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Hidden in Plain Sight: Uncovering the Emotional Labor of Black Women Students at Historically White Colleges and Universities

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We utilized the emotional labor triangle to understand how 16 Black women students who attended Historically white colleges and universities (HWCUs) navigated gendered-racialized oppressive environments that mattered to their academic success. This study contributes to a gap in the literature, as much of the research focused on students of color without disaggregating for gender or other social identities. In addition, the literature is scant on experiences of Black women students use of emotional labor. Emotional labor has largely been studied from a management perspective. Through qualitative semi-structured interviews, we examined the emotional labor Black women expended while pursuing their undergraduate degree. We employed a qualitative, intersectional, methodological approach to foreground historically marginalized voices and situated the study in the hypervisibility Black women participants described feeling as space invaders on their historically White undergraduate campus and at the same time the invisibleness of their voice and masking of their feelings as they encountered gendered racism. Further, we emphasized the emotional toll and stress that may occur for Black women when they do not utilize engaged coping mechanisms while expending their emotional labor. The study holds implications for educators to address emotional labor inequities within HWCUs.

Keywords: Black women, emotional labor, historically White campuses

Experiencing hypervisibility and invisibility simultaneously can lead to stress-related physical and mental health concerns (Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999; Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009; Szymanski & Lewis, 2016). This is often the experience of Black women at historically White colleges and universities (HWCUs). Many HWCUs boast about their racially inclusive student body through pictures in college viewbooks (Hartley & Morphew, 2008; Henslee, Leao, Miller, Wendling, & Whittington, 2017), making Black students hypervisible by spotlighting them in campus materials. Images in HWCU marketing materials do not always reflect the lived experiences Black women students have that render them invisible through structures and systems that uphold and perpetuate White supremacy, patriarchy, and other systems of domination.

Movements erupting across the country (#MeToo) and on various college campuses, such as #BlackLivesMatter and #ITooAmHarvard (George Mwangi, Bettencourt, & Malaney, 2018), also make Black women students' issues of racism/sexism hypervisible with widespread media attention. At the same time, this coverage renders the founders of these movements, Black women, invisible. For example, the #MeToo movement, started by a Black woman to expose stories of harassment and sexual assault, gained more traction when White women celebrities shared their experiences of sexual misconduct (Chan, 2019). Three Black women founded #BlackLivesMatter (BlackLivesMatter.com/about), yet the hashtag is often used in response to the killing of Black males. #ITooAmHarvard was a media campaign developed by a college student who identifies as a Black and Japanese woman (Butler, 2014). The campaign was so successful that other institutions launched similar movements, likely without recognizing that the founder of the campaign is a biracial Black woman. The erasure of Black women's voices while using their labor is not new (Linder & Rodriguez, 2012). We cited only more recent examples of Black women's labor being used while their voices and intersectional experiences become invisible.

Some 80 years ago, in her critically acclaimed novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston (1937/1998) wrote that the Black woman is the "mule of the world" (p. 14). Hurston reflected the physical and often hypervisible labor that Black women bear. This quote also unmasks the invisible emotional labor that Black women exert in various spaces, including college campuses. Although some research has highlighted Black women college student experiences at HWCUs (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Domingue, 2015; Fries-Britt &

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Turner, 2001; Kelly, Segoshi, Adams, & Raines, 2017; Linder & Rodriguez, 2012), few higher education studies have examined the intersectional experiences of Black women and the invisible emotional energy they exert. Our study addresses the research question, what are Black women students' from HWCUs experiences with emotional labor? One goal of this work is to make the often-invisible emotional labor of Black women college students visible.

Conceptual Framework

To reveal the invisible work of Black women students in HWCUs, we utilized the emotional framework discussed in management literature that has recently appeared in studies of Black professors. Emotional labor requires a worker to constrain their own feelings to provide a space that is suitable for others (Hochschild, 2003). Emotional labor is most commonly used in literature to describe the interactions between employees, customers, and management in the workplace (Constanti & Gibbs, 2004). The exchange of these roles emphasize the pressure of those who perform under the manager and customers' expectations. Employees (performers) carry out the mission of the organization (management), and provide customer satisfaction. The customers are the recipients of the service and work provided by the employees. Customers have power to evaluate employee's work measured by the customer's perception and satisfaction (Groth, Hennig-Thurau, & Walsh, 2009). Organizations (management) act as the employee's supervisor, ensuring an appropriate relationship between the employee and the customer (Kruml & Geddes, 2000). Management's level of control over employees' emotional labor is situated in workplace policies, professional development, and supervisory expectations (Hochschild, 2003). These mechanisms for control allow management and customers to exude power and justify expectations over employees.

As employees work to please customers and management, employees embody an element of performance in which they balance management and customer satisfaction regardless of their personal feelings about the tasks. When the employees' compensation is comparable to the amount of emotional labor expended on professional tasks, the process can be equitable and cultivate agency. If there is an imbalance, the employee can be vulnerable to management and customers' exploitation (Constanti & Gibbs, 2004).

The tension and imbalance of employee/employer/customer relationships is illustrated in an emotional labor triangle (ELT), which is made up of three particular roles positioned at each corner: performer (employee), customer, and management (Constanti & Gibbs, 2004; see Figure 1). The ELT was designed within the context of business, but for this study, we labeled HWCUs as institutional management, Black women as performers, and White students and faculty as the customers. Intersectionality theory expands our conceptual framework (Berger & Guidroz, 2009; May, 2015; Strayhorn, 2013, 2017).

A Black feminist scholar, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), introduced the concept of intersectionality among other legal and theoretical concepts to understand how race and gender can shape one's lived experience. Intersectionality theory encompasses how multiple forms of oppression are experienced when various social identities, such as race, sex, class, ability, and sexual orientation, intersect (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). For our conceptual framework in this study, we overlay an intersectional lens on the ELT to examine how power structures and dynamics in HWCU spaces may influence the educational experience of Black women students (see Figure 2).

When incorporating the ELT with intersectionality, we are questioning whether Black women students at HWCUs operate as performers, and HWCUs act as institutional managers, which uphold power, privilege, and oppression rather than a mutually beneficial relationship between all stakeholders. As performers, Black women may be expected to provide service to students and faculty (customers) at the expense of their emotional labor. Intersectional frameworks and analyses provide a holistic view of students in higher education (Museus & Griffin, 2011; Strayhorn, 2013, 2017) and allow us to better understand the unique, complex experiences of Black women in HWCUs by looking at how racialized and gendered oppression is experienced intersectionally.

Literature Review

The literature review on emotional labor and the experiences of Black women undergraduate students is organized in three categories: emotional labor as a form of performance by space invaders in higher education, emotional labor as a disengagement coping mechanism, and emotional labor as an engagement coping mechanism. We use intersectional theory to frame the experiences of Black women students at HWCUs.

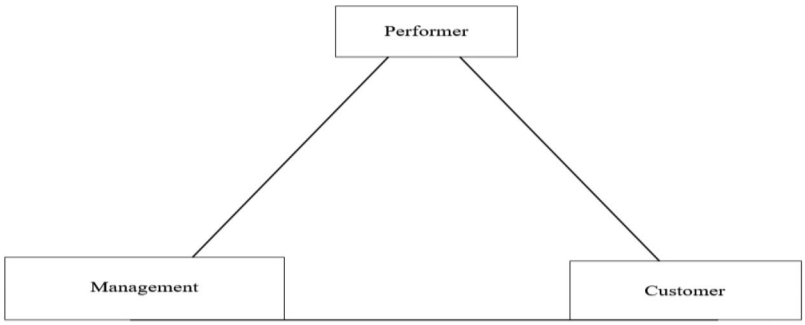

Figure 1. Emotional labor triangle adapted from Constanti and Gibbs (2004).

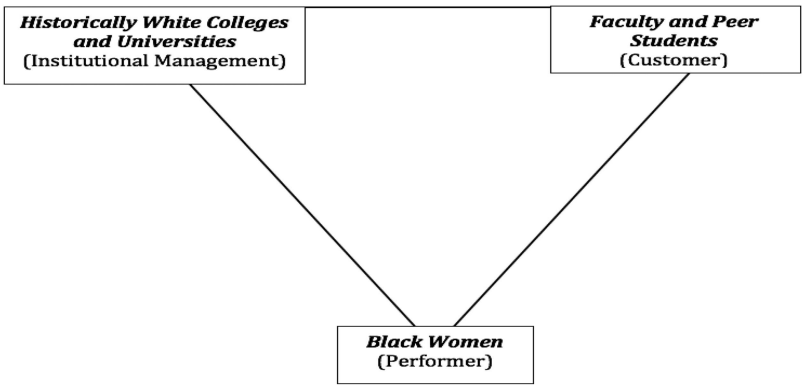

Figure 2. Emotional labor triangle with an intersectional lens that highlights race and gender. Adapted from Constanti and Gibbs (2004) and Delgado and Stefancic (2012).

Emotional Labor as a Performance by Space Invaders in Higher Education

Emotional labor is described as a performance in which one must conceal feelings and provide services to others in a way that benefits management (Constanti & Gibbs, 2004). We situate Black women as the "performers": students who must expend emotional labor to succeed in HWCUs with faculty and peers. Black women's performance offers a benefit to the institution as they diversify university graduates. This dynamic may create an unequal distribution of emotional labor in which the larger institution, faculty, and peers view and treat minoritized students as space invaders.

Hostile environments force Black women to make a critical decision when entering HWCUs: assimilate or disrupt the space. Both decisions require personal sacrifice from Black women that is disproportionate to their White counterparts, who are not viewed as space invaders at HWCUs. Either decision requires Black women to use emotional labor to survive or creates opportunity for emotional labor to be exploited.

A qualitative study from outside higher education evidences the performance of a space invader. Durr and Harvey Wingfield (2011) sought to understand how the intersection of race and gender affected the experiences of Black women in their daily work environments. Through semistructured interviews and participant observation, Durr and Harvey Wingfield found that Black women often believed that their performance in the workplace was criticized more because of gendered racism. Related to the hypersurveillance of Black women in the workplace, they used more emotional labor to survive historically White spaces (Durr & Harvey Wingfield, 2011). Their findings support Puwar's (2004) claim that Black women are deemed out of place in certain environments and give credence to the idea that Black women students expend emotional labor in HWCUs.

As "space invaders," Black women experience overt forms of racism, sexism, and microaggressions, and have to learn how to navigate these encounters while also being successful in their degree attainment (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; Kelly et al., 2017; Szymanski & Lewis, 2016). Although many of the Black women participants graduated, this came at a cost, eroding their academic confidence and performance (Kelly et al., 2017). The negative experiences Black women encounter at HWCUs as space invaders may force them to utilize emotional labor more frequently and thus develop coping mechanisms to manage the hostile environments they encounter.

Emotional Labor as a Disengagement Coping Mechanism

When emotional labor is inequitably expended and goes unresolved, Black women may resort to using coping mechanisms that positively or negatively affect their psychosocial, physical, and emotional well-being, also known as disengagement and engagement coping mechanisms (Szymanski & Lewis, 2016). Disengagement strategies take the form of detachment and distancing oneself in HWCUs, whereas engagement strategies take the form of resistance and advocacy efforts. Research in psychology and sociology has revealed that racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression serve as stressors to individuals who hold marginalized identities (Clark et al., 1999; Landrine & Klonoff, 1996; Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009). Understanding how Black women experience HWCUs offers insight into the spaces in which coping mechanisms may be necessary for their survival.

Disengagement coping mechanisms, in which one performs at a certain level to maintain the comfort of those in power, can be isolating (Durr & Harvey Wingfield, 2011). Black women who experience gendered racism are more likely to cope with psychological distress by detaching from others and blaming oneself (Szymanski & Lewis, 2016). For fear of feeding into stereotypes or disrupting space, Black women may refuse to vocalize their discomfort and conceal the distress they are experiencing. Though this strategy may be perceived as passive behavior, Evans and Moore (2015) described this action as an act of survival. Black women who hold intersecting, marginalized identities may experience racial battle fatigue (RBF) as they determine how to navigate oppressive environments.

RBF describes how the effects of micro and macro forms of racialized oppression manifest physiologically, psychologically, and behaviorally within Black women and other marginalized groups at HWCUs (Pierce, 1995; Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011; Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2006). We posit that RBF can have a damaging effect on Black women because of their multiple intersecting oppressed identities. Dealing with gendered racism can

have a deleterious effect because it may require the emotional labor of Black women putting on a façade to conceal their true feelings (Durr & Harvey Wingfield, 2011). This process, coupled with dealing with gendered racism, can add to the overall fatigue that Black women face in higher education.

Emotional Labor as An Engagement Coping Mechanism

Emotional labor is also connected to positive outcomes that cultivate agency and resistance (Collins, 1998; hooks, 1990; Mirza, 2009; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Szymanski and Lewis (2016) explained that engagement coping mechanisms take the form of self-advocacy and engagement in educational spaces that provide tools of resistance. For example, Black women who participate in one or more of the following programs or organizations can draw on engagement coping mechanisms to address oppression experienced at an HWCU: identity-based student organizations, student demonstrations, student activism, and inclusive mentorship programs.

When Black women utilize engagement coping mechanisms, they develop counterinterpretations of their own identities, interests, and needs (Mirza, 2009) while in a safe space. el-Khoury (2012) utilized "strategies of resistance" to analyze how Black individuals self-govern and manage themselves when experiencing racialized forms of oppression. Although el-Khoury did not use an intersectional lens to examine how gendered racism influences the use of these strategies, they are also applicable to the experiences of Black women in higher education. In particular, "disposition to steadiness" (el-Khoury, 2012, p. 90) is defined as an internal dialogue within Black individuals who are able to make meaning of oppressive encounters and still maintain a steady, positive outlook of themselves. When Black women find safe spaces on campus, they may engage in healthy strategies, such as engagement coping mechanisms, that counterisolation, foster community, and build resistance to oppressive environments.

Although there is literature that defines emotional labor and its implications, we discovered a lack of research that emphasizes how emotional labor manifests from the perspective of Black women students. Our research fills a gap in literature by centering the experiences of Black women who offer reflections of key moments in college when they experienced intersectional oppression, expended emotional labor, and utilized emotional labor as a coping mechanism.

Method

As researchers, we used an intersectional, qualitative research methodology because it allowed us "to become intimately acquainted . . . with the sociohistorical realities of historically oppressed groups" (Stewart, 2010, p. 295), such as women and persons of color. Cole (2009) specified that research on intersectionality can be conducted by focusing on inclusion and equity from data collection to analysis. We included Black women with different intersecting identities in the recruitment and data collection efforts. We also focused data analysis on the diversity of their experiences and noted places where their experiences were similar to women in the study with different intersecting identities. This methodology assisted us in answering our central research question: What are Black women students from HWCUs' experiences with emotional labor?

Participants

Through snowball sampling, we first e-mailed those we knew were eligible for the study and then asked them to contact others who may be eligible. We also e-mailed key informants (staff we knew in area colleges and university diversity offices) and asked them to send our recruitment e-mail (see Appendix A) to Black women who met our criteria. Eligibility was described in our recruitment e-mail and required that participants were female assigned at birth but could identify as genderqueer, woman, and identified as Black (inclusive of African American, Afro-Caribbean, African, among others), graduated from any HWCU as an undergraduate, and lived in the Chicago, Illinois, area at the time of data collection. We chose Chicago for convenience as well the fact that it is the third largest city in the United States, with the second highest Black population (Rastogi, Johnson, Hoefell, & Drewery, 2011). Those who agreed to participate in the study were subsequently e-mailed a consent form and scheduled for an interview.

Of the 16 participants, six self-identified as first-generation college students; seven self-identified their socioeconomic status as lower-middle, four as middle, three as lower, and two as upper-middle class. Their status as college graduates from 13 different universities (five private, eight public, one women's college) gave them the advantage of telling their stories as HWCU students in full retrospect. A majority identified as heterosexual, with two identifying as queer. One participant identified as genderqueer; however, they adhered to the criteria of the study in that they were assigned female at birth and answered the call for a study of Black women. The remaining participants all identified as cisgender women. The undergraduate majors of the participants varied from the humanities to the natural sciences. The most recent graduate in the study received her bachelor's degree in 2014, and one participant received her degree in 1979. Participants' graduation date range enriched our data by allowing us to look at Black women students' experiences over time and note changes in experiences based on year of graduation, if any (see Appendix B).

Procedure

Procedures included completion of a short demographic questionnaire, consent form, and an individual semistructured interview (see Appendix C). The questionnaire captured where participants attended college and how they defined their social identities. Individual interviews were an hour long in person, with two conducted through a video-chat software program. Examples of the questions included "How, if at all, do you believe your identities affected your college experience?" and "What words would you use to describe yourself in college?" The research team used a Field Note Reflection Sheet to reflect on the interview experience, and on this form, we noted our feelings, stated our assumptions, and discussed these in research team meetings to assist in setting them apart from what the participants shared. As a form of member checking and credibility procedure (Miles & Huberman, 1994), we e-mailed interview transcripts to participants to assure that we accurately captured participants' thoughts.

In our open-coding phase of data analysis, we did an independent initial read of the transcript, and first-round codes came from answers to our main research question about any experiences the participants had with emotional labor. Next, consensus was used only in our initial description of the first-round coding so that we could establish basic descriptive categories from the data. To move from codes to categories, we used a data reduction technique called *axial coding* (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) to structure the data and did a second read of the transcript asking the analytic question (Neumann, 2009) "How, if at all, did Black women's experiences connect to ELT?" (Constanti & Gibbs, 2004), Last, we each coded the data with the ELT and participants' intersectional identities in mind and came together again to arrange the codes into categories based on which codes seemed to group together. For example, we grouped codes for microaggressions, lack of structural diversity, and racial superiority of White classmates into a category of *presumptions of racism*. We grouped other codes for avoidance, and awareness of isolation into a category of *internal battles coping with intersecting gendered racism and other isms*. We relied on independent coding to cut down on privileging coding by members of the team with more status or power (e.g., tenured faculty member). We utilized peer debriefing (Miles & Huberman, 1994) with each other in a way that honored our own differing intersecting identities as well as to enhance credibility of the analysis—searching for disconfirming data and being open to the meaning each team member drew from the data, irrespective of student or faculty status.

In data collection and analysis, we adhered to our ELT and intersectionality conceptual framework. We explicitly had an open call for participants that included women who identify along a gender spectrum, asked participants in the interviews which social identities were salient for them, and probed for how the intersection of their salient social identities may have shaped their experiences with emotional labor in college. This intersectional lens guided us as we moved from codes, to categories, and, finally, to themes in the data analysis. We moved from categories to themes by interpreting what meaning we could derive from categories based on patterns that emerged that cut across all of the data. For instance, as a team, we discussed the main insights that came from how participants described not only the category of presumptions of racism but also how that intersected with categories related to internal battles of identity that were intersectional in nature. Thus, patterns that emerged around expending emotional labor came from analyzing categories that we grouped together to describe broader themes related to ELT: experiencing oppression, reacting to, and coping with it. We arrived at the themes in this article based on following the patterns in the data that enabled us to answer our research question.

Researcher Positionality

Our identities were essential to our positionality throughout conceptualizing, conducting, and analyzing the study. Each of us hold a diverse set of intersecting identities that shapes our understanding and value of intersectionality. One of the researchers identifies as a queer Black woman, and in addition to being a doctoral student also works full time as a staff administrator in an HWCU. The additional researchers identify as heterosexual Black women; one is a professor in a graduate preparation program and the others are part-time and full-time doctoral students. Our salient identities enhanced our data analysis as we shared some similarities and some differences with the participants. For instance, as insiders to Black women who attended HWCUs, we set aside our experiences as undergraduates as separate from the participants through completion of the Field Note Reflection sheets and discussions with each other about the data. In addition, we utilized each other as peer debriefers to recognize when our intersecting identities might be leading us to assume something about the participants' journeys that we could not prove through the data. As we grounded our discussion of themes and patterns that emerged from the categories of data, we used a constant comparative method (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) to focus specifically on the components of ELT performance and coping, and then compared that with instances in which participants' intersectional identities were named or implied.

Results

Findings show three linkages to the emotional labor and intersectionality framework: Black women experienced (a) anger over being put in the performer role as proof of HWCUs' commitment to racial and gender diversity, (b) exhaustion over having to perform in ways that made their peers and professors more comfortable with their intersectional identities, and (c) alienation from performing as one of the few Black women in their major or class. Black women were in vulnerable positions as undergraduate students and felt pressure to conceal their true emotions of anger, exhaustion, and alienation in academically gendered/racist (among other oppressive) environments, in which they performed for peers to be included in study groups and for faculty who held power with grades. Black women participants struggled to maintain their gendered-racial intersectional identity development while performing within White spaces on campus.

Anger: Performance as Recruitment Tool

Lauren grew angry when she saw how Black students were being put in the role of performer for recruitment at her HWCU:

> They gravitated toward people of color for like photography reasons . . . we'd be the representation of all the Black people . . . So I think that has really struck like a light bulb where it went off of like, "Who am I," "What are they using me as," and "What does that mean"? . . . I never understood like the impact it could have of them just trying to meet numbers or them just trying to like make their institution look good.

As someone who identifies as a Black woman from a low-socioeconomic background attending a private university, Lauren reflected on the hypervisibility of what it meant to her identity to feel she was "representing" all Black people on her campus. Her gender and class seemed hidden in the university's quest to show students of different races on campus. Kimberly was also angered by her HWCU's efforts to be seen as racially diverse, with no race-related problems, and their lack of addressing issues that did arise:

> There was like a big racial incident where somebody spray painted "nigger" on the door of a Black female student. And my university was going through great lengths to keep it out of the news because they didn't wanna scare parents from sending their kids to the school

> and not wanting the school . . . I feel like that happened quite frequently . . . a school who can go through so much to hide this but not do anything to try to prevent this or . . . help race relations, I think that was one of my bigger gripes with [HWCU].

Kimberly demonstrated the role of performing when she shared how she could not show how angry she was each time an incident happened. She explained that she "was always like deciding which comment can you let go, which one do you need to say something about . . . kinda felt like any time I was in large groups I was always like navigating that fine line." The fact that she shared two salient identities of the Black woman whose door was vandalized also made Kimberly question how open she could be on campus in exploring her intersecting gendered-racialized identities.

Kimberly expressed how she believed her intersecting identities of being a Black woman were on display (or performed) for the benefit of White history professors who touted that they had a Black woman student who wanted to study French history instead of the assumed African American history:

> I had a lot of departments contact me and be like "Are you real?" It was like "You're really a Black woman who wants to study? . . . Really? How did this happen?" Like that sort of interest. And when I go to history conferences there are people who know me because I'm "oh, that Black girl who's studying modern Europe; specifically France. Ooh." You know?

Kimberly said the hypervisibility she experienced for simply studying something that others do not expect you to study added unwanted pressure to perform as a Black woman: "So definitely being an African American in the field of history I am very aware of it. It's a blessing and a curse because it gets you noticed but it also gets you noticed. You know what I mean?" In this example, Kimberly's ability to name the underlying tension of hypervisibility as a Black woman indicates that there is an emotional price to hiding her feelings of anger over being on display.

Black women participants reacted to feelings of anger over being used for the racial diversity they brought to the university, but at the same time, they were trying to figure out what it meant to be a Black woman in college. As Ruthie shared,

> I tried not to let that [gendered racism] be a hindrance for me and I would encourage other Black women not to let that be a hindrance for them. Never let someone tell you cannot, no matter what that is. Understand the divide of being a Black woman. There is one and I would be remiss if I try to pretend that there was not one.

Ruthie voiced that she had an internal dialogue that she would tell herself and other Black women to push harder because "not every professor, teacher, faculty member and staff member is gonna push you because they're gonna put that limit on you; they're gonna put that box and only think that you're mediocre is excellent." The emotional labor expended from being seen as an incompetent Black woman took its toll on her identity development.

Exhaustion: Performing for Others' Comfort

The power dynamics professors hold also kept Black women participants from voicing their feelings about intersectional oppression they experienced. Kimberly shared how she had to hold her tongue and not react negatively when a White woman professor suggested she won an award in graduate school simply because of her race: "I feel like you're coming at me in a way that's like 'you're just winning this award because you're Black and you're in this department and you've gotten by pretty well.' I was like 'ok.'" It was exhausting for Kimberly to hide her feelings of hurt in the presence of her woman professor and when she was questioned at the history conference when the award was presented:

> There were historians that were [asking] "why are you not doing Black history?" And I'm like "Did you ask everyone else in the room that? Did you question anyone else's decisions on what kind of history they wanted to do? Or is it just because I'm dark skinned and I stand out?" . . . It was very challenging for me . . . It was very frustrating. And it was another one of those moments where I realized that I was choosing a field where I was going to be inherently alone; like I was gonna be the only one of me.

Kimberly's words of "another one of those moments" is an indication of how many times she had been questioned about her place in her academic major but yet chose to remain silent so she could keep professors comfortable as they evaluated and graded her work. The emotional labor of not voicing the hurt of oppression also connected to Alicia's experience. Alicia reflected on how she presented as White because of her straight hair and light skin, and heard racist remarks from people who did not know she was Black. She was exhausted holding in her reactions and did not have the space to explore her identity as a Black woman:

> I was really struggling with my identity or like what, or how to be in this place and just get through things that made me uncomfortable. But I didn't really have anyone to talk to because all my friends were White. So I was trying to consciously avoid it and not make them uncomfortable and then that makes me uncomfortable too because of the way I'm treated.

Alicia struggled with placing the feelings of her White friends over her own. She said she would have to "kinda talk yourself down" when racial incidents happened because as a Black woman, "you take it in a different way than my friends would take it or other White students would take it." She did not process her feelings fully because of pressure to perform a role that would make her White friends comfortable and would not label her as an overly sensitive Black woman.

Like Alicia, Renee shared how traumatized she was by the racism she experienced on her campus and how she did not fully share her feelings about it: "I think it was my freshman year- and [I was] leaving the student center and walking down the sidewalk and somebody had written the 'N' word on the sidewalk and some other stuff. I had never seen that before." Renee did not share her feelings with White peers or faculty because she wanted to adhere to their comfort and not be seen as the "angry Black woman." Renee was performing a role so she would not conform to a gendered-racial stereotype assumed of Black women.

Lauren had a similar experience in class of not wanting to show her anger when a White student disclosed that they had never seen a Black person before:

> It made me feel like weirded out a little bit or like what do you do or how do you respond, what do you say? So I didn't know how to answer it. So I was like really like lost . . . I also didn't wanna make him feel like "ok that's your problem, but like you've just been sheltered." Also I didn't understand "like how is that possible that you've never seen a Black person?"

In a class situation, Lauren felt targeted and on the spot and could not disclose these feelings for fear of making the White male student feel bad and herself looking like the overly sensitive Black woman.

Megan put a name on how she was feeling as a Black woman managing White students' comments and microaggressions when she stated, "This girl told me once . . . 'I minored in sociology at college.' I said 'Girl, that is so cute. I majored in Black.'" Megan went on to explain:

> Those days when you're just carrying it and . . . those microaggressions where things happen and you're . . . like did this happen . . . or . . . am I just making it up? And people will make you feel like you're crazy, and that's a hard part of just being like sometimes you're keeping it in and you do not say anything because you feel like maybe I'm just being too sensitive and maybe you know I said something . . . sometimes you have to just wake yourself up and say, "No, girl, that's not the case." Like there's something there. Whether that person knows they did it or not, they did it and you know addressing it they'll probably cry and they'll probably say that they didn't mean it. But you know let's check it. Let's, you know, let's talk about this and see you know, what can we do about this and why you feel comfortable enough to do x, y and z.

The emotional labor of wading through feelings of being "crazy" or the sensitive Black woman and wondering if the person will cry if she addressed the microaggression was evident in Megan's quote. Megan shared how she managed her emotions, took steps to express her feelings of being offended by microaggressions, and pondered what would happen if she addressed them head on with the person who committed the offense.

Emotional exhaustion also occurred within racially minoritized spaces for a participant who held multiple intersecting identities. S identified as Black, queer (sexual orientation), and genderqueer (gender identity). S's reflection indicated a layered experience of emotional labor:

> So yeah, my Black and queer identities were really salient for me at college. I think, so if I had, if I was to think about gender in college I was trying to conceal gender in college. I was not like "whoo-hoo" Black woman; I was really like I'm Black, I do not even want you to know that I'm a woman. I'm not really sure if I'm a woman. I do not really know what's going on so I do not even wanna talk about that part.

Emotional labor and intersectional identity development occurred simultaneously for S. Although S. identified as a woman at the beginning of college, they were expending emotional labor trying not to make meaning of their gender identity throughout college. S's exhaustion came from pouring energy into concealing their gender and focusing on racial and sexual orientation identities throughout their HWCU experience.

Alienation: Performing as an Act of One

Some of the emotional labor Black women experienced involved the alienation they felt being the only or one of a few students of color in their academic majors and classes. Gwendolyn noted that she decided not to go to one of the top engineering schools as an undergraduate because she did not want to be the only Black woman in the program.

> [I] visited a few other schools and when they paraded their engineering students [out] for like student weekend, it was all these White men and I was just like, what's not about to happen is I'm not about to sit in these classes and it's just all these White men that look all the same. Just kind of your stereotypical like college bred engineering White boy.

Despite also not wanting to be the only one, Megan described how alienated she felt in the HWCU she attended. One example came from her predominantly White peers not inviting her to be in their study group:

> You work so hard to normalize yourself and to be a part of this respectability and I'm this . . . well yeah, I'm Black but you know I'm not one of those Blacks that you're afraid of and you do not wanna be around . . . I've done everything that you all said I should do in order to make it and I still cannot and then you still will not let me in your club. That hurts.

As she described feelings of alienation, Megan did not elaborate on what it meant for her to conform to being a Black woman that White classmates would not fear. Nia echoed Megan's feelings of frustration at not being invited to nearly-all-White study groups. Nia's example came from alienation she experienced during activities:

> I'm the only Black kid in the class so I gotta figure out whose team I wanna go try to get on because nobody really asked me to be on the team or in the group . . . for the group project . . . they had to do these freshmen like bonding activities and you know you're like three Black people in a sea of 2,000 White kids.

Nia shared that as a Black woman, she holds back her frustration and it seethes inside of her: "You are so angry you can't open your mouth because you know that you'll just crack into a million pieces? So like there's so many days like that where I just got so mad and I'm sitting in there." Nia did not allow herself to speak in class at times because she would crack the performer mask she was using that kept her from breaking down in front of her White peers. Feelings of hurt and anger were kept in check because participants did not want to show stereotypes of overly sensitive or angry Black women to White peers.

Black women not only experienced alienation from lack of Black peers—they also had little to no Black faculty and did not feel comfortable talking to White faculty about their struggles. Shaundice shared how she ended up leaving her science major because she did not want to go to the professor and ask for help and be seen as a Black woman from a lower-middle-class socioeconomic status who was academically inferior:

> I needed to try and figure it out on my own. And of course that was not successful because we were on the quarter system so there were three classes with chemistry that I was supposed to take. I finished the first one, I withdrew from the second course and I didn't take the third.

Three other Black women participants left science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) majors and switched to humanities or social science majors largely related to gendered-racialized isolation in the primarily White male fields. Performing as one or one of the few Black women students in STEM majors took such a toll emotionally that they changed their majors and missed opportunities to pursue their first academic major.

Discussion

Our study sought to make the often-invisible emotional labor of Black women college students visible to educators in HWCUs. We utilized emotional labor to critically analyze the positioning of power and demonstrate how emotional labor may be disproportionately expended to the detriment of Black women students. The model of emotional labor includes exploitation as a potential outcome of how this triangle of emotional labor is formed. In order to delve more deeply into possible exploitation of Black women students, we incorporated intersectionality theory using marginalized social identities of race, class, and gender with ELT to better understand how power, privilege, and oppression may influence the utilization of emotional labor. Although we used an intersectional lens when examining the use of emotional labor, race and gender were the most salient identities mentioned by participants in this study (see Figure 3).

The emotional energy Black women students expended trying to manage how White faculty and peers experienced them negatively impacted their success in academic majors and left little room to explore their gendered-racial and other marginalized identities (e.g., class, sexual orientation) in spaces in which they were not performing. Emotional labor was a tool used by Black women to perform in roles acceptable in White and, in many cases, White male environments, such as Kimberly experienced in her European History major. Kimberly not performing the expected role of a Black woman majoring in African American History disoriented her primarily White male faculty and they sanctioned her with questions about her choices. In one case, a White woman professor questioned Kimberly's ability to earn an award on the merits of her work as opposed to because she was a Black woman. This directly relates to assertions made by researchers that White customers and management often view Black women as space invaders who are disorienting (Evans & Moore, 2015; Puwar, 2004).

Emotional labor as performance was used by Black women participants to combat perceived inferiority of Black women in academia (Szymanski & Lewis, 2016). Black women participants performed roles counter to the "angry Black woman" and masked this anger by being the "independent Black woman" in class who did not need any help from professors or peers in study groups (Constanti & Gibbs, 2004). The performance appeared to benefit Black women participants in the moment because they "saved face" in the presence of the largely White male gaze, but it took its toll emotionally as they withheld expressions of confusion, hurt, and anger. The performance also kept Black women participants from seeking academic assistance from White faculty and peers when they needed it. Black women participants named tensions not only with their White male counterparts—they also experienced moments of RBF when engaging with White faculty and peer students (Solórzano et al., 2000). Participants expressed feelings of being exhausted from suppressing their feelings of anger and confusion dealing with racialized-gendered oppression. For example, four of the 16 participants who began college in STEM majors all switched largely because of isolation in a predominantly White male environment. Wei, Alvarez, Ku, Russell, and Bonett (2010) might label their departure from STEM as a disengagement coping strategy, as the Black women participants described distancing themselves from patriarchal and White supremacist spaces in which they did not believe they could fully express their intersectional Black women identities. All 16 of the Black women participants graduated with majors in humanities and social sciences, which historically have critical masses of women and students of color.

Black women participants also utilized what Wei et al. (2010) called *engagement coping strategies* and el-Khoury (2012) called *disposition to steadiness*. Engagement coping strategies can manifest in resistance to patriarchy and White supremacist environments. For instance, when Gwendolyn visited one HWCU and noticed that the student representatives from the engineering program she was interested in were all White males, she chose to attend another HWCU that had more women and students of color. Another form of resistance is managing your emotions effectively through reflection and internal dialogues that uplift one's feelings about their race and gender and diminish feelings of inferiority. Megan described the internal dialogue she had when she was confronted with microaggressions related to her marginalized identities. Her ability to reflect on the incident, convince herself that she in fact was not crazy, and engage in dialogue with the

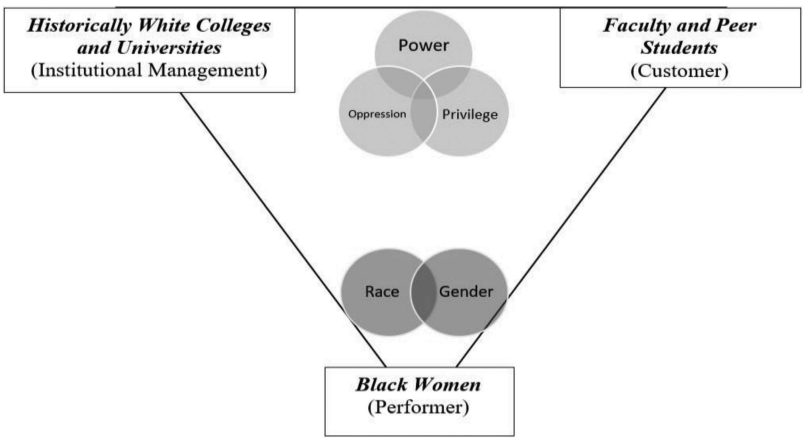

Figure 3. Emotional labor triangle with an intersectional lens based on our findings. Adapted from Constanti and Gibbs (2004) and Delgado and Stefancic (2012).

offender showed her utilization of disposition to steadiness (el-Khoury, 2012).

Although engagement coping is a positive way for Black women to manage emotional labor, this method, along with disengagement coping, comes at a cost. For example, Megan had to think carefully about the possible outcomes of her conversation with her White peer. Emotional labor becomes taxing and unfairly puts Black women in vulnerable positions. Black women have to constantly think about their actions and decide which way they want to approach conflict or incidents in HWCUs. Evans and Moore (2015) called this "emotional gymnastics," in which students have to quickly develop skills to navigate within HWCUs, adapt to dominant culture, and/or make the decision to avoid or address conflict while also fulfilling the expectations of being a college student. For instance, Lauren described feeling lost in deciding how to react to a microaggression without making the White male student feel bad. These examples reveal the power dynamics of privilege in which White men do not have to think about how their oppressive actions might be negatively viewed or affect Black women in HWCUs.

First, gendered racism, and other intersecting layers of marginalized oppression, unnecessarily puts the responsibility on Black women to (learn how to) identify and recognize forms of oppression (micro/macroaggressions) within HWCUs. Second, Black women have to manage their emotional labor (experience of frustration, confusion, isolation, and/or exhaustion). Third, Black women expend their emotional labor by deciding to use engagement/disengagement coping strategies. Fourth, Black women expend more emotional labor to work through the residual effects of their coping strategies (White individual's reactions, passing or failing a class, changing majors; Smith et al., 2011; Solórzano et al., 2000). For example, Both Lauren and Kimberly expressed anger at the fact that students of color are used to benefit institutions, but they were unable to express it. Lauren explained how photographers gravitated toward students of color for marketing materials. In a study of college viewbooks, Henslee et al. (2017) found that some Black students believed the diversity represented in college viewbooks did not align with actual experiences once on campus. This research, coupled with Lauren's experience, is a small snippet into how Black women students—and possibly other students of color—may be exploited at the benefit of the institution and are tasked with performing in burdensome ways.

In our Figure 3 model, HWCUs, White peers, and faculty uphold and maintain White supremacy in their roles as institution and customer, while the Black women students perform in ways that make their institution, peers, and professors comfortable at the expense of their emotional labor.

Implications for Research

When our Black women participants first entered HWCUs, they had to learn how to manage their emotions and strategize ways to excel despite the oppression they experienced. Although this research emphasizes the experience of Black women, they are not a homogenous group (Kelly et al., 2017). In order to fully understand the experience of ELT's impact on Black women students at HWCUs, research that is more intersectional is needed. Ways to further this research could entail studying other students who hold intersecting marginalized identities related to race, gender, ethnicity, language, nationality, sex, ability, among other social identities. For example, Szymanski and Lewis (2016), developed research that centered the intersectional experience of Black women within higher education and provided a deeper understanding of how emotional labor is used for survival within HWCUs. Our study's findings led us to advocating for more research that teases out ways that the often-invisible emotional labor of Black women college students may be reduced or more equitably distributed.

Implications for Practice

Given the findings that evidenced the invisible emotional labor Black women in this study expended, there are actions educators may take to lessen the cost of emotional labor and decrease the disproportionate expenditure by Black women. Our research underscores how Black women were not encouraged in being their full selves in academic settings. Second, our research revealed that in addition to single incidents of racism or sexism, Black women have intersectional experiences of oppression within HWCUs (Kelly et al., 2017). The good news is that there are strategies educators at HWCUs may take to support students with intersecting marginalized identities.

Proposed Strategies for Educators and Students

Based on our findings, we developed three strategies that may assist educators in creating more inclusive and affirming HWCUs for Black women. In order for an educator to create this type of space, they must be in a position of authority to affect institutional change. Faculty, administrators, staff, and students are equal contributors to ELT, as it signifies the social capital each role holds at their HWCU. Although these particular positions may hold different levels of power, each role has the ability to influence or directly create institutional change (May, 2015; Smith et al., 2006). Our strategies refer to "educators" as an umbrella term for faculty, staff, and administrators who are able to access power and influence change.

Understanding the complexity of identity development. Educators who understand how white-centered logic (WCL) is operationalized and used individually to maintain systems of oppression (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Bonilla-Silva & Gianpaolo, 2008) throughout HWCU culture (historical and present-day traditions), spaces (buildings and monuments), power, and authority (bias-driven policy) can interrupt these systems (Feagin, 2006; Lipsitz, 2011; Moore, 2008). In our study, White educators and students exercised privilege by contributing to oppressive environments that required Black women to expend emotional labor. We recommend that all educators participate in professional development trainings and workshops that help educators understand the complex nature of identity development and intersectionality, recognize how their own identities influence the support they provide for Black women, and recognize how Black women experience racialized, gendered, and racialized-gendered oppression within HWCUs. Engaging in this work will allow educators to disrupt oppressive behavior, thoughtfully support Black women students, and decrease the number of times Black women utilize emotional labor.

Encourage inclusive engagement. Our findings indicated that more can be done to appropriately assess the needs of Black women in HWCUs. Educators and students can strengthen how they critically observe and support Black women. When educators

notice that Black women are using engagement coping mechanisms, they can name existing stressors, affirm the experience of Black women, and actively connect students to additional resources. When educators notice or perceive Black women disengaging as a coping mechanism through withdrawing from discussions, silencing themselves, or isolating themselves from study groups and class activities, naming the behavior and encouraging them to engage in supportive activities, programs, and environments may lessen the cost of emotional labor (Szymanski & Lewis, 2016). By encouraging inclusive engagement, Black women will be able to navigate their college experience more smoothly.

Facilitate Black women's identity development. Our findings revealed that Black women participants were uncomfortable asking for help from White educators and peer groups. Knowing this, educators can connect Black women to other faculty, staff, and students who reflect their racial identity and/or display competency in disrupting whiteness. In a study that centered on the leadership development of Black women students, Domingue (2015) named "sources of nourishment" that empowered Black women leaders to persist in oppressive environments. Mentorship and White allyship stood out as specific ways in which educators can help Black women students use emotional labor as an engagement coping mechanism. Educators who are aware of the various student services can provide Black women students with resources for intersectional identity development, such as mentorship programs, student organizations, and wellness centers. In order to connect Black women to staff, faculty, and students who can facilitate positive identity development, educators can work within their spheres of influence to strengthen the recruitment and retention of competent faculty and administrators.

Scope and Limitations

Limitations were largely found in the scope of the study. By focusing only on Black women in the Chicago area, we potentially left out the voices of Black women with diverse experiences in other geographic regions. There are unique attributes of different geographic regions that might not have been captured in the participants' narratives. Black women living in Chicago are but one subset of Black women, and the vastness of Black women college graduates living in any city was too large to fully tap. We sought a diverse sample of Black women graduates from HWCUs; however, all but two identified as heterosexual and only one identified as genderqueer. We recognize that recruiting cisgender Black women or females assigned at birth excludes transgender Black women, who also have a unique, intersectional narrative within higher education. Research on emotional labor should continue and expand to include trans women college students.

We were also limited by the time period in which these Black women attended their HWCUs and by capturing data after they graduated. In particular, we kept the participant in the study who graduated in 1979 because her answers were consistent with others. Even though her degree was dated, her feelings were relevant, especially her recollection of seeing the "N" word written on the sidewalk. Participants' distance from graduation appeared to give them time to make meaning of how they spent emotional labor in college. Although these factors limited our research, the findings and implications of our work brings evidence of emotional labor in HWCUs that is scarce in the literature.

Conclusion

To some degree, everyone utilizes emotional labor, whether it is in the workplace, classroom, student organizations, or other outlets (Constanti & Gibbs, 2004). When Black women students use emotional labor as an engagement coping mechanism, they are able to build resiliency and identify strategies to help them persist in HWCUs. However, when Black women students use emotional labor as a disengagement coping mechanism, it is possible that they will not have safe spaces to process oppressive experiences inside and outside of the classroom. As the mental and physical stress of holding in feelings related to oppression may lead to stress-related health concerns (Szymanski & Lewis, 2016), we urge educators to think strategically in forming more congruent ELTs in which Black women (the performer), White faculty/staff/students (the customer), and serving institutions (the management) can have beneficial relationships that support well-being. The realities of emotional labor being largely invisible and the ways in which emotional labor can be exploited (by being hypervisible) provide an opportunity for administrators, faculty, and staff within higher education to develop strategies that address the ways in which Black women experience HWCUs.

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(*Appendices follow*)

Appendix A

Recruitment E-Mail

Greetings

We would like to invite you to be involved in a research study called The Experiences of Black Women Graduates of Historically White Colleges and Universities (HWCUs). I am a faculty member from X and researcher is a student at X. Anyone who identifies as female assigned at birth, genderqueer, woman, among others would be eligible. Anyone who also identifies as Black (inclusive of African American, Afro-Caribbean, African, among others), is eligible. We are conducting a study about the experiences of Black women graduates from PWIs. We are looking for women who recently graduated with at least a bachelor's degree (it is fine if they have an advanced-degree such as a master's, PhD, JD, or MD too). We are interested in women who graduated from PWI's and who currently live in the Chicago metropolitan area.

Our hope is that the findings of this study will shed light on ways to better serve Black women and Students of Color in college. To be involved the women would complete a 60–90 min interview with one of us. If women would like to become involved, they can contact us and we can determine when and where to meet. If you have any questions, you are welcome to contact me on e-mail or on my cell phone. We look forward to talking with you!

Sincerely,

Researchers

Appendix B

Demographics of Participants

Pseudoname	Major	Intersecting salient identities	Year graduated	Institutional type/generation
Alicia	History	Black/Catholic/lower to mid-SES/heterosexual	2006	Private/religious
Nicole	Psychology	Black/mid SES/heterosexual	2002	Public
K.	English & African American Studies	Black/Christian/lower to mid-SES/heterosexual	2006	Public
S.	Psychology	Black/lower to mid-SES/genderqueer/queer	2005	Public/first generation
Jay	Psychology	Black/Christian/lower to mid-SES/queer	2004	Public/first generation
Megan	Political Science & Women's Studies/Gender Studies	Black/agnostic/lower to mid-SES/heterosexual	2007	Private
Gwendolyn	Psychology	Black/Christian/mid to upper-SES/heterosexual	2008	Private
Renee	Business	African American/Baptist/mid to upper-SES/heterosexual	1979	Public
Sky	Music Education & Communications	Black/Christian/mid SES/heterosexual	2006	Private
Kimberly	History	African American/Christian/lower SES/heterosexual	2010	Public/first generation
J.	Political Science & Spanish	Black/Christian/lower to mid-SES/heterosexual	2004	Public/first generation
Lauren	Psychology & Human Relations	Black/Christian/lower SES/heterosexual	2012	Private/first generation
Nia	Interior Design	Black/Christian/mid SES/heterosexual	2005	Private/religious
Ruthie	English	Black/Christian/lower-mid SES/heterosexual	2005	Public
Annie	Psychology & African American Studies	Black/Christian/low SES/heterosexual	2014	Public
Shaundice	Black Studies & Sociology	Black/Latina/Christian/lower to mid-SES/straight	2002	Public/first generation

Note. SES = socioeconomic status.

(*Appendices continue*)

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

How did you end up going to college?

At what age were you when you knew you would go to college?

What role did finances play in your decision to go to college?

How did you prepare for college academically?

What was a typical day in college like for you?

What was one of your favorite experiences in college?

Describe your closest friends in college.

What did you do on a typical Friday night?

Were they the same racial/ethnic background? Was that important?

What did they end up doing after college?

How, if at all, do you believe your identities impacted your college experience?

ASK FOLLOW-UPS TO GET STORIES:

Can you describe a particular identity (e.g., race, sex, socioeconomic) that was impactful during your college experience?

ONLY AS FOLLOW-UPS IF RACE/GENDER DOES NOT COME OUT

Was there a time when you really felt like your race/ethnicity was particularly obvious in college?

Was there a time when you thought a lot about your sex during college?

What was a particular time that your identity was at the forefront of your experience?

What was your most challenging moment with your identities in college?

What would do you attribute your success in college to?

If you were to list three of the most important strategies that you used to make it through college, what would they be?

Tell me about one of the people who supported you the most during your time in college.

Describe the relationship that you had with your family during college.

Was there a particular moment you noticed the relationship change?

Where are you from?

What role did education play in your family? What did it mean to your family that you graduated (and went on in your education if they did)?

Background of high school

Involvement in programs

Mentors

Describe one of your most challenging experiences during college?

If you were to list three of the major barriers that you faced during your time in college, what would they be?

Tell me about someone who tried to keep you from finishing your degree if there was such a person.

What words would you use to describe yourself while you were in college?

How was this different or the same from how you saw yourself prior to that?

What was important to you while you were in college?

What was unimportant to you during this time?

(*Appendices continue*)

Reflecting back, how to you think that going to college influenced the way that you would describe yourself now?

What words would you use to describe yourself now?

How do these words differ from how you would have described yourself earlier in life?

What is important to you now?

What is unimportant to you at this time?

How did getting a college degree affect your life more generally?

PLEASE ASK AT END:

What advice would you have for new Black women college students going to school today?

Have you remained involved in that college as alumni at all?

What are you doing professionally at this time?

Do you like it? If so, why? If not, why?

What would you like to be doing in the future?

Was there anything else you wanted to say or talk about?

Do you have questions for me?

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