Social Integration: Social integration involvement and establishment on college campuses contributes to student experiences, engagement, and individual growth (Wildhagen, 2015).

Social Networks: Creating a sense of community involves building social networks with peers and positive relationships while maintaining cultural ties to communities of origins (Nunez, 2011).

Students of Color: A term used for students who identify as Black or African American, Latinx, Asian, Native American, or of another racial identity group (McCoy, 2014).

United States (US) Black Student: The term United States (US) Black is being utilized for this study because Black students from the U.S experience race and racism differently from Black students in African and Caribbean countries (Lee & Green, 2016).

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Summary

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Underrepresented groups, such as students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds and US Black college-aged women are increasingly becoming a part of higher education systems but are scantly studied. Difficulties with social integration and building social capital among US Black women, low-income, and first-generation students correlate to not much being known about social capital and its connection to collegiate fitness participation programs. (Means & Pyne, 2017). The purpose of this study was to examine the phenomenon of utilizing the CRT and the social capital framework to inform best practices related to socially integrating U.S Black female students at PWIs.

This chapter has provided an overview of elements that will connect to the study being completed. Chapter II will discuss the theoretical framework and will provide an overview of literature that focuses on FGLI US Black college women. Chapter III will present the methodology of this study. The chapter will elaborate on researcher positionality, the study setting, participant recruitment, data collection, data analysis, and study limitations. Chapter IV presents the findings of this study. Chapter V concludes with theoretical and practical implications, along with recommendations for future research.

Chapter II: Review of Literature

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of first-generation low-income (FGLI) United States (US) Black college women, on the relationship of collegiate fitness program's role in bridging and bonding social capital at a four-year predominately White institution (PWI). This chapter will provide an overview of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Social Capital Theory, which were selected as frameworks for this study. It will be followed by an overview of literature related to the history of higher education at predominately White institutions (PWIs), socioeconomic and racially underrepresented students' social integration experiences on campus, and the intersections of race, gender, and class of student experiences in collegiate fitness programs.

Theoretical Framework

The two theoretical frameworks that guided this study were Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Bourdieu's (1986) Social Capital Theory. The key concepts of CRT that were utilized were intersectionality, especially with respect to race, gender, and socioeconomic status. Centering race on Black college women's student experiences along with exploring counter spaces, which tend to be established as culturally affirming places within larger and exclusionary public universities (Nunez, 2011), allowed for a multidimensional view at their social experiences on campus. When Bourdieu's theory of social capital is placed in the conversation with CRT it is often shown that both theories are portrayed as at odds, when they are actually aligned (Tichavakunda, 2019). Bourdieu's theory of social capital explains capital as the aggregate or actual resources that are linked to a durable network or mutual acquaintance or recognition (Mirsha,

2020). CRT and Social Capital Theory are compatible and inform each other in areas of critiquing deficit-based thought. For example, not all Black student experiences are the same and each student may have a varying experience depending on their unique mutually constitutive identities such as gender, social class, and other identities (Tichavakunda, 2019). A CRT lens will support the examination of how racialized minorities experience campus life and offered programs and how race and gender inform experiences. The Social Capital Theory perspective will show its facilitation to understand access to resources that help form a student's network.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory, which is immersed in critical inquiry, provides researchers and learners with a beginning point to research how oppression is both recreated and challenged (Cabrera, 2018). Employing Critical Race Theory (CRT) to explore the experiences of US Black students can help reveal how larger cultural, economic, and social factors intersect to create, maintain, and explain the stubborn persistence of Black student disadvantages in US higher education and in wider society (Allen et al., 2018). Allen et al. (2018) explained how CRT literature helps explain how race, racism, and power shape Black student trajectories in higher education. CRT scholars utilize individual experiences of marginalized persons to analyze and critique institutional policies and initiatives (Tichavakunda, 2019). In the higher education setting, racial microaggressions, accumulative acts of hostility, ignorance, and discrimination have had a substantial negative impact on campus climates for Students of Color (Patton et al., 2016).

Since its inception, Critical Race Theory (CRT) has had a number of scholars work to explore its relevance in education. The first-time CRT was utilized as an analytical framework in education was to assess inequity in education (Hilrado, 2010). In higher education, students and researchers alike have continued to be drawn to CRT for its ability to examine the persistence of disparate educational opportunities for historically marginalized communities (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015). CRT grounds its conceptual framework in the distinctive contextual experiences of People of Color (Morfin at al., 2006) and higher education scholars use CRT to illuminate how People of Color have been ignored or made invisible in research that helps guide the field (Patton et al., 2016). There is and will continue be a substantial overlap of constructive criticism with the legal and educational perspectives and use of CRT tenets (Cabrera, 2018). CRT challenges dominant frames that perpetuate White supremacy by maintaining the centrality of race and racism as key components of US society. Reviewing CRT's emphasis on social justice helps recognize higher education as both an oppressive and empowering space for those enrolled (Allen et al., 2018).

Centering Race and Racism

Critical race theory (CRT) evolved out of critical legal studies in the 1980s as a movement seeking to account for the role of race and persistence of racism in American society (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015). Perspectives that help emphasize the centrality of race and racism of the CRT theory have strong and direct correlations to educational and other social systems (Patton et al., 2016). Analysis of centering on race and racism engages with how race intersects with identities and forms of subordination in higher education and how students of color perceive issues of race being overlooked in

university curricula and activities (Nunez, 2011; Tichavakunda, 2019). Often enrolled in predominately White institutions, Students of Color have to contextualize their campus climates within the US racial climate. In a 2018 study (Mawangi) proposed that scholars have reported that Black students had negative perceptions of their campus climate due to racial hostility, inequitable treatment, isolation, and tokenism, along with overt racism. The racial realist perspective in higher education could free scholars to imagine new questions and methods that reveal a wider scope of analysis of the experiences of students of color (Tichavakunda, 2019).

CRT explores the role of race and racism in perpetuating social disparities between dominant and marginalized racial groups (Hilrado, 2010). A CRT perspective requires that student development researchers consider their own race and intersections with other social identities such as gender, social class, and ability (Patton et al., 2016). Given the oppressive nature of both Whiteness and capitalism and their connection, students of color and low socioeconomic status students are often unable to benefit from individual agency while they are enrolled in higher education (Sarcedo et al., 2015). Research (Yosso et al., 2009) has suggested that universities accept students of color for admission to enrich the experiences and outcomes of White students, who are said to reap the benefits of becoming more racially tolerant. As such, they diversify the White student experience, heighten their points of view, and prepare them to gain employment in a multicultural and global economy. CRT scholars have asserted that racism is so ingrained in US culture that it is unrecognizable to most people, especially those who have power and influence to dismantle racial hierarchies (Patton et al., 2016). CRT's explicit goals that challenge and disrupt normative structures that fuel racism and racial oppression

must be activated in the higher education setting (Patton et al., 2016). Reviewing the perspectives of a centering race related concept would assume that Black students, who are not all the same, may have a varying experience depending on their unique and mutual identities of gender, class, sexuality, and so forth (Tichavakunda, 2019).

Intersectionality

The term, concept, and analytical framework of intersectionality continues to have a significant impact on the field of education (Harris & Leonardo, 2018). The literature related to Black women enrolled in undergraduate degree programs and utilizing the intersectional approach allows for focus on inter-reliant sociohistorical systems that may influence interdependent identity-specific experiences (Harris & Patton, 2019). Intersectionality examines multiple mutually reinforcing forms of oppression that contextualize lived experiences (Cabrera, 2018), and provides scholars with a critical and analytical lens to help interrogate race, ethnicity, class, and gender disparities that contest the existing ways to look at structures of inequality (Harris & Patton, 2019). Scholars guided by intersectionality are led to understand the systems of reduction as they are often brought to bear on social identities. For example, popular mass media has continually marked Black women as uncontrollable, abusive, unpredictable, sassy, irrational, strong, and angry (Corbin et al., 2018). When women of color students transition their way into academia and a higher education landscape, they bring the intersection or their race and gender with them (Harris & Leonardo, 2018).

Black college women have at least two targeted identities, race and gender. Despite recent research (Kelly at al., 2021) related to the negative experiences of Black college women attending PWIs, there is still prominent neglect to Black college women

not receiving support in the higher education setting. Intersectionality scholars suggest that the concurrent experience of both racism and sexism is greater than the sum of its parts (Lewis et al., 2021). Early articulations of intersectionality had been focused on system-level processes, given its history in critical race and legal studies, and scholars from various disciplines have applied intersectionality to individual-level variables. For example, researchers (Harris & Patton, 2019) conducted investigations of the interlocking forms or oppression and how there is simultaneous influence on a person's college and out-of-college life experiences. Harris and Patton (2019) expressed that intersectional analysis has power to transform knowledge, society, and higher education. Intersectionality differs from the more established tradition of multiculturalism in education and disrupts group-based formulations such as women, People of Color, and sexual minorities (Harris & Leonardo, 2018).

The origins of intersectionality date back much further (Harris & Patton, 2019), and intersectionality continues to call attention to social identities that are marginalized and made invisible, while pointing to the gaps found between social categorization and intersubjective experiences (Harris & Leonardo, 2018). For individuals with racially marginalized identities, racial battle fatigue is often further complicated with gendered racism, blocked opportunities, and mundane extreme environmental stress (Linley, 2018). When the concept of intersectionality is used to examine microaggressions, the intersectionality of race, class, and gender, imposes a heavy burden on first-generation low-income (FGLI) college students of color (Morales, 2014; Sarcedo, 2015). Harwood et al. (2018) compared microaggressive behaviors to resemble acts of interpersonal aggression that is visually identified by turning of heads, funny looks, whispers, and

harassment by gendered, racial, and class marginalized students. Critical Race Theory (CRT) recognizes and embraces the experiential knowledge of historically marginalized people, and the power of narrative gives testimony to the experiences of historically underrepresented students while legitimizing their authoritative knowledge (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015; Linley, 2018).

The term intersectionality has been ushered into the prevailing discourse and is institutionalized in the academy (Harris & Patton, 2019). Intersectionality holds the possibility to be transformative because it encourages scholars to focus on social structural analysis of inequality, organizations, and institutional manifestations of power hierarchies and their effect on individuals and groups (Harris & Patton, 2019). Lewis et al. (2021) studied the perceived racism in health which revealed that racism had been found to negatively affect both the mental and physical outcomes of people who identify with minoritized racial groups. Researchers have also written about the complexities of oppression faced by women of color, where collective narratives vary based on markers of identity, political affiliations, and experiences (Harris & Patton, 2019). While there is argument that intersectionality should only be used to explore Black womanhood, others argue that the theory can and should expand to explore multiple populations and intersections (Harris & Patton, 2019). Blackness itself is not an empty box that scholars can continue to fill with race, class, and gender (Harris & Leonardo, 2018). For this study, intersectionality will help elucidate how racism and sexism reinforce each other, and how race and gender gravitationally tug at each other (Harris & Leonardo, 2018). Intersectionality also recognizes that oppression and racism are unidirectional and can be

experienced within and across divergent intersectional planes such as classism, sexism, ableism, and so on (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015).

Counter spaces

Academic and social counter spaces have been identified as essential for survival of Black college students (Grier-Reed, 2010). Beyond portraying a racially diverse group of students in recruitment brochures, historically White universities have not committed to providing equal access and opportunities for students of color over the last few decades (Yosso et al., 2009). Physical counter spaces have been known to serve as sites where deficit notions for students of color are challenged and where positive collegiate racial climate can be established (Linley, 2018). Counter spaces have served and have been established as culturally affirming places within larger and exclusionary public universities (Nunez 2011). Black students have faced a variety of stressors on PWI campuses and challenges such as lack of support, social isolation, and inequitable treatment by university personnel (Grier-Reed et al., 2016).

Grier-Reed (2010) studied the creation of counter spaces or sanctuaries where PWI enrolled Black college students could develop relationships and supports to cope. The inherent factor of counter spaces is that they provide sanctuaries for Black students to make sense of their experiences on campus and to find support and validation for their realities (Grier-Reed, 2010). Literature about racial clustering, counter spaces, and racial microaggressions illustrates the ways students interact transversely with related and non-related groups. Students of color often feel a sense of connection among alike racial and ethnic subculture groups on campus, which often causes feelings of alienation from the overall institutional environment (Linley, 2018). Students of color face charges of being

unqualified and sometimes out of place in higher education (Yosso et al., 2009) by how they decide to engage academically or socially. Activating the CRT tenet of counter space to emphasize the distinctive structure of a campus counter space within a higher education setting, can help institutions to truly become inclusive and not simply superficially diverse (Hilrado, 2010).

Bourdieu's Theory of Social Reproduction (Social Capital)

Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu theorized that social capital acknowledges the role of resources not of the individual, but within that individual's network of relationships (Almeida et al., 2019; Mirsha, 2020). Social capital is the aggregate of actual or potential resources that connect to durable networks that have been institutionalized (Bourdieu, 1986; Museus & Neville, 2012). In the context of higher education, support to build or gain social capital and social support are especially relevant (Mirsha, 2020). Social capital as a concept, connects with group solidarity, social networks, and social ties. According to Bourdieu's theory, as a result to a student's social class, they may lack cultural, economic, and social capital that's needed to succeed in the college environment (DeRosa & Dolby, 2014). Almeida et al. (2019) have found that first-generation college students (FGCS) who developed social capital with peers who had college-educated parents benefited, with an increase shown in motivation and intellectual development, highlighting thus the important role of resourceful social networks.

Examining the effects of social capital supports the descriptive way in which social networks help create a mechanism whereby individuals maintain discipline and compliance among the general population in higher education (Peabody, 2013). Literature (Adams & McBrayer, 2020) mentions the cultural mismatch that forces first-

generation college students to straddle between their home culture, and the unfamiliar culture they transitioned into when they entered college. Scholars who have examined differences between first-generation and non-first-generation students position their studies within Bourdieu's framework of social capital (Soria & Stebleton, 2012). "In its simplest form, social capital sums up individuals' experiences within informal networks, registered organizations, associations of different kinds, and social movements" (Birani & Lehmann, 2013, p. 284), and can be anything from appreciating diversity to feelings of safety and trust with associated networks. Lee et al. (2018) explained that the measurement of social capital primarily relies on the individuals' evaluation of available resources and benefits available through the connections they may be involved in on campus or while enrolled. Social capital can also be passed through families which hinders first-generation students' social capital that relates to being successful in higher education because they do not acquire it from their parents or guardians who may not have earned a baccalaureate degree (Soria & Stebleton, 2012).

The work of Bourdieu has played a very prominent role in the research presented about the experiences of first-generation and working-class students at universities (Birani & Lehmann, 2013). In 2013 study, Peabody stressed the importance for colleges and universities to keep in mind the potential benefits associated with the accumulation of social capital for first-generation students. Social support is significant in higher education and the concept of social capital can be useful in understanding the impact that institutional agents have on experiences and outcomes of racially and socioeconomically underrepresented students (Mirsha, 2020: Museus & Neville, 2012). Addressing the low rates of educational attainment in higher education is a complex task due to a wide range

of premature departure among students of color having failure to meaningfully connect to their institution or experiencing negative or unwelcoming campus environments (Museus & Neville, 2012). The connection to particular social groups can provide the essential resources of individual gains for college students (Birani & Lehmann, 2013).

Social Capital Networks

A characteristic of networks such as socio-economic status, education level, resources, or power, influence the formation of ties which connect to how social capital is gained (Mirsha, 2020). Almeida et al. (2019) produced a study that analyzed grit as it related to first-generation college student success, utilizing a social capital theoretical framework. Though first-generation college students possess a social support network of parents, friends, and relatives, if they are also categorized as low-income status, they have attached elements in their college experience that relate to necessities of housing, tuition cost, and often have to work more while enrolled which causes a significant amount of stress (DeRosa & Dolby, 2014). First-generation students often have less college-educated individuals in their network outside of school, so their social capital relationships on-campus with their peers, faculty, and staff essentially often time contribute to their success in college (Almeida et al., 2019).

Bourdieu argues that one's ability to interact with others, engaging in different experiences, and succeeding in new environments is based on whether one possesses the types of capital consistent with those valued in a culture or specific group (DeRosa & Dolby, 2014). Museus and Neville (2012) highlighted the importance of institutional agents and social capital in the experiences of racial minority students in K-12 and proposed that similar practices could be applied to supporting students of color in higher

education. Not all racial minority student's dropout or graduate with poor grades, but they do suffer from noticeable racial disparities in baccalaureate degree attainment which makes the opportunity to build individual social capital pertinent (Mirsha, 2020; Museus & Neville, 2012). Bourdieu's social capital theory can be seen in examinations of social class in higher education (DeRosa & Dolby, 2014). Research has noted that although racially underrepresented students may lack certain types of social capital, they do have access to other specific forms of capital which is unique to them (Mirsha, 2020). Museus and Neville (2012) explained that institutional agents have connected racial minority students to social capital and networks at higher education institutions by offering various funds of information concerning social norms and cultural nuances. The institutional agents served as human bridges between students and social network opportunities that helped students engage in educational and social related activities across groups on campus.

While social capital is often viewed as bestowing benefits that can be drawn from interpersonal ties to groups and individuals (Lee at al., 2018), some scholars have pointed out the potential of negative effects related to exclusion of outsiders, excessive claims on members, and restrictions on individual freedoms (Peabody, 2013). Higher education institutions need to be aware that some students lack certain forms of capital, and that they will face challenges not encountered by peers, because of their lack of knowledge of how to navigate campus (Peabody, 2013). No singular or holistic articulation of social class exists, and class exclusion is often cemented in higher education cocurricular and lack of retention (Williams & Martin, 2021).

Bourdieu (1986) viewed social capital as based on homogenous networks in terms of social class, and an asset of the privileged only. As well as collective benefits, social capital has individual benefits that gain returns though access to social networks, job opportunities, emotional support, and good health (Fuller, 2014). Social capital is often measured through questions of social connections and social support. The collective gains are rooted in generalized trust which is vital in the creation and maintenance of the collective asset (Ferlander, 2007). The two most common indicators of social capital are membership of voluntary associations and generalized social trust (Ferlander, 2007). For minority students pursuing higher education, there is an added level of complexity with regard to peer interactions (Mirsha, 2020). Peer support and network determine a student's integration and acceptance in higher education institutions which subsequently affects retention and success. Social capital theory contends with the reason for societal inequities being associated with class-based socialization and obtaining culturally relevant skills to function in diverse settings (Tobolowsky et al, 2020). With the underlying assumption that first-generation students possess less social capital than their peers (Soria & Stebleton, 2012), research has shown evidence that social capital fosters social connections and affiliations (Peabody, 2013). If the assumption is that entering a university as a first-generation student from an ethnic-minority group is akin to entering a new country with unknown rules, cultural expectations, and norms, the need for the development of social capital becomes transparent.

Bridging and Bonding Social Capital, Social Networks, & Social Support

In 2007, Ferlander posed the question of the differences between bonding and bridging social capital in terms of health-related outcomes. Given the increasing

importance of social connections, bridging and bonding social capital continue to be

highlighted dimensions when reviewing higher education research. Bonding social capital

is vital for getting by and bridging social capital is crucial for getting ahead (Ferlander,

2007), and students may derive use of both forms at their selected university or institution

of higher learning. Low-income, first-generation, or minority students are less likely to

attend or complete a degree than their more privileged peers if social capital is not

obtained (Jensen & Jetten, 2015). Social capital references instrumental productive

relationships. Networks that provide access to opportunity or lead to advantageous

outcomes highlight the lack of social capital that effects students' choice of university

major, and their general university experience (Jensen & Jetten, 2015; Strayhorn, 2010).

Friendships are often considered to be a form of bonding social capital, due to the

frequency between people who share common characteristics or interest (Claridge, 2018).

Formed friendships between people of different cultural backgrounds, socioeconomic

backgrounds, or ages may also act as a bridging relation (Claridge, 2018). It is also clear

that not all students benefit equally from opportunities to develop forms of social identity

while enrolled at a university (Jensen & Jetten, 2015). Bridging networks provide access

to different resources such as allowing different groups to share or exchange ideas that

contribute to a consensus among a group representing diverse interests (Claridge, 2018).

Social capital is derived to value membership in social groups, social networks, or

within institutions (Jensen & Jetten, 2015). Examining individual's interpersonal

environments allows for focus on some of the structural aspects of one's network

composition. In scholarly work, the concept of social capital is aligned to the type of

resources and benefits that can be drawn from interpersonal ties as well as from broader

circles (Lee et al., 2018). Creating a sense of community involves building social networks with peers and positive relationships while maintaining cultural ties to communities of origins (Nunez, 2011). The type of culture that one participates in, consumes, and has knowledge of illuminates one's social position and has the power to entrench and reproduce this position (Gemar, 2021). Often for students of color enrolled in higher education, building a social support network becomes an additional interpersonal challenge, and creating that sense of community involves building social networks (Nunez, 2011).

Close connections between individuals are important in maintaining and reproducing social capital among the actors within social networks (Gemar, 2021; Museus & Neville, 2012). One's social network cannot be separated from the economic and capital resources of the individuals in that network (Gemar, 2021) or as Lee et al. (2018) expressed, social support plays a substantial role in one's health and well-being. Sport or fitness participation may play a distinct role in the domain of culture in forming types of social capital networks, an area of our lives that constitutes social class (Gemar, 2021). Fostering a strong sense of institutional identity among students enhances a college student's chance of instilling strong ties between graduates and the institution (Wildhagen, 2015). Like social networks, many students enrolled in higher education have observed the advantages of cultural variety in them. Regarding the size and diversity of social networks, Black students on some college campuses tend to have smaller ones but can bridge a form of social capital that functions as a lubricant that has the potential to work as social leverage to help them get ahead (Claridge, 2018). Black students may prefer to seek informal networks of support to cope with distressing rather than seeking

institutional formal resource support from departments like counseling services, access to their campus multicultural center, or help from a campus administrator (Grier-Reed et al, 2016). Given the increasing importance of social connections formed, the concept of social support contains ideas of network relationships and the resources drawn from those networks (Lee et al., 2018).

Bourdieu's Social Capital Theory & Critical Race Theory

Social capital exists in the relations among people (Lee et al., 2018). Bourdieu's focused actions in his research stretched across the behaviors and struggles of agents and their role in societal structures along with the personal histories (Tichavakunda, 2019). The concept of social capital was developed to explain the types of resources and benefits that can be drawn from interpersonal ties as well as from broader social circles (Lee at al., 2018). Connecting Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Bourdieu's work, one can learn about macro-structures within institutions from an individual's personal experiences and behaviors (Tichavakunda, 2019). Bourdieu's theory and CRT are not in opposition when used together, instead the result is an engagement of interplay between race, structure, and agency in education.

Although CRT was birthed from legal protest, it is insisted that scholars consider this theory being of importance to the field education and to society (Tichavakunda, 2019). CRT has never fully engaged with Bourdieu's social capital theory, which would allow for drawing upon various tenants or different propositions of the theory depending upon their analysis (Tichavakunda, 2019). For instance, Savas (2014) stressed that "attendance at an ethnically diverse college does not guarantee that students will have meaningful intergroup interactions" (p. 517). Depending on the characteristics of one's

network, social capital can facilitate access to resources and other forms of capital (Tichavakunda, 2019). Understanding this notion helps comprehend the challenges faced by students of color who choose to attend predominately White colleges or universities.

History of Higher Education & Predominately White Institutions (PWI's)

Higher education scholars have historically been concerned with retention and persistence of White students aside from other student populations (Franklin, 2019). The significance of race for postsecondary opportunities has been seen to be rooted in meritocracy, which remains as a standard for higher education policy and practice (Baber, 2015) and the American postsecondary system is not alone in camouflaging dissonance between espoused principles of equitable opportunity and the realities of stratified outcomes based on race (Baber, 2015). Despite significant changes in policy construction at colleges and universities, student body inequalities remain pervasive for racially underrepresented students enrolled (Estrada et al., 2016), and as colleges and universities continue to diversify, there continues to be an increased presence of students who are the first in their families to pursue higher education (Adams & McBrayer, 2020; Peabody, 2013).

Contemporary patterns in higher education show that American postsecondary systems continue to be complicit in the reproduction of White racial privilege in the United States. A dramatic shift in the demographic makeup of PWIs occurred when landmark court decisions desegregated institutions of higher learning and dismantled dual educational systems that once excluded certain racial groups (Hannon et al., 2016). The initial objective of separate but equal postsecondary education systems were established to protect the White-only universities from a mass of Black student intentions to enroll

(Baber, 2015). For example, colleges and universities are no longer racially segregated by law and discrimination based on race and ethnicity (Patton et al., 2016), but many higher education policies that address racial discrimination are formed in accordance with minimizing harm to the interests of Whites rather than providing sufficient relief to students of color (Baber, 2015). The portrayal of diverse students in college campus recruitment marketing tools at historically White institutions have been done at a disservice to students of color. These institutions do not necessarily commit to providing equal access opportunities or promise an inviting campus racial climate (Yosso et al., 2009).

PWI's in higher education continue to lack progression in the population number of racially underrepresented students over the past few decades that universities accept students of color to enrich the experiences and outcomes of White students who reap the benefits of becoming more racially tolerant and diversifying their point of view (Yosso et al., 2009). There has been increasing differentiation within higher education systems among four-year colleges that has contributed to the widening divisions between social class status, not only because of blocked access, but because of classed pathways through the system of higher education (Wildhagen, 2015). Considering that obtaining a degree is a key facilitator of social mobility in higher education, it is most important to focus on the broader narrative which promotes FGCS' success (Duffy et al., 2020). Postsecondary education facilitates upward mobility for college students who are racially and socioeconomically underrepresented. In many cases, students of these underrepresented student groups face a combination of normative and unique stressors that hinder their social integration (Billingsley & Hurd, 2019). Since the mid 1970s, scholars have tried to

understand what some of the underlying influences that highlight the uneven patterns in student success (Bassett, 2021). Universities and colleges often neglect to acknowledge how racial climates on campuses present challenges for students of color (Adams & McBayer, 2020). White faculty at PWIs have been known to contribute to the negative experiences of students of color. For instance, Museus and Neville (2012) gave an example in their study about a White faculty member who demonstrated insensitivity to Black culture by making stereotypical comments to students that gave the notion that one or a few Black students and their presented behavior represented their race in its entirety.

Students of color often report experiencing racial discrimination on college campuses and have acknowledged inequities in the university environment to be alienating, hostile, and unwelcoming (Billingsley & Hurd, 2019; Clayton et al., 2019). Despite the clear benefits of higher education, the US legal and judicial system has systematically limited Black student attendance at public institutions (Allen et al., 2018). Black students attending PWIs perceive such environments as unsupportive, unsympathetic, chilly (Strayhorn, 2010), and the ones who are first-generation status believe they do not matter to their university and often feel disconnected from peers due to their first-generation status (Gibbons et al., 2019).

Although perpetrated by individuals, racial microaggressions are part of the larger, systemic structure that disadvantages racially minoritized groups while holding up Whiteness as an ideal (Sarcedo et al., 2015). Given the oppressive nature of both Whiteness and capitalism and their connection, racial and low socioeconomic status students are often unable to benefit from individual agency while they are enrolled in higher education. With the consistent enrollment of Black women at PWIs, Black

students at PWIs have overall continued to report having inadequate social lives (Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, 2014; Hannon et al., 2016). Higher education administration agents do play an important role in shaping the experiences of college students in general, and racial minority undergraduates at PWIs feel under pressure to prove themselves socially and academically while enrolled in college achievements (Museus & Neville, 2012; Strayhorn, 2010).

On Campus Experiences of Racially and Socioeconomically Underrepresented Students

Although predominately White Institutions (PWIs) have become more diverse and are populated with students from various racial backgrounds, when comparing a PWI to historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), racially underrepresented college student social integration experiences differ. Being an emergent process, integration into the college environment formulates formal and informal interactions students have on campus, in both academic and social capacities. The unique sociohistorical position of higher education institutions in the United States (US) amplifies incoherence between meritocratic ideals and realties (Baber, 2015). Students from racially underrepresented populations experience racially charged microaggressions most of their life, and the added stressor of a higher education institution is overwhelming for them (Franklin, 2019). First-generation low-income (FGLI) racially underrepresented college students' social integration experiences are met with obstacles that intertwine with their intersecting racial and social class identities. Student social and classroom encounters are often laden with stress and feelings of disconnection while navigating college campus environments (Williams & Martin, 2021). Basset (2021) noted

that Black students who have negative encounters on campus become less involved and are isolated, and Black students are not inherently lacking; higher education institutional systems create the structures that trouble them (Williams & Martin, 2021).

First-generation and socioeconomically hindered college students often appear to feel disconnected from common university social structures and have reported perceived experiences of social class discrimination (Billingsley & Hurd, 2019: Pratt et al., 2019). Means and Pyne (2017) presented that while first-generation low-income college students pointed to positive institutional support structures through departments, programs, residence halls, and classroom spaces, that challenges and dilemmas still unfolded for them during their first year of college. Although postsecondary access has increased for underrepresented students of color over the last two decades, White students have captured most of the enrollment growth at the most selective and well-funded higher education institutions (Baber, 2015). US scholars have historically argued social issues as being relegated to the margins of college campuses and can be found in class-related support programs. Students of color are more likely to report negative climates and the term 'campus climate' is more relevant to their experiences due to the racialized component to their post-secondary experience (Franklin, 2019). Failure to address negative racial climates within higher education institutions continues to result in challenges for students of color, and it will continue in decades to come across the spectrum if not addressed (Adams & McBrayer, 2020).

Racism on campus has taken a toll on students of color, and persistence in higher education and graduation is still a questionable reality for students connected to this population (Franklin, 2019). When students involve themselves on campus, they can

develop supportive peer groups with other members involved in extracurricular activities

and potentially develop a broader social network (Bllingsley & Hurd, 2019). There has

been a consensus that social integration is multidimensional (Gillen-O'Neell, 2019), and

FGLI students' identities play a significant role as they navigate their transitions between

home and into college. Students that engage with their racially diverse peers gain

positively correlated social, academic, and nonacademic gains (Hall et al, 2011). Students

of Color who have found support structures or people on campus have increased

confidence in their ability to exercise (Means & Pyne, 2017). Underrepresented students

experiencing discrimination may benefit from involvement in extracurricular activities

that provide direct focus and support toward their targeted marginalized identities

(Billingsley & Hurd, 2019). For example, various elements of diversity have positively

influenced Latino students' sense of campus climate (Nunez, 2011), and among other

People of Color, those who are closely tied to their sense of self tend to be happier than

their peers whose ethnic background is less central to their identity (Gillen-O'Neel,

2019).

Social Class, Race and Gender in Higher Education

In 2013, Peabody stressed the notion that student engagement during college is

key to fostering positive interactions between peers and integrating them into the life and

culture of a college campus. It has been frequently reported in research that once on

campus, FGCS are less likely to integrate into the campus culture (Hall et al, 2011;

Peabody, 2013). Given the invisible ways in which social class, race, and gender impact a

students' experience, gaining better perspective of how low-income students who are first in their family to attend college can offer understanding for campus administrators and their role in supporting student engagement and success while enrolled (Kelly et al., 2021; Williams & Martin, 2021).

Social Class

First-generation students are more likely than their non-first-generation counterparts to be Students of Color which correlates to a marginalized experience based on class, while being enrolled at a predominately White campus (Billingsley & Hurd, 2019; Gibbons et al, 2019; Nunez, 2011). For students who are first in their family to go to college, issues involved with college adjustment can be complex (Fischer, 2007). Due to familial lack of first-hand understanding of the college experience, targeted advice from parents of historically marginalized low socioeconomic students has been unavailable. Social class deserves unique exploration due to often being misperceived as a natural form of social strata rather than the reproduction of inequality (Williams & Martin, 2021). Sociologists have historically used capital to help describe how people experience class navigation in the US (Williams & Martin, 2021). Students who lack sufficient interaction with others on campus or who have negative experiences may decide to depart the university as a result of reevaluation, or because of the difficulties to make valuable connections (Fischer, 2007; Tobolowsky et al, 2020). Involvement in campus extracurricular activities may help neutralize or offset the harmful effects of discrimination on a socioeconomically underrepresented students' psychological well-being (Billingsley & Hurd, 2019).

Social class plays an important role for individuals regardless of their cognizance of its impact (Williams & Martin, 2021). FGCS struggle with adjustment and stand as a hybrid class identity for students who are in the process of gaining upward social mobility (Gibbons et al, 2019). A portrait of first-generation college students (FGCS) is connected to problems they encounter once they matriculate into the college setting (Tobolowsky et al, 2020; Wildhagen, 2015). Since the early 2000s, FGCS have become the object of heightened attention in higher education. Student affairs professionals design programming for FGCS (Wildhagen, 2015), but because FGCS typically come from lower income homes, these students are more likely to work and live off campus which has translated into having less time and energy to participate in any on-campus activities (Tobolowsky et al, 2020).

In terms of social environments, Inkelas et al. (2007) found that FGCS benefited more from extracurricular activities and engagement with peers but were less likely to participate in beneficial activities with students who were not first-generation while on campus. FGCS are often attached to programs structured to have a variety of resources in one central place where they can seek the advice of a counselor or administrator to be referred to other university offices (Bassett, 2021). In a 2021 study, Bassett conducted in-depth longitudinal interviews with eight female, low-income, first-generation college students over the course of their first year, at a 4-year regional comprehensive public university where 30% of the students enrolled came from a racial and ethnic background and 50% of the students were first-generation status. The study established that "students entering college with first-generation status reported that use of health services, academic advising, and academic support services, were at a lower rate than their continuing-

generation peers and that the lower usage rates were influenced by structural and cultural factors" (p. 21).

First-generation college students (FGCS) are hyper aware of their social class and how it influences their campus environment and their peer-to-peer interactions (Williams & Martin, 2021). Schademan and Thompson (2016) discussed how FGCS, especially those from different racial backgrounds, often described themselves as unprepared for the alienation they feel upon entering college. FGCS struggle with college adjustment and the components associated with understanding college culture (Gibbons et al., 2019). First-generation low-income (FGLI) college student populations make up a significant percentage of student populations at multiple universities, and discrimination and marginalization episodes such as on campus segregation and being racially profiled have occurred way too often over the past few decades (Adams & McBrayer, 2020; Duffy et al., 2020).

FGLI college students have much lower retention rates in comparison to other demographic groups, and in some cases the racial and socioeconomic identity dynamics may provide a hindrance to social integration processes while on campus (Clayton et al, 2019; Schademan & Thompson, 2016). As Adams et al. (2016) pointed out in their study, first-generation students are less likely to socialize with faculty or students outside of the classroom, less likely to develop close friendships with other students, and less likely to participate in extracurricular activities on campus. First-generation status and the relationship between racial status can influence the conditional extent to which academic and social engagement in college affects students' outcomes as well as the forms of engagement that are most meaningful (Nunez, 2011). For FGCS from racially

underrepresented groups, the experience of systematic oppression, such as classism and racism, , contribute to the forms of oppression that help shape students' involvement on campus while enrolled in higher education (Adams & McBrayer, 2020; Means & Pyne, 2017).

Race & Gender

In 2016, Hannon et al. cited the importance of understanding how race, gender, and the collegiate setting influenced the experiences of Black college women, who were the focal population of their study. Much research on Black students at the collegiate level focuses on Black men and not Black women. While Black college women matriculating at higher rates, they still exist within the margins of higher education (Kelly et al., 2021), but the focus remains on creating support structures for Black men. Racial socialization practices have helped to preserve and enhance the resilience of Black women despite the discrimination and oppression they face in their daily environments (Nelson et al., 2016). Recognizing the marginalization experiences of Black college women can emphasize the need to understand the complexities of both race and gender, and how their strength forms a central part of their identity of being a Black woman (Hannon et al., 2016; Nelson et al., 2016).

Black students attending PWIs have reported an increase of psychological stress and difficulty adjusting in the social environment. The stress that Black college women endure can be more acute given the intersectionality of their marginalized identities (Kelly et al., 2021). In a study referencing the perceptions of the 'strong Black woman' role, it was cited that Black women enact alternatives to the stereotypical images of them to interrupt the distorted representations (Nelson at al., 2016). Black college women

students often feel invisible or isolated while enrolled at PWI institutions, even when they are engaging in extracurricular activities and excelling in the classroom and academic setting (Kelly et al., 2021). Black students historically face challenges, such as, higher levels of isolation, estrangement, and alienation, which foster both increased stress and poor health outcomes (Hannon et al., 2016).

Nevertheless, Black college women thrive holistically at four-year institutions, as it pertains to navigating PWIs. It has been reported that Black college women may acquire strength from their spirituality or their relationships with others which include extended kin-like individuals and communities (Hotchkins, 2017; Nelson et al., 2016). Strength has been posited as a culturally specific coping mechanism critical for survival of women from African descent and has its underpinnings in perseverance through adversity (Nelson et al., 2016). The "angry Black woman" stereotype hinders Black women who attempt to exude passion when offering an opinion to multiple subjective areas while enrolled in higher education. This type of perception continues to present a pervasiveness in the US culture and have led Black women to manage the discomforted experiences by dealing with societal opinion, rather than conceptualizing the experience as depressing or the need to seek treatment for support (Nelson et al., 2016). Holding simultaneous membership in both racially and economically minoritized groups, first-generation college students of color from low-income backgrounds experience the dance between race and class in education often (Sarcedo et al., 2015).

First-generation status, race, and ethnicity have a relationship to the extent that social engagement in college affects students' outcomes as well as the engagement that is most meaningful (Nunez, 2011). Among undergraduate students from racially

underrepresented populations surfaces the intersection of challenging factors that threaten their success in college (Tobolowsky et al, 2020). Social integration involvement and establishment on college campuses contributes to student experiences, engagement and individual growth, and programming for students (Wildhagen, 2015). Though inhabiting into campus spaces seems like an automatic notion for new college students, settling into campus life differs for racially marginalized student populations in terms of involvement and outcomes (Fischer, 2007). When students see themselves as part of the campus community, they become members of the campus community, they gain a better understanding of campus which represents yet another way to explore the influence of connectedness with other students on campus (Johnson et al., 2007). With research consistently demonstrating structural and institutional factors related to campus connections, the academic environment includes important programs and departments related to fitness and recreational sport engagement (Duffy et al., 2020).

The Role of Collegiate Fitness & Recreational Sports on Campuses

The relationship between athletic involvement and academics continues to generate a considerable debate, even though reviewers of the empirical evidence have consistently noted positive association between athletic participation and educational attainment (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Baghurst & Kelley, 2014). The impact of campus recreation on student leadership development in intramural and club sports, plays a role in engagement for college students across the board (Dugan et al, 2015). Student retention is typically determined by the students' experiences and attitudes toward the institution (Kampf & Teske, 2013), and collegiate fitness and recreation related studies have been direct in their efforts to explore the benefits and major purposes that correlate

with college student participation in fitness and recreational sport activity while enrolled. College students tend to learn more effectively when instruction incorporates different modes of learning, and student satisfaction with the college experience tends to be higher with participation in a collegiate fitness and recreation programs (Kampf & Teske, 2013). The role and importance of collegiate fitness and recreational sport facilities and programs are unique for the different students enrolled at a higher education institution. College campuses have begun to realize that collegiate recreational sport and fitness environments serve as learning and integration spaces that support positive higher education student involvement outcomes (Haines & Fortman, 2008). Participating in such programs contributes to college student growth skills that include communication, developing friendships, multicultural awareness, stress relief, and physical fitness. Physical activity and exercise while enrolled in higher education have been connected to a plethora of health benefits and have demonstrated their ability to affect mental health and resiliency for college students (Fried et al., 2020).

Growth in intrinsic motivation, healthy physical activity practices, and gaining value clarification are common marketing strategies utilized by campus administrators to attract students to fitness and sport participation opportunities (Sturts & Ross, 2013). Researchers have reported that a long-time positive health behavior that benefits students is recreational sport participation (Haines & Fortman, 2008). When physical activity levels are low for students enrolled, student environments could be plagued by sedentary behaviors (Fried et al., 2020). Campus fitness and recreation centers provide students with a social bonding experience and increased connection to their university (Kampf & Teske, 2013). Campus fitness and recreation sport departments provide a variety of

options for physical activity, exercise, and sport program participation for students on campus (Vasold et al., 2020), and when students are engaging with their peers in the non-classroom setting it is often referred to as 'out of class' learning (Fine et al., 2016; Haines & Fortman, 2008).

Associated literature for campus fitness and recreation programs from the year 2014 and onward is exploratory research that illustrates the relationship between fitness and recreational sport involvement, and about academic and social success of college students who participate in these programs. Participation in recreational programs has been found to enhance the college experience for students, and not just in academics (Vasold et al., 2020). It is proposed that college campus and university communities should continue to utilize and design their resources to foster student engagement and success (Vasold et al., 2020), and the social, physical, and cognitive outcomes of fitness and recreational sport participation contribute to a body of knowledge that further supports a student's overall engagement and development (Sturts & Ross, 2013). Empirical research has validated the benefit of student involvement in collegiate fitness and recreation (Dugan et al, 2015) along with the lack of related literature surrounding the effect of campus fitness and recreation participation and the integration among low-income and FGCS (Adams et al., 2016). FGCS can derive greater benefits from participation in inclusive non-academic activities, and this involvement has had a large impact on their success (Pratt et al., 2019). As expressed by Fine et al. (2016), fitness and recreational sport participation supports a strong social engagement component which is an important factor for first-generation student experiences in higher education.

Additional research support is needed to better understand the relationship between students' involvement in campus fitness and recreational sports and their personal development (Rothwell & Theodore, 2006). Though participation in campus fitness and recreational sports can contribute to an enhanced quality of campus life, leadership, communication skills, and help college students create healthy practices, not all students gain a positive experience within participation (Struts & Ross, 2013). Bland (2014) expressed that college students are struck by constant personal, educational, and social stressors, and that physical activity had been well documented as an effective means of reducing stress and anxiety but not the sole solution. Various challenges and stressors associated with college sometimes have a negative impact on the corresponding health of college students (Bland, 2014).

Social Integration & Shared Experiences

There is importance of understanding the multiple identities of college students and their race and gender (Hannon et al., 2016). Tobolowsky et al. (2020), conducted a subject analysis and review of literature in the context of how FGLI students participate in their campus offered programs related to recreation, fitness and sport revealed that examined demographics such as gender, ethnicity, and class standing allowed for unique entry into participation spaces. It appears that this population of students are either not participating in these programs, or program specific policies are not having as much impact on this student population (Tobolowsky et al, 2020). Williams et al. (2020) explored identifying racial differences while promoting physical activity among female college students. Although the study reported that the involved students had an opportunity to participate in physical activities such as intramural sports, club sports, and

use of the recreational center, the racial and ethnic differences in physical activity participation were consistent with other literature estimating that non-minority female students participated more consistently (Williams et al., 2020).

Considering the social integration variable, physical, and sociocultural environments affect physical activity patterns for students enrolled in higher education. Engaging in regular physical activity and exercise decreases a student's stress level if they are exposed and actively participating in fitness and recreational sport related activities (Williams et al., 2020). Actual participation in campus intramural sports provides opportunities for student values to be publicly affirmed with entrance into participation being deemed voluntary and choosing to participate over alternatives such as student organizations, extracurricular programs, or personal uses of time (Rothwell & Theodore, 2006). Intramural sport programs have grown into a prominent collegiate recreation program that will continue to be ever present in colleges and universities, and over the past decade's emergence of recreational sport departments and facilities have had many positive effects on college students (Sturts & Ross, 2013). Students gaining perspectives on the explored learning that can occur in the college setting can be achieved through participation in recreational or competitive club sports (Dugan et al, 2015). Campus recreation and fitness centers environments contribute to attracting students to a university and provide a reason for them not to leave (Sturts & Ross, 2013). Considering the transition from late adolescence to adulthood, support for the promotion of physical activity and exercise on college and university campuses has grown (Vaslod et al., 2019).

Summary

In summary, this chapter discussed higher education and the various components related to its history, and the lived experiences of racially minoritized students who navigate predominately White institutions. For this chapter the focus was on Black college women who participated in collegiate fitness programs. This chapter provided an overview of the theoretical frameworks utilized to frame the study. The two presented frameworks were Critical Race Theory (CRT), along with Bourdieu's Theory of Social Reproduction (Social Capital). The tenets of CRT reviewed were centering race and racism, intersectionality, and a presentation of campus counter spaces. Bourdieu's Social Capital Theory was presented and aligned with literature focused on social capital networks, bridging social capital, bonding social capital, and social support, and social capital's connection to CRT. Exploring the literature related to the history of predominately White institutions (PWIs) exposed peer reviewed literature related to the on-campus experiences of racially and socioeconomically underrepresented students, along with topics and issues related to social class standing, race, and gender in higher education. Learning environments on university campuses are not only a physical or economic resource, Student of Colors informal interactions among and outside of their racial groups allows for acquiring knowledge outside of a classroom setting (Savas, 2014). With this, the role of collegiate fitness and recreational sports on campus literature was explored to see what social integration and shared experiences students of color, more specifically Black college women, may experience while enrolled in higher education. Production of an institutional social climate that is inclusive and that embraces

inclusiveness and diversity would support Black students as they cope with challenges

such as isolation, alienation, and self-doubt (Savas, 2014).

Chapter III: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of FGLI United States (US) Black college women, on the relationship of collegiate fitness programs' role in bridging and bonding social capital at a four-year PWI. This study focused on answering the following questions and sub-questions:

1. What are FGLI US Black college women perspectives on the relationship between participating in collegiate fitness programs and bridging and bonding social capital?

   a. How did they describe their social networks within collegiate fitness and on campus as whole? How did race, gender and social class intersect in their descriptions?

   b. How did their collegiate fitness experiences relate to their bridging and bonding social capital experiences outside of fitness?

A qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach was considered for this study with focus on FGLI US Black college women perspectives of a campus fitness program's role on bridging and bonding social capital. Applying a phenomenological research design allowed the researcher to conduct an exploratory study that involved iterative interviews, with questions that were focused on the study participants' experiences (Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

At the time of this study, there was limited research on US Black college women involvement in campus fitness programs while being enrolled in higher education. Most of the studies about Black college women focused on academic retention and support strategies, perceptions of the strong Black women's role in college and in society, and

their leadership mobility while they navigated White spaces in higher education

(Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, 2014; Hotchkins, 2017; Nelson et al., 2016). The missing

factors related to Black college women who hold FGLI status was their bridging and

bonding social capital experiences, and more recent research on their involvement in

college fitness programs. The goal of this study was to shed light on their experiences

while enrolled in college and participating in campus fitness programs. This chapter

begins with information about the researcher's background and continues with the

study's setting, participants recruitment, data collection, data analysis, and the study

limitations.

Researcher Background

Some aspects of positionality are culturally ascribed or generally regarded as

being fixed, for example, someone's gender, race, skin-color, or nationality (Holmes,

2020). The researcher found interest in the topic due to her personal undergraduate

experiences within co-curricular activities. Her experiences allowed her to construct

bridging and bonding social capital experiences while enrolled as Black college student at

a (PWI). Bridging social capital experiences included team sport participation through

intramural sports, development of a network outside her Black student peers at her on

campus job, and purposeful engagement with people who were different than she.

Bonding social capital presented itself in the researcher's strong ties to her Black student

peers through cultural club involvement and the establishment of thick trust with other

(FGLI) Black women peers and campus administrators of color. Being a FGLI Black

college woman who participated in fitness and recreation related programs as an

undergraduate student, the researcher chose to consider the positionality that reflected her

past experiences in fitness and recreation participation, while also seeking out the experiences of a newer generation of students. On-campus student employment and participation within her campus recreation department allowed the researcher to participate in bridging and bonding social capital experiences within her social networks inside and outside work and engagement settings on and off campus.

The researcher's experiences catapulted her into a lifestyle and practice that held strong roots in physical and health education, along with sport. Collegiate fitness and recreation not only shaped her socially but heightened her awareness of other social activity opportunities at her university. Personal career navigation in the field of collegiate fitness and recreation has allowed for the researcher to view and contribute to the creation of programs and services related to student social adaptation, student social integration experiences, and student personal growth in health and fitness behaviors while being enrolled in higher education. Along with this, the researcher understood that she brought her Black racial identity, gender identity as a woman, her FGLI persona, and her individual Black experience to the research approach.

The focus on FGLI Black college women students and who bridged and bonded social capital experiences through their social networks and collegiate fitness programs, was stemmed from the lack of research available about non-student-athletes who identify as a woman and as Black. Evaluated research continued to portray African American and Black women as a problem with one-dimensional views presented in past and present research, and on many occasions the focus was on the struggles and challenges of Black college women who were student athletes. Continuing to have a detached research approach with Black college women will keep their stories in the shadows (Lindsay-

Dennis, 2015). If no one is discussing Black college women in various aspects of higher education, Black college women may continue to not receive the much-needed support they desperately need in higher education.

The researcher understood that being a Black administrative faculty member, along with identifying as a first-generation college student, that her personal views and biases could have influenced the study's data collection and analysis. For example, the researcher works in the campus fitness space where the study participants engaged in collegiate fitness activity and programs. Her internal insight to campus fitness programs and services could have persuaded participants to perceive their lived experiences in a different manner than how they wanted to express their individual experiences. The researcher utilized reflexivity to stay neutral by not imposing her own thoughts and past experiences on the study participant experiences. For example, if a study participant had a negative experience, the researcher was open to participant individual interpretations of their encouraging or harmful experiences that were expressed during the interview sessions. Allowing the collected data from this study to filter through the researcher's lens presented an opportunity for reflexive and careful review of the data to frame the study participants' journeys while steering away from personal biases.

Reflexivity is viewed as the process of continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation for a researcher or research team, that may affect the research process and outcomes (Berger, 2015). With having commonalities in identified race, social class, and ability (Vacarro & Newman, 2016), the researcher conducted reflexivity reflection sessions during the process of conducting this study addressing any potential assumptions, concerns, and questions related to the study topic. Conducting reflexivity

required an act of critical self-reflection by the researcher, being sure to check their biases prior to each interview session. The researcher's social background, assumptions, positioning, and behavior may have affected the study (Bradshaw et al., 2017) by attempting to build a friendship with study participants to gain more insight into their lived experiences at their university. This was addressed by maintaining a reflexive journal in which rich descriptions of transcript data analysis allowed the researcher to produce an audit trail of recorded notes, along with positioning self to address any biases that could influence any final data analysis. For example, it is possible to present to participants the idea that experiences in fitness can be positive if they get connected to the activities that fit them or their style of physical exercise. The researcher aimed to not project her own views and interpretations of the participants' experiences but rather to try and focus on their meaning.

Setting

The selected setting for this study was a four-year public university located in the western region of the United States referred to as Frontier University (pseudonym) in this study. Frontier University had an associated student population of approximately 21,000 students, with the undergraduate student population of approximately 16,500 students. The dominant racial composition was majority White (a little over 50%) with the remaining populations representing racial and ethnic groups that categorized as Hispanic or Latino representing (about 20%), Asian (almost 8%), Two or More Races (about 8%), Black or African American (less than 4%), American Indian or Alaska Native (less than 1%), and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (less than 0.5%). Although the selected institution was categorized as a predominately White institution, it was striving

to become a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). The campus fitness center at this institution had an administration fee included in tuition costs that allowed each enrolled student to gain open access to the facility. Centrally located in the heart of campus, the fitness center offered students opportunities to participate in the functional fitness spaces, strength equipment, free weights and barbells, cardiovascular endurance equipment, an indoor track, a fitness stairway, group exercise drop-in classes, and intramural and sport clubs.

Recruitment

Participant recruitment for this study began after approval was received from the researcher's Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Frontier University. Following approval from IRB, the researcher worked to target participants via a recruitment email that included a flier which was circulated to campus administrators from various departments that commonly worked and served first-generation and racially underrepresented students within campus student life services at Frontier University. This effort and method of recruitment helped reach students to voluntarily patriciate in the study. Participants who volunteered to participate in this study had to meet the following conditions:

1) Identified as US Black

2) Identified as female or a woman

3) Identified as FGLI socioeconomic status

4) Have an undergraduate class standing of sophomore or above (junior and senior standing was eligible; freshman standing was not)

5) Be enrolled at Frontier University

Each criterion was made specific to gather explicit and unique experiences of FGLI Black college women enrolled at Frontier University. Black culture identification could have included Black immigrant students from Africa or other countries, but the US Black student experiences in America with race and racism differ greatly from similar experiences in African cultures, and students from different Black cultural backgrounds cannot be lumped into one category of Blackness. Therefore, instituting US Black as the racial identity requirement, and female or woman as the gender requirement for study participant criteria, helped further express the importance of utilizing CRTs intersectionality tenet as a theoretical lens.

The intersection of race and gender, especially in the higher education setting, allowed the researcher to critically cross-examine racial and gender specific structures. Being first in their family to attend college and first-generation status, study eligible participants were more likely to share a unique experience in adapting to higher education social environments. Applying FGLI status as a participant condition for this study highlighted the additional importance to examine socioeconomic status (SES). Not only did SES encompass income status, but it also was a predictor of outcomes in the collegiate educational setting especially for students from socioeconomically underrepresented populations.

Students selected for this study had different types of involvement in campus fitness and recreation participation. What was a more important factor for the study, aside from the type of participation in campus fitness related programs, was the study of participants' academic class standing. Student experiences in upper class academic class standing in higher education are different and more informing than first-year freshman

students. Racially underrepresented college sophomores, juniors, and seniors who had attempted some type of transition and progress into a PWI environment had experiences that helped indicate if bridging and bonding cultural gaps through engagement and participation existed at Frontier University. Participants selected for this study at Frontier University allowed for the documentation of their relative experiences so their perspectives could reveal what areas of institutional programming and opportunity could be influenced or improved.

FGLI Black women student-athletes were excluded from this study. Though collegiate student-athlete participation in sports is similarly voluntary like campus fitness programs, student-athletes operate in an exclusive and different environment than non-athlete students. This study was based on the interviews of 10 students who met the study participant conditions. Prior to the first interview session, participants were given a consent information script that explained the study and an invitation to answer questions in person with the researcher. Participants were instructed at the start of the first interview they could discontinue their participation in the study at any time. Prior to conducting the second interview sessions, it was reiterated to participants that they could discontinue participation at any time. Participants received a monetary incentive in the form of a $25 Amazon gift card for each interview they attended.

Participant Profiles

This section provides a brief overview of the ten (10) Black college women student participants involved in this study. The names of the participants were pseudonyms selected by them. All participants confirmed they were born in the United

States, and they identified as Black FGLI. Table 1 shows the demographic information of the 10 participants.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

Name	Major	Minor	Class Standing
Airee	Sociology	None	Sophomore
Alanah	Biology	None	Senior
Ayame	Accounting	None	Junior
Bee	Public Health	None	Senior
Delilah	Biotechnology	Health Sciences	Junior
Elle	Sociology	Social Justice	Senior
Jasper	Criminal Justice	Sociology	Senior
Mamba	Criminal Justice	Political Science	Junior
Sophia	Marketing	None	Sophomore
Tiana	Speech Pathology	None	Senior

Airee

Airee was a sophomore majoring in sociology. Not wanting to attend Frontier University after learning that it was a predominately White school from students in her hometown, she found ways to connect with the campus and its people through campus resources and student clubs and organizations. During her time at Frontier, she developed a confident expressiveness about her racial and gender identity. This led her to connect with campus groups and venture outside the Black societal cultural norm by gaining an interest in Asian culture and wanting to become fluent in Japanese. Her experiences allowed her to yearn to learn more, which geared her up to possibly traveling the world with some of her future career aspirations. Due to her lack of enthusiasm for the Frontier

campus fitness center, she attended when she could, while she worked through her challenges of feeling body-shamed along with her LGBTQA+ identity when she visited the space with her peers.

Alanah

Alanah was a senior majoring in biology. Born in the Midwest of the US, her family later located to the west coast. She shared that her journey to Frontier was influenced by a college preparatory scholar program that engaged Black students to attend four-year public universities. Being a part of that scholar program catapulted her into campus employment opportunities, along with student organizations that related to her future career plans of wanting to become a physical therapist. She kept a small social network during her time at the university because she had a hard time trusting people. She fell in love with fitness at the campus fitness center but kept to herself. As she moved along and advanced in her class standing, she didn't like how busy it would get at Frontier's fitness center and she found more comfort in fitness spaces outside of campus that were either 24 hours or opened earlier than the Frontier fitness center.

Ayame

Ayame was an accounting major, in her junior year. Being born and raised in the Midwest in her youth years, her family later moved to the west coast. Changing her major from mechanical engineering to a business related major, she aspired to become an accountant. Participating in campus business clubs, she connected with her peers in and outside of the classroom. With no familial background in how to or where to go to work out, she had a challenge with engaging in fitness on campus. Sharing that she had never

heard of a Black girl working out at a fitness center, it was the invitation by one of her roommates that jump started her participation at the Frontier fitness center on campus.

Bee

Bee was a senior majoring in public health. She expressed that Frontier University was not her first choice for universities to attend. Her ideal college type was not shared, but she knew that she wanted to attend somewhere that was close to her West coast home during the time of a global pandemic. Time at her current university gave her a change of scenery with its outdoor and nature benefits. Growing great social connections with close friend groups was accompanied by her student employment position at a busy facility located on campus. She aspired to become a healthcare administrator to serve all populations. Knowing the importance of what behaviors support a healthy mind and body, she felt a sense of intimidation when at the Frontier fitness center. When she made time to engage in fitness on campus, she only worked out with her already established groups outside of the Frontier fitness center.

Delilah

Delilah was a junior majoring in biotechnology, with a minor in community health sciences. Born in a neighboring state to her university, she had moved to that state with her family in her teen years. Thinking college was not an option for her due to low test scores proved wrong as her high-grade point average allowed her to enroll and be accepted. She connected to campus through student employment, club and organization involvement, and by connecting with her off-campus living communities. She experienced both negative and positive experiences with professors on her campus but was extremely proud to have had two Black male professors during her academic career

so far. She enjoyed her time spent at the on-campus fitness center, but she preferred to work out in the fitness center within her off-campus housing living community with her network and best friends.

Elle

Elle was a senior, majoring in sociology with a social justice minor. She was encouraged by her high school and local community to enroll at Frontier University, the same town where she grew up. Facing academic stressors, she was often supported by her experiences as a student employee on campus. Her job was in a central area on campus for high traffic and involvement for students. Being of mixed race, Black and Asian, on a majority White campus, she expressed that she never expected to ever have friends in her classes. She later gained more confidence as a student and peer while working at her on-campus job and in class with racially and gender-alike peers on campus, especially after being promoted to a student supervisor role within her work department. Still feeling some insecurities about attending Frontier fitness center, she acknowledged that she was paying a student fee for the fitness center, so she made sure to use it.

Jasper

Jasper was a senior criminal justice major, minoring in sociology. Born in a neighboring state of Frontier University, she knew day one that she wanted to be connected to social justice work. Growing up as mixed race and identifying as Black, brought some challenges growing up in a predominately White town. She aspired to pursue forensic pathology with backgrounds in criminal justice and sociology. Being employed as a student employee on her campus, not only exposed her to customer service, but to groups on campus that utilized her place of work for events and programs.

Her fitness engagement was with roommates, even though she preferred working out alone to be more focused. She also enjoyed watching intramural sport games that took place within the Frontier fitness center to cheer on peers who played for their different represented organizations.

Mamba

Mamba was a junior, majoring in criminal justice with a political science minor. Completing college credits in high school, and having a desire to attend a Historically Black College and University (HBCU), she instead attended Frontier University because it was financially inexpensive, and she wanted to be in a different weather climate environment than what she grew up in. Her campus fitness experiences ranged from use of the Frontier fitness center to lift weights, participating in sport related clubs, and participation in some of the offered fitness classes included with her student membership. Her fitness participation while enrolled in college was driven by her desire to enter the military, in which some of the requirements to enter were based on her level of physical readiness.

Sophia

Sophia was a pre-business major focus in marketing, as a sophomore. Being of mixed race and identifying as Black while growing up in a predominately White town often made her stand out from her peers. Her youth experiences drove her desire to attend a HBCU, but participating in a pre-college program at Frontier University, she knew she would receive a better education if she stayed home. She balanced her academics, along with her role as a club executive board member for multiple cultural clubs on her campus. Managing the complexities of both of her racial identities, and often her gender within

her selected major, she worried about her future career aspirations while questioning if her family was right when they insisted that she stayed in a STEM related major to more easily secure a job. Wanting to see more Black people and women participate, in fitness on campus, she also frequented community fitness and sought out connections in both spaces. Sometimes comparing her body type to other women in the campus fitness space, she learned that her journey was different which led her to encourage other Black women to own the skin that they were in.

Tiana

Tiana was a senior majoring in speech pathology with a minor in gerontology. Being the oldest of three siblings, she knew that attending college was of importance. Inspired by an older family member who was deaf, she planned to own her own speech pathology clinic to serve racially underrepresented populations for early intervention. She enjoyed working as a student leader on campus and helping students get adjusted to campus through first-year student programs living in Frontier on-campus housing. She truly enjoyed working out at the Frontier fitness center to take fitness classes that were included with the student membership, along with engaging in individual weightlifting.

Confidentially

The confidentiality of each study participant was of high priority. Discretion was maintained to avoid any easily identifiable characteristics or campus participation factors due to the low percentage of non-student-athlete Black college women enrolled at their institution at the time of the study. Each participant gained an opportunity to select their own individual pseudonym, which was used throughout the study. Study participants'

personal information, interview audio recordings, and transcribed interview transcripts were kept in a locked drawer in the researcher's office, and within an encrypted folder on a secure web-based storage system. All participant information, digital interview recordings, and interview notes will be held securely for two years. Subsequently, all participant information, interview responses, and all related notes will be disposed of.

Data Collection

Data collection for this study began in the fall of 2022 by conducting two in-depth semi-structured interviews in person, with the second interview session including a participant mapping exercise. Semi-structured interviews were used to examine the perspectives and experiences of 10 US FGLI Black college women. This interviewing method allowed the researcher to honor the study participants' life-experiences by conducting multiple interview sessions, instead of just one. Interview session one served as an introductory session to ask the first set of semi-structured interview questions to participants. The first interview session provided study participants with an introduction to the researcher as a doctoral candidate, and a consent information script regarding the purpose of the study (See Appendix A for the consent information script.) The consent information script form discussed the minimal risk involved for study participants, along with the benefits of participating in the study.

After verbal consent was obtained from study participants, the first interview sessions were aimed at exploring study participants' experiences at a four-year public university, to learn about their social network connections and relationships, and participants' experiences in campus fitness programs. The first set of interview questions lasted between 25 minutes and 60 minutes. Interview sessions were guided by 14

questions and sub questions (See Appendix D for a copy of the first session interview questions). Interviews from the first interview sessions were transcribed and analyzed to formulate questions for the second interview sessions. The second set of interviews served as a period to conduct a participant mapping exercise with each participant. The goal of conducting a participant map was to explore study participants' next five-to-ten-year plans and the social supports that they found would assist them in reaching their goals, to examine their connection to their communities and social networks outside of campus, and to explore what they felt an ideal fitness campus space could be on their campus if they had a chance to restructure it. This method of data collection allowed the researcher to gain perspectives on the associated themes from the participant groups' first interview session, along with an opportunity to ask follow-up questions specific to each participant.

Interview sessions for the second interview took place in the spring 2023 semester, which placed about four to five months between the first and second interview sessions for some of the study participants. The second set of interview questions connected to the participants' mapping exercise were first piloted with three participants from the researcher's institution prior to conducting interview sessions with the 10 participants in this study. The piloting of the three questions was done to ensure understanding of question delivery and to gauge how much time study participants might need to complete the mapping exercises.

The second interview sessions lasted between 28 minutes and 45 minutes. Semi-structured interview questions for both interview sessions were organized and developed with consideration to critical race theory (CRT) and social capital theory. These

interviews allowed the researcher to view the heart of the phenomenon, while organization of each participants' individual perception or reality was expressed through their responses to interview questions (Bradshaw et al., 2017). Utilizing a semi-structured interview process with open-ended questions increased flexibility for clarifying questions during each interview sessions. Being sure that data collection and analysis was an iterative process, participant responses to questions and simultaneous adaptation of the analytical process supported the study's progression as the data emerged (Bradshaw et al., 2017).

Data Analysis

The data analysis for this research study began after the first set of interviews were completed. The researcher listened to each study participant's audio recording and transcribed each one verbatim. All participants' identifiable information was noted and replaced with participant selected pseudonyms. Interviews were transcribed by the researcher, which led to the construction of a table to compile the descriptive factors from each interview question and for each participant. Data analysis and interpretation had parallels that entailed immersion and interpretation (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). The initial reading of interview data familiarized the researcher with the voices of each participant. With the repeated review of participant transcripts, it enabled the transcriptions to come alive during the data analysis phase (Bradshaw et al., 2017). Reviewing each interview transcription benefited the researcher in utilizing an inductive analysis for this study to assist in the search for any salient categories within the collected data sets in the quest for emerging themes and subthemes.

To discern study themes and subthemes, the researcher took a qualitative description approach in data analysis which helped the researcher remain true in studying a participant's account and interpretations and to help keep the researcher's own interpretations of the data transparent (Bradshaw et al., 2017).

Once transcriptions were read through, a process referred to as *annotation* was conducted. Approaching qualitative research in an annotative manner helped organize data to be disseminated and label relevant words, phrases, sentences, and sections from the interview transcripts (Bandara et al., 2015). Inductive coding is a ground-up approach where the researcher derives codes from the interview data. Identification of specific text segments related to the study, related objectives, and labeled segments of text data create categories, which can reduce any overlap and redundancy among categories to incorporate the most important themes and focus on the study's pertinent findings (Liu, 2016). Any content analysis that fit better with straightforward descriptions of the collected data from participants, helped associate the analysis of this study to support the phenomenological design (Bradshaw et al., 2017).

The next step in analyzing the first set of interview transcripts was to conceptualize the data to eliminate or combine certain codes. After segmenting the data and positioning it to connect to created categories, the researcher took a deeper look to determine if there were any hierarchies in what had been analyzed. The data collected from the first set of interviews helped construct the questions for the second interview sessions.

The coding processes were repeated for the second set of interviews. The data for the second interview was also conceptualized to eliminate or combine certain codes that

were present in the data. This data was coded to uncover what participants saw as successful and accomplished futures for themselves despite the racial and gendered experiences they endured on their campus.

Codes from both interviews were aligned in a sense to further explain participants experiences. For example, the first interview session brought themes associated with racialized and gendered experiences on the participants' campus, and within the campus fitness space directly. Though participants overwhelming had struggles and challenges navigating their campus, their connection to campus counter spaces and to campus life and social networks helped them to persevere through the challenges. The second set of interviews brought narratives associated with what their future goals and plans for the next five to ten years would be: what were their true connections to their communities and social networks, who were the individuals that would help support them through their journeys, and what their ideal campus fitness space would look like.

The researcher then took the aligned and unaligned data and used it to construct the final themes of this study, along with the necessary tools to write the findings for this study. The final situated themes for this study were structured to display to readers the lived experiences of Black college women as they were challenged with racial and gendered experiences, and as they connected to bridging and bonding social capital with peers and campus support services.

Summary

This study used a qualitative design to explore the experiences of 10 US FGLI Black college women students at a four-year PWI. The purpose was to examine the perspectives of FGLI Black female students who participated in campus fitness programs.

The study was conducted at Frontier University, a four-year predominately White institution located in a large western region in the US. The data collected for this study was from conducting two semi-structured interviews that were completed with 10 study participants. The semi-structured interview questions for session one were structured to gain perspective of the research question for the study: What are FGLI US Black college women perspectives on the relationship between participating in collegiate fitness programs while bridging and bonding social capital? How do they describe their social networks within collegiate fitness and on campus as whole? How do race, gender and social class intersect in their descriptions? How do their collegiate fitness experiences relate to their bridging and bonding social capital experiences outside of fitness? The data collected from the first and second interview sessions were utilized to illustrate the findings of the study. Data analysis was conducted by listening to each study participant's audio recordings to transcribe them verbatim. This analysis led to the development of themes from all associated data sets to develop the findings of the study and to answer the research question for this study.

Chapter IV: Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of first-generation low-income (FGLI) United States (US) Black college women, on the relationship of collegiate fitness program's role in bridging and bonding social capital at a four-year predominately White institution (PWI). Utilizing Critical Race Theory's (CRT) tenants of centering race and racism, intersectionality, and counter spaces to radiate the Black college student experience, and Bourdieu's Social Capital Theory. Within CRT, centering race and racism accounts for the role of race and persistence of racism in American society (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015), while intersectionality helps apply a critical and analytical lens to help interrogate race, class, and gender disparities that exist when evaluating structures of inequality (Harris & Patton, 2019). The campus counter space tenant was utilized in framing this study to observe the role of campus spaces contributing to culturally affirming physical spaces within larger public universities (Nunez, 2011). Bourdieu's social capital theory plays prominent role in explaining the experiences of first-generation and working-class students at universities (Birani & Lehmann, 2013), and his insights were relevant to this study.

While this study brought about challenging racial and gendered experiences on campus and within campus fitness spaces, study participants also experienced rewarding outputs in their bridging and bonding social capital connections to peer support groups and to campus support services. Study data sources included two in-person interviews and a study participant mapping exercise that explored study participants five-to-ten-year plans, their connection to their communities, and what they felt an ideal fitness campus space could be. This chapter discusses the findings of this study. The first section of this

chapter, theme one, addresses the racial and gendered experiences of the student participants while they attended a predominately White institution (PWI). The second section of this chapter, theme two, discusses student participant experiences on campus and within the campus fitness space. The third section of this chapter, theme three, discusses student study participants and their connection to their campus community and what positive outcomes they experienced connecting to people and physical spaces. This section also attends to the bridging and boding social capital connections that study participants established through peer support groups and campus support services and those connections framed their physical, emotional, and intellectual strength for themselves.

Theme one and theme four of this study presented a clear contradiction of each other seeing that theme one described study participant experiences on campus that were deemed negative. Participants involved in this study expressed their campus engagement stints that included the search for Black student camaraderie, elimination of barriers to gain access to campus resources, and to defy the Black stereotypes related to the way Black students spoke, carried themselves, or how they were supposed to perform in academics. Though these challenges arose for the Black women in this study, in theme four, study participants expressed that though they faced intrusive racial and gendered experiences on campus, they persisted with the support of peers, campus support services, and on their individual hard work and merit. Albeit seemingly contradictory in a first view, the four themes combined reveal the complexity of the participants' campus experiences.

Racial and Gendered Experiences on Campus

Racial and gendered experiences were found throughout study participant data. Participants expressed their connections and disconnections to campus, while discussing their perspectives on the challenges Black students encountered at a predominately White institution and what opportunities were available to Black students specifically. Campus life involvement at a university comes in all shapes, sizes, and cultural groupings. Out-of-classroom activities range from joining a club, engaging in undergraduate research, or having a student job on campus. College students voluntarily participate in out of classroom experiences to add more value to the time they are enrolled in college. Most of the students in this study made an effort to get involved in clubs and organization, or work as a student employee at their on-campus job during the spring and fall semesters. Nevertheless, they struggled to find Black student camaraderie, had challenges gaining access to campus resources, worried about their own mental health and well-being as they navigated a predominately White campus, and worked to counteract the Black woman stereotype perceptions on their campus. These topics will be examined in this section.

Campus engagement and Black student camaraderie. Campus engagement, connection to campus activities, and to other Black students was positive for some of the Black women in this study, while others struggled to gain Black college student camaraderie. Those who were involved in campus sometimes encountered activities that were uncommon to Black students or Black culture, or that were lowly attended by Black students at their campus. Black students at Frontier University were not visually present in Greek life, club sports, and academic based clubs. Whether study participants were highly involved or less involved in out-of-class activities and engagement, they

experienced racial stereotype comments from Black and non-Black peers. Some participants were even accused of being Whitewashed because of their interest in school learning, and because of how they presented themselves to their peers with proper non-slang related speech. Participants involved in this study expressed that being a Black student at Frontier they were often referred to as being Whitewashed. They were referred as this term when they were too focused on their academics or when they didn't speak in a vernacular manner that connected to slang words or a great level of expression with hand motions and loud voice tones. Bee, who was in her senior year as a public heath major, had experienced being called Whitewashed on multiple occasions. When asked why she was called Whitewashed, she replied with:

> The way you talk, oftentimes your hair. Which on a White campus, you don't gotta do your hair because they won't know the difference. But you know, when Black people see you, they're gonna know. So usually if your braids are a bit, you know, grown out, that's…bad.

Learning about Bee's experiences on campus, and her experience of being called Whitewashed she shared that she felt that her peers had tried to erase her Blackness, just by the way she talked. Peers would insinuate that because she spoke with clear speech, that she wasn't really Black. Bee's pressure to uphold a nice appearance was expressed through the upkeep of her braided hair. As shared by Bee, hair style was of importance within the Black culture, and she wanted to express her Black culture through her hair. She shared that she always made sure to keep her hair fresh and not outgrown as to not stand out negatively to her Black campus peers, and to fend off any comments from her White peers. Ayame recounted an experience of not being seen as Black enough, prior to

attending college. Based on Ayame's view, successfully fitting in at a predominately White campus was rooted in the type of personality you had, and whether you had the will and drive to get involved on campus. She explained how she had trouble connecting with people because of her shy personality.

> I think it can be a bit true [connecting with other students at Frontier University] especially it also depends on your personality. I feel like you know, I mean, growing up as, I was pretty shy when I was little. And I mean, I know they meant to jokingly, but they'd be like, are you really Black? And it's like**...**

Ayame was not sure if her family members and friends meant it jokingly when they asked her if she was really Black because she was very smart and loved to read. Past experiences of not feeling Black enough to fit into social groups resurfaced, as Ayame felt that one had to have an outgoing personality to fit into the campus and its culture. Perhaps an underlying expectation associated with her race characterized such views. Not all students attached themselves to racially culture-based clubs while at Frontier. Bee was not a regular participant of the campus Black student organization activities but couldn't imagine her campus without a structured Black student connection outside of the classroom. As Bee expressed "if there was no Black student organization on campus, I would just feel weird," even though she had no interest in joining the student club. After discussing how she didn't feel safe in all Black spaces, personally, even if it was with family members, even though she didn't attend meetings or events related to the club, she further explained the importance of the Black student club by stating, "there is importance to have like people in your community." In this case, the likeness and similarities she spoke of was to connect with other Black students. Though she hadn't

found a way to connect with more Black students outside of her small circle with her two best friends who were Black, she felt that she had enough Black students around her to help express her Blackness and to not feel alone. As such, her bonding capital seemed to be sufficient for her.

Tiana held a unique perspective on the Black student connection on campus, based on her personal experiences. She expressed how the Black student camaraderie wasn't always present and available at Frontier University to help support the Black student experience on their campus. She shared:

But it's kind of hard finding like that camaraderie amongst like Black students because they're very hard to seek out here. And when you do, it's like, it feels like you have to be friends with them because nobody's going to understand the Black experience like them. And so that's kind of hard. I feel like, but you know, I found my group. I found my people, some of them are Black. Some of them are not. I don't hang out with just exclusively Black people.

Tiana seemed to have built social capital with her Black peers outside of the student club setting. Though she felt like she was obligated to be friends with Black students on campus because they were few in numbers, she also held joy in connecting with her Black friends and non-Black peers who were not in her academic circles or within her on campus job circle, building both bonding and bridging capital. Tiana felt that she gained an increased level of social circles branching out from her Black peers at Frontier, from her connected involvement through her job on campus and through her connections at the campus fitness center. Airee had her own individualized opinions about having racial and culturally based clubs on campus. She felt that having to join special clubs like a Black

student focused group, students could be made to feel like they were a special breed or outcast on campus. She explained:

> I feel like when you're a White student going to a predominantly White campus, there's no struggles, there's no navigating. You're just in it, you just know it. But the way that some things are set up or set up where we have to jump through extra hoops, you know, we have to go out of our way to find these resources to you know, we have to see, we have to join all these special clubs and, you know, organizations because that stuff just doesn't come easy to us, you know, and we're treated like we're like a special breed.

Though Airee was hesitant to accept that there were race-specific clubs on campus, she felt that because White students were the dominant group at Frontier, that they didn't have to create or structure any special clubs. She later appreciated the opportunity to be connected to Black students in a club structured setting, which helped her gain a sense of connection to campus and to other Black peers and learned about more of the historical meaning surrounding the importance of Black student clubs on predominately White campuses. Mamba, who was involved in multiple sport-related clubs on campus, had interest in joining a sorority but refrained from doing so due to the racial make-up of most sororities on campus. She shared her desire to connect with Greek life on campus, but reverted because she felt that she would not be selected for a sorority or that she would be out of place racially and socioeconomically. She explained:

> Like I want to join a sorority, I want to be a part of a sorority, I want to be a part of something bigger, but they're all White. They're all blonde, all blonde, and even the brunette who's White, gets treated differently.

Greek life participation at Frontier University was a popular campus engagement activity that appealed to most students on campus but discouraged Mamba and some of the other Black women in this study to join one of the groups due to the White blonde representation they saw in each sorority at Frontier. Social exclusion from the predominately White women sororities was felt by study participants, which was an absence of a bridge to socially connect with White women peers in a Greek life setting. Bee also expressed a related sentiment about how she felt about the White sororities at Frontier while explaining some of the challenges that Black students had when trying to get connected to campus.

> Um, definitely, it's just like, finding people who you know, are like a safe environment. Because I feel like a lot of people especially like the freshmen, you get on campus, your first thing is like, oh, I gotta find these friends. I gotta be on these people. Like, I don't want to be alone. And so Black people join White sororities. They get all these friends, who they think are their friends, but they're really not. Like microaggressions all that.

Fitting into the social scene on campus was a challenge for most participants in this study because of negative social interactions they experienced. Bee encountered racist and ignorant peers who talked about her Black physical features such as her lips. Bee felt that some students might have thought that students felt that they just needed to get connected to something on campus to not be seen as an outcast, especially with being Black on a predominately White campus. She mentioned that she had seen Black students join non-Black fraternities and end up being the token Black person in student social groups to help validate White students' connection to diversity. Airee also had trouble fitting into

campus groups, especially after being called racial and gender slurs while walking down the main street that Frontier University was located on. On one occasion while Airee was walking down the street on the main road of campus in a Frontier pride shirt, a car riding by with White males yelled out to her and called her a faggot. Airee felt that this action was very unnecessary and uncalled for, which gave her another reason to steer clear of other White male peers and away from the main roads of campus. Bee felt that some students might have thought that if they just needed to get connected to something on campus to not be seen as an outcast, especially with being Black on a predominately White campus. Sharing their thoughts and experiences helped see that these experiences were not only isolated to them but could be seen in other Black student experiences on their campus.

Delilah who moved to off campus housing after her sophomore year, shared her experience when asked what it was like to exist as a Black woman on her campus, and if she had faced any challenges when she tried to see what campus had to offer:

Absolutely. One thousand percent. Because everyone is looking at you already like you're out of place and not only do they look at you like you're out of place they treat you like you're out of place to. You're just like I'm just trying to get a degree dude. I'm not here for a race war. I'm not here for whatever kind of microaggressions you feel you need to display at this moment like I'm just here to do the same thing you're here to do. So, it just makes it very uncomfortable. It just makes the environment uncomfortable. Like it's weird.

Delilah explained how she felt while navigating Frontier University. There was lack of support from other peers and administrators and a disconnect to campus. She, and other

study participants felt that there were challenges for Black students on campus to gain access to resources that would benefit them while being in school and possibly post-graduation.

Black student lack of access to campus resources. Student participants in this study felt that because of their racial identity that they had to work much harder to learn about, what they called, "hidden" campus resources that were afforded to their White peers. Many of the study participants did not want to be coddled when trying to gain access to campus resource information, but they wanted information to be more widespread when it came to helping support Black students specifically in all areas related to student life and academics. Feeling like she had to go out of her way to find resources, Airee felt that her university had not necessarily set her up to be successful. She explained that she explored campus to find the things she needed and how she asked questions she thought that she needed to ask. She shared information related to how she needed support from campus. She said "I needed a space where people understood that I'm in here alone. I don't have family supporting me. And I need those resources." The resources Airee spoke of included informational sessions and workshops hosted in offices relating to helping serve first-generation students and low-income students. Session topics related to financial aid, free application for federal student aid (FASFA), and money. Ayame also felt that access and participation in these types of workshops would have been helpful to her in her freshman and sophomore year at Frontier as she navigated ways to save money to have the opportunity to live on campus in the residential halls. She had been informed by a campus peer that she needed to purchase a meal plan if she lived on campus, which wasn't the case. Finding out she didn't have to keep her meal

plan being an upper-class student she shared her relief of not having to pay for an expensive meal plan so that she could save her money to pay for other school expenses. She shared, "oh, as soon as I was able to get out of the meal plan that was like the first thing I did. I was like, dude, I'm not paying." Gaining an opportunity to opt out of her campus meal plan while living in on campus housing helped Ayame save more funds to pay for other school expenses. Though dining in the campus dining commons was an on-campus option for food, Ayame was in her junior year and had found ways to feed herself on less dollars and found better food variety off campus. She utilized the campus shuttle that took students to a local store on the weekends to shop for food.

Sophia talked about her money stressors and how she had a fear of not gaining access to internships because she was a Black student on campus. She compared her experience of gaining access to job force related information to her cousin, who attended an HBCU:

And so just not having the resources on a PWI is very difficult because I feel like [at a] HBCU, I've seen my cousin go from internship to internship to making $100,000 a year or six figures a year. And I'm just like, dang, like you went to a Clerk. What resources were they giving you? They were helping you like; you know, I can see that we're helping you. And I feel like people that go to HBCUs are successful when they graduate. And I just don't know how it's gonna look we don't even I don't even know the statistics of Black people when they graduate from PWI, I don't know where they are in life.

Sophia was in fear of not gaining access to information related to internship and future career tips, even though she was a business major and connected to the Black student

club on campus. Not only did study participants stress about future career opportunities, but a few expressed challenges also when simply attending class or looking to be on and around campus. Participants from this study noted that there were challenges for them as Black students on a predominately White campus.

     Black student well-being. As stated previously, having Black representation in predominately White campus spaces was of great importance and a common theme across participants shared stories. As they joined clubs, they sought out to be the Black representatives in their classes, they also struggled with asking for help in academics and personally when they needed it. Though she was very involved on campus, Mamba shared the following when asked what a challenge had been for her at the university as she navigated her coursework, Mamba shared:

> Um, a challenging experience for me would be my mindset, because I don't like the fact that I don't, I don't like quitting things. And it's very hard for me to like quit and say hey, this is not working for me. I'm always like I'm someone who likes to make things work.

Mamba had not reached a point to where she had quit anything, but she explained that she was on the brink of failing an academic course until she found support from peers in a spoken word group called Frontier Speaks. The tools she learned in this group helped her become more vocal in classroom discussions without feeling like she would be singled out as the only Black person or only woman of color in the classroom space. Not involved in as many extracurricular activities as Mamba, transitioning to a larger environment from her high school environment, Elle explained what being at a four-year institution felt like:

To like being at Frontier it's like, nobody really knows you. Because just like, you have to find your own community within that. I have dealt with like a lot of mental health issues like and I'm still kind of dealing with it, but I feel like I've gotten better grip on it. I remember like starting a Frontier had just like so much anxiety all the time and like, it was just like, like, getting my schoolwork was relatively...okay, it really wasn't easy, but like I was still doing it. But at the same time, I was like having breakdowns every day and like really struggling to like get a grip on everything. So, I think that's probably like the biggest challenge I've had. I deal with like social anxiety too.

Asking for help academically and socially was not common for the women in this study, and especially not for Elle. With her transition from a small high school environment before attending Frontier, she was accustomed to automatic receipt of help in a classroom setting and while at school. Study participants shared that they relied on themselves or a close friend, and sometimes family to help move them forward socially or academically while they were enrolled in college. Some study participants would rather struggle through a class and fail, instead of admitting that they were failing. Ayame shared that finding her self-confidence was hard, and she went on to explain why it was hard to ask for help from others.

Um, sometimes like I still feel like I have difficulties asking for help, especially like when it comes to academics. I think with that, I think it comes to development, I know a lot of...you kind of struggle with finding yourself. And like I know not a lot of like, girls my age or main purpose is like kind of looks which is even more pervasive when it comes to the Black community. You know,

like, you know, like your looks are being compared to being masculine or

something. I don't think I ever put much faith in my looks I just put faith in my

academics. And so of course I got good grades in high school but in college like

that shift from high school to college is, so, it's like It's like someone like

backhanded you.

Like Elle, Ayame was not as prepared for the shift in academic rigor at Frontier in her

first few years. Whether it was classroom performance or just being present on campus,

Ayame struggled with receiving the help she needed to perform better academically in

her classes, along with coping with her own personal insecurities about her physical

appearance as a Black woman, and how that connected to her drive to perform in school.

Jasper expressed in her first interview that she had evolved as a student and as a thinker

as she moved further away from her freshman and sophomore years, while occupying

senior class standing at Frontier she shared:

I'm probably, not probably, the mental health aspect of certain things has

definitely caught up to me in a way that I wasn't expecting. I've always kind of

struggled with mental health for as long as I can remember, like, I, especially like

anxiety, and that eventually, like trailing into depression and whatnot. And I can

remember distinctly like my freshman year, I had a really good handle on things.

And at least I thought I did.

Not having a handle or control of her emotions and thoughts brought about frustration for

Jasper in her first two years in college. Having a few years of campus life experience

under her belt didn't lessen her anxiety and depression, but instead, gave her the ability to

recognize when these symptoms were building so that she could connect to her social networks for support.

Participants from this study bared all in terms of sharing their vulnerabilities and insecurities as they shared stories related to their experiences on campus. One thing they could not control on their campus was the opinions of their peers. It was not uncommon for these Black students to experience microaggressive behavior while enrolled and navigating campus, especially due to the campus being predominately White. Connecting the Black student experience to student well-being was a significant factor when explaining the mental state of the study participants in this study. They faced campus engagement challenges, connections made with their racially alike peers, and unsuccessful navigation to specific campus resources.

Black stereotypes and gendered experiences. Study participant narratives discussed how their campus peers perceived them as Black women on a predominately White campus. Non-Black students would stare at them with dirty looks and perceived them to be unapproachable. On frequent occasions, they felt that their non-Black student peers would say whatever they wanted to them because they were Black. Being perceived as physically and mentally strong activated a societal stereotype for these Black women as they navigated Frontier University. Participants shared that it was hard to navigate their campus space as Black women. Their peers would often ask them questions about the Black culture, give them dirty looks, and often label them as 'angry Black women.' Airee, who personally felt that she faced much more pressure than her Black peers on campus due to the intersection of her racial and gender identity. She experienced being stared at by non-Black campus peers and was often asked by peers if they could touch her

hair. She explained, "…I've gotten dirty looks around campus. I mean, there's been people who came and touched my hair. It's really weird." For Airee, and other women in this study, hair was a special part of who they were as Black women. They enjoyed the fact they could express themselves and their personality through their hairstyles but were also burdened with not having access to Black hair products in the stores and not having consistent connection to a Black beautician in Frontier.

Tiana who was well known on campus for her student leader roles, had opportunities to engage in hard conversation with some of her peers about race and how students navigate campus. She shared:

> I feel like there's this generational thing that we've learned as Black people to like, you know, kind of work around White people. And, and so coming to a predominantly White campus, you don't really know where you fit in, and what spaces are okay for you to enter.

With this experience, Tiana had settled on that it was very hard to navigate a White campus, and that one had to learn how to work around White people. For her that meant, to not get in their way, and to not let them get in hers. In her social circles and networks with non-Black students, Tiana was able to assert herself socially while staying connected to her racially mixed peer groups. Study participants went on to share instances where they were called angry or were told that they were unapproachable. Airee shared that whenever she tried to express herself in campus settings, she was called angry. She closed out her story by saying, "I'm Black and I'm proud and that's something that nobody's gonna take away from me." Elle also had a related experience of being told that she didn't seem to be approachable, after later becoming friends with a White peer

on campus. When attempting to gain more information about her experience, she explained:

> I think like, it's not really necessarily specific to campus. It's kind of just been like my experience growing up in general. But I do notice in like, day to day interactions, like a lot of people, like especially like friends that I've like made, but like, later on, they'll just be like, well, my first thought when I first met you, like, I thought you were intimidating. Like, I thought, like, you'd be really hard to approach and things like that. And I'm like, but like, what made you think this? And they can't really point to like, a specific aspect of me. And I'm like, I feel like I'm acting like how everybody normally acts and like, but it just like, seems like there's kind of that like, racial aspect that like not necessarily they develop out of like intent to like be harmful or racist, but it's just kind of like the way that they've been socialized growing up. So, I think that really like takes place here at Frontier too like, just with like the people that I meet right outside of like, outside of my race and things like that.

Elle expressed that she felt like her peers perceived her to be the socially perpetuated Black woman stereotype. This stereotype deems Black women to be intimidating, loud, and unapproachable. Being of mixed race, Elle searched to become grounded in the intersections or her own two racial identities of Asian and Black. Not knowing how much experience her White peers possessed in connecting with other students of color, she had thoughts that this group of peers maybe had not been socialized with racially diverse groups of people. When asked about some of the challenges she encountered on campus, Bee recounted another instance when people on campus made her feel uncomfortable.

She talked about how she was still getting used to the stares of her peers, but she sincerely disliked the verbal attacks. Her peers at Frontier displayed behavior that was disheartening and inappropriate at times. Bee explained:

> …but it's also just like encountering so many ignorant people is a challenge because like some people they just see Black people as like, these like strong like, I can say anything to you as I hurt your feelings. Like they say, wild comments and then they like, upset when you're like, oh, that's disrespectful. That's racist, like don't do that. So, it is hard.

Though she didn't disclose the racist language used by her peers during her interview session, Bee was clear that she did not like that her peers felt that they could say negative and racist comments to Black students. Mamba had a similar experience in one of her classes. She explained why she felt that people didn't like engaging or helping Black students on campus, and maybe why the Black men on campus didn't want to date Black women. These were her thoughts:

And it's really hard because the I guess what seems to be like the discussion last year, the Black men on campus, date the White girls in like, if you wanted to date in between, like within your race, you couldn't do that because they're no longer interested in African American females, or whatever the situation was. So, it makes everything harder. And like for me in my classes, it makes things harder too. I don't like speaking up. I don't like talking in class because I don't want to be, I don't want to make it seem like I'm the one with all of the Black perspective, because that's not true. I barely have a perspective compared to all these other people around.

Mamba expressed her experience as a Black woman at Frontier in multiple settings. On one hand she wanted the attention as a Black woman to have had an opportunity to date a Black male peer. On the other hand she wanted to not be singled out in class to give the Black perspective as a Black woman. Mamba wanted to navigate her Blackness and identity and use it as a tool to help her gain access to the things she wanted to feel fulfilled as she navigated campus, like finding a guy to date that was of the same race. Mamba had built some form of social capital but was still seeking social acceptance in some instances. The various factors related to challenges for these Black college women student participants on a predominately White campus were shown through challenges to get connected and engaged to campus by learning to hurdle and maneuver over obstacles to gain access to hidden resources. Many of these obstacles reflected the important role of race and racism in campus relations. Black student well-being and Black student camaraderie were tested by verbal and physical actions of non-Black peers while, working to tear away from the societal construct of presenting as an angry Black woman on their university campus. Similar racial and gendered student experiences were found in the fitness space of the study participant's campus too.

Racialized and Gendered Experiences in Fitness

Fitness participation by study participants induced unique interactions with peers, encouraged them to assert themselves as a racial representation in the campus fitness space by engaging in new activities, navigating the campus fitness landscape facing challenges with their bodies, keeping up with fitness attire trends, and confronting fitness intimidation in a White male dominated space. Examining the campus fitness experiences

of the Black college women in in this study displayed a variation of what desires they had to participate in campus fitness programs and what they hesitated to participate in within campus fitness programs at Frontier. Being one of the lower percentage student groups on campus, it was not uncommon for the women in this study not to see anyone who looked like them in campus fitness while also being familiar to racialized and gendered experiences while participating.

Gender, race, and fitness. Many of the study participants engaged in group fitness classes and individual fitness during their semesters. With both participation components being included with the student membership use fee at their campus fitness center, there were multiple occasions where hesitation to sign up for fitness classes was a challenge. It was not only because class registrations would fill up quickly, but also because class participants and instructors often had no racial resemblance or cultural similarities of theirs. Tiana who frequented the campus fitness center weekly, explained her challenges with registering for a Pilates class:

> And I tried so many times to get into that class. And it's always sold out every
> single time. I mean, not sold out, but you know, booked up. I'm like, I'm not
> trying to go at 6:30 in the morning. But like the times that are available for me are
> you know, most convenient, man, they're booked up and even in the morning,
> they're booked up, which I'm just like, man. At first, I was like Pilates, like that's
> just like the stuff that you saw, like in the movies that like rich White people did.
> And…more specifically like rich White women. They're like hey, I'm going go to
> my Pilates class. And I'm just like, you know what, let me try it. And its life
> changing…

Frontier drop-in fitness classes were offered to students in a manner of voluntary participation. They could opt in or opt out of taking a fitness class and could sign up for them through the campus fitness center online portal. Classes like Pilates, Yoga, and other fitness class disciplines that focus on relaxation and stretching techniques, were uncharted territory experiences for the women in this study. Most of the women in this study shared that they had participated in team sports in their youth and during high school. They had not had exposure to an environment like the fitness center space at Frontier where there was access to weightlifting, weight assisted machines, and other equipment. Though Tiana's experience in Pilates was life changing after attending a few classes she talked about how she reverted back to her fitness comfort space where she liked to engage in heavy weightlifting. Alanah, who preferred to keep to herself when participating in fitness shared instances with her experience in a Pilates class and in a mobility stretching class that she participated in. Although there were repeated experiences in the Pilates class for Alanah, she expressed not connecting with anyone in either of the classes she attended. However, she did learn techniques for breathing to help her when she was stressed and allowed her to use those same techniques when she lifted weights. The time that Alanah attended a mobility class it happened to be a class session where there were a smaller group of people. The smaller group fitness class still presented no engagement with a college peer. Alanah explained her experience in the class below:

> I was, like, trying to venture out and trying to see like, oh, maybe. But I'll be
> honest, those classes had a lot of older people. And that was not something that I
> was used to. So, I didn't end up getting a lot of connections from them because it

was a lot of older White women in this Pilates classes. And then…one mobility

class, it was only me and one other student…he didn't speak to me the entire time.

So, I didn't want to speak to him.

As study participants shared more about their experiences in the campus fitness center

space, it was clear that they had different levels of experience and confidence pertaining

to their involvement in campus fitness programs. Alanah experienced an instance of

being in a fitness class with one other peer, and that there was a lack of social connection

due to her having more comfort connecting with women, women or color, or Black

people. The peer she held class space with was a White male. While Alanah couldn't gain

a connection with another peer, Elle also shared her experience in campus fitness. She

stated that "…having a lack of guidance," was the true reason why she didn't visit the

campus fitness center. She also conferred during her first interview session that:

I don't know, none of my friends really like go to the gym consistently either. So,

it was like kind of hard to find someone that [I] could like…I could go…and have

someone support me.

Hesitation to not step foot in the campus fitness center was a trend for most of the study

participants, and especially for Elle. It was revealed that study participants either needed

more guidance, support, or to be left alone to choose their own activities. When asked

what encouraged her to physically move and engage in physical activity and exercise,

Mamba shared:

You know, I would rather do swim than run any day. I would rather do laps and

be out of breath underwater than on land and just having shin splints and out of

breath and wheezing and looking five shades darker. Like none of that, none of that sounds appealing to me.

Mamba, who participated in multiple club sport groups on campus, had different experiences than Ayame. Though she participated in team sports that took place primarily outside, she would have rather participated in indoor fitness related activities. Not having an opportunity to engage in much outdoor activities growing up, Ayame enjoyed being outside, but hadn't had the chance to experience being in the outdoors to engage in related activities prior to attending college. Ayame explained, "um, well, personally, I love the outdoors and no one in my family does." She also shared her sentiments of why she may not have had the drive of others to jump into activities related to fitness on campus or to being active on a consistent basis. She shared:

Like, I kind of realized that there's really no talk about fitness in the Black community. Like, usually if we talk about anything, it's about food. Thanksgiving, you know. We don't really talk about obesity rates or anything like that. And my grandma, she had diabetes and my mom, she's pre diabetic. She got diagnosed pretty recently. And so, but I was like, you know, I never really heard of like you know a Black girl going to the gym.

Ayame's precollege experiences with outdoor activities and fitness were influenced by a nonexistent structure in her family setting. It wasn't until she attended Frontier University that she saw Black women who looked like her engaging in fitness. Many of the study participants expressed their hesitation to engage in the campus fitness space after joining their institution as enrolled students. Alanah recalled a time in the campus fitness center locker room where she realized the lack of receptiveness and racial disconnect between

Black women and White women within campus spaces was due to major differences in

racial thought processes and societal structured perspectives on women. She highlighted:

> And then it's also hard to make friends here because of the demographic. And
>
> that's definitely been like a challenge for me because, like when I used to go to the
>
> gym on campus, I would get ready in the locker room. And like their
>
> conversations just were not like…I would hear their conversations, I would be
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> like, I just didn't understand them. I didn't understand like, why they would just
>
> talk…or like or even the things that they would talk about. They just didn't make
>
> sense to me. And you know, like when you're used to being around a certain
>
> group of people. Like I'm a Black woman, used to being around Black women or
>
> colored women, or some minority. There's a stigma of White women. They have
>
> like, an entitlement to them. That we just don't get. Like the problems that come
>
> to me are so fixable to me. But you're wanting me to fix them. And I don't know.
>
> So maybe it's just how I think of White women...

The demographic and racial composition of students at Frontier was lopsided in terms of

the Black and White student populations. Alanah had previously expressed how she

didn't have much success connecting with her peers on campus, and how she made the

effort to connect in the fitness space but failed. She said that she felt that White women

were treated differently than Black women in multiple settings, including college

campuses. Some of Alanah's perceptions of White women may have come from her

negative roommate experiences in her freshman and sophomore years at Frontier. Her

White female roommates targeted her and tormented her so that she would move out.

When explaining that experience, Alanah felt that she could not react how she wanted to in the situation because she was Black, and they were White.

Participant experiences in fitness ranged from nervousness, having, or not having an accountability partner, and unfamiliarity with working out at a college fitness center. It also seemingly felt that representation of Black people in the campus fitness space was not only pertinent to feel some connectedness to other peers, but to also reverberate the importance of healthy behaviors for those who are a part of the Black community on campus. The Black women in this study wanted to not only see more gendered representation, but racial representation in their campus fitness space too. Wanting to see more Black people in the campus fitness space connected them to the assurance that working out was a positive activity. To participate and see Black students participate in fitness and sports outside of intercollegiate sports fostered opportunities for Black students to connect to campus through fitness, which was expressed by study participants as something of unique character.

When discussing Black culture and its connection to fitness, not all students represented in this study expressed their familial experiences with being active in physical activity or not, but a few did. Ayame articulated that she had, "…never heard [of] my family ever working out, like at all." Sophia shared her experience of seeing Black students in the fitness space, "I just didn't see anybody that like, even if it's just a person of color, I'll talk you know… if I actually want to talk to somebody, yes. But there is this one other Black girl in there." Not prompted to share family health and physical activity history in her interview sessions, Tiana expressed extreme passion when

explaining why she worked out at the campus fitness space while she was enrolled in college, she articulated:

> So, I take my gym time and fitness very seriously. Especially because my family already has a predisposition to being big people, [and] overly overweight. Like my mom's dad…he died when he was 36 from a stroke because he was so obese and also didn't have good eating habits. [He] never exercised or anything like that. And so, my mom she's like traumatized that we're going to go down the same path. And so ever since I was a kid, I had been in some type of sport and just to make sure that I was always active as I got older.

A few study participants shared that they wanted to see more students that looked like them racially when working out, and when asked why, Sophia shared her take on the Black community stressors related to health practices and known disparities within her represented community:

> Just because I know in the Black community…we have, we are prone to chronic diseases; you know? So, I'm just happy to see that we all been trying to get fit, you know, and especially now some gyms becoming a trend, everyone wants to look good and just like we need more Black representation because I'm starting to see these gym gurus and they look nothing like my body type.

Sophia shared her knowledge of health disparities that plagued racially marginalized communities in the nation, but also in her hometown where Frontier University was located. She explained that fitness was trending nationally, and that she hoped that more Black people and their communities would continue to engage in fitness related activities.

Racialized experiences for the participants in this study directly connected to fitness participation type and a representation of race in the fitness space. Based on participant data, gendered experiences in fitness were fairly like racialized experiences. What differed in gendered experiences for study participants, was, experiences of discomfort related to body size and body type, what type of fitness clothing was appropriate to wear to the gym, being intimidated to enter the campus fitness space, and experiencing unwanted sexualized attention from males at the fitness center.

Body type comparison and fitness clothing. On multiple occasions, Airee mentioned that she hadn't had positive experiences at her campus fitness center. She explained that she often stayed to herself while participating, and she felt she had to do so because of her size and not so much because of her racial background. She emotionally expressed:

> Existing while fat in fitness. That. Like I don't I don't face backlash because I'm gay in here. I don't think [I] face backlash because I'm Black. I don't face backlash because of anything else other than the fact that I'm fat in a fitness center. It's like, you come here to get fit. But if you're not already fit when you come in here, you're not supposed to be here.

While Airee wanted to be respected for her larger size in the campus fitness space by her peers, Ayame had the opposite challenge with her body size and type. She shared that she wanted to gain more size as opposed to being smaller to conform to the societal standards of women in college fitness spaces. She said:

> …I want to bulk up my arms. My arms are so damn scrawny. And I really want to like you know, get into lifting weights and stuff. And so, but I'm like, so nervous

of going out onto the floor where everyone's powerlifting. But I feel like once I kind of gather up the courage, I really want to start going to the gym more often this semester.

The floor where students traditionally lifted the heavier weights was the first floor of the campus fitness center. Some study participants from this study expressed their own likes and dislikes of their bodies when answering interview questions related to their own individual experiences in campus fitness. While a few participants exuded confidence in their own skin, more of the group was in comparison mode with other women in the space, and the comparison was typically with White women. Sophia shared components of a conversation she had with a Black male friend she was working out with at the campus fitness center, she shared what they discussed.

I'm just like, why can I like get that? He was like, um, you have to understand girl, you're Black. You're gonna have a very different structure from them. Like you notice all of them are White, like, you know. And…like you have hips and like the butt. But you're not gonna, your upper body is gonna be more muscular. You're gonna have more [of] a wider torso. You're not going to have that skinny itty-bitty waist, but you're gonna have a wider torso because girl like your people came from Africa.

Study participants relationship with physical activity grew as they got older on campus. Black women bodies are often criticized in the media, and evidently in college campus fitness spaces. During Sophia's first interview session, she reflected heavily on her cultural make up as a Black mixed woman and realized that some of her body fitness goals were realistic, while other fitness body goals may never be obtained. In the

interaction with her Black male friend, intersections of race and gender prevail, reproducing an expected image of Black women. One must wonder what underlined the stereotypical depiction of Black women, who as all others, represent different body types. In a different interview, Mamba shared an experience she had with other college women as they prepared for a military related drill and physical testing. Though she was the only Black woman in the group, she felt that the group she had connected to were fighting against body dysmorphia, Mamba commented on her difficulties to drop weight to get a passing evaluation for the testing she had to complete. She shared:

> And so, all my other friends were fasting, and they were losing weight like crazy. They got down to their weight and they were going to their Military Processing Stations (MEPS) and everything and I'm still over here doing cardio. And it was very encouraging to me when I saw like all these other women fighting with the same things that I was fighting with because I didn't see anything wrong with the way I looked. I didn't see anything. I didn't think I was overweight.

Study participants vented that keeping up with current fitness trends was a challenge. Students that visited the Frontier campus fitness center wore high-end fitness attire, expensive fitness shoes and sneakers, and some of them appeared to be fitness influencers that liked to film their workouts, based on participants' descriptions. A few of the study participants felt targeted because of their gender and appearance, many times connected to finances, while visiting their campus fitness center. Airee shared some of her feelings about being perceived as overweight in the fitness center on campus and about how she dressed when she went to work out.

I wear you know, a tank top, a sports bra. You know my sweater my shoes. While

you know you have the other smaller girls were wearing you know, sports bras,

you know, really tight yoga pants and like really cute outfits and stuff. There is no

place that caters to my size when it comes to that kind of stuff. And even then, I'm

not comfortable but if I did wear that stuff. Oh, I'm gonna be treated even more

like a spectacle. So, it's just like, it just gives me the ick. I hate coming in here.

Negative body size expressiveness and negative peer interactions were echoed throughout

many of the study participant narratives during their first interview sessions.

Experiencing negative feelings of peer disconnection elevated study participant

disconnection not only to non-Black peers, but also to campus. Some study participants

were unhappy with their body structures and how they felt and looked in their selected

attire was not appropriate enough for the campus fitness center environment. These

thoughts added to the feeling of intimidation when working out on the first floor or the

facility, which was known and seen as a predominately White male space.

Fitness Intimidation and unwanted male attention. Fitness intimidation often

shows up in college campus fitness spaces due to the imbalance of gender enrollment at

most higher education institutions. Though the average number of college women

enrolling in higher education continues to grow, their male counterparts often dominate

the use of collegiate campus fitness and recreation landscapes. Considering the

involvement in fitness and recreation, the participants of this study had intersecting racial

and gendered identities that placed them in a position to be more noticeable, which they

perceived was the case when occupying fitness space with their predominately White and

male peers. Elle had plans to never set foot inside the campus fitness when she arrived on

campus, she shared that "… it was like, it felt like it was easy to, but I didn't necessarily feel comfortable going." Bee also felt intimidation while occupying the fitness space on the first floor**:** "I was really scared and hesitant when I first went. It was intimidating. Especially the first floor you will ever catch me on the first floor. And I found out was a common thing." Bee didn't like working out on the first floor of the campus fitness center due to her male peers heavily occupying the space, and hearing from other peers that it was an intimidating space to be in if you didn't know exactly what you were doing. Working out alone or with her already established friend groups was when she felt comfortable at the campus fitness center. Also feeling uncomfortable at the Frontier fitness center. Airee still felt fat in the campus fitness space, and on many visits to the campus fitness space, she refused to work out on the first floor of the fitness center at Frontier.

> Being fat in like, a fitness environment is the worst thing I've ever experienced. I would much rather be called a slur then join any of the classes, join any of the clubs, anything associated with fitness, and that's coming from the deepest depths of my uterus.

Stigmas surrounding being a gym goer was of heavy conversation during participant interviews. Airee did not find comfort in a campus space that she felt that she was supposed to visit, due to her heavier body size. Though the campus fitness center was one of Tiana's favorite places to go, she felt strongly about what the perception was of her peers when going to work out on campus. She shared her thoughts and feelings related to the campus buzz of the fitness center being an intimidating place.

> …I feel like there's this stigma when you go to the gym. You should already
>
> know what you're doing. And that like, and you see like, you see all the big beefy
>
> dudes on the first floor. And you're just like, and they're over here pumping iron
>
> and like into it. And you're just like, oh my gosh, first of all as a woman that is
>
> intimidating.

Tiana overcame her fear of being present and engaging in fitness on campus. Though she did not have a workout buddy, or a structured workout routine when she started working out at her campus fitness center, when she began to lift weights, she gained more confidence in the fitness space. Nevertheless, this reality did not negate the challenges that she faced initially.

Escaping away from the first floor of the fitness center was a common practice for the participants in this study. Not being felt as an affirming space which they could thrive in, there were times when participants would flee the first level to occupy other levels of the facility to have more confidence in their selected activity or physical activity engagement. Mamba explained why she would use the third floor of the facility instead of the first, "I went to the third floor a lot because I was so intimidated by the first floor, and I played a lot of basketball." When sharing social experiences in fitness during interview sessions, Amy shared an experience that was connected to her fear and intimidation of entering the campus fitness space. Although she had the assistance of a friend, she still had her reservations about being in the space physically. Ayame shared:

> One social experience. I feel like just my friend kind of, you know, my roommate
>
> offering was really the start of it. Because beforehand, it was I was already aware

that I was paying for the gym, but I was pretty much prepared to never step foot in there.

Ayame had her own individual battles with finding her place at the fitness center as a Black woman on campus, and because she felt scrawny and not strong enough to workout at the campus fitness center. While unwanted attention from males in the campus fitness center space was a common theme for other study participants. Male students seemed to think that cat calling or shooting their shot was a suitable way to try and seek the interest of women at the campus fitness center. If it wasn't the study participants themselves sharing their own stories related to being rudely interrupted during a fitness session, it was them overhearing conversations in the women's locker room about experiences related to being hit on at the gym. Tiana shared a major reason of why her male peers made her feel uncomfortable in the fitness center space, "I probably say like when the guys are staring like that is so uncomfortable. I hate that." She also shared….

> I've had some experiences in the gym where I'm just trying to grind and some guy is kind of trying [to] talk, I don't want to talk to you, bro. I just want to focus on my workout. And I know that's a kind of a problem that a lot of women have when they're just trying to work out and they're just like, man, I just want to do what I need to do, and just not be bothered.

Working out without being objectified by male peers was something that Tiana hoped would shift as she gained more confidence working out on the first level of the campus fitness center. She wanted to be in a space to conduct the kind of fitness that she chose to engage in. In this case, weightlifting took place on the first level of the Frontier campus fitness center. Racial and gendered experiences in the campus fitness spaces reigned

multiple challenges for the study participants in this study. Whether it was figuring out what type of fitness participation was best and less intimidating or finding a place in campus fitness spaces with unfamiliar activities and people, working away from negative experiences was the goal. Student engagement opportunities for Black college women enrolled at predominately White institutions must be catered to in a manner to where racial and gendered specific experiences are minimized to help relieve the detriment of the Black student experience on campus and within programs of student engagement. Though the Black women in this study faced challenges with campus engagement, finding resources on their own, and faced racial and gendered stereotypes, they also found a connection to the campus community, peer support, and campus support services to aid them during their time in college.

Connection to Campus and Community

The women involved in this study were readily engaged in campus club and organizations, campus employment, and community volunteer opportunities. They connected themselves to campus resources, people, and established their social networks. Through engaging in club and organization leadership roles, gaining workforce experience, and participating in volunteer work, these study participants activated both bonding and bridging social capital experiences that supported their mobilization as Black college women who navigated a predominately White institution (PWI). At Frontier University, study participants found campus counter spaces in which they utilized facilities and programs, while also taking ownership of unclaimed peer gathering spaces on campus. Most of their campus connections and mobility occurred at Frontier University's campus student union, which was centrally located in the hub of campus.

This facility provided campus goers with places to dine for daily meals along with direct access to student engagement related program offices and staff. Physical counter spaces, a tenant of critical race theory, identifies these spaces as essential to Black college students. These spaces can be culturally affirming or not, depending on the university racial climate and setting. The Black college women in this study took up space where they could affirm their own and new diverse experiences with peers, on-campus jobs, and campus support services.

Bonding and bridging social capital characterized study participant lived experiences, their social networks, and their social capital mobilization around campus and in their communities. As it has been mentioned, the role and significance of various capitals are often framed as a key factor when exploring theory and best practices when evaluating students in higher education environments. Bonding social capital was experienced by study participants through Black student cultural club participation, women of color student collective gatherings, rooming with other women of color in the campus residential dormitories, and conducting intentional hangouts with students who identified as first-generation. Bonding social capital experiences and outcomes consistently aligned with the racial, gender, and social class identities of the participants in this study. Campus support services mentioned in this study offered support to students involved in this study by connecting directly to their racial and social class identities. Students referenced the Black student cultural engagement not only as peer support bonding, but also as a campus service to connect them to resources. The Black women in this study were clear about the benefits associated with their bonding social capital

experiences that connected them to their campus multicultural center, the first-generation center, and to campus administrators who were women of color.

Bridging social capital experiences were also foundationally engrained in study participants connection to their peer support groups and the campus support services they had access to. Peer support was experienced through peer groups in academic based clubs, completed volunteer hours at off campus approved sites, successfully being hired by an on-campus department, and engagement with campus Greek Life. Though there were initial weak ties and thin trust to these bridging social capital experiences, the social relationships were built on the exchange of shared interest and the opportunity to create relationships beyond their already established social circles.

The presented table provides an overview of study participant depictions of bonding and bridging social capital experiences that study participants experienced while being enrolled at Frontier University. This table is being included to contribute to the study's research question and the findings associated with social capital and connection to the students in this study, social networks. As found in the review of literature related to the social integration of Black students in higher education, Bourdieu's theory of social capital, a student's social class can determine their connection to various capital's that are needed to survive in a college environment.

Table 2

Overview of Bonding Social Capital and Bridging Social Capital

Bonding Social Capital		Bridging Social Capital	
Peer Support	**Campus Support Services**	**Peer Support**	**Campus Support Services**
"I think a positive experience has been actually finding the Black people on campus. Like I've joined BSO later in the year, so I haven't had too much experience but just being there I've met so many different people." **(Airee, Sophomore)**	"For the Multicultural Center? I think that it was more I needed a job. Yeah. And so, as I like worked there, I kind of like got to talk with the staff and like the employees and stuff and then it kind of just became a comfortable space. And then like I realized that they were people that I could like depend on to like talk to and like give me good advice and like, you know, just good people to be around." **(Bee, Senior)**	"It was called Veta Alpha Phi. It's like VAP for short. But yeah, I joined my first accounting club and it's a really small community, but it's really nice. And one thing that I really like about accounting and its club is that everyone's super transparent…" **(Ayame, Junior)**	"Oh, that was the Minority Association for premedical students. Yeah. Like they were just a group of, you could be LGBTQ. You could be anything. They were even accepting people that weren't minorities. But it was just when I was on that pre-med route since the pandemic that all change so." **(Alanah, Senior)**
"…so when I finally requested to move rooms, I was roomed with, you know, girls who are especially quiet like me, but they're both not, but they were. One was Chinese and the other was Japanese." **(Ayame, Junior)**	"Um, my first year I did feel really connected. I was at the multicultural center almost every week. They did Hispanic heritage month. They've done, I want to say Native American culture. I know that they went to the to the building inside of the student union there's like an auditorium there.... and that was pretty amazing because I've never met like a Native American person." **(Mamba, Junior)**	"I find it very interesting that the groups I'm leaded to our predominantly White sport club team, I was the only Black person on team. Martial arts, I was the only Black person there. I'm the only Black person in all of my criminal justice classes." **(Mamba, Junior)**	"So, when I started working at the student union, I feel like it helped me kind of come out of my shell a little bit and like sort of develop like better social skills and like handling like social situations a lot better. I think that was like probably the biggest challenge I've had just like mental health issues and stuff like that." **(Elle, Senior)**
"A lot of my friends are low income, but I feel like maybe that's just like a[n] all around the board type of thing. But they're all low income.	"Um, it's pretty much just like, like a hangout space. They provide free printing. They have like computers. Sometimes they host	"Yeah, I got hired there. It's very customer service oriented, but also very like task oriented and goal oriented which I'm all	"…I do really just work. So whatever outreach programs they have me do…any of the events that Frontier Scholars of Tomorrow

I would say a lot of my friends are People of Color. I guess majority of them [are] Black. Yeah." **(Bee, Senior)**	little events and workshops and stuff in there. In fact, right after my mom passed and I was struggling to figure out how to do FAFSA." **(Airee, Sophomore)**	about. Yeah, so he was like, we really, you know, I think you'd be really good fit there. So, another connection from an unexpected connection." **(Jasper, Senior)**	have me do because they've helped me out so much. I want to help them out too. But other than that, no, I don't have any like, like clubs, organizations." **(Alanah, Senior)**

Peer support and bonding social capital. Peer support varies for students enrolled at colleges and universities. In the case of this study, students were supported by their peers through various types of campus involvement and connections. The Black student organization (BSO) served as a student led group that helped students express their Blackness, while peer friend support groups came about from roommate experiences, or by taking academic classes. There were also cases in which participants connected with their peers because they were all low-income students enrolled in college. Study participants' exclusive identities produced unique experiences of bonding with their peers. Bonding social capital presents itself with strong ties to common and frequently socialized groups of people. Connecting to those who had similar demographics and who they had established trust with, the participants from this study had similar and unique bonding capital experiences. The Black student organization (BSO) had not been a positive experience for Alanah and Tiana, but it was for Airee, Sophia, and Delilah. BSO provided help and support to Black students and to their experiences navigating a White campus. The organization met weekly to create a no judgement space for Black students and the club officers and members offered support for each other through one-on-one and group discussions. Sophia recalled how she connected to the Black student organization after she attended one of the campus annual club fairs open to all enrolled students.

…I went to the BSO table, and they were just very welcoming. And I was just

like, this is where I want to go, you know, and then I ended up going to the

meeting and it was just like people on campus. I was just like, there's more of us.

So, it was just very exciting and then being able to talk to more people and get…I

wouldn't say like very, very close, but getting to know more people it was a good

experience.

Club fairs held on campus served as a time to allow new and continuing students to learn

about what clubs they could get involved in while enrolled as a student. The BSO table

presented at the club fair provided information about where meetings took place on

campus, how often the club met, and how to get involved within the club. Seeing more

Black people in one space, and at one time allowed Sophia to gain a sense of connection

to her peers and to talk with more Black students about how to make sense of their

different experiences on campus. Possessing a similar demographic factor of racial and

ethnic similarities, the Black student connection was reinforced for her. Airee also had a

positive experience when connecting with the student led club, BSO. She held excitement

to also find more Black people on campus to connect with outside of her classes. She

shared:

I think a positive experience has been actually finding the Black people on

campus. Like I've joined BSO later in the year, so I haven't had too much

experience but just being there I've met so many different people. Obviously, just

like anybody, you know, you click with some people you don't click with others,

but most of them are really supportive. A lot of them you know, have supported

me on my makeup journey. A lot of people you know [I] actually talked to, I

invited a couple to my birthday.

Airee joined BSO later in the year because she had challenges connecting with her peers

when first arriving to Frontier University. She had challenges connecting due to being

from a city that was not near Frontier, and not having any experiences of sharing a room

with a stranger living in campus housing. Struggling with her own racial and gender

identity, positioned her to stay to herself and be an active participant in campus clubs or

events until she found BSO.

Most participants from this study were more focused on the overall Black student

connection, while some participants had a desire to connect more with Black women.

When asked what a positive experience at Frontier University had been, Delilah shared

that being a part of BSO was positive because of the people she had met. She went on to

further explain how she set out to be more connected to her Black woman peers on

campus.

…I actually did not take a liking to BSO until like, I'm gonna say 2020…under

Breon's (pseudonym) presidency, because I just met Breon. Yeah, and that's when

I met Jessica (pseudonym) the former president. And I was just starting to meet

all these Black women. And I was like, oh, wow. This is cool. Because I was not

around Black women as much like my first semester of college.

Delilah explained how she didn't quite like BSO at first but began to when she knew

more of the women and students involved. She expressed in her interview sessions of

how she was often the only Black girl or person in her friend groups her freshman year. It

wasn't until later in her time on campus that she was able connect with Black students, and more specifically, Black women.

Along with BSO, additional club participation opportunities were available on campus to study participants. Clubs on campus had been formed to support students of color, and in some instances, clubs only for women were formed. The women of color collective was a club that Black women could join. This club met twice a month and held space in person and virtual space for women of color to discuss their experiences related to being stereotyped, being the only person of color in classes, and how to successfully navigate White spaces on campus. Airee conveyed that BSO fulfilled her connection with Black people, while the WoCC fulfilled her gender identity needs. She explained how the group helped her during a hard time.

> …going to the women of color collective that was actually really good because I was going through such a rough time, and just having that space where I didn't feel judged and everybody accepted all my chaos. That was really nice. So, my experience here hasn't been all around negative.

The negative experiences shared by Airee in which she felt judged included instances where peers would ask her questions about her Blackness, her hair, and when she was called angry. She recalled being called angry anytime that she spoke loudly or had opinions about topics related to race, campus happenings, or gender. Even though she experienced unpleasant situations, she still found a way to bond with others through racial and gender structured groups on campus.

Study participants connected with their peers through selected friend groups and through on and off campus roommate experiences, which did not always start off

pleasantly. Ayame had an experience with two roommates who were in a sorority on campus. The two roommates were White women, and they were very mean to her, as she explained in her first interview session. She later requested to be moved out of her room and into another dormitory space and it was approved. In her new room she no longer had White roommates and was placed in a space with two other women of color.

> …so when I finally requested to move rooms, I was roomed with, you know, girls who are especially quiet like me, but they're both not, but they were. One was Chinese and the other was Japanese. And one of my roommates, she was like, you know look, go to the gym with me. You know, she was like, I don't like...I hate going by myself. I just feel like you would like to go to the gym.

Having two women of color roommates who had similar personalities and mannerisms as her, created a healthy and non-confrontational space for Ayame as she found comfort with living on campus. Her two roommates also inspired her to go to the campus fitness center to workout, which supported Ayame's plans of wanting to be more active in physical activity to help her have less scrawny arms. Not only did Ayame make a strong peer connection, but Alanah did also. When asked what a positive experience was being enrolled at Frontier University, Alanah shared that having a new roommate after moving out from off campus student housing, and into another apartment off campus, was a memorable experience. She shared what she gained from her new roommate, along with an unplanned connection with a peer.

> So that's definitely been a positive experience because it wasn't something I planned for it. It was actually against my plan, and she's my best friend. So that's

certainly been a positive experience is like finding somebody who's literally going through the same program with you and understanding every step of the struggle. Connecting with a roommate was against Alanah's plan because she wanted to be alone. As she shared in both of her interview sessions, her focus was to just go to class and work as she always did, and to not engage with her peers. Having a similar major as her roommate helped Alanah in her coursework. She knew what classes to take, and she gained a better understanding of the paths she could take career wise. This experience tremendously helped her as a student, and she gained a friend out of it. In Alanah and Ayame's case, roommate connections led to strong bonds of friendships, that presented as bonded social capital due to these women networking inside of racially matching groups. Alanah's roommate was another woman of color who was in the same academic major as her, and Ayame's roommates were women who had a quiet personality like her. Both connections presented a sense of homogeneity.

Friend groups provided study participants connection to other peers, resources, and their social networks. The semi-structured interview questions presented to the participants of this study encouraged them to share details about their social networks and the identities of the people connected to them. The identities that surfaced from participant explanations were race, gender, and social class status. Bee explained why she connected so closely with one of her peer circles, in which she expressed it was partly because of their social class status.

A lot of my friends are low income, but I feel like maybe that's just like a[n] all around the board type of thing. But they're all low income. I would say a lot of my friends are People of Color. I guess majority of them [are] Black. Yeah.

Bee and other study participants often connected with other students who were like them, or who shared similar intersecting identities with them. Study participants identified as Black and low income without any covertness. While Bee shared her connection to other low-income peers, Elle shared an experience when connecting to others who shared her mixed racial identity. She explained:

> Um, yeah, I feel like I've started to like, form connections with a lot of people. That are like more closely in my like, within my social identity. In my sociology class last year, I remember meeting this girl she's, I think she's mixed. She's half Black, half White.

In Elle's effort to get out of her comfort zone, she formed more connections with her built confidence because of her role at her on campus job. Working as a student leader, in which she led, supported, and assisted in some of the disciplinary tasks with student workers, that experience contributed to her connection with a peer in her sociology class that was also of mixed race. This action of peer connection was uncharted territory for Elle due to her shy personality and not wanting to approach people to make a connection in the past. Peer connections can sometimes have negative outcomes, which do not allow individuals to step outside of their comfort zone to unfamiliar social groups and networks. Nevertheless, they can also have positive outcomes as expressed by the study participant experiences which were positive when engaging in Black and racially gendered clubs, when they connected with their roommates, and when they leaned on friends for support in all areas of their life and to help support any intersecting identities they possessed.

Campus student services and bonding social capital. Campus services for study participants expanded far and beyond on campus. For this group of Black college women, who identified as first-generation and low income, there were a few physical counter spaces on campus that helped serve them. Campus counter spaces have been known to help Black students make sense of their experiences on campus to support some of their validation. Two spaces that frequently served students in this study as they navigated services to help them financially, academically, and mentally were the First-Generation Center and the Multicultural Center. Both centers were located in high trafficked buildings on campus. Both facilities were centrally located near areas where students would socially connect, learn, dine, and where some resided for on campus living.

The first-generation (FG) student service on campus first served as an academic space, and second as a social space for students. The campus multicultural center (MC) was a physical space on campus that was staffed and structured to support students representing communities such as Asian Pacific Islander, Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and LGBTQIA+, and each identifying group had a designated staff coordinator. In both campus spaces you would find couches, computer stations, big gathering tables, offices of staffed coordinators, directors, and administrative support staff. The designated offices structured to serve first-generation and multicultural students, planned programs related to the department's mission and goals, to the students identified within their programs, along with educational programs for the campus community.

Study participants shared that the MC was conveniently located in a spot where they could frequent multiple times throughout the day. Visits to the space would be for

social connections or to get some homework done. Along with these physical spaces serving as inspirational spaces for study participants, this space helped most of the students find a connection to campus. A stronger level of comfort was gained by Airee as she positioned herself to get connected to more services that Frontier University had to offer. She explained one of the major reasons that she hung around the first-generation student service offices.

> Um, it's pretty much just like, like a hangout space. They provide free printing.
> They have like computers. Sometimes they host little events and workshops and
> stuff in there. In fact, right after my mom passed and I was struggling to figure out
> how to do FAFSA.

The majority of the participants in this study expressed the need for comfortable and safe spaces that provided access to campus resources and information. Along with wanting early access to important information, like financial aid information sought out by Ariee, these Black women wanted to be where there was positive racial climate and a culturally affirmed space, to experience bonded social capital. Seeking that same frame of cultural support and comfort, Bee sought to find an on-campus job. The multicultural center not only produced cultural programs and showcases for the campus community, but also provided jobs for students on campus. Bee shared her journey of when she was looking for a job on campus. She explained that she wanted to work in a department where there were similar racial and gender connections with other people. She was able to find what she desired in that student job, and it ended up being more fulfilling that expected.

> For the Multicultural Center? I think that it was more I needed a job. And then I
> got a job there. And then as I worked there, I met my best friend there, Lori. So,

we both the hired there at the same time. We got hired our freshmen year. I think

freshman year, second semester. Yeah. And so, as I like worked there, I kind of

like got to talk with the staff and like the employees and stuff and then it kind of

just became a comfortable space. And then like I realized that they were people

that I could like depend on to like talk to and like give me good advice and like,

you know, just good people to be around.

Bee's early year experiences on campus helped her develop a lack of trust towards others,

because people that she had relied on to help her socially or emotionally, were not there

when she needed them. She mentioned that it took her a few years to realize that some of

her friendships needed to end and then she weeded out the negative people, and moved

forward with those that she could trust. Her newfound confidence catapulted her desire to

connect to other campus services and resources that ended up helping her. When asked

how she connected to TRiO at Frontier University, Bee shared that it was a first-

generation student service that she had heard about from a counselor on campus, who

worked out of the TRiO office.

TRiO scholars I was more so like this is a good opportunity to you know, have

like that on my like under my belt and also, I do [need] some help being first gen.

Just because I don't really know what I was doing. I was like maybe they have the

answers for me. So, kind of just get stuck through with it. Yeah.

Bee learned where to find where the good and positive support for her and where it was

on campus. The desired services just happened to be in two counter spaces frequented by

other participants in this study also. Those spaces were the multicultural center and the

first-generation service offices located in high traffic areas on their campus. Along with

connecting to campus services and physical spaces, a unique factor for a few of the study participants was their connection to faculty and staff on campus. Airee, who had standing appointments at multiple campus services centers and programs, explained her connection to different people and areas on campus.

> …my name is known around here. But yeah, I mean, the Dean of Students, the first, one of my first gen coordinators. The, one of the coordinators at the DRC. You, um, people in the counseling center, um, my boss, I mean, there's so many different people in higher places. And I think too, when I tell people that like, oh, you know, I have weekly meetings with the dean. Either they, or the reaction is one of two things. It's either they think I'm like a bad kid or something like I've been getting in trouble which I guess makes sense a little bit because you know, you think a dean you think of, oh, you know, I'm gonna get expelled.

Airee was proud of the connections she had made with racial, and gender acquainted administrative staff. Holding a position as a student employee on campus and no longer having a nervous approach to entering spaces and meeting people, Airee built confidence to know others and for others to know her when she was on campus. Though she didn't mention the multicultural center in this instance, she shared that the multicultural center was a place she visited multiple times a week, just as other study participants did too. Spending almost every week at the multicultural center in her earlier years on campus, Mamba also felt a strong connection to the space where students gathered and attended programs. She discussed her experiences about learning about a new culture and attending an event related to that culture.

Um, my first year I did feel really connected. I was at the multicultural center almost every week. They did Hispanic heritage month. They've done, I want to say Native American culture. I know that they went to the to the building inside of the student union there's like an auditorium there. And there was a huge presentation. And there was like a cultural dance and like I'm not sure songs that were sung. And that was pretty amazing because I've never met like a Native American person. And here it's a big thing because the school was founded on their land. And so that was very important to see.

The connection to a culturally centered area and environment was a new experience and fulfilling experience for Mamba who was in her junior year and connected her to a bonding social capital experience with peers from other marginalized racial groups. Her participation and connection to the multicultural center on campus attached her to a display of culture in a way that she wanted to learn more. Just as Mamba found new cultural exposure beginnings in the multicultural center, Delilah had a strong desire to connect with a Black student group or organization on campus after being disconnected from a friend peer group. A group that she had been connected to in her first year had only White and Asian students in the group.

Um, I made a whole bunch of Asian and White friends and then I was filtered out for two Asian people. I was kicked out. It took two White people to kick me out like so basically, when I met all these, like really great women. I was just like, oh, wow, thank goodness. I had been just so lost, like so I started taking a liking to BSO under Breon's presidency. And then I attended a few of the meetings on and off because I was still super, super busy. And now I'm able to actually attend

meetings regularly like I remembered everything. I paid my dues. Yeah, that's

when I started to meet a lot more by people on campus.

Delilah, along with other participants in this study, felt a sense of connection among alike

peers in their racial and ethnic groups on campus as a bonding social capital experience.

BSO kickstarted Delilah's meeting with other and newer people on campus. When she

was able to attend regular meetings if she wasn't too busy with work, class, or braiding

hair, she made sure to be at club meetings. These positive experiences and connection to

campus services allowed students to get getter situated with themselves, along with

giving study participants the confidence to reach out, connect, and tap into new

experiences.

      Peer support and bridging social capital. The Black women in this study

revealed that in their attempt to engage in social relationships with peers and groups of

shared interest, that they were often the only Black person in the group, and sometimes

the only woman. Engaging as a member of academic clubs, volunteering to gain service

hours, applying to work for an on-campus employer, and connecting with campus Greek

life were accounted experiences from study participants. Bridging social capital

experiences are created by students opening themselves up to unfamiliar experiences. The

women in this study formulated network relationships outside of their normal social

groups that were comprised of women and People of Color. Bridging social capital

fostered an opportunity for the participants from this study to work within social

relationships of exchange within clubs, peer groups, and campus administrative that they

had an interest in. Joining her first club, Ayame was a bit hesitant to branch out in

accounting related extracurriculars. Her major was predominately male, White, and there

appeared to be an increasing number of international students as she reached more of her upper-level coursework. Ayame found peer support in a smaller group through an accounting club at Frontier University. Being a part of Veta Alpha Phi (VAP) gave her an opportunity to connect with alike and unalike peers in the capacity of a shared interest group.

> It was called Veta Alpha Phi. It's like VAP for short. But yeah, I joined my first accounting club and it's a really small community, but it's really nice. And one thing that I really like about accounting and its club is that everyone's super transparent…

Ayame explained that in their first meeting, discussion the course textbook and some of the gendered-specific items that needed to be updated for future versions of the textbook. Not only did Ayame experience a small group communication setting that was supportive, but she also bridged a connection to volunteer service hours. The VPA required students to complete volunteer service hours with different peers. Having had a familiar experience and access to the on-campus student food pantry, she wanted to give her time to support campus service that helped support her in the past. This participation led her to connect with peers in other majors from different social backgrounds. She talked about her experience volunteering for the on-campus food pantry:

> But yeah, I do like, and they also have their own greenhouse here to where they grow their own food. And so, it actually feels like a community, like self-sustaining, which is what I really like.

Connecting with a new community and learning more about healthy food, gave Ayame access to a new tool to activate a new origin of food selection and consumption for herself, which in her family and environment prior to college was never present. Sophia,

who also connected herself to a student club related to her academic major, member participation was driven by the need to connect with a business-related club to help her with future career plans. Being a business major like Ayame, Sophia seemed to have gained pressure from her family to major in something in the sciences where jobs were more seemingly secure. But she felt that she needed to make connections with everyone to have a chance to get ahead in the field of business and marketing. She explained, "and I'm a business major I have to make connections you know and so, I've been talking with people in a marketing club, and hopefully I can connect with them." With the hope to connect with multiple memberships in other clubs on campus, Sophia expressed that she needed to situate herself to gain access to opportunities, after feeling like Black students had to go the extra step to gain access to information about their desired future careers. Sophia wanted to position herself to connect with all types of students racially to learn more about marketing. As she expressed in her interview sessions, her family was supportive of her attendance in college, but they would have rather seen her become a doctor, nurse, or lawyer.

As Sophia held true to her passion of being connected to business and marketing, as a criminal justice major, Mamba continued to navigate campus and different types of clubs. Her interest was connected to anything that required a high level of physical activity to spoken word groups that discussed topics related to social justice and rights for "people in chill and nonchalant settings", as she explained. In her time of engaging in campus military related groups, she navigated the club sport scene to not only challenge herself physically but also mentally. She also shared that she discovered that she was often the only Black student in the groups and activities she connected herself to.

I find it very interesting that the groups I'm leaded to our predominantly White sport club team, I was the only Black person on team. Martial arts, I was the only Black person there. I'm the only Black person in all of my criminal justice classes.

When asked what led her to these specific clubs, she explained that she wanted to try new things to challenge her body and mind. She went on to further explain her experiences in sport clubs she attached herself to, and some of the activities that the group engaged in outside of club practices and competitions.

I've been to the martial arts club. They are pretty amazing. I absolutely love their atmosphere, because they're very inclusive. They're very, like into expressing like things you've never done before. And putting you in those situations. Like I've never gone camping. I've never gone out into the desert and lit fire and just have fun. That was the first time that I've ever gone to like a historic landmark that was near. And it was amazing.

Physical and mental challenges, along with new experiences allowed Mamba to exude self-expressive behaviors in her club participation efforts. She also was able to express herself in a different manner on campus.

My time here has been interesting. I like fallen in love with it and I've un-fallen in love with it because my first year I was with Frontier speaks and we were a spoken poetry group or spoken word group and we had lots of events and that's what like made me more connected to people not only who were African American, but people who are more in touch with like the LGBTQ plus community. And, so many other people who just showed up from the school to our events and who wanted to share their poetry as well.

There were times that Mamba had experienced feeling connected on campus, and times where she did not, like being the only Black person in class often. She found her place in different clubs and participated at her own rate and pace. She was not acknowledging or expressing regret to her attraction to clubs and activities that did not have much Black representation. Jasper had a similar experience of being the only Black person or in the group where there were more than a few People of Color. Her connection led her to obtaining an on-campus job, in which she was referred by a male friend who was in White male fraternity on campus. Frontier University's Greek life organization were predominately White. Though there are historically Black fraternity and sorority presence on campus, along with multicultural fraternities and sororities, Jasper was not connected socially to those groups. When asked how she got connected to student employment on campus, she shared:

> …actually from one of the guys in the fraternity. Yeah, I got hired there, I think end of April. And at the time, he was like, you know, you'd be really great in this department. I work in the event management department. So, it's very customer service oriented, but also very like task oriented and goal oriented which I'm all about. Yeah, so he was like, we really, you know, I think you'd be really good fit there. So, another connection from an unexpected connection.

The unexpected connection was Jasper's personal non-Greek connection extended outside of just attending Greek intramural sport contest to root for her friends involved in Greek life. She developed a stronger connection with White peers in social settings that was outside of her normal groups. This connection fostered an opportunity for Jasper to build bridging social capital on campus. Majoring in criminal justice and minoring in

sociology, her normal and frequent connected groups were groups occupied by individuals that were of mixed raced, different gender identity categories, along with groups occupied predominately by women.

Campus student services and bridging social capital. Study participants in this study described Frontier University campus services and resources as something that connected them to campus and some new people and peers from shared interest groups. They all somewhat expressed that the connections between diverse groups elevated their campus experience. Participants engaged in on-campus jobs, connected to peer groups, organization, clubs, and campus support services that were either free or supported by student fees. Elle, who had anxieties after leaving a smaller high school environment before attending Frontier University, explained how she got an on-campus job to help with her daily breakdowns and pressures that she put on herself.

> So, when I started working at the student union, I feel like it helped me kind of
> come out of my shell a little bit and like sort of develop like better social skills
> and like handling like social situations a lot better. I think that was like probably
> the biggest challenge I've had just like mental health issues and stuff like that.

Coming out of her shell was a big step for Elle. At Frontier she had challenges within her relationships with her networks. She explained that having a group with different social backgrounds made it hard to learn how to take from different perspectives. During her second interview session, she shared that she was in the process of becoming a student supervisor which would have opened her up to new people and experiences.

Jasper, who grew up near the university and shared that though she had pre-college established social networks, she still needed to establish advanced networks being

involved at a university. Having a campus job, and like Mamba, often being connected to groups and organizations that had low Black student involvement, Jasper explained that she wanted to get involved with on campus and in the community.

> So, I have a pretty big social group around me. I work on campus, so I have a lot of connections that way. And growing up here as well, like a lot of my high school friends, they came here, even just people in general, I went to high school with, you know, like younger classes and stuff. I see them all the time. I'm a little involved in Greek life because I'm not in a sorority myself. But like I said, I have that connection to that fraternity. So, when they have like some philanthropy events. I help out with that, which has been really fun. And then like I was saying earlier, I'm going to join that nonprofit organization here on campus that's going to also open up a lot of doors for me I'm hoping.

Like Jasper's involvement in a social justice group, Alanah, who later switched her end career goal to physical therapy, was involved in pre professional group that gave guidance to minority students on the steps involved to pursue and enroll in medical school. She shared her experience of being connected to more than just racial minority students when she was involved in the club:

> Oh, that was the Minority Association for premedical students. Yeah. Like they were just a group of, you could be LGBTQ. You could be anything. They were even accepting people that weren't minorities. But it was just when I was on that pre-med route since the pandemic that all change so.

Alanah's desire and action to connect differed from her peers in the sense of her connecting to things only related to work while enrolled in school. She did show a

glimpse of unexpected volunteerism when it came to helping a pre-college program connected to. Her prior involvement in a program that helped get her enrolled at Frontier University, shifted her mentality about just going to campus to work and not engaging in any groups or programs. She explained why she stepped out of her comfort zone to get involved.

> …I do really just work. So whatever outreach programs they have me do, I'll definitely get to them. And any of the events that Frontier Scholars of Tomorrow have me do because they've helped me out so much. I want to help them out too.
>
> But other than that, no, I don't have any like, like clubs, organizations.

Consistently focused on her campus job and not wanting to spend much extra time on campus outside of her scheduled work hours, Alanah wanted to pay it forward by providing service and information to potential and admitted students, that related to school finances. Asking for help or receiving it wasn't always easy for the participants in this study. Sharing her experiences of taking an uncomfortable step to ask for help while enrolled at Frontier, Ayame shared one of the first times she asked for help.

> A positive experience is, I think once I got out of my shell. And looked around for the program. I think my positive experience is learning when to ask for help.

Ayame went on to talk about how she had to overcome her hesitation of asking for any type of help. She recalled how it may have been learned behavior from her family upbringing. She was taught to work hard and to get stuff done on her own.

> I just kind of, I don't know, I just never really thought that was a thing, especially since I was like, well, I don't think they will really care. You know, because it's such a big university and I don't know. It just like it just never back in my high

school. It was kind of like a we're all in this together, you know? And so here I

was like, well, everything's so different. I don't know. I don't feel like they would

take me seriously if I did ask for help. So why bother? And then what ended up

really helping me was when I went to Frontier Provisions.

Frontier provisions was the campus food pantry in which all enrolled students had access

to perishable and non-perishable food items. Students also placed orders online orders for

pick up. Not learning about all of Frontier's campus engagement services until later in

her academic journey, Ayame moved further away from original thoughts of the campus

not providing what students really need. These experiences in campus support services

opened her trust to academic advisors and counselors as she continued to navigate

through her junior year as an accounting major.

Future Plans and Goals

Graduating from higher education was an exciting idea, and a fearful idea for the

first-generation Black college women in this study. Participants in this study ranged from

sophomore stranding to being in their second to last semesters of their senior year.

Developing plans for their futures was a heavy discussion. Whether they were in their

earlier or later years of undergraduate coursework, nervousness overcame participants

when talking about what their futures could hold for them as individuals and as young

Black women who identified as first-generation and low-income. Most participants saw

themselves living and working outside of the city that Frontier university was in, while

others kept the university as an option or back up plan for graduate school. A mapping

exercise was conducted in the second interview sessions to learn about post-graduation

plans from higher education for the Black women in this study. The exercise was guided

with semi-structured questions to see where participants saw themselves in the next five

to ten years. Participants contemplated where they might live, conduct future studies in

their selected majors, along with sharing who from their social networks would have been

a part of the journey.

    Post-graduation plans. Some of the study participants were unsure about what

the next steps would be, a few participants were interested in pursuing graduate school,

some participants wanted to explore bigger cities for school or for work, while others

wanted to simply ensure that that were housing secure along with some establishment

into adulthood. Discussions about future plans for the women in this study, served as a

lens to establish what information and experiences had been attained through these Black

women social network and experiences in college. Social capital affects college students'

general university experiences, and these women allowed their social connections to

foster connections and affiliations.

    Elle, a senior majoring in sociology, with a minor in social justice, knew she

wanted to stick close to her passion of trying to learn more about social justice issues as

she navigated her post-graduation plans. In her second interview session she shared

where she saw herself five years ahead:

> In five years, I see myself being a lot more independent than I am now. I hope to
>
> be doing something I am passionate about, whether it be making art or helping
>
> those in need and if it's not my profession I hope it is something I do on the side
>
> still. I also see myself leaving Frontier to gain new experiences and connections.

Growing up in the same city as Frontier University, Elle was sure that there was more out in the world for her. Being immersed in the community that Frontier University was in, which didn't highlight social justice work often, Elle wanted to do more impact social justice work in another city or region, along with gaining new experiences and connections with people. With the decision to focus on this type of work for her future, Elle was sure that her confidence was stronger. Bee shared how she underestimated herself when it came into applying for college for undergraduate enrollment at Frontier University prior to being enrolled. Later in the study she did shift her thinking and self-confidence due to her best friends helping her think higher of herself as a student.

> I feel like I also like I underestimate myself a lot. Like even like just going into college. I was like I'm not going to get into any schools, and out of like the schools, I got into so many schools. I didn't maybe get into a school because of a GPA requirement. But so, he's always telling me that like, oh, like just do it, like it won't hurt to try like you'll never know until you do it. And I feel like that would be like, my like, biggest motivator to like do it.

The person that Bee referred to was her best male friend (Don) who was one of the two friends in her in-group connection that she always confided in for school and life advise. Utilizing the same energy that she received from her Frontier University social network, Bee later felt more hopeful about the applications she submitted to pursue graduate studies, that developed from a bonding social capital experience.

Graduation, post graduate work, and discovery was discussed with participants in this study. Presenting some flexible and concrete plans and ideas for their futures was captured in discussions related to pursuing graduate school and finding jobs after

graduation with the unintentional perspective to seek out new environments with adventures and opportunities being at the forefront. Tiana talked about how she had thought about traveling at some point after graduating, she expressed:

> I don't know why I thought about it. Oh, maybe it was because when I was thinking about grad school, I was like, oh, like kind of where do I want to go? What kind of cities am I going to be living in?

Going to college in the same state where Frontier University was geographically located, gave Tiana the urge to seek a change of scenery to pursue her graduate degree in Speech Pathology. In her second interview session she explained how she wanted a chance to attend a school where there was more racial diversity, and she was assured that she could find that outside of Frontier University.

Not all study participants wanted to attend graduate school right after their undergraduate term. For instance, Mamba wanted to attend graduate school after spending some time working in a job. Only in her junior year, and with a bit more time to consider what she wanted to do for her career, Mamba shared some of her plans related to where she saw herself in the workforce after graduating, where she'd be living, along with her plans to travel the US

> So, in five years, I want to be working in a criminal justice related field. I want to be to have an apartment, not own anything yet. Still, I will be 24 so I'm not, I don't want to be complacent. I want the job market to be open. And not to be like stuck in one place because I haven't been to many places. So why not just go while you can.

As a student who took criminal justice college classes at her high school, Mamba was working to set herself up for a bright future and an opportunity to get out into the world to not become complacent in her living situation and in her future career. Also seeking to explore the option to get out of her home state, Bee had plans to seek residency in a bigger city to hopefully meet more diverse people. She talked about her connections to the Black students at Frontier University and how she enjoyed those relationships. She also knew that wanting to pursue work in the healthcare administration field of work that she would need to branch out and meet new people from different cultures.

> But I just think there's so much culture and like I can meet so many new people. I'm a social person. So, you know, maybe I'll live in New York City but like a little bit away from the city.

Exploring a new city was a major goal for Bee. Not only for her future career plans, but for her own sake. Having had experienced a mostly all Black high school, then attending a predominately White university, her feelings were strong to find a new environment to grow as a Black woman. Pursuing a career in the healthcare field like Bee, Alanah had sights on pursuing a doctorate in physical therapy five years after finishing her undergraduate degree. After being asked what the journey looked like to obtain her doctorate in that specific field of work, she shared:

> …that gap years and then the program is two years plus a year residency. Okay, so that literally five okay, so I will literally from today, I'll just be finished with residency and everything and I'm not exactly sure what the process looks like for physical therapists, but I'm sure that it's like another onboarding exam or licensing or things like that to actually go practice. So I'm sure I'll be preparing for things

like that at that time, whether it's a test or if they need me to get a license or things like that, and then choosing where I actually want to practice okay, because where I am right now, I don't really mind if I have to go to like the East Coast, if that means that that's where my path goes, right. I'm not like stuck to anywhere.

Though there is often a stigma placed on college students that if they take a gap year after graduating from graduate school, that they will not return, Alanah made it very clear that she had plans to not only return to school but that she would pursue a higher degree after completing her time as an undergraduate. Though not connected with many of her peers and some of her professors while enrolled in her undergraduate coursework, taking this next step was something that Alanah felt that she could accomplish her post-graduation goals alone.

Seeking more connections to her social networks while enrolled at Frontier University, Sophia talked about her future plans to connect with people, and also about where she saw herself living geographically after graduating.

Yeah, so just getting out there. Actually, I think that's the whole process of being a business major. You just got to do it. Gotta get out there. So just me getting out there and I particularly want to move to Southern California after I graduate. So, I got to network real[ly] good.

Networking had always been at the front and a major tool for Sophia as she took on roles as a club member, club leader, and being first in her immediate family to pursue higher education at a four-year university. Though her mom wanted her to obtain a STEM degree, she wanted to move to California to have a better chance and opportunity to work in business and marketing.

Housing. Coming from low-income backgrounds, housing security and insecurity came up in discussions related to living in on campus housing units, off campus housing units, and with friends during the semester and school breaks. When discussing their five-to-ten-year plans after graduation, housing was discussed in a manner that participants felt that they needed to oversee how they were going to gain access to their future living spaces. When asked where she saw herself in the next five to ten years, Airee, without hesitation stated, "not homeless." Airee grew up in a single parent home where money was stretched, and housing was not always secure. She shared what it was like growing up as low-income in the city that she grew up in, which was not in the same city as Frontier University.

> …so I've noticed a lot of the criticism actually coming from other Black people. It's like, oh, you know, I'm living out of my car, but you have a house you're not poor you know, you're not low income. You know, you're in the suburbs. Just because my old Black mom kept my house looking alright. Well, mostly me, but anyways. You know, and we had cars. What y'all didn't know is that those cars are broken down. You know, what y'all didn't know is that my mom worked two, three jobs to keep the lights on. What y'all didn't know is the domestic violence that we faced.

Being only a sophomore at Frontier University didn't steer Airee away from establishing that she wanted to move away from her low-income identity as she edged towards her last few years of college. She made sure that she kept connection to the Black student led organization on campus, along with connection to the first-generation center where she

attended workshops and sessions related to college financial aid access and information about those resources.

Mamba talked delightfully about not wanting to be complacent in future years. Though she explained how she wanted to start off living in an apartment, she shared that she wanted to purchase residential property and who she would seek help from as she thought about the next five to ten years of her life, and how to accomplish this particular goal.

> And then for 10 years, the people I can talk to would be like to buy a house will be my high school counselor. She has been homeless. And so, her first investment as soon as she got a job as soon as she became a counselor, was to make an investment on a house. And that speaks a lot to me because I'm also a couch surfing homeless teen. And so that's something like to invest in a house. It's something that's a good investment. And so, she's also buying her second house. So, I am definitely going to be asking her like, what are the tips and tricks that she found in the housing market.

Mamba continued to share about the strong social network connections that she had developed while she was in high school, in her interview sessions. She continued to seek out guidance and advice from old school counselors to help her make decisions about her future and for her time enrolled in college. She found comfort in connecting with her counselor who was a White woman, queer, and married. Though Mamba and her counselor did not share the same racial identity, they shared a lived experience of being homeless in their youth. Like Mamba, Delilah, who wanted to move to the East coast of the US to start her career, saw herself owning a home and other properties. When

discussing where she saw herself in five to ten years, she talked about her homeownership plans. She was asked how she planned on obtaining this goal, and answered with, "have an owned house. My mother will help me with this. She is a real estate agent and my mom's friend is a lender." Being sure of what she wanted for herself in the future in terms of housing, Delilah was proud to have her Black mother and her mother's friend, who was also a Black woman, help guide and support her for her homeownership plans. This bonded connection through race, gender, family, and family acquaintances would allow Delilah to establish her own learned knowledge to navigate homeownership in the future. Housing wants and needs for their future selves was of importance and a highlighted area of attention for study participants. While Airee sought out to not be homeless in the future, Mamba shared her desires to invest in property and businesses, while Delilah planned to own her own home one day.

     Future jobs, careers, and finances. Study participant narratives revealed that job, career, financial, and relationship stability were areas of focus for them as they continued to navigate adulthood and societal obstacles that depicted first-generation low-income Black college women as a population that didn't progress academically when enrolled in higher education. More often it was mentioned that job, career, and financial stability were of the most importance for study participants as they looked ahead to the next five to ten years of their lives. Mamba explained what she wanted to do after getting more acquainted with her selected career field of criminal justice.

     I want to start changing my career from criminal justice research to the political

     science realm. Where like lobbyists are like a politician. And then I want to start

investing money into endowments for scholarships, and I want there to be an emphasis on encouraging students to travel.

Being dead set on staying connected to criminal justice work, Mamba began to explore future work that would bring about more finances so that she could give back to Frontier University to support students that may have wanted to travel like she planned to. Mamba also stated, "I want to get a grasp on managing my own retirement fund. You can create this by investing your own money into the stock market." For this plan financial plan, Mamba insisted that she was fully capable of accomplishing one of her personal financial goals. Tiana also had sights set on traveling as a part of her career. She shared that connection to her future graduate school peers and professors would have helped her get to where she wanted in her career. "Okay, I would say my professor in grad school, and speech pathology friends would help me get to the point of working as a traveling speech pathologist or working at a public elementary school." With a great amount of confidence, own certainty, and a developed bonding capital connection, Tiana felt and knew that her future established networks would be set up to help her grow and succeed professionally. With a bit of uncertainty, of how she would ask for letters of recommendations for her professors at Frontier University for her graduate studies, Bee talked about her goal of working in health administration to help support herself financially. Her lack of a bridging capital connection with her professors, may have influenced how successful she would be in presenting an impressive graduate school application packet.

> I was thinking of doing health administration. But I don't really know a lot of professors in that field. But even my professors, I feel like I haven't really

established a relationship with my professors. So, I feel like the people like the

connections I've made are people outside of things that I'm doing so it's like a

little irritating.

Bee's expressed frustrations related to not having built any strong relationships with

professors to help her transition into graduate studies in healthcare administration,

discouraged her a bit when thinking of her future. The work that she had done working

with campus administrators who worked within campus centers and programs that

specifically and directly served students of color and students from low socioeconomic

backgrounds, may have been the best thing she did for herself socially. With her plans to

relocate to a larger metropolitan city, she thought that she would be more prepared for the

real-life challenges ahead related to communicating with diverse people in new

environments.

Not having been too many places outside of her home state and the city that

Frontier University was in, Mamba was the most interested and forward thinking of the

study participants in terms of maximizing her dollars as she planned to earn more after

graduating from undergraduate studies. She had established a mindset to plan for

retirement at an early age and how she shared how she had learned about investing in the

stock market.

I want to get a grasp on managing my own retirement fund. You can create this by

investing your own money into the stock market. So, I want to do that. Yes. I also

see myself traveling.

Reflecting on her time of couch surfing and not having a stable residence at times,

Mamba wanted to make sure that her future self was set up financially. Being a low-

income student positioned her to create a plan to maximize her financial earning potential. Earning money was of importance to many of the participants in this study who all identified as low-income. Alanah saw herself working in her planned career field with established additional streams of income while she navigated the next five to ten years of her life.

> I see myself with money. Like money in my hand is success, like in my career. I just see myself very successful. Okay. I don't see myself with the family. I didn't put that down. Okay. I see. Like, even branching more into my career, so maybe like, I want to be a Doctor of Physical Therapy. But maybe I even get my own clinic and I have other doctors working for me or working with me. Or maybe I dabble in real estate on the side or something. I won't just only be doing that. Like I see myself branching my career out to something.

Alanah made it clear when she shared the core components of what she had plans to do after her time in undergraduate. She did not see herself with a family because she felt that it would have distracted her to get to her career end goals. Along with her big career plans, she felt that she would have the capacity to take on additional side jobs to have a steady income. Though Alanah did not share additional members in her support circles to help her reach her next five to ten years, other study participants found connection with alike and unalike support role players in their success.

Social network(s) support for future. The Black women from this study made it clear that they did not get to where they were alone. Participants narratives and examples of how they had connected or felt disconnected to peers and administration at Frontier University. Ayame was reliant on her own abilities to make a path for herself while she

navigated higher education and to get to graduation. Ayame was appreciative of the support she received from the accounting club she was a member of, and when asked who were the individuals that would help her navigate the next five to ten years of her life, she said, "definitely myself and I would say the people in my club." Ayame communicated in her first interview session that she was taught to put her head down, to do the work, and to just get stuff done no matter what the circumstances. Being in her junior year at the time of this study, she shared that it wasn't until the end of her sophomore year that she began to trust the campus and it's offered resources for first-generation and low-income students. She had not trusted the campus in the past because she had not identified with professors, peers, or extracurriculars she could have gotten involved in. Her involvement in a student club with major related peers helped with her connection to campus and other racially diverse students. Her student club involvement also gained her access and recognition to community accounting businesses to secure an internship with possible transition into an entry level full-time job. This was a bridged connection to an of campus network that would help her gain additional access to resources to help with a full-time job or career.

As participants shared more about their five-to-ten-year plans and journeys, racial, gender, and socioeconomic statues of connected people were revealed after being asked what the identities were of their current social networks at the time the study was conducted, and how their future support social networks would be constructed. Elle shared that she hoped that her future social support networks would help her. The help she was seeking was related to support to move her forward in life and in her career, and that those involved would resemble her own identities.

The people that may be able to help get me there are those that come from similar

communities as me with similar circumstances and goals. Those who might

already have more knowledge than I do and are willing to lend me their support.

Elle identified as a Black and Asian biracial student who was first-generation and low-

income. She talked about how she looked forward to connecting to people like her to

bond while at school or in the community because she felt estranged from her own

family. The individuals she preferred to connect with and wanted to continue connecting

with in future years were those identified as People of Color and individuals from the

LGBTQA+ community.

While Elle wanted connection to alike peers and colleagues in the future, Airee

thought that it would be impossible to be attached to some of the future social support

connections she was seeking. Though she wanted her future network to resemble her

physically or racially, she perceived that the people in leadership positions would all be

White as she prepared in the next few years to start her career in which she hoped to

reach her goal to fluently speak Japanese in whatever job she could utilized that skill in.

I don't want to perceive nobody because all the people are perceiving as White

people. I'm trying to. I'm trying. I feel like I mean, I say like there's nothing wrong

with White people. Don't get me wrong, but I feel like there's enough White

people in power. And there's enough but there's also the White people that are in

power are being like their companies are being ran and operated by underdogs

that are People of Color. So, if anybody, I would want the ghost writers to be the

ones who support me, but because they're not placed in positions that have labels

or any type of position of power it's too hard for me to like, conceptualize their
help.

Airee who had lost her mother just year before this study was conducted, had always relied on her mother to help her with potential plans and uplift her school and personal efforts. Seeking to fill that void with other family like campus support, Airee was uplifted by campus administrators through a bonded connection with those who identified as women and as a person of color from a racially marginalized group. These people supported and uplifted her in structured and unstructured settings to help support and uplift her strategies to become a hard-working Black woman like her mom. She shared that seeking help from others was influenced by the loss of her mom, which changed her outlook some things such as asking for help.

Campus community support. On campus support showed up uniquely and surprisingly for some of the study participants. Identifying as Black women, participants often felt that their natural connection should have been to other Black women that were their peers or with a campus administrator alike. Attending a predominately White university had not allowed study participants to see many campus administrators that matched their racial and gender identities. If they did happen to find someone to connect with, there was a slim chance that that individual was available to take on another mentee, offer visits to campus offices, or to connect through informal connections. As most study participants shared, most of the Black campus women in academics or administration were hard to find, or not in visible roles that were student facing. Study participants were very transparent about not seeking out a connection to Black women in faculty and staff roles at Frontier University.

Participants from this study connected with on campus administrators' and peers who identified as male, female, queer, and first-generation status. In some cases, students sought out help and support from campus resources and peers, other times campus community and student peers requested connection and wanted to support the students included in this study. Bee was having a hard time during the semester, and she was encouraged by her best friend to visit the campus support office that helped students of color and connected students to campus and community resources. Finally taking her friends advice, Bee went to visit an administrator who she had built a prior relationship with when she worked for the campus cultural center.

> But I don't know he helped me recently. Just like I guess I'm just having a hard time every winter I'm having a hard time. So, I'll just have to, like go through my breakup or whatever. And so, Zara just came back from Sweden. She's also pretty close to Kraig. So, he was like tell Bee to come see me. And I was like, okay, I feel bad when it comes to me. They're just like, talk to me and like, he's always just like giving me advice and like motivation to just keep going without harm. And he like tells me the truth if I don't want to hear it. Yeah, it's good. Yeah, he helps me I guess keep going just because a lot of times I'm like, really over it.

Bee spoke about having the ability to talk about her problems with peers and administrators without harm. She wanted the time and space to vent, while also gaining new perspectives and guidance to help her make important decisions as a student, an employee at her job, and for her relationships. Along with campus administration support, other study participants sought out and received support from male peer counterparts who identified as gay, and a female professor who was a member of the

LGBTQA community too. Airee shared information related to her male best friend, who she thought identified as gay. She stated, "my bestie he's a Black man. Um, I believe he identifies as a member of the LGBTQ community." Airee then went on to say that she had not had too much experience with the LGBTQ community at Frontier, and that she felt that it was White dominated. She shared:

> And then as far as like the LGBTQ community, I'm honestly, I don't have too much experience with that. But the experience I do have is it's definitely White dominated. The acceptance the exposure and like representation is White dominated. I just feel like there isn't much love for the minority people who are part of this community, or less, it's a designated time in place.

Aside for her involvement in clubs like the Black student organization, and the women of color collective, Airee had not found a club on campus to support her gay identity. For any of the groups or events she may had wanted to connect herself to, they were White centered and dominated so she did not feel comfortable attaching herself to it. She did find comfort in her best friend relationship:

> He already knows that like, at some point I'm gonna do some or say some crazy or like, whenever we hang out together. Like, we just play you know, I'm saying, and I don't expect him to change me and he doesn't put any labels on me.

Airee appreciated this connection due to her nonexistent role or drive to be connected to the LGBTQ community on campus, or to the Black LGBTQ community in Frontier. This friendship connection helped validate her gender identity, while also allow her to express herself if she wanted to change her mind or perspective about her gender preference for her own identity. Bee's relationship with her best friend Don showed resemblance to

Airee's relationship with her male best friend. Bee expressed how her best friend, who had encouraged her to apply for multiple colleges while she was preparing to apply to Frontier, had helped her during her time in college:

> Don is gay, which I feel like it's like a part of his personality and like, a way that he is just so like, charming and like out there and like, everybody loves him. And he also like, has introduced me to a lot of things that I probably wouldn't have known otherwise. Probably, like, played into, like, the way that I express myself now as well. Just make more…than just like free to do what I want.

Bee struggled with disengagement to campus socially when she encountered a lot of racism through a horrible roommate experience that occurred in her earlier years at Frontier. Her best friend, Don, encouraged her to physically move about campus to get involved. Both Airee and Bee had similar connections to Black gay male peers who helped them with their confidence to shape and form who they were as students and as leaders on campus. While Airee and Bee had a connection to one individual, Mamba had a combination of racial and sexually oriented campus support members. After being asked what the identities were of the people who would help you reach her five-to-ten-year goals, she shared:

> So, Professor Bird, she is a female, she's White. She's a PhD scholar, queer, has a dog and a house. And yes, Mr. Rocker, Black male, married with children, owns a house has many degrees on finance and is on his financial journey. Mrs. Levinson's [a] White female counselor queer are part of the LGBTQIA plus community, married and has children, own two houses and has a similar background. Colleagues and peers, political science majors and those who have

FSUN experience. And I should have included experience with the Frontier

legislature. And then universities prior experience with managing scholarships

and communication with donors with knowledge of endowments.

Mamba never articulated her gender identity and if it was connected to the LGBTQIA

plus communities, but her professors, counselors, and friends identified with those

communities. Mamba stressed the importance of her being connected to successful

people, because she wanted to be successful with a career, to own a home, and to give

back to Frontier university if she was able to in the future. Study participants projected

their need to be strong to navigate campus and society with their multiple identities that

often intersected in the spaces they showed up in on campus, and within the community

surrounding campus.

Reframing the strong Black woman stereotype. Though depicted as being strong

willed by their peers and pegged by societal constructs of how Black women present

themselves in social settings, the Black women in this study experienced instances in

which they had to navigate their physical, emotional, and intellectual capacities to

maintain some type of stability while enrolled at Frontier University. Having to endure

being stared at by their peers, early life experiences of turmoil and trauma, and being

stereotyped while enrolled in college, tested the abilities of these college women. Feeling

that they had to be strong while growing up, they all created some form of coping

mechanism to handle the physical, emotional, and intellectual related experiences by the

time they were enrolled in college at a predominately White university.

Physical strength. Expressing their own depicted concepts of their bodies and

how they used them to walk into campus spaces, utilized them for fitness activities, and

how they characterized themselves was highlighted in most of the study participant interviews. Their Black woman identities were expressed through study participants explanation of their racial make-up, body shape and size, their hair, and even sexuality. Learning more about study participant's likes and dislikes about themselves, they shared stories related to what they could handle physically when they challenged themselves and connected to other people and campus spaces.

During her first interview session, Jasper mentioned that she had struggled with her personal identity as a Black student on campus. Being mixed-race with White and Black, she managed to shift her thinking about the intersection of her two racial backgrounds to feel more confident in her racial identity. Getting connected to more people on campus, she talked about how things had improved as she expanded her social circle.

Yeah, um, it definitely has gotten a little bit better. I feel more just now nonchalant about it, if that makes sense, because I know who I am and the people that know me know who I am and they love me for who I am, and I don't really need the acceptance of anyone else. What's kind of crazy too, is my boyfriend. He's very like, [a] curious person who loves to ask questions. And I remember it was something that, you know, it definitely helped in my actual like, okay, I can maybe get with you like relationship wise. He just asked me so much about like, how I grew up and you know what it meant to be Black on this campus because he's pretty aware too, that there's not a lot of Black people on this campus. And, you know, he helps me just, I don't know feel just like, I said like, less like more confident [in] myself and nonchalant about everything else.

Jasper's disclosed that her boyfriend was White, and that being in a relationship with him positioned her to think differently and to not get offended by any of his questions and wonder related to learning more about Black culture. As she explained, she was happy to help him learn more about her, which led to her gaining more appreciation for her racially mixed identity.

The Black women in this study discussed some of the components about their individual hair journeys, and how hair connected to identity as Black woman and how changing their physical appearance helped uplift their confidence. During the discussion related to her five-to-ten-year plans from the. time she was currently enrolled at Frontier, Alanah shared, "and then I also put my hair will be long, because my locs are also a part of who I am now." While being enrolled in college, Alanah had chosen to wear a natural hair style, dreadlocks, that had large influence from Black cultural hairstyles. Along with the important attention to her natural hair, Alanah wanted to improve her own physical appearance.

> And so, I grew up skinny and I was always just extremely skinny. So in the pandemic, you know, we have all this time on our hands. It started with like, cardio, straight cardio, always doing those ab exercises. And then I'm like looking into it. I'm doing my research on social media. And I started weightlifting. I didn't take it serious though, until I came to campus because the gym here is beautiful. Like my dad had a gym at home but it's not the same. Like so I started seriously like taking weightlifting series in January of 2021. And campus, I guess like campus, and fitness, the Frontier gym is where I fell in love with fitness.

Alanah's body size was a challenge for her when she first started at Frontier. Thinking that she was too skinny to even attempt working out, she was encouraged by her boyfriend who was a main source of social support while she had been enrolled in college. When she began to lift weights, it became a part of her identity as a Black woman. Participants in this study brought up how they worked on practiced self-love. Loving herself more, along with her hair, Ayame had connection to her hair. She shared when she finally decided to wear her hair more natural, which had been trending nationally for Black women. She shared a story of when she was transitioning from having permed and relaxed hair, and to when she went fully natural.

> I was just looking at myself in the mirror and I just got a shower and my hair was like, so damaged from the perm. And I was like, Look, I'm not gonna wait for the transition. I'm just gonna cut it all off. Yeah. And so that's what I did. I just like cut everything off. And when I took a picture my mom was like, What the hell so, but you know, I liked it and then like, twist like became my go to. And I just, I just like the way that my hair looked in curls. I just fell in love with my hair and it kinda like kind of became my saving grace just being more comfortable with myself.

Ayame, who had been told by people in her family that she wasn't pretty enough, had the same family members who asked her was she Black because all she wanted to do was read prior to enrolling in college, finally felt beautiful with her curly natural hair. While Ayame found comfort in a new hairstyle and identity, Airee continued to not conform to societal labels to help define who she was as a Black queer woman. She expressed how she felt about gender:

Gender identity is such like a weird thing because it is so like, fragile, because there's days where I feel like a Black woman like I'm a Black woman, you get what I'm saying. But there's also I'm just Airee. I'm not my sex. I'm not my genitalia. I'm just here. And I feel like saying it, it's kind of controversial, but I think that those two can, like exist you know, together without having to erase one or the other at a specific time. If on Tuesday, I'm a Black woman, and then on Friday, I decide that I'm a Black man, that's my business. That's, that's just me. So, I feel like I don't know I'm just Airee and when I feel what I feel, I feel it.

Navigating all of her retained identities, Airee did not want to be identified in one category for gender, and also for her race. In her sophomore year, she learned about herself while enrolled at Frontier as she navigated her coursework as a sociology major. Reflecting on their lived experiences, the participants in this study also discussed their individual emotional capacities.

Emotional strength. Pegged with social challenges that related to their Black woman identity on a predominately White campus, participants of this study experienced instances of the Black woman stereotype threat which was present in some of their semester interactions with peers. Attempting to defy the stereotype, the quality of built relationships mattered for the women in this study. Those who expressed their challenges of managing their mental health, shared how their social network of friends helped them cope with stress, anxiety, depression, and isolation. While others worked through emotional incidents in which they didn't react how others expected them to, and how they surprised themselves on how they reacted in those said situations. In her second interview, Elle revisited her explanation of how some of the friends in her group helped

her with her mental health struggles. She shared in her first interview session of how she had emotional breakdowns daily, and how it was her peer friend groups that helped support her by listening to her and by not making her feel like a burden to them. She shared the following when asked how her network of friends had helped her:

> They can help me a lot towards the start or planning phase of my journey as I feel that the only thing, or one of the only things, holding me back is my confidence in succeeding and beating the odds against me.

Elle felt that improving her mental health improved from the confidence she gained, and the connection to people was a major factor to this success. Elle often felt that the odds were against her because she was of mixed racial background, and growing up in a family where she was the outcast, hindered her from building confidence to stand out more in her social settings and especially at a big university.

Along with the intersection of racial identities talked about by study participants, the intersection of race and gender was talked about by participants, when discussion surrounded their roles on campus, within their friend groups, and within their families. While some participants shared more racial specific experiences in their storytelling, than events that involved their gender, but gender wasn't far behind. Airee shared her frustrations of possessing intersecting identities as she navigated a White campus. Sharing how she had learned more about intersectionality in her sociology classes, she shared:

> I mean, I've, it's not even what I've learned, it's what I've experienced, and I finally have a label to put on it. I'm not being perceived as just a Black, well, just a Black person. I'm being perceived as Black women or perceived as a woman.

I'm perceived as a Black person. I was perceived as a gay Black person, you know. I'm saying I'm perceived as all these different things at once, and I'm not being like affected by just one thing at one time. And I think like I said, that's even more prominent on campus because, you know, there's some people who are, who see me as a Black woman, but then there's also some people who see me as a gay Black woman, but there's also people that see me as just a Black person.

And with those different you know, perceptions, I'm being treated different ways. In this case, Airee is explaining how her peers had perceived her as many different identities. Airee expressed during her interview session that the campus setting mattered, and that she could sometimes predict how people would view her identity in particular campus spaces. She also shared how difficult it was to handle all her gender, racial, and sexuality identities that she felt made her stand out visually on campus.

Airee had in-class experiences that challenged her emotional capacity, while Alanah shared an in-depth emotional trauma situation living off campus with non-Black women roommates who tormented her and made her feel very uncomfortable in her living space. She shared examples of her roommates leaving trash outside or her room door, roommates leaving their dirty underwear on the kitchen counter, and someone putting broken glass in her blender bottle. Alanah had strong feelings about reacting to the negative actions towards her and felt that because she was a Black woman living in a predominately White city, attending a predominately White institution, that if she did react and the police were called that she would get in trouble. She shared this story, which related to her roommate incident while living off campus:

…so I've always been like, taller, and I'm like, bigger than like all of my friends and then on top of being both those things. I am also Black. So it's kind of like this, like there's this like manly stigma that are placed already on Black woman. And then I'm 5'10" and then it's like a lot you know. So not that I even like, I guess use that as a part of who I am. And I've never like, I've never gotten into like a physical fight or gotten to a point where I had to fight because just my presence or me just speaking up about it or talking to you directly about it was more than enough, right? Then at this stage in this situation when I would speak up for myself, things would get better until they weren't better anymore. At first, it's like, okay, when I speak up for myself, and I don't get the outcome I want. What do I do? Oh, I ignore you. And I show you that you're not bothering me. But then when that doesn't get the reaction, you know, what do I do now? Do I break and show you that I'm weak? Or do I say something to try to get you to stop? So, when I say like losing my identity I mean, like I've never known myself or would never think to be in a situation where I'm being blatantly disrespected every single day, every single day, and I don't say anything, and I just let it happen. Not necessarily that I was doing that, but it made me so emotional. Because I would never let something like that happen.

Evaluating the situation as a Black woman in predominately White spaces, Alanah felt that she should have done more to speak up for herself when she was targeted up on by her old roommates. After her roommate incident, Alanah began to attend counseling sessions which helped her shift a part of her identity to become someone that was not afraid of confrontation, and to speak up for herself. Her emotional capacity was

challenged, and she was able to get through to attach herself to helpful resources to prepare for anything that may come up like the roommate situation. Mental health challenges, racial identity attitudes, and race related stress, among the Black women in this study were highlighted, along with study participants gaining opportunities to learn new things. Connections to people, new subjects in their coursework, challenged their intellects with some challenges and successes in and outside of classroom spaces at Frontier.

   Intellectual strength. The participants from this study majored in subjects such as sociology, speech pathology, business, criminal justice, public health, and biology. Learning new subjects and how to connect with professors were different and similar in some ways for these Black women. Students in this study felt that they had to work much harder academically than their non-Black peers to prove to their professors that they were a good and focused student. Alanah shared her beliefs about how she navigated her courses as a biology major.

   Because being Black already, especially at a White campus, you're surrounded by

   White professors and not to say that they are thinking down on you. But you kind

   of have to assume because it's better to assume negative than positive especially.

Being connected to a STEM major, most of Alanah's professors were White males. She had reflected on her high school experience of teachers thinking and speaking less of her in the classroom space. As other participants, like Alanah, Black women were subjected to any thoughts or perceptions about Black students not wanting to complete their assigned work because Black students are seen as less in educational settings. Ayame who was an accounting major, had felt that she wasn't smart enough during her time

connected to her STEM major. She knew she had the capacity to get the work done and

completed, she disclosed that the predominately White male students she saw in all of her

classes intimidated her when she thought about her potential future career choices

thinking of her future career in the field, would not allow her to thrive in her academics.

She reflected on what she learned from her mom and family to just put your head down

and do the work.

> And so, it was just something like that, where when it came to navigating a White
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> campus. It was just like, just not focusing on so much of it. And just like just put
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> your head down and focus on you. You know, and so I think that's what's really
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> helped me.

Though putting her head down to just get through or push through classes and

functioning on a White campus wasn't a healthy behavior, Ayame used the technique as a

coping mechanism to survive daily at Frontier. Jasper also shared a way to cope while she

navigated campus life. When asked about some of the challenges she had experienced on

campus, she shared how she positioned herself in social groups in settings.

> Like I have, obviously my family like, you know, we're mixed family. My dad's
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> Black, my mom's White, my boyfriend's White. You know, I have friends of all
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> different kinds of races and genders and, you know, social class as well. So, I
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> haven't really, I like to think of a very universal, like, group of people around me.

The intersection and variety of identities of people that Jasper surrounded herself with,

contributed to her success of connected with like and unalike peers. Her mixed racial

identity served as a shield from some of the negative conversations she had to endure and

allowed her to get into identity mixed conversations and have an opinion. Being very

opinionated and open to have hard conversations, Airee expressed her frustrations with having to explain who she was and how she identified to her peers.

> I mean, I've it's not even what I've learned, it's what I've experienced, and I finally have a label to put on it. I'm not being perceived as just a Black well, just a Black person. I'm being perceived as Black women are perceived as a woman I'm perceived as a Black person, I was perceived as a gay Black person, you know, I'm saying I'm perceived as all these different things at once, and I'm not being like affected by just one thing at one time. And I think like I said, that's even more prominent on campus because, you know, there's some people who are who see me as a Black woman, but then there's also some people who see me as a gay Black woman, but there's also people that see me as just a Black person. And with those different you know, perceptions. I'm being treated different ways. I'm not just Airee.

Airee was finally proud to learn that what she had felt in high school and when she started at Frontier university, had a term attached to it. Intersectionality what she experienced on a daily basis as she navigated campus to attend classes, to work as a student employee at her job, and even when she visited the campus dining commons to have a meal. When she found out that there was a term for her identity and experiences, she felt more confident about who she was as a college student and who she could be in her future.

Summary

This study examined the perspectives of US FGLI Black college women and the ways they navigated their social networks to bridging and bonding social capital while attending a public four-year predominately White institution. The FGLI Black college women in this study shared their campus life experiences and about the racial and gendered experiences they endured. The challenges they experienced were through campus social engagement, navigating their individual physical and mental health, avoiding Black stereotype perceptions, and navigating campus fitness peers, fitness programs, and the fitness facility. Though students experienced unpleasant experiences while navigating their campus, peer support clubs, peer friend groups, campus support programs, and campus faculty and staff supported these students during the time they were enrolled at their institution. Student study participants developed post-graduation plans based on their self-developed accomplishments and from the help of first-generation students and campus administrators, community campus partners who matched their gender, and with other Black women student peers that helped them be proud to be Black and to be a woman. Reframing some of the societal constructs of the Black woman stereotype, this study's findings suggest that despite these students facing negative racial and gendered experiences with campus community members and campus spaces, they continued to connect themselves to racial, gender, and social class similar support people and services to complete and accomplish the goal they set out for themselves.

Chapter V: Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of FGLI US Black college women's relationship of collegiate fitness programs bridging and bonding social capital at a four-year predominately White public institution. The research question guiding this study was, what are FGLI US Black college women perspectives on the relationship between participating in collegiate fitness programs while bridging and bonding social capital? How do they describe their social networks within collegiate fitness and on campus as whole? How do race, gender, and social class intersect in their descriptions? How do their collegiate fitness experiences relate to their bridging and bonding social capital experiences outside of fitness?

The FGLI Black college women experiences were unique due to how women of color transition their way into academia and the higher education landscape while presenting their intersections of race, gender, and social class. Having to contextualize their campus climates while holding intersecting identities, imposed a heavy burden on study participants as they noted a commonly experienced turning of heads, funny looks, whispers, and harassment from peers (Harwood et al., 2018). Although study participants experienced challenges while navigating a White campus and faced negative racial and gendered experiences, they found a way to connect themselves to campus support services and peer support groups. This study expanded on the research of FGLI US Black college women and highlighted study participants' lived experiences while enrolled at a university. This chapter provides theoretical implications of this study and continues with practical recommendations, and recommendations for future research.

Overview of Major Findings and Connection to Literature

This study focused on FGLI US Black college women's navigation of social connections and engagement at a four-year predominately White public institution. The students experienced racial and gendered challenges in the university setting but connected themselves to positive campus support services and peer groups during their time enrolled at their university. The findings of this study brought attention to elements not previously found in the review of literature for Black college women who cultivate bridging and bonding social capital while enrolled in higher education. The contributions of this study are discussed in relation to intersectional racial and gendered experiences in campus spaces that allowed them to learn about the essentials in building tolerance, acceptance, and understanding of other people. Upon evaluation of connections to campus services and the people connected to these services, the development of peer and administrative social network relationships helped the women in this study better achieve academically and socially.

Intersectional Racial and Gendered Experiences

The concurrent experience of both racism and sexism while enrolled in higher education is greater than the sum of its parts (Lewis et al., 2021). For the FGLI Black college women in this study, campus climate experience included accessing campus resources, practicing well-being while enrolled, and navigating through student peers who often projected assumptions of the Black stereotype on them. The campus climate perspectives of study participants varied, and while some of the students in this study wished for a stronger Black student connection, others structured their out-of-classroom activities by connecting them with on-campus employment opportunities, becoming a

member of a campus club or organization, or by engaging in fitness on and off campus. As CRT's centering race and racism tenant explains in the literature (Nunez 2011; Tichavakunda, 2019), race and racism engage with how race intersects with identities and forms of subordination in higher education and how students of color perceive issues of race being overlooked in university curricula and activities. In this study, many of the students felt that access to internships, future career options, or financial aid resources was much harder for them than their White peers. One woman in the study had not received financial aid information that was beneficial until she attended a financial aid workshop in the first-generation center. Study participants felt that they were not aligned to the campus messaging about receiving information related to academic and monetary resources. "The concept of racial battle fatigue for racially minoritized individuals navigating White environments is often repleted with gendered racism, blocked opportunities, and mundane environmental stress" (Linley, 2018, p. 24). This showed up in the study findings when participants talked about the desire to join a sorority, finding their own communities within the campus setting, and managing their individual mental health challenges.

Black student well-being was an expanding factor within this study and revealed itself through study participants shared mental health challenges, along with peers' racial and stereotypical assumptions, judgement, and microaggressive behavior toward them. Students in this study discussed balancing their positive and negative mindsets, along with navigating the campus while being a Black woman. Their mental health was challenged in academic courses when they thought professors were singling them out because they were Black students. Peers' racial and gendered stereotypes came into play

from the comments from roommates about their physical features and how they spoke. It didn't seem that the actions and comments of campus professors and peers were intentional, but they left a negative experience for the participants in this study. The women in this study had racial and gendered experiences that affected their ability to form social connections with peers and resources.

Intersectional Racial and Gendered Experiences in Fitness

The Black college women in this study described some of the barriers and challenges with getting involved in campus fitness. There was hesitation to participate in their campus fitness activities due to the lack of Black representation, and specifically Black woman representation in the fitness space. Though participation in campus fitness programs can contribute to an enhanced quality of life to help students create healthy practices to reduce stress and anxiety, it is not the sole solution (Bland, 2014). As a result of getting out of their comfort zones and fear of the campus fitness center, the students in this study found connections with instructors in fitness by participating in classes offered at the campus fitness center. College students tend to learn more effectively when instruction incorporates different modes of learning, and student satisfaction with their college experience tends to be higher with participation in a collegiate fitness and recreation programs (Kampf & Teske, 2013). For example, one participant learned breathing exercises that helped support more effective workout sessions, which also allowed her to use the same breathing techniques in stressful situations with her peers. When participants did utilize the campus fitness center space and programs, they felt more energized and more confident.

Examining the social integration and shared experiences in this study, participants worked hard to overcome obstacles with body comparison to White women and to learn what fitness attire was best for workouts when visiting their campus fitness center. Racial and ethnic differences in physical activity participation in higher education fosters the notion that minority women students participate less than their White peers (Williams et al., 2020). Due to the campus fitness environment being new to many of the Black women in this study, they worked to overcome challenges with feeling fat in fitness and not having any pre-college or familial association with working out. Participants attached themselves to fitness program-related participation to try and reap the campus advertised positive benefits, such as, mental health support, increased energy, and potential social connections. Participants not only participated in student clubs that included outings that involved socially engagement in physical activities through club socials, but also engaged in direct participation in sport club teams.

Study participants expressed the importance of remaining physically active not only to support their mental health, but to also breakdown the preconceived social constructs related to Black people in fitness, or the lack of their presence in fitness spaces and activities that have led to detrimental health disparities for Black people. As an outcome, the women in this study embraced the effort to participate in fitness, to only be met with a lack of Black woman representation in the campus fitness space, and the overpowering presence of White males in the campus fitness space, which made them feel uncomfortable and unwelcomed. There were occasions in which participants were more noticeable in the space being Black and a woman at their predominately White

campus. In this space, some participants also experienced unwanted sexual attention from their male peer counterparts from all racial backgrounds.

Intersectionality also recognizes that oppression and racism are unidirectional and can be experienced within and across divergent intersectional planes such as classism, sexism, ableism, and so on (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015). For the women in this study, their fitness experiences matched their experiences outside of the Frontier fitness center. Until they had established a peer or administrator connection, they did not feel welcomed. As they connected with peer support groups and campus administrators on campus, they connected with fitness instructors while taking drop-in fitness classes, and they brought their already established friend groups to the fitness center with them.

Peer Support: Bonding and Bridging

The FGLI Black college women in this study discussed their connections to their peer groups that supported them while they were enrolled. Involvement by many of the students involved in this study, connected them to a Black student organization and a club structured to support women of color on campus. The forms of support were connected to experiencing a welcoming environment and connecting with other Black students while enrolled at a predominately White campus. The racial and gender intersect acknowledgement for the findings in this study connected to previous literature related to Black college women enrolled in undergraduate degree programs and how their intersectional approach to engagement allowed for a focus on interdependent identity-specific experiences (Harris & Patton, 2019). For example, the women in this study found that connecting themselves to Black- and women-centered activities, allowed them to

gain enough confidence to connect to others and feel appreciated and like a member of the campus and community.

Study participant connections extended outside of the classroom and club participant spaces and were present in on-campus and off-campus housing reserved for enrolled students at Frontier University. First-generation college students are sometimes first in their families to experience living on campus or within campus housing units. They can experience early negative roommate experiences, which may later shift to positive peer support with new roommates. First-generation low-income college students can point to positive institutional support structures through departments, programs, and residence halls, even though the challenges and dilemmas still unfold for these students during their first and early years in college (Means and Pyne, 2017). In this study, the institutional support structures were the Black student organization, the women of color group, on-campus roommates, peers in classes, club sports, and academic-based clubs.

Friend groups provided study participants with connections to other peers, resources, and social networks. Resource connections included access to volunteer and service work, Greek life, campus jobs, spoken word groups, and recreational activities with peers. Students bonded through their first-generation (FG) and low-income (LI) status to create bonding social capital experiences which eased the pressure when they were not the only FGLI student in social group gatherings. As the research suggests, social class plays an important role in the dimensions of identity (Williams & Martin, 2021). Generalizing their experiences in clubs, being present on campus, and connecting with racial and gender alike peers was of importance to study participants as they navigated Frontier University. Study participants not only connected through social class

similarities, but also racially. Having class with racially similar peers helped participants feel more comfortable in the classroom setting and gave those students additional confidence in other environments on campus that created a bonding capital experience because they were of the same racial group. Literature discusses that Black college women essentially thrive at predominately White institutions when they acquire strength from relationships with kin-like individuals or communities (Hotchkins, 2017; Nelson et al., 2016). The women in this study appreciated their connections to women of color, but more specifically Black women. These connections structured a peer support bond that could not be duplicated with other peer connections.

Club connections and involvement for the participants in this study were intentional and strategic, and connection to campus peers was demanding for most. The students in this study were asked how getting involved with campus activities contributed to their experience at Frontier. They shared that connecting with different types of clubs and organizations helped them enjoy their time on campus and to grow socially. They gained, as they explained, lifelong friendships and support systems that they could rely on for emotional and in-person support to talk through challenging situation. Black students on some college campuses tend to have smaller social networks but can bridge a form of social capital and has the potential to work as social leverage to help them get ahead (Claridge, 2018).

Many of the highlighted strengths and positive experiences for the FGLI Black college women occurred within campus groups in which there were no other Black college students. Students from this study held executive board leadership positions within clubs, faced their public speaking fears in a spoken word group, and challenged

their bodies in different sports club activities that they thought they could never do. Just as the literature recommended, "maintaining close connections with individuals helps reproduce social capital among those within social networks" (Nunez, 2011, p. 642). As one participant found that fitness and sports played a distinct role in their areas of interest for activity selection, that participation assisted them in creating and maintaining a social network.

Other participants found solace in connecting with others outside of their racial and social class group through service work. Gaining connection to on-campus clubs that required service hours as a membership requirement gave this group of Black college women exposure not only to new community spaces, but to peers from all walks of life that were of a different race, gender, or social class. These network connections created a foundation for study participants to gain early access and recognition to their desired career. Attendance at on-campus job fairs, and at club meetings with community guest speakers, as well as leaving campus to volunteer their time to conduct service work connected these women to bridging capital relationships.

Many of the study participants engaged in on-campus student employment to gain access to funding to help them pay for tuition, housing costs, and to develop some type of disposable funds to engage in off-campus activities that required cost. Taking this approach to build a foundation of secure finances, bonded these students to peers who were also working on campus to support their expenses outside of tuition and on-campus housing. Connections for the women in this study were formed outside of the classroom space and within their formed social groups. For example, a unique connection transpired for one of the Black college women in this study through a peer that was connected to a

campus Greek life organization. On campus Greek life at Frontier was known to be predominately White and predominately male, which made the connection unique. White male peers, administrators, and professors were often mentioned in helping encourage the Black college women to apply for jobs on campus and to be more involved in campus activities. Black college women thrive holistically at predominately White four-year institutions, even though campus life differs for racially marginalized students in term of involvement and outcomes (Fischer, 2007). For instance, women in this study were working within campus departments to not only help gain monetary return, but to also experience connection to campus and to people. The Black women in this study shared instances of connecting with White peers who were connected to Greek organization that in turn connected them to a campus job, which was a form of bridging social capital. It was not uncommon for the Black college women in this study to connect with White peers, but it was uncommon for them to be connected and involved with Greek fraternities that were White male dominant. This experience created a foundation to elevate the social capital of these women as they worked in their selected jobs, while also utilizing their transferrable skills to navigate campus spaces and environments. Those transferrable skills included time management, building new relationships, and small group communication skills that they could activate within their peer social network connections.

Campus Support Services: Bonding and Bridging

The Black women in this study discussed ways they found access to campus support services, campus resources, and campus spaces. The forms of campus support services they sought out were connected to cultural and first-generation centers, campus

administrators of color or who identified as women, and culturally based clubs. Attendance at the campus cultural center bonded students to Black culture and campus administrators from the same or different racial backgrounds. The inherent factor of counter spaces is that they provide sanctuaries for Black students to make sense of their experiences on campus and to find support and validation for their realities (Grier-Reed, 2010). The cultural center staff were valuable individuals who provided support in a variety of way. The most beneficial support was in the form of delivering encouragement, serving as mentors, and provided a physical space for students to focus on academic and non-academic activities.

The first-generation center provided study participants with a connection to financial assistance and information in a setting with peers of the same social class to help, instead of just meeting with an assigned financial aid advisor based on their last name. First-generation students often have individuals in their circles with low educational attainment outside of school, so the social capital relationships on campus with their peers, faculty, and staff are essential contributions to their success as a student (Almeida at al., 2019). In a unique setting with no parental or guardian connection or accurate perspectives of the higher education experience, the first-generation Black college women were challenged with navigating multiple layers of hypervisibility at PWIs. Because hypervisibility has led to stress-related physical and mental health concerns of Black college women at historically White colleges and universities (Kelly et al., 2021), some enrolled in club memberships for a cultural club on campus. The Black women in this study mentioned that involvement in Frontier's Black student organization assisted in their sense of connection to other Black students, tools to build their

leadership skills to confront campus microaggressions, and information about campus resources to help them grow as a student and as an adult. "The greater the individual's social capital, the greater their ability to access institutional resources" (Fuller, 2014, p. 131). Though study participants endured challenges navigating campus spaces and resources, they connected themselves to the right people, spaces, and resources to complete coursework and engage with peers.

The literature illuminated "social capital and connection as an aggregate that links itself to the construction of durable networks that help college enrolled students in higher education" (Mirsha, 2020, p. 2). Connection to campus student employment, community organizations, and engagement with peers and campus resources were bridged connections for the Black college women in this study. Connections with diverse groups were formed in terms of campus support with individuals from different racial and gender groups, and from student networking outside of their normal social connections that drove them to campus administrators of color or to programs and spaces that were for FGLI students.

The bridging of social capital perspectives is often connected to operationalized and generalized trust toward others who are different in terms of race and gender (Chu & Yang, 2019). As the Black women in this study interacted with campus support staff with whom they did not necessarily share an identity, their interactions formed building blocks to bridge capital connections. This echoed research findings, in terms of participants in this study who connected to community organizations that opened doors to volunteering, internships, and possible future careers. Additionally, for these Black women, there was a shift in their mentalities about asking for help from unalike peers and administrators at

Frontier University. The most significant impact described by these Black college women, was creating new relationships beyond their own social circles that allowed them to feel seen and connected to more people.

Future Plans and Goals

Researchers have conducted investigations of the interlocking forms of oppression and how there is simultaneous influence on a person's college and out of college experiences (Harris & Patton, 2019). The next five-to-ten-year plans for the Black women in this study conveyed their determination to be housing secure, firmly situated in a job or career, and to continue connecting with the social networks they formed while enrolled in college.

Black women are often marginalized at all levels of education due to the intersection of their race and gender, and because of this, their social support networks are their parents, relatives, and friends they grew up with who may not be enrolled in college. All the Black women in this study saw themselves as successful either as being enrolled in graduate school or taking a gap year to prepare for physical therapy school. These women did not want to continue the cycle of failing to obtain an undergraduate degree like those in their immediate families.

The goal for many of these Black women was to obtain a career with a stable salary, so they activated their social networks to bridge connections to professors, mentors, sponsors, and peer groups to help them obtain these goals. The women in this study envisioned that their mentors would look like them racially and would be in a career doing exactly what they thought they had planned for themselves in the future. Realistically, this was not the case. Instead, the women in this study found themselves

with social network connections that resembled their own journeys, but through similar and diverse groups of people. Of the social network connections, they found themselves connected to some who had also grown up as low-income, and now presented themselves as successful people by gaining degrees and purchasing homes.

Venturing out to new geographical areas to explore new cities was a common association among participants in this study. They all sought to find new cultural climates to build new relationships that would challenge their curiosities about people from other cultural upbringings and socioeconomic status. Engaging in those type of ventures after finishing their undergraduate work, would aid these women in building future capital to support their enrollment into graduate programs, to get established into a career with a stable salary, and to purchase homes.

Theoretical Implications

The centering race and racism tenant of CRT centers the racial experiences of Black women who experience intersectional oppression and emotional labor while enrolled in higher education (Kelly et al., 2021). The Black college women in this study shared specific examples of instances where they felt unseen and unheard and out of place at their university. They encountered racial and gendered microaggressions from peers and other campus residents in on-campus housing, in campus social spaces, and in activities outside of the classroom space, which connects to the concept of CRT's intersectionality tenant. Theoretically, intersectionality elucidates how racism and sexism reinforce each other, and how it illuminates the way race and gender gravitationally pull toward each other (Harris & Leonardo, 2018).

While also utilizing a social capital lens to explore study participant lived experiences, use of theoretical approach helped highlight a notion of social networks and relationships and them constituting an important resource to connect socially. Instead of the customary literature approach to compare White students to students of color, or comparing first-generation low-income students to more affluent students, this study contributes to how Black college women gain access to social capital and campus privileged knowledge. Enduring through racial and gendered hardships led these women to experience positive peer and campus services, after overcoming challenges before their connection to supportive people and places. What constitutes in-group and those outside the group connections to peers, administrators, support services, and how to obtain social capital, could also be considered as a contribution to future research.

Considering the use of CRT's centering race and racism as theoretical frame for this study, "the racial realist perspectives in higher education should continue to construct new questions and methods that reveal a wide scope of analysis for the experiences of Black college women" (Tichavakunda, 2019, p. 653). Though the women in this study found a sense of relief after being challenged through racial and gendered experiences on campus, there needed to be initial support when they entered their institution that required extra support in the format of peer support groups with bridging and bonding capital components, along with campus support services with those same factors. For the women in this study, and as it has been advised in research, social capital is intrinsically linked to the interconnection between economic, cultural, and social capital (Fuller, 2014).

Utilizing Bourdieu's Social Capital Theory concept to analyze Black college women social networks and connections, there has not been a heavy emphasis placed on

the bridging and bonding concepts related to intercultural connections and social capital. A contribution of this study was to show how social capital manifests itself to address the support needed by Black college women enrolled in higher education. Black college women are more likely to be isolated socially, academically, and financially. This study explores the perception of campus social capital, and how bridging and bonding social capital connections confers to peer support groups and campus support services, so they can help "address the multi-reinforcing forms of oppression that contextualize the lived experiences" (Cabrera, 2018, p. 212), for the Black women in this study. This examination and study of the Black college women enrolled at a PWI acknowledges the unique perspectives of the women in this study in relation to oppression and how to express their identity through their lived experiences.

The bonding social capital aspects discussed in this study were used to study participant's Black student peers within student clubs and peer friend groups, along with connection to students who identified as low-income. Though a few of the students in this study were not connected to the Black student organization as members or club leaders, they still understood the benefits of being connected to the student club as a bonding capital connection for Black students. This capital was driven by the racial, gender, and social class connections that gave the women in this study a sense of pride and protection. Bonding social capital activated itself within the lives of these study participants when they sought out to deepen their already established connections and social networks.

Students in this study also developed bonding social capital through university campus services with administrators of color who worked in the campus cultural center, with first-generation students and program leaders, and with Black students in cultural

club peer groups. Study participants' connection to campus through physical spaces, also referred to as campus counter spaces, were spaces structured to serve students of color-identified populations, first-generation status, and with other expressive identities, created space to serve and support academic needs along with social support. The women in this study connected themselves to people and physical spaces that connected to their racial, gender, and social class attributes. These bonding social capital connections did not produce negative outcomes as they have been suggested may do so in literature.

Components of bridging of social capital can be identified in this study reviewing study participants shared interest groups, non-culturally based clubs, involvement that connected to their future careers, and on-campus services and access to student employment opportunities. Study participants connected to non-Black student peers in club sport activities, academic-based clubs that did not have many Black students or women involved, and with White male peers involved in campus Greek who helped them get connected to a campus job.

The connections made through these bridged connections provided study participants with essential resources to obtain individual gains for their time in college (Birani & Lehmann, 2013). Many of the students in this study held on-campus jobs that allowed for a bridged connection to form new relationships and networking outside of their norm. As students gained more familiarity with campus and where to go for help, many of the Black women in this study situated themselves in clubs that were connected to their academic majors and future career aspirations. This capital was driven by a shift in mindsets and a newfound confidence to be physically present in spaces to help catapult themselves into connections to help support their futures and time out of college. The

goal of the Black women in this study was to achieve more, and to gain a sense of stability in their future education, future finances, and future social networks.

This study reported connection to people as a bonding and bridging connection for students. Additionally, the bonding and bridging capital from this study showed differences and some distinct connections and intersections among the reported bonding and bridging social capital of students. On one hand the multicultural physical space positioned itself as a gathering space for alike peers who had access to services to support them, racially, academically, and socially, and opportunities to work there as student employees to gain work experience. The greater highlight was the campus administrators in the cultural center campus space that created an environment to connect with peers, and the opportunity for some of the study participants to find and gain work experience. Another unique bridging and bonding capital connection was through participants' club involvement. The cultural club connection to the Black student organization allowed students to engage with their racially diverse peers through a bonding capital experience to gain positively correlated social, academic, and non-academic gains (Hall et al., 2011), while the non-culturally based pre-professional clubs offered the same experiences through a bridging capital experience. More than two participants in the study shared that their community work fostered future growth and career plans to work in the subject area of social justice. The concept of bridging and bonding social capital have not been highlighted in recent or past empirical research studies, and the Black college women in this study utilized both bonding and bridging capital experiences to maintain connection to campus and people.

Practical Recommendations

Based on the results of this study, the complex racial and gendered experiences that occur for FGLI Black college women inside and outside of the classroom space are pertinent for higher education administrators. Though these Black women may be succeeding academically, they may be struggling socially and emotionally. Balancing the intersection of their racial and gender identities to show up to engage and connect with people has been a tactic of Black college women for decades. Support for these women can be achieved by campus professors not singling out Black college women to be the Black perspective or voice during group class discussions, or by campus peers not conforming to society's image of Black women as angry beings. Classroom professors should acknowledge the low percentage of Black college women in their classrooms, and their institutions should provide training for faculty on how to lead effective conversations about race and racism in the classroom.

Campus service departments and programs that create culturally based groups and organizations for involvement while enrolled in college, should be introduced early to potential and incoming students as Black college women are more often enrolling at PWIs. Campus support department areas such as new student orientation programs can structure information sessions that are directed at Black college women to inform them on what social groups are available to incoming students. For example, universities should support the construction and sustainability of Black sororities, Black student organizations, and women of color structured clubs to gain overwhelming positives from these socially connected group involvements. Cultural club involvement served as a critical resource for the students in this study at Frontier University.

Though the literature suggest that campus fitness and recreation centers provide students with a social bonding experience and increased connection to their university, this connection can also challenge the social bond and connection to fitness for Black college women. By adjusting the introduction to fitness space and programming structures, campus fitness and recreation departments must consider the entrance of FGLI students to a fitness space that may be unfamiliar to them, how to get involved with fitness classes, and how to establish a peer social connection while working out. The theories of social capital connections have assisted higher education institutions in creating the appropriate policies and practices to promote and help to support Black college women enrolled in higher education.

Considerations and Recommendations for Future Research

This study was conducted in a short time frame and future research could expand on this study by following students into their graduate studies. A more complex study could delve into the social capital factors, as it is something that expands beyond family, networks, and relationships. It would be beneficial to further explore the family structures of these FGLI Black college women to gain a better perspective of family influence on education. As addressed earlier, a key component of social capital and social integration experiences for FGLI racially underrepresented college students are held within their experiences and connections to campus support structures and their entrance into institutional structured campus environments. Further exploration of how Black college women select their academic major and how it may connect them to campus and campus involvement may be beneficial.

The first-generation Black college women in this study found their own individual fit into fitness while also experiencing challenging racial and gendered experiences. Conducting an ethnographic study to observe and interact with Black college women as they engage in fitness would allow for an opportunity to see first-hand how this population engages with peers in the fitness space to gather additional conclusions about their experiences. Lastly, expanding the study to other four-year public institutions with the similar population could help gain a supplementary perspective of the challenges and successes that FGLI Black college women face while enrolled in college, and more specifically at a PWI.

Conclusion

This qualitative study explored FGLI US Black college women perspectives of collegiate fitness bridging and bonding of social capital while being enrolled at a four-year PWI. This study was one of few that has utilized Bourdieu's Social Capital Theory to further explore the role of resources specifically for Black college women enrolled at a four-year public institution. Utilizing the context of higher education, and use of Bourdieu's Social Capital Theory concept of group resource, study participant experiences connected them to group solidarities, social networks, and social ties.

Historically, literature has expressed that US Black college women have been denied broad access to post-secondary institutions that are not historically Black or small (Williams et al., 2020). As they enter into the higher education setting, Black college women navigate their campuses with their racial and gender identities, while also holding the identity as an FGLI student. Bourdieu highlights in his theory that a student's social

class may hinder them from obtaining social capital, which ultimately helps students succeed in the college environment.

In the case of this study, and in society, Black college women are often overlooked if they are not participating in varsity sports at a college or university, and Black college women have not been at the forefront or research at higher education institutions as much as Black men.

The study's constructed themes showed that the women in this study experienced negative racial and gender experiences while being enrolled but were able to find a positive pocket of support with campus administrators, campus programs, and to their campus peers. Campus support people and services need to be in place at higher education institutions upon entry, during, and until departure for FGLI US Black college women enrolled at PWIs. The same effort that supports Black college males with degree completion through campus programs, campus resources, and Black male mentors, must be done for Black college women. This study reveals that access to campus support administrators in multicultural centers and first-generation programs, and to peer support groups formatted to serve racial and gender identities of the students, was beneficial for the Black women in this study.

This study was able to highlight tenants of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and how they assisted in shedding light to these students' experiences in their daily lives and while on campus. Centering race and racism were evident in the discussed social disparities between dominant and marginalized racial groups, which were bridged by connections in academic based clubs, volunteering, and within student employment. Students of color and low socioeconomic status students are often unable to benefit from individual

agency; however, the women in this study were able to do this in their role as students in the classroom setting to achieve academic success in rigorous majors. Experiencing components of intersectionality highlights that Black college women have at least two targeted identities that connect to racism and sexism. Once study participants learned how to journey through college without having to abandon one identity for the other, they were proud of the connections they established with campus administrators. These administrators helped with everything from financial aid resources to life advice. Having some help with the same race, gender, or social class standing assured the women in this study that they were supported along with an example of successful people with similar upbringings and lived experiences. Academic and social counter spaces continue to be essential for Black college student survival in higher education, as for the women in this study. Not only did the multicultural center and campus first-generation support program spaces help the women in this study, so did on-campus residences and Black student club meetings, which gave these women somewhere to go to feel seen and acknowledged, to feel safe, and somewhere to grow emotionally, spiritually, and individually.

This study was conducted to provide further insight on how to institutionally support FGLI US Black college women enrolled in higher education. What was discovered was that Black college women have the resiliency and grit to still be successful in higher education when they are challenged with social and structural obstacles that may happen to attack their racial, gender, and social class identities. Black college women will continue to enroll in higher education to obtain degrees. The hope is that higher education institutional systemic and systematic structures will culturally shift to not only serve the influx of racially diverse student enrollment at universities and

colleges, but that they will take the time to acknowledge that better support and care must be considered for FGLI US Black college women.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Consent Information Script

We are conducting a research study to learn about first-generation low-income Black college women perspectives on campus fitness programs role in bridging social capital while enrolled in higher education.

If you volunteer to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in two in-person interview sessions, which will be audio recorded. Your participation should take about 60 minutes for the first interview session, and 30-45 minutes for interview session number two.

This study is considered to be minimal risk of harm. This means the risks of your participation in the research are similar in type or intensity to what you encounter during your daily activities.

Benefits of doing research are not definite; but we hope to learn if participation in campus fitness related programs while enrolled at a higher education institution contributes to bridging social capital for first-generation low-income Black college women.

Study participants who decide to enroll in the study will receive a $25.00 Amazon.com gift card at the start of interview session one, and an additional $25.00 Amazon.com gift card at the start of interview session number two. If a study participant participates in both interview sessions they will receive the full $50.00 incentive for being a part of the study.

The researchers and the University of Nevada, Reno will treat your identity and the information collected about you with professional standards of confidentiality and protect it to the extent allowed by law. You will not be personally identified in any reports or publications that may result from this study. The US Department of Health and Human Services, the University of Nevada, Reno Research Integrity Office, and the Institutional Review Board may look at your study records.

You may ask questions of the researcher at any time by calling or emailing the PI Eleni Oikonomidoy at 775-682-7865 or eleni@unr.edu. Or by calling or sending an email to the study contact, Sheena Harvey at 775-351-3751 or sheenah@unr.edu.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may stop at any time. Declining to participate or stopping your participation will not have any negative effects on you.

You may ask about your rights as a research participant. If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about this research, you may report them (anonymously if you so choose) by calling the University of Nevada, Reno Research Integrity Office at 775.327.2368.

Thank you for your participation in this study!

Appendix B: Recruitment Flier

Seeking Black College Women Study Participants!

Hello! My name is Sheena Harvey, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Equity and Diversity program with the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Nevada, Reno. I am seeking participants for a research study about first-generation (FG) low-income (LI) Black college women experiences in campus fitness programs while enrolled in college.

To participate in this study, you must meet the following criteria:

- Must be currently enrolled as an undergraduate student at a four-year higher education institution
- Must be first in immediate family to attend college at a four-year higher education institution
- Must identify as low-income
- Must be a Woman
- Must be U.S. – born Black
- Must have at least one full academic year of participation in on-campus fitness related facilities or programs
- Must be enrolled and currently attending the university selected for this study
- Must not be a student-athlete at the university selected for this study

**You will be asked to participate in two (2) in-person one-on-one interviews with me. The first interview session will take approximately 60 minutes.
The second interview session will approximately take 30 – 45 minutes.**

Study participants who decide to enroll in the study will receive a $25.00 Amazon.com gift card at the start of the first interview session, and an additional $25.00 Amazon.com gift card at the start of the second interview session.

*If you would like to volunteer for this study, please email me directly at **sheenah@unr.edu** to receive a link to the study's demographic questionnaire to make sure you meet the study's requirement criteria.*
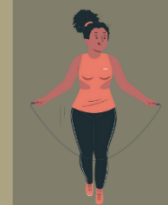
Appendix C: Demographic Questionnaire

Thanks for deciding to be a part of this research study. This research is being conducted to learn about first-generation low-income Black college women experiences in campus fitness programs while enrolled in college.

Please read through the questions and answer each one.

1. I give my consent to participate in the study.
   Yes, No
2. Are you currently enrolled at four-year higher education institution?
   Yes, No
3. Are you first in your immediate family to attend college at a four-year higher education institution?
   Yes, No
4. Do you identify as a low-income college student?
   Yes, No
5. What is your current class standing at the institution you are currently enrolled at?
   Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, Senior
6. Have you had academic attendance of one full year at the institution you are enrolled at?
   Yes, No
7. If you answered yes to question 6, during your one full year of attendance at your institution, did you participate in on-campus fitness related facilities or programs?
   Yes, No
8. Are you currently a student-athlete at the university you are enrolled at?
   Yes, No
9. Please enter the name of your college/university.
   (Please be sure spell out the full name of the university)
10. What is your college major?
11. What is your college minor?
    (If you do not have one, please leave blank)
12. What is your age?
13. What is your race/ethnicity?
14. Do you identify as a woman?
15. Please provide an email address that you would like to receive information at about the study, and to receive your Amazon gift card, after completing the study.
16. Please provide a phone number if I am not able to contact you through email.
    (xxx-xxx-xxxx)
17. Please enter a pseudonym (fictitious name) that you would like me to use during the study, instead of using your first name.

Thank you for completing this demographic questionnaire. I will be in touch with you shortly. If you have any questions prior to me contacting you, please do not hesitate to email me at sheenah@unr.edu or call me at 775-351-3751.

Appendix D: First Interview Questions Semi-Structured

1. Please tell me a little bit about yourself.
    a. Where are you from? Where did you attend high school?
2. How did you end up at your current university?
3. Please tell me about your time at your university so far.
    a. What has been a positive experience?
    b. What has been a challenging experience?
4. Please tell me about your social network in general.
    a. How many people would you say are in your network?
    b. Who are the people in your network?
    c. Do you share common social identities (race, social class, gender, etc.) with the people in your network? If so, what are those and with whom?
5. Please tell me about your social network at your university.
    a. How many people would you say are in your network?
    b. Who are the people in your network?
    c. Do you share common social identities (race, social class, gender, etc.) with the people in your network? If so, what are those and with whom?
6. Connecting with people can have positives and negatives. How is the relationship with those in your social network?
    a. How have your network connections helped you?
    b. How have your network challenged you?
7. If any, what groups/organizations are you involved in at your university?
    a. Why did you choose this/those groups?
8. Please describe how connected you feel to campus.
    a. How many people are you close to (in and out of school)?
9. Some people say that there are challenges for Black students on predominately White college campuses.
    a. What are your thoughts about this statement?
    b. What are your experiences related to navigating a White campus?
10. In addition to challenges, there may be opportunities for Black students on predominately White college campuses.
    a. What are your thoughts about this statement?
11. Please tell me about your experiences in campus fitness.
    a. Do you interact with others when exercising? If so, whom?
12. Do your fitness interactions extend outside of campus fitness? If so, how?
    a. How frequently do these interactions occur?
13. Can you please share one social experience in fitness that has been helpful for you?
14. Can you please share one social experience in fitness that has been a challenge for you?

Appendix E: Second Interview Questions

1. **Mapping Exercise**

Give participants a piece of paper, pens, pencils, markers, etc. and ask the following questions:

Where do you see yourself 5 to 10 years from now?
   a. Who are the people that can help you get there?
   b. Match the people you've selected to the journey.
   c. What are the projected identities of the people you have identified in helping you along your journey?

2. **Community Connection**

In the first interview you referred to community. Please tell me who is a part of this community, and how did you get connected to them?

3. **Fitness Center Scenario**

You are the director of the fitness center on campus. You have been given 1 million dollars to create an ideal space within the fitness center.
   a. What does that space look like and who is there?
   b. How do people in that space interact with each other?
   c. What is the quality of interactions in the space?

Appendix F: Participant Individual Questions

<u>**Airee Individual Questions**</u>
1. In your first interview you mentioned the support of specific groups (BSO & WoCC). You shared that you didn't feel judged in those groups.
    a. Could you provide an example of an experience in both of those clubs/groups?
2. In your first interview you shared how you were learning to trust people more.
    a. Is the trust you are working to build within your networks or outside of them?
3. In the first interview you mentioned that you stay on and near campus for safety reasons.
    a. When have you felt unsafe on or near campus?
    b. When do you feel most safe on or near campus?
4. In your first interview you mentioned that you've learned more about intersectionality since being in college.
    a. What have you learned, and could you share an example?
5. Last time we connected, you shared that 'you call yourself a woman, you identify as Black, but that you were also exploring your own gender identity.
    a. Could you share more about that?
    b. Does your gender identity exploration connect or disconnect you to your networks?

<u>**Tiana Individual Questions**</u>
1. In your first interview you mentioned that the 'Black student camaraderie' was non-existent/negative.
    a. Could you please provide an example or give me more on that?
2. In your first interview you shared that your RA experience was positive.
    a. Could you please provide an example or give me more on that?
        i. If not mentioned, bring up participant comment about their talks about race.
3. Let's talk about relationships in your network.
    a. You mentioned that your network helped you get out of a dark place. Would you feel comfortable sharing how they helped with that? Could you provide an example?
4. In your first interview you mentioned that finding spaces on campus is important, and that it is important for Black students to go into spaces. Why is this important?
5. In your first interview you mentioned that when navigating a White campus, you have to learn how to 'work around' White people.' Could you please an example of how you've had to do this?
6. How did your participation in FrontierFIT connect to your time in the campus fitness center or campus in general?

Ayame Individual Questions
1. In your first interview you mentioned that your relationship with your network helped you get connected to resources.
   a. What were the resources and please provide an example of how you got connected to a particular resource.
2. In your first interview you shared that you could not comprehend your own identity prior to college.
   a. Could you please provide an example of what you meant by this?
3. In your first interview you talked about the Women of Color Collective group.
   a. Could you please provide an example of what that group did for you?
4. In your first interview you mentioned the opportunity to connect with a Black guy counselor on campus.
   a. Could you please tell me more about your experience, without disclosing too much about your personal session with them?
5. In your first interview you commented that there was no 'fitness' talk in the Black community.
   a. What did you mean by that, and could you provide an example of how this may influence your participation in fitness or fitness groups?

Mamba Individual Questions
1. In your first interview you mentioned that the group members of Wolf Speaks helped you get through some of your classes. Could you please provide an example of how they have helped you.
2. What initially drew you to the club sport groups that you have participated in? Could you provide an example.
3. In your first interview you mentioned that you were under the assumption that White UNR students didn't attend school with Black people.
   a. Could you please provide an example of how you came to this statement?
4. In your first interview you mentioned that you had not personally seen any opportunities for Black students on campus.
5. Have you seen opportunities for other Black students you know or know of? If so, what opportunities have you learned about for other Black students?

Jasper Individual Questions
1. In your first interview you talked about your connected networks.
   a. What identities do your share with your network?
   b. You mentioned that it was beneficial to set boundaries with your network of people. Can you provide an example(s) of how you have set boundaries?
2. Please tell me more about you time/experience as a FrontierFIT mentor.
3. In your first interview you mentioned that you had a stronger connection to people than actual campus. Could you please provide an example of this statement?

4. In your first interview you mentioned that you struggled with your personal identity as a Black student on campus. Could you please provide an example of what you may have experienced so far?

Sophia Individual Questions

1. In your first interview you mentioned that you want more connections with/for your social network.
   a. What is your role in this?
2. In your first interview you shared your experiences with the club BSO.
   a. Please share a positive experience from BSO.
   b. Please share a challenging experience from BSO.
   c. Please share how you got involved in a leadership role within BSO.
3. In your first interview you mentioned that you felt that you had to do more than others on campus because of the color of your skin. Could you please provide an example?
4. In your first interview you mentioned that you would like to see more Black people at the gym on campus. Could you please share more about wanting to see this.

Elle Individual Questions

1. In your first interview you shared that your on-campus job connected you to a positive connection. You shared that you have become a leader and that you experienced social skill improvement.
   a. How did your job, or what events occurred that helped you become a leader?
   b. How has your social skills improved and who were the people or events involved that have contributed to this improvement?
2. In your first interview you shared/expressed that your social identity was that you're a mixed girl (Black & White).
   a. You expressed that you didn't expect to have friends in class. Why is that?
   b. You mentioned that you couldn't really connect with the Black students on campus, and that your upbringing was different. Could you please provide an example?
3. In the first interview, I asked you about your relationship with your network. You mentioned that your network helped/supported you building confidence and supported your mental health.
   a. Can you share how your network has contributed to your confidence build and who may have been involved with that? Please provide an example.
   b. Can you share how your network has helped with your mental health and who may have been involved with that? Please provide an example.

<u>Bee Individual Questions</u>
1. In your first interview you shared information about your time at UNR (on campus) so far. You mentioned that you encountered a lot of racist and ignorant people.
    a. Could please provide an example of a particular encounter that related to racism and/or ignorance?
2. In your first interview you talked about the relationship with your network. You mentioned that they helped you with support.
    a. Could you please give an example of how and who may have helped you?
3. In your first interview you talked about being Black on a White campus. You stated that "people say whatever they want to us because Black people are perceived to be strong."
    a. Can you please provide an example of how Black people are perceived to be strong or how you have been perceived.
4. Black people join White sororities to try to fit in better. Why is that, or why do you think this? Could you please provide an example?
5. In your first interview you expressed that club like BSO are beneficial for Black students on campus. You mentioned that it wasn't for you, but that it is beneficial for other Black students.
    a. Could you please provide an example or provide further details on this?

<u>Alanah Individual Questions</u>
1. In the first interview, you mentioned growing up you knew White people have it differently than you did.
    a. Can you explain more about that or provide an example?
2. In the first interview we talked about work ethic, and you made a particular statement.
    a. Why do you feel like you have to work twice as hard around White people?
3. In your first interview you expressed that you gravitate more towards women, in terms of being connected or engaging with people. Could you give me more on this or please provide an example?
4. In your first interview you shared that your network was small because you had issues trusting people. This was based of the roommate situation and incident.
    a. Is there any other reason to why you may not feel that having a larger network would be helpful or beneficial for?

<u>Delilah Individual Questions</u>
1. In your first interview you talked about being a part of BSO and how it has been a positive experience.
    a. Can you please share more about that and provide an example(s)?
    b. You also mentioned that BSO put you around more Black women.
        i. What has that done for you?
        ii. Could you provide me an example of what you hope to flourish or happen from these relationships with Black women?
2. In your first interview you spoke about the positive experience you've have with your Canyon Flats community.

      a. Could you please provide an example of a connection(s), and who are the people involved?

3. In your first interview we talked about the relationship(s) with networks.
   a. You stated that you worked on learning what it means to depend on people. Can you please provide an example of this?

4. Could you please tell me more about the mental health support and community service-based group that you got involved with?