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"I'M THAT GIRL": EXPLORING BLACK WOMEN COLLEGE STUDENTS' IDENTITY EXPRESSION AND HIP-HOP

by

FALLAN S. FRANK

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at
The University of Texas at Arlington
May 2024

Arlington, Texas

Supervising Committee:

Ericka Roland, Supervising Professor
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ABSTRACT

"I'm That Girl": Exploring Black Women College Students' Identity Expression and Hip-Hop

Fallan Simone Frank, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Arlington, 2024

Supervising Professor: Ericka Roland

Despite the expansion of the literature on Black women in college student identity development, there is little understanding of how Black college women express their identity and what influences the expression of their multiple identities. This study focuses on understanding to what extent the significant cultural influence of Hip-Hop influences Black women college students' expression of their multiple identities within the various college environments. As Hip-Hop culture increasingly becomes significant within contemporary college student life, it is more critical than ever to understand its impact on Black college women's identity expression and lived experiences as they navigate college. Thus, in this study, I examined how Black college women express their multiple identities in college environments from an asset-based approach through the Black Feminist Thought and Hip-Hop Feminism lens. There were six participants for this study, with 12 dialogic conversations, two dialogic conversations per participant, and lyric and photograph elicitation. There were two findings from the study: 1) The participants used aesthetics and language to express their identities, especially their Blackness and womanhood, and 2) The participants used Hip Hop as inspiration for multifaceted identity expression. The findings centered on Black college women's lived experiences and unique standpoints within the contemporary college environments, which led to their self-definition and self-valuation. Ultimately, this study was designed for Black undergraduate women as they experience a blossoming into becoming “that girl” while finding personal liberation related to their multiple identity expressions regardless of the space or place and using Hip-Hop’s influence to embrace their multifacetedness.

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“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.” - 1 Peter 4:10

Lord, thank you first for giving me the gifts and tools to get through this process. Despite the challenges, you reminded me of my testimony and the lives I will change with this degree. Thank you for sustaining me, giving me peace and solace on my most challenging days, and continuing to order my steps toward my purpose. It is and always will be Your plan over my plan.

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DEDICATION

Bertha L. Pipion Johnwell (March 21, 1935 - January 25, 2023)

David Lynn Frank (September 14, 1959 - December 25, 2023)

This dissertation is dedicated to two significant people I lost in the first and last month of 2023 while on this dissertation process: my Maw Maw and my parrain (godfather in Louisiana Creole). My grief for the two of you has sustained me in pushing through this dissertation despite it all. I hope I am making you both proud.

As the youngest granddaughter of a sharecropper who could not read or write, this dissertation is also dedicated to my late paternal grandparents, Rellick Frank and Elsie Mae Simien Frank. The pride I have in our family, culture, and last name have been a source of strength to me during this journey to honor your sacrifices and legacy. To all four of my grandparents, Rellick and Elsie Frank, Bertha Johnwell, and Charles Pryce, thank you for being so impactful in my life. The memories of you all have kept me grounded in my beliefs while also lifting me up when I needed it.

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Brayden, Harmony, and Amari, please know you can do anything you put your mind to in this world, and this dissertation is dedicated to you all in continuing to become our ancestors' wildest dreams.

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Additionally, I would like to dedicate my work to every Black woman as she navigates her own identity expression. I hope the stories within this dissertation resonate with you in some way, shape, or form. You deserve to show up and take up space as you wish with your long nails, 30-inch bust down, or whatever else. To all my girlfriends from college and beyond, this dissertation is in honor of us. Even though we are now educational leaders, directors in corporate, lawyers, and medical doctors, we will stand on couches and have the time of our lives in the club on the weekend. Thank you for each inspiring me in your own way and reminding me to embrace all our multiple identities.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this work to my growth and journey as I pursued my childhood dream of becoming Dr. Fallan Simone Frank. I will continue taking up space and embracing my multifacetedness as I navigate what comes next.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“I’m a Savage. Classy, bougie, ratchet.

Sassy, moody, nasty (yeah), acting stupid, what's happening?”

-Megan Thee Stallion

These lyrics from Megan Pete’s, also known as Megan Thee Stallion, Grammy-award winning song titled Savage reminds society that Black women are not monolithic and that their expressions of who they are can be multifaceted. There is a long history of gendered racism that produced oppressive and damaging dominant images of Black women that limited their expression of self (Scott et al., 2023). However, Megan Thee Stallion’s lyrics resist multiple tropes of race, gender, sexuality, and class concerning Black women. For example, “savage” can be viewed as a cultural reclaiming of the term for Black women who have been perceived throughout history as the angry Black woman trope. Moreover, Megan showcases the unapologetic multidimensionality of Black women while disrupting the hegemonic, modern society norms through the lyrics “savage” (strong), “nasty” (sexual liberation), “classy” (sophisticated), and “moody” (sensitive). How Black women speak, dress, and express themselves is not monolithic, and Megan Thee Stallion’s lyrics remind us that we control our narratives unapologetically as Black women.

Hip-Hop and its artists, such as Megan Thee Stallion, Cardi B, Latto, and Beyonce, are increasingly becoming more prevalent on college campuses, thus influencing college students as well (Payne & West, 2022). However, college students, particularly Black women, influence Hip-Hop and its artists. For example, Angel Reese’s breakout year in women’s college basketball overflowed into pop culture (Chavkin, 2023). Reese’s influence on Hip-Hop has recently materialized with her cameo in Latto's video for her new song "Put It On Da Floor Again" featuring Cardi B. "I been ballin' so damn hard could've went to LSU, huh," is what Cardi B raps while having a picture of herself in a Louisiana State University's (LSU) basketball jersey as her Instagram profile picture. Contemporary Hip-Hop and Black women college students are birthing a new era where they are both influential on each other and continuing to emerge as a reminder to reclaim and control our narratives unapologetically.

The predominately Black women's basketball team at LSU displayed this unapologetic multidimensionality of Black college women nationally when they dominated Iowa's predominately White team in the college women's basketball championship. Angel Reese for LSU waved her hand in front of her face to Iowa's star player, Caitlin Clark – the same gesture Clark made during the playoffs. Reese also pointed to her ring finger, signaling a championship ring, and was considered classless for those gestures, illustrating a tale often told of how Black women are perceived differently than White women even when doing the same thing. Reese received criticism all year for being a basketball player who talked trash but also wore her wigs and lashes. After winning the national championship, in her post-game interview, Angel declared,

> "All year, I was critiqued about who I was… I'm too hood; I'm too ghetto, y'all told me that all year. But when other people do it, y'all don't say nothing. This was for the girls that looked like me. … It was bigger than me tonight."

Like Megan Thee Stallion, Black college women like Angel Reese are signaling a new, unapologetic generation where Black women refuse to fit in a box. It is not about being either a professional, a respectable Black woman, or a ratchet Black woman, but rather about being all three plus more. Black women in college are part of the legacy of Black women in Hip-Hop and feminism who continue to resist respectable politics and seek authentic expression through aesthetics, language, and community.

Background

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), between 2018 and 2019, Black women comprised 66% of bachelor's degrees among Black students in higher education (NCES, 2020). Although Black women are a large sub-group within the greater population of students of color in college, they are significantly underrepresented within research on college student identity development (Williams et al., 2022). The years students spend in college are representative of a period in which students are involved in an intricate search for identity, more so than similar age individuals not in college (Chickering, 1969; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Gopalan & Brady, 2020; Porter, 2017; Strayhorn, 2012).

Identity development theories share characteristics and assumptions about the nature of development, the social construction of identity, and the importance of considering environmental influences. Many theories in student affairs focus on identity as a developmental progression from simple, conferred ideas about oneself to more complex understandings of identity (Marcia et al., 1993; Quintana, 2007). Several theories (Cass, 1979; Cross & Vandiver, 2001; Helms, 1990, 1994) mark development through progressive, linear stages or statuses that lead to an endpoint in which identities are internalized, synthesized, and permanent. The term stage has been criticized for representing an identity state that is rigid, stable, and defined externally to the individual (Helms, 1994). Identity development theories are often developed with the understanding that identity is socially constructed and reconstructed.

Scholars note that the process of identity reconstruction is typically initiated as a result of disequilibrium, a psychological state of mismatch between individual sense-making and perceptions of self in context (environment), or life changes that can initiate dissonance between the perception of self and attainment of possible selves (Marcia, 2002; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Pizzolato, 2003, 2005). Disequilibrium prompts the individual to enter a re-formation period that does not disintegrate their established identity; instead, the cognitive process of making meaning of changes prompts reconstruction of identity that incorporates a change in environment, social status, or other life events. Identity development theories entail consideration of the environment or context, a complex system that influences behaviors, attitudes, and cognition (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1994; Wozniak & Fischer, 1993). The influence of culture and societal norms creates an intricate web of unstated expectations for the individual. This web may expand or change as society changes, but it is always present. Individuals express their understanding of these expectations through a series of assumed behaviors or beliefs, often unnoticed by most individuals. Nevertheless, this web dictates behavior and determines who or what is appropriate (Collins, 2000).

Theorists also conceptualized identity beyond the perspectives of White middle-class men to investigate how specific groups come to know their social identities (e.g., race, sexuality, and gender). These theories, often stemming from research outside of higher education, frequently view the development of social identities in isolation (Patton et al., 2016). For instance, Helms (1990) built upon Cross's (1978) racial identity development model to create a womanist identity model specifically for women of color. Moreover, most scholarship relating to Black women's identity development typically only applies race or gender to explore the intricacies of Black women's identity development and often does not explore Black women college students (Hill, 2004; Hooks, 2001; Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

A growing body of scholarship is centering on Black women college student identity development and creating theories (Henry et al., 2010; Porter, 2013; Porter & Dean, 2015; Williams et al., 2022; Winkle-Wagner, 2009). The research focuses on the specialized process of Black women's gendered racial identity development while in college and how they make meaning of their identities with their intersectional experiences. Additionally, Williams & Lewis' (2021) study found six gendered racial ideologies: assimilation, humanist, defiance, strength, pride, and empowerment, representing Black women college students' attitudes and beliefs toward their identities, which can impact how they express or articulate them.

Black women college student identity development has been expanded more recently to examine through the intersection and focus of other lenses, including engineering, first-generation, and the foster-care system (Devost, 2023; Ross et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2022). Porter's (2017) amended Model of Identity Development in Black Undergraduate Women (MIDBUW) reaffirms that Black college women's identities are affected by various influences and interactions throughout their socialization processes in the collegiate environment. Black women in college have a diversity of values, beliefs, attitudes, and experiences; however, researchers show that some commonalities within their journey to identity development consist of support systems, stereotypes on campus, and spaces of affirmation (Patton, 2006; Porter & Dean, 2015; Winkle-Wagner et al., 2018). Despite the increasing inclusion of Black women in the college student identity development literature, there is limited understanding of how Black college women express their identity and what influences the expression of their multiple identities (Payne & West, 2022; Porter, 2017).

Statement of the Problem

With Black women Hip-Hop artists increasingly showcasing their multifacetedness, Black college women like Angel are now participating in this display of multifacetedness via Hip-Hop. Consequently, there is a need for in-depth discourse around how Black college women express their multiple identities. Black women, throughout their girlhood and adulthood, do not have the privilege to express their identities without the constraints of sexism, racism, adultification, and hypersexualization, which continues within college environments (Williams et al., 2022). To evade the multiple oppressions and the uniquely harmful Black respectability politics Black women face, scholars encourage Black women to protect themselves by being respectable regardless of whatever offenses have been done to them (Harris, 2003; Wilkins, 2012). Therefore, the overall problem is that Black women's expression of their multiple identities is policed or confined to respectability politics within college environments, resulting in either the invisibility or hypervisibility of Black women in these spaces and places (Krusemark, 2012). Furthermore, when Black women in college dare to resist respectability, they can encounter more oppression, more policing of their identity, or be ostracized in specific college spaces. If there is no awareness of how Black collegiate women express their identities, the creation of future identity development frameworks, programs, and spaces for Black collegiate women is futile.

Scholars note that cultural and social aspects influence how college students express their understanding of their identities (Carter, 1995; Erikson, 1968; Helms, 1984, 1985, 1993; Jones & McEwen, 2000; Parham, 1989; Parham & Helms, 1981; Vandiver et al., 2001), Black culture and social movement are often missing from the discourse of Black women's college student identity development. Therefore, the problem is that Black female college students' construction and expression of their multiple identities are not understood in terms of major cultural influences, such as Hip-Hop, resulting in an insufficient and limited scope of understanding and supporting Black female college students. Thus, Hip-Hop and the social movement of Black women in Hip-Hop must be explored to understand Black women college students' resistance to respectability politics and their authentic expression through aesthetics, language, and community. Another problem is the lack of Black women's expression of multiple social identities in student identity development theories. When Black women's expressions of multiple social identities are not considered in student identity development theories, it results in their experiences of oppression and marginalization as Black women in the collegiate environments not being accurately represented (Alexander, 2009). Likewise, the lack of consideration also results in the influences of their multiple identities development and articulation not being critically analyzed. Such an omission in these theories is another strategy of respectability politics to be enacted in practice, another strategy to marginalize further and oppress Black women, and another strategy to impede their journey to liberation. Hence, I argue that Black women's expressions of multiple social identities and Hip-Hop's influence on their expression must be examined for Black women to influence the development and understanding of college student identity development theories. In addition, I argue that understanding Black women's college student identity development through the lens of Hip-Hop creates space for them to challenge respectability, embrace their multifacetedness, and champion their own personal and collective liberation.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine how Black college women express their interlocking, multiple identities. This study centers on Black female college students' unapologetic expression of their multiple identities in college environments from an asset-based approach. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do Black women college students express their identities within college environments?
2. How does Hip-Hop influence Black women college students' expression of their multiple identities? And to what extent?

I capitalize the "B" in Black to reflect a shared sense of identity and community and, in honor of Black Feminist Thought, oppose practices that often disrespect Black people through the power to name (Collins & Bilge, 2016).

Rationale and Significance of the Study

As Hip-Hop culture continuously becomes significant in the lives of contemporary college students, it is critical to understand better Black college women attaining identity expression and lived experiences (Henry, 2008; Henry et al., 2010). In addition, higher education institutions contribute to the misrepresentations of Black women through the ongoing use of stereotypical messages, images, and unfinished explorations of the Black experience (Collins, 2000; Downey et al., 2009; Hooks, 1981; Keyes, 2013). Black collegiate women dealing with these circumstances are more inclined to face challenges that can disrupt their identity development and articulation (Henry et al., 2010; Porter & Dean, 2015). Research suggests Hip-Hop influences how Black women in college see themselves (Henry, 2010; Payne & West, 2022; Porter, 2017; West & Porter, 2023). With current Black college women like Angel Reese and Flau'jae Johnson of LSU's 2023 Women's Basketball National Championship team making national headlines for taking up space and being unapologetically their multifaceted selves, it is now more important than ever to understand how Black women in college express their identities.

As scholars and practitioners in higher education continue to investigate and put into practice the identity development of college students, it is essential to continue to examine the double marginalization of Black women and consider the cultural influences among contemporary student populations. This research is significant because it builds upon previous studies of Black women college students' identity development by emphasizing the expression of the multiple identities that have developed. This study has the potential to contribute significantly to the field of higher education by adding to the growing body of research on Black women college student identity development theories and providing a more nuanced understanding of the expressions of their multiple identities. Higher education professionals are uniquely situated to facilitate the holistic development of Black collegiate women; consequently, they must know the complexities facing these women. Moreover, this insight helps student affairs professionals understand why advocating for and engaging Black college women is vital, particularly around Hip-Hop culture. Higher education institutions can provide welcoming spaces for/ with Black women in college that simultaneously embrace and critique Hip-Hop and other cultural influences as they articulate their gendered racial and sexual identities. This study will expand policy and practice for Black college women and their supporters by encouraging Black collegiate women to “leverage simultaneity” as they seek to understand their expression of multiple identities, which can also serve as a tool to empower them to show up authentically (Payne & West, 2022, p. 182). This research is significant for Black undergraduate women as they find personal liberation related to their multiple identity expressions regardless of the space or place.

Research Positionality

As a Southern, Louisiana Creole, Black woman, some of my fondest childhood memories are riding in the car with my parents while listening to Lauryn Hill, Erykah Badu, and Tupac. Growing up in the Dirty South and spending most holidays and summers in Louisiana, I always loved Hip-Hop, particularly trap music. I grew up in the Southern Hip-Hop era of Atlanta/Memphis Crunk, New Orleans Bounce, and Houston's Chopped and Screwed with 106 & Park, music videos, video vixens, and the rise of technology and social media. My favorite rapper growing up was Baton Rouge native Lil Boosie, who helped popularize the term "ratchet." Throughout middle and high school, my friends and I would go to skating rink parties and event space parties created for us by rapping and dancing to all our favorite Hip-Hop and rap songs. Nonetheless, I am a scholar who has always loved school and impressed the faculty and staff throughout my K-12 school journey. I graduated from a predominantly White high school as salutatorian, a top 10 percent academic all-star, and a top 10 percent top senior; however, I was constantly bumping Future, Boosie, and Jeezy through my car speakers every chance I was given. Throughout my adolescence and childhood, without even knowing or comprehending it, I was expressing my multiple identities in different ways depending on the environment and context. Consequently, even at a young age, I began assuming that Black women shift their identities and how they articulate them, conditional on environmental factors.

Attending college was the same experience. I witnessed my Black peers and myself at the University of Alabama go from leading student government association meetings and being leaders inside and outside the classroom to being at a National Panhellenic Council (NPHC) fraternity's party in the club dancing, acting ratchet, and rapping the songs played. We lived, acted, and ultimately expressed ourselves differently depending on where and who was around.

Similarly, I saw the same phenomenon in graduate school, attending LSU and running the day-to-day operations at the university's African American Cultural Center (AACC). Who we (my Black graduate program cohort members and the Black undergraduate students) were in predominantly White spaces at LSU, and who we were at the AACC would be significant shifts. That also changed when we stepped off campus. The culmination of these experiences sparked an interest in understanding how we, as Black women who are leaders, scholars, athletes, rappers, and whatever else, choose to display our savage, classy bougie, ratchet, and everything else depending on where we are and who is there. That is what led to this study.

I have had a unique experience where my student affairs career has worked in cultural centers. I witnessed many of the same occurrences as the Program Coordinator at Pennsylvania State University's Paul Robeson Cultural Center (PRCC). The PRCC was a space for Black students, faculty, and staff to be authentic; however, outside of that space, identity shifts would happen depending on the people and environment. Space and place mattered. A moment that stuck with me was when one of the Black undergraduate women I served ran into my office stressed because it was the day before the career fair, and she had medium knotless braids with blonde in her head. The same student I saw every day being unapologetic at the PRCC was scared her hair would hinder her ability to secure an internship at the career fair. It reminded me that as Black women, we have to negotiate how much of us we choose to have shown up. As I write this, the Create a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair (CROWN) Act was passed two weeks ago in Texas, prohibiting race-based hair discrimination in the workplace and school. Laws like the CROWN Act being passed in 2023 are why the study is critical. Black women should be able to express who they are through language and aesthetics without the mentalization of worrying about being policed. A law should not have to be passed to stop policing Black women and their hair or other expressions of identity they choose.

To this day, I have a mental battle in my head when I have an in-person interview and show up with my medium, colorful, bedazzled nails on because I do not want to be judged. The irony is that I am a racially ambiguous Black woman, and even with that 'privilege,' I still face challenges in choosing how much I express and articulate my identities. Knowing that I still experience challenges in my identity expression, but witnessing and admitting Angel Reese and Caresha be unapologetic in their expression of identity led me to this inquiry of the study.

My positionality as a Black woman pursuing my doctoral degree who also likes to stand on couches in the club while rapping City Girls during my limited free time positions me to explore the complexities of Hip-Hop's influence on Black college women expressing their multiple identities. Even though Black women are not a monolith, my perspective and self-reflection on my journey with identity expression and Hip-Hop also added to my ability to relate with this research and participants. However, I must listen to participants' narratives and honor the individualism within Hip-Hop and the uniqueness of Black women's varied lived experiences. Just as Hip-Hop reminds us, we get to construct our multifaceted narratives and tell our stories.

Consequently, I bring several assumptions to this study.

1. I recognize the interlocking systems of oppression that Black women encounter and resist. I assume I can connect with the participants because we share identities and experiences.
2. Black women can experience an interlocking system of oppression that influences how they, consciously or unconsciously, express themselves and their identities.

3. Black women should be able to express their multiple identities while being unapologetic and authentic. Consequently, I center Black women's multifacetedness throughout this study.
4. I believe all types of higher education institutions, including historically white institutions (HWI) and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), are spaces that can police Black women and suppress their identity expression.
5. Additionally, I believe Hip-Hop can be a vehicle for Black women to be unapologetic.
6. The term and expression of ratchetness is a form of resistance and freedom.

Definition of Key Terms

These definitions are offered to clarify the key terms used in this dissertation.

Black Woman: An individual who racially identifies within the Black Diaspora, a native of Africa or has origins from Africa, and identifies as a woman or with womanhood for their gender identity (Durham et al., 2013; Evans-Winters, 2019)

Gendered Racism: A complex form of racial and gender oppression that intersects to create a unique experience for women who simultaneously occupy marginalized groups and often encounter discrimination (Essed, 1991). An example is Black women facing oppression due to their Blackness and womanness.

Hip-Hop: "An African diasporic phenomenon not bound by space and time and is made up of a collective consciousness from global cultures; a culture" (Iglesias & Harris, 2022, p. 124). Hip-Hop music is not limited to rap but includes neo-soul and Rhythm and Blues (R&B) music.

Historically White Institution (HWI): Institutions of higher education that have histories, traditions, symbols, customs, practices, curriculum, and policies that were all created by White people, for White people, and to make whiteness the norm through a White experience by excluding others (Allen et al., 1991; Brunsma et al., 2013).

Identity: Characteristics or identifications such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and ability that coexist within individuals and communities and can shape the way individuals see and are seen by society; one's social group is defined by intersecting socially constructed group categories. Identity is a particular form of social representation that mediates the relationship between the individual and the social world (DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2014; Chryssochoou, 2003).

Identity Expression: How someone publicly presents themselves and their identities, such as race, gender, sexuality, class, etc. Expression includes behavior and outward appearances such as hair, makeup, dress, language, voice, and self-presentation (Arnett, 2023; Goffman, 1959; Williams et al., 2022).

Ratchet: A term that means many things dependent on the context, but it is often used to characterize the behaviors of an individual or group; cultural understanding and performance of anti-respectability that can be shared throughout the Black diaspora regardless of geography, class, education, etc. by celebrating creativity and individual expression (Brown & Young, 2015; Love, 2012; McEachern, 2017).

Theoretical Framework

Because this research seeks to understand Black college women's identity expression and Hip-Hop influences, the theoretical framework guiding this study is Black Feminist Thought (BFT) (Collins, 2000, 2009). BFT is a critical social theory that elucidates the intersectionality of Black women's multiple identities, the politics connected with the multiple identities, and the oppression encountered when these identities overlap (Griffin, 2016; Lorde, 1984). It "encompasses theoretical interpretations of Black women's reality by those who live it" (Collins, 1990, p. 22). According to Collins (1986), at the core of BFT is the notion of standpoint, which is explained as the construction of Black women's unique point of view and worldview. BFT assists with understanding Black college women's lived experiences, identity construction, and identity expression (Anfara & Mertz, 2006). It also honors the lived experiences of Black women in college being "outsiders within" (Collins, 1986, p. 15), meaning they find themselves in places and spaces dominated by racism, sexism, classism, privilege, loneliness, and microaggressions (Griffin, 2016; Howard-Hamilton, 2003) while possessing more than one identity that is systematically oppressed. BFT recognizes the collective oppression of Black women and challenges the systems that attempt to oppress Black women by intertwining resistance and empowerment.

Black feminist thought provides an appropriate framework that adds a significant layer of depth to understanding Black women in college and their identity expression. Three primary tenets of BFT are relevant to this study on Black women college students' identity expression: the ethic of caring, a situation of struggle, and self-definition and self-valuation. The three interconnected elements of an ethic of caring are the emphasis placed on individual uniqueness, the appropriateness of emotions in dialogues, and the development of the capacity for empathy (Collins, 1989). The second tenet, the situation of struggle, is used to characterize the Black woman's reality – "a struggle to survive in two contradictory worlds simultaneously, one White, privileged, and oppressive, the other Black, exploited, and oppressed" (Cannon, 1985, p. 30). Lastly, the BFT tenet of self-definition and self-valuation refers to the dehumanization and internalized oppression that underpin the power dynamics that impact Black women and the controlling images they encounter. Self-definition describes how Black women challenge stereotypical photos, giving them "the power to name one's own reality" (Collins, 2000, p. 300).

Self-valuation emphasizes how Black women create new, authentic images of themselves to replace the stereotypical images the dominant produces (Collins, 1986).

BFT provides an intersectional lens to focus on the unique significance of Black college women's identity expression and its influences. Therefore, it is critical to emphasize and reflect on the Combahee River Collective's 1977 statement, "The shared belief that Black women are inherently valuable, that our liberation is a necessity not as an adjunct to somebody else's, but because of our need as human persons for autonomy" (Taylor, 2017, p. 18). Hence, this study's exploration of personal liberation related to Black college women's multiple identity expressions can also provide an understanding of the liberation of all oppressed individuals and communities. BFT also acknowledges Black women's "concrete experience as a criterion of meaning" (Collins, 2000, p. 758). Therefore, I invite Black college women to speak their realities and identify the social, cultural, and institutional constructs that shape their lived experiences around identity expression and articulation.

Although Collins (1989) considers BFT a unified perspective, she also emphasizes that there are "multiple realities among Black women" (p. 757). These multiple realities can also be applied to Black college women's multiple identities and, thus, how they choose to express those identities. Because of the complexities of their multiple identities, it is critical to use BFT as a theoretical framework to provide the necessary support and structure for research that focuses on the narratives of Black college women and explores their lived experiences, identity development, and identity expression.

To further understand what influences the expression of Black college women's multiple identities, examine the theoretical frameworks built upon the foundation of BFT, including Hip-Hop Feminism (HHF). According to Halliday and Payne (2020), "Hip-Hop Feminism celebrates women's love for the culture and their battle for identity, representation, and respect," meaning it helps guide this study's understanding of the complexities of Hip-Hop's influence on Black college women expressing their multiple identities (p. 8). HHF examines the relationship between Hip-Hop and other Black feminist theories and elucidates a new wave of Black feminists using contemporary media spaces and (re)constructing knowledge within them (Durham et al., 2013). In Rose's book *Black Noise* (1994), she asserts that Black women rappers revolutionized the representation of Black women by challenging Western aesthetics of beauty and challenging hegemony and male-centered dominance within Hip-Hop culture. This challenge of societal norms is still being displayed today through rappers like Megan Thee Stallion and Flau'jae Johnson. It can potentially impact how Black college women articulate their identities unapologetically.

Joan Morgan (1999), credited with creating Hip-Hop Feminism, laid HHF's foundation by narrating the unique relationship between her feminist ways of thinking and Hip-Hop with *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost*. Morgan (1999) urged Black women to not only accept but embrace the complex relationship with Hip-Hop by "fucking with the grays," meaning to challenge society's definition of feminism and to construct a feminism that challenges respectability politics and sexual agency by embracing all its contradictions (p. 59).

Other Black feminist scholars expanded the theorizing of HHF to create instead of simply deconstructing or critiquing feminism and society (Durham et al., 2013). Cheryl Keyes (2000) noted four distinct and fluid Black women identities within Hip-Hop classified as Queen Mother, Fly Girl, Sista with Attitude, and Lesbian, and further explained that Black women might hold these identities exclusively or concurrently, stating, "Black [women] rappers can, however, shift between these categories or belong to more than one simultaneously" (Keyes, 2000, p. 256).

HHF continued to expand with Pough's (2004) notion of Hip-Hop as a counter space for developing Black women's identity. In this counter space, Black women "bring wreck" to the stereotypical messages, images, and oppression within Hip-Hop and society. As the pathway for HHF advanced, so did its scholarship and meaning.

The Crunk Feminist Collection (CFC), a group of Hip-Hop generation feminists and scholars, extended HHF and its gray areas by arguing for "percussive" feminism, referencing the term and definition of percussion, especially within Southern rap music. The CFC argues that percussive feminism creates creativity when methods and inquiry items are put together that typically do not fit the hegemonic ways of thinking, such as Hip-Hop and feminism (Crunk Feminist Collective, 2010). The CFC positions HHF as a "next generation feminism" that is "ain't ya mama's feminism" (Crunk Feminist Collective, 2010). According to CFC members Durham et al. (2013), HHF is "an umbrella term to encompass creative, intellectual work regarding girls and women in Hip-Hop culture and as part of the Hip-Hop generation" (p. 721). Because this new generation of HHF rejects complying with feminism that restricts or limits other individuals, such as trans-identified and gender-nonconforming women, it mainly focuses on challenging respectability politics, sexual identity, and ratchet feminisms (Payne, 2020; Brown, 2013; Halliday & Payne, 2020; Love, 2012, 2017; Pickens, 2015; Stallings, 2013). HHF reminds us to be inclusive of what is deemed ratchet and hood voices and emphasizes the inclusion of trans women and femmes, as well as sexual liberation and freedom ((Halliday & Payne, 2020). Hip-Hop Feminism scholars, including L. H. Stallings (2013), Robin Boylorn (2016), Brittney Cooper (2012), Therí Pickens (2015), and Bettina Love (2017) all highlight ratchetness and the ratchet imagination as a positive way for Black women to leverage Hip-Hop as a creative space to challenge respectability politics rooted in heteropatriarchy while exploring their own identities and the expression of them.

The theoretical frameworks of BFT and HHF address the relational aspects of Black women's unique lived experiences, identity development, identity expression, the college environment, and cultural influences that assist in understanding the intricacies of Black college women expressing their multiple identities and Hip-Hop's influence on their expression. BFT provides the broader context to capture a fuller, more authentic understanding of Black female identity development and expression, often constructed based on their lived experiences of encountering multiple oppression. The incorporation of HHF provides a more focused, nuanced layer of BFT by using Hip-Hop culture to understand Black women further, to examine connections or disconnections between HHF and Black feminism, and to reconstruct and redefine knowledge within those spaces. Using the foundations and expansion of HHF as a guide, this study explores how Black women in college leverage the complex contradictions of cultural influences to articulate and express their multiple gendered racial and sexual identities. Hip-Hop Feminism as a theoretical framework acknowledges Morgan's (1999) gray areas, Pough's (2004) concept of bringing wreck, and the Crunk Feminist Collective's reminder to embrace ratchet. These BFT and HHF theories are used within this research to guide data generation methods and data analysis. The two theoretical frameworks and their core tenets are foundational in selecting data-generating methods and as a starting point for deductive data analysis. The frameworks utilized together are intended to help examine the multidimensional aspects of Black women college students' expression of their multiple identities and to make sense of how and to what extent Hip-Hop influences their identity(s) expression.

Forthcoming Chapters of Dissertation

Although scholars are now studying Black college women’s identity development and its influences, there is no research inquiry explicitly devoted to how Black college women express or articulate their multiple identities and what influences their expression. The subsequent chapters of this dissertation will present ways to center and support Black women in college throughout their identity development and identity expression journey. Chapter Two provides a history of Black women’s college identity development and their commonalities, discusses respectability politics, identity shifting, impression management, and self-presentation, and situates how Hip-Hop influences Black women’s identity through higher education and identity development. In Chapter Three, qualitative methodology for narrative inquiry and other aspects of data collection are discussed. After that, participant interview data and its analysis, individually and collectively, are addressed in Chapter Four. Lastly, Chapter Five concludes the dissertation with recommendations for future research and practice.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Black college women's unique experiences with racism and sexism, especially at Predominately White Institutions, have been and remain a barrier to their healthy gendered racial identity development (Porter, 2017). Moreover, due to the permeating influence of Hip-Hop culture on Black undergraduate women and their college experiences, scholarship examining Hip-Hop's influence on their identity development has become progressively important (Hunt, 2018; Payne & West, 2022). Although there is scattered literature on Black college women's relationship with Hip-Hop's influence on identity development, there remains limited literature on the Black college women's relationship with Hip-Hop's influence on their negotiation and expression of identity (Henry et al., 2010; Payne & West, 2022). In this literature review, I sought to understand the scholarship about Black college women in connection with Hip-Hop and their identity negotiation.

Peer-reviewed articles were accessed by electronic databases such as Google Scholar, ERIC, EBSCO, Project Muse, and ProQuest to conduct the literature review. I used the following search terms: Black college women, Black undergraduate women, Black college female, African American college women, college student identity development, Black women college student identity development, Black college women and Hip-Hop, Black women and self-presentation, identity shifting, Hip-Hop and Black women, Hip-Hop and Black women identity. The terms "African American" and "female" are not utilized within the literature review but are used in the key search terms to expand the range of literature for review. I did not include articles on Black women faculty, staff, or administrators to focalize the literature review. Additionally, due to limited research, I included articles on Black college women regardless of institution type. There were a total of 145 articles used to arrange the literature review through the subsequent sections: (a) college student identity development, (b) holistic perspective on Black women's college student development, (c) Black women and respectability politics, and (d) Hip-Hop's influence of Black women identity.

College Student Identity Development

The origins of student development theory in higher education began with the creation of the Student Personnel Point of View (SPPV) in 1937, which highlighted the importance of centering the development of the whole student as a primary objective of higher education (Evans et al., 2009). Jones and Stewart (2016) consider the "first-wave" of college student development theories as foundational and grounded in sociology and psychology, focusing on the individual. These first-wave theories were often grouped into "families" of theories and include psychosocial (Erikson, 1959; Chickering, 1969; Marcia, 1966); person-environment (Banning, 1978; Lewin, 1936; Sanford, 1962); cognitive-structural (Baxter Magolda, 1992, 2004; Belenky et al., 1986; Kohlberg, 1981; Piaget, 1952; Perry, 1968); maturity (Heath, 1968); and typology (Holland, 1997). According to Porter et al. (2018), most of these foundational theories were created based on White males' college experiences and the lack of recognition of lived experiences from the growing diverse student populations.

These limitations made way for the "second-wave" of college student development theories that centered on students' experiences from marginalized communities to be more inclusive of the growing diversity in higher education (Jones & Stewart, 2016). Second-wave theories consider social identities for students and primarily include racial identity (Cross, 1971; Helms, 1990), ethnic identity (Phinney, 1990), and sexual identity (Cass, 1979). Focusing on social identities and the notion that identities are socially constructed illuminated the need to incorporate privilege and oppression into college student development theories because oppressive systems are significant to social constructions (Jones & Abes, 2013). According to McEwen (2003), identity development is the "process of becoming more complex in one's personal and social identities" (p. 205). Waterman's (1982) study asserted that individual identity is believed to show its highest increase in formation during collegiate years because of the diversity of experiences and interactions within the college environment. Because of this, colleges and universities must understand, encourage, and help facilitate healthy identity development for their diverse college student demographics.

With the use of Erikson's Psychosocial Theory of Development (1968) as the foundation of many college student development theories, Chickering (1969, 1993) created a framework with seven vectors to outline the "tasks" involved with identity formation among college students. The vectors are to be considered "major highways for journeying toward individuation-the discovery and refinement of one's unique way of being-and also toward communion with other individuals and groups, including the larger national and global society" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 35). Despite Chickering's Theory of Identity Development centering on the individual variations associated with college students establishing identity, the second-wave theories emphasize the impact of privilege and oppression on identity development. For example, William Cross (1971) created one of the first racial identity development theories, focusing on African American students, as part of his Nigrescence (the process of becoming Black) theory. Cross (1971) developed a five-stage theoretical model to detail the process of a Black person as they progress from a White to a positive Black frame of reference through the stages of pre-encounter, encounter, immersion/emersion, internalization, and internalization/commitment).

Building upon Cross's work, in 1990, Helms created the White Identity Development Model, which proposed that beliefs, values, and attitudes are not dependent on race but instead on a person's stage of racial identity. Moreover, Phinney (1990) developed a Model of Ethnic Identity Development that applies to all marginalized racial or ethnic groups, which featured three stages: diffusion-foreclosure, moratorium, and identity achievement. Phinney (1990) suggests that students who are part of a minoritized racial or ethnic group encounter foundational conflicts that happen consequently as members of a minoritized group. These students experience threats of stereotyping and prejudice to their identities, and, as a result, they critically explore their racial or ethnic identity to resolve the threats that help attain identity achievement. Beyond racial and ethnic identity development, Bussey and Bandura (1999) focused on the social identity of gender with the Social Cognitive Theory of Gender Development that gender concepts and roles are the result of an extensive system of social influences that function interdependently in various societal subsystems which contribute to gender identity formation.

Student identity development theories and models have historically been based and concentrated on predominately White and male student populations (Abes et al., 2007). As a result, the identity development of Black women and all students of color pursuing their undergraduate degree has been confined to these limited theoretical frameworks based on the "perceptions and agendas of members of the dominant society" (Howard-Hamilton, 2003, p. 20). Black college women's experiences with racism and sexism, particularly in predominantly white institutions (PWIs), continue to impede their gendered racial identity development (Porter, 2017). Various scholars have tried to remedy the absence of intersectionality in the present student identity development theories by highlighting the role of multiple identities (Abes et al., 2007; Jones & McEwen, 2000). The recognition of intersectionality in student development, coupled with the third-wave theories, creates new opportunities for students with intersecting identities to approach college student identity development, including opening that space for Black women.

Acknowledging the multiple factors, including race, that influence gender identity development, Robbins and McGowan (2016) state, “Gender cannot be understood in isolation from other social identities; gender is inextricable from sexism, genderism, and their intersections with other social structural conditions; and gender is a socially constructed, interactive process” (p. 72), essentially implying that gender identity development is also intersectional with other third-wave theories such as critical race theory, queer theory, feminist theories, intersectionality, decolonizing & indigenous theories, and crip theories (Abes et al., 2019). Although these various critical perspectives have opened space for examining gender identity development, and it has been asserted that gender cannot be separated from other social identities, there has been little to no research on Black women specifically. A more nuanced layer is needed when exploring Black women, and models of identity development rooted in Black feminism have helped scholars examine gendered racial identities when studying the intersection of race and gender on Black women’s experiences specifically (Thomas et al., 2011; Williams & Lewis, 2021). The more nuanced layer provides the foundation and needs for another wave of theories.

Jones and Lazarus Stewart (2016) regard these more nuanced theories as the “third-wave” and post-structural type of college student development theories. Third-wave theories apply critical perspectives to the knowledge of student development and question hegemonic assumptions regarding healthy college student identity development. These third-wave, post-structural theories include Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001), intersectionality

(Crenshaw, 1991), transgender identity development theory (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005), etc., and showcase how societal constructions and systems create and sustain marginalization and oppression. (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009; Jones & Abes, 2013). Moreover, third-wave theories are significant to further understand and support students typically most marginalized during their unique identity development and to center social justice. These three waves of college student identity development theories are essential for increasing student engagement, retention, and belonging and are critical for postsecondary education.

Black Women's College Student Identity Development

Most research concerning the identity development of Black women frequently utilizes the lenses of race and gender to examine the complex nature of identity development of the Black woman's experience as the frame of reference (Henry, 2008; Henry et al., 2010; Hill, 2004; Hooks, 2001; Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003). For example, Helms (1990) created the womanist identity model that parallels the five stages of Cross's identity development model to characterize how women, especially women of color, shift from an external, societal-based definition of oneself as a woman to an internal-based definition. In Boisnier's (2003) study, the womanist (Ossana et al., 1992) and feminist (Downing & Roush, 1985) identity development models were examined in their capacity to capture the varied experiences of Black and White women. The womanist model highlights how a woman happens to esteem herself as a woman in any role she chooses. The feminist identity model is one of multiple potential results of a woman's journey for a positive identity (Boisnier, 2003). The results of Boisnier's (2003) research found some support for the claim that Black women align more with the womanist model. These models help lay the foundation for more centralized research on how Black women develop their college student identity at an HWI.

Scholars identified many contextual elements that impact Black women's gendered racial identity development. Still, there is limited research regarding the distinct process of Black women's gendered racial identity development while in college and how they make meaning of their gendered racial identity. Williams and Lewis (2021) conducted a qualitative study with 19 Black women at a large, predominantly White Southeastern public university about their gendered racial identity development to address the limited body of research. These scholars found four phases of the developmental process, hyperawareness, reflection, rejection, and navigation, that are affected by numerous factors unique to Black women's intersectional experiences. Williams and Lewis (2021) also found six gendered racial ideologies: assimilation, humanism, defiance, strength, pride, and empowerment, illustrating Black women's attitudes and beliefs toward their gendered racial identity. Other scholars like Ross et al. (2021) have also expanded the literature on Black women's college identity development through studies on topics such as the engineering identity development of Black women in engineering. Furthermore, mainly connected to Black college women is Porter's (2017) amended MIDBUW, which "depicts the unique experiences of Black undergraduate women as both raced and gendered beings who experience oppression and marginalization as Black women in predominantly White collegiate environments" (p. 90).

The MIDBUW reflects the reality that an assortment of influences and interactions impacts Black college women's identities throughout their socialization processes, which include pre-collegiate socialization, collegiate socialization, interactions with others, and intersectionality of identities to conceptualize how they articulate their identity as Black undergraduate women (Porter, 2017; Porter et al., 2020). Additionally, Williams et al. (2022) specifically explored the identity development of six Black first-generation college women and found that each participant determined that support systems and counterspaces were needed. Despite expanding identity development theories to include other social identities, conflicts, and advances have been made to develop healthy coping strategies and balance their identity development on the campus, further supporting the complexity.

Complexities in the theories referencing gender, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation typically caused separation and disconnection instead of interconnected possibilities. Subsequently, it led to the recognition of the need for holistic perspectives and theories which emphasizes intersectionality rather than the separate silos gained importance (Baxter Magolda, 2009). Holistic approaches also require consideration beyond identity development to see what other development elements are necessary to achieve identity development. For example, Bronfenbrenner's ecology model states that "the environment and the individual shape—and are shaped by—one another is "a dynamic, shifting relationship of reciprocal influence," that can be explored through identity development to display the dynamics of student development about student culture and campus environment" (Renn, 2004, p. 29). Taylor (2008) integrated environmental and personal factors in their study to create an "integrated map of young adult's development journey from external reliance to internal definition" (p. 219). Additionally, Baxter Magolda's (2001, 2008, 2009) longitudinal study identifies the layers of self-authorship, or the internal capacity to define one's beliefs, identity, and relationships, and found three components of self-authorship that include trusting the internal voice, building an internal foundation, and securing internal commitments. Other developmental theoretical frameworks for a holistic approach include out-of-class engagement, self-determination theory, and attribution theory. According to Baxter Magolda (2009), the "intentional exploration of the intersections among developmental dimensions is also crucial to understanding the activity of meaning-making" (p. 634).

A holistic, intersectional approach can help determine the factors influencing Black undergraduate women's identity development and meaning-making at an HWI. Applying this influence with consideration of context and interactions with others, such as societal norms and expectations that develop from culture, all impact how an individual constructs their identity (Jones, 1997; McEwen, 2003; Torres, 2003; Torres et al., 2009; Weber, 1998). A literature review supports that although individual differences exist, many shared factors exist in Black women's identity development.

Commonalities Among Black Women's Identity Development

According to Porter (2017), previous college student identity development theories fail to encapsulate the experiences of Black undergraduate women because they lack a more holistic perspective—one based upon their cultural, personal, and social contexts and intersections of identities" (p. 8). Her study utilizing a holistic perspective asserts that racial saliency and articulation of identity reveal that Black women are not a monolithic group with a singular experience and viewpoint (Porter, 2017). Although Black collegiate women are rather diverse in values, beliefs, attitudes, and experiences, researchers highlighted commonalities within Black women's identity development, including support systems, stereotypes on campus, and spaces of affirmation.

Support Systems

Kegan's (1994) meaning-making framework's third order of consciousness depicts that meaning-making happens in relationships with others. Porter and Dean (2015) conducted a phenomenological study to identify factors that influence identity development and mean-making of Black undergraduate women. They found that “individual and collective support systems painted a macro-level picture of the environment through which these women must navigate” (p. 131). The meaning of support systems varies by how Black women interpret them but can include the institution, faculty and staff, student organizations, peers, family, friends outside of campus, etc. Support systems can assist Black undergraduate women in making meaning and recognizing internal and external factors that influence their identity development (Porter & Dean, 2015).

Winkle-Wagner (2009) contends that identity is formed through an individual's interactions; specifically, “the self develops out of interactions between oneself, others, and the larger social structure...” (p. 17). As a result, support systems and the interactions within those systems matter. Individual and community support systems, whether obtained before or throughout college, impact Black women’s identity development by serving as guides throughout numerous stages of their college and early career experiences (Croom et al., 2017; Porter & Dean, 2015). According to Porter and Dean (2015), Black women college students hold the support and trust of an administrator or faculty member who cares about their success, wellness, and identity development in high regard. Community support is depicted in Croom et al.’s (2017) study of undergraduate Black women engaging in sister circle student organizations. Research in this realm found that they were searching for guidance and found ways to create spaces where they could make meaning of negative experiences and messages at their HWI constructively and healthily. Individual and institutional support can influence Black women and their college identity development.

Institutional support, especially at a HWI, includes general support while in college, support from other Black women in collegiate Black organizations, support from sister circles, and support from faculty and staff members, which can all positively influence Black women's development and success (Croom et al., 2017; Porter & Byrd, 2022). Coker's (2003) study explored the role of institutional support structures in facilitating Black women's success. Participants are potential leaders with strengths that can be further developed with proper support and programs. Often, Black women do not gain the institutional support needed.

Another critical system in the identity development of Black college women is the family, which can provide strength to Black women college students, particularly in the face of oppression. Coker's (2003) study of African American women found that family support could assist women as they experience the mental and emotional weight of racism and sexism on campus. However, more research is necessary to explore family factors and dynamics that can differentially affect the identity development of this group. Some research supports that families may influence Black college women positively and negatively. In their examination of 30 Black women at a Predominately White Institution, Winkle-Wagner (2009) found the women felt forced to conduct themselves differently at home as opposed to on campus, thus creating a feeling of homelessness while in college. Collins (1986) refers to this as an illustration of their marginalization through their "outsider within" status. Coined by Collins (1986) within her BFT regarding Black women, the term refers to having an insider perspective while occupying dominant group spaces but remaining as outsiders due to their lack of belonging and place within the dominant group. The influence of support systems in Black college women's lives influences the development of their racial and gender identities, which also influences how they combat the typical stereotypes of Black women.

Black Women Stereotypes on Campus

Previous scholarship has revealed that Black women are subjected to excessively higher expectations than other groups and are influenced by identity politics and stereotypes (Everett & Croom, 2017; Winkle-Wagner, 2015; Woods-Giscombé, 2010). Hence, social constructs and inequities, such as stereotypes, influence Black women's identity development (Winkle-Wagner et al., 2018). Brown et al. (2017) claimed that Black women were influenced and socialized by their familial support system, which often impacted if and to what extent they internalized and intentionally combated individuals' stereotypes and perceptions of them. The experience of living and learning on the margins while often fighting back against stereotypes influences Black college women's development (Porter & Byrd, 2022). Among these are the "impact of tropes on Black undergraduate women's identity development, self-hatred influenced by a White standard beauty, and perpetuation of stereotypes," which can influence how others view Black undergraduate women and how they view themselves (p. 809). Such experiences can cause Black women in college to react, cope, internalize, persist, and struggle to succeed within their HWI environments in different methods (Corbin et al., 2018; Lewis et al., 2012; Roland & Agosto, 2017).

Some stereotypical images can be perceived as positive yet still have negative repercussions. For example, the Strong Black Woman (SBW) stereotype portrays Black women as strong, independent, caring, self-sacrificing, and self-sufficient. In the study conducted by West et al. (2016), SBW is a paradox for Black college women due to its positive perception but negative impact on their health. Embodying this stereotype can be a positive way to cope with intersecting oppressive structures like racism, sexism, and classism. Paradoxically, internalizing SBW also negatively affects Black college women's physical and mental health. Moreover, Winkle-Wagner's research findings (2008) found that Black college women's experiences of being strong and showcasing strength and assertiveness are a disadvantage on college campuses. Participants voiced how being assertive and speaking in class or on an issue produced emotions of uneasiness and being silent due to others' microaggressions and stereotypes toward them. Corbin et al. (2018) added another layer to SBW by emphasizing the SBW characterization and comparing it with the angry Black woman trope. Black women use both stereotypes to address and navigate racial battle fatigue and racialized microaggressive behavior. Stereotypes can also prevent Black women from being themselves at college, such as the academic mask Black women often put on that is characterized by a model of student and professional behavior (Shavers & Moore, 2014).

Internalizing stereotypes can produce adverse outcomes due to society's presumption that Black women remain on the margins (West et al., 2016; Winkle-Wagner, 2008). When Black women internalize stereotypes, there is a higher probability of marginalization, unhappiness, and a constant struggle to survive within a system that negatively perceives them. For Black women to combat these stereotypes, Black college women identified spaces of affirmation or counterspaces as places where they did not have to negotiate themselves and where their identities were represented, respected, and re-affirmed (Porter & Byrd, 2022).

Spaces of Affirmation

Past studies have highlighted the necessity for communication, community, and connection spaces to affirm Black women (Patton, 2006; Porter, 2013; Porter & Dean, 2015). These spaces of affirmation, such as sister circles, student organizations, women's centers, and cultural centers, are critical to Black women's college development (Porter, 2017). Black college women negotiate the spaces where they can and should be their authentic selves in public, which is why spaces where they can take off their academic masks are necessary (Shavers & Moore, 2014; Winkle-Wagner, 2009).

Higher education institutions and spaces were initially developed to accommodate whiteness; as a result, Black women on college campuses must negotiate potential relationships and interactions with others as they navigate spaces historically and institutionally not produced for them (Porter & Dean, 2015). Having to do so directly impacts Black women's meaning-making in their identity development because of its correlation to their relationships and interactions with others (Kegan, 1994). Spaces of affirmation and lack of spaces of affirmation force Black women to learn how to survive and thrive during college while also navigating academic and social spaces. In Porter's (2017) study, certain spaces on campus, such as the classroom and student center, where Black women engaged with others, affected and constructed how participants examined their identities, built and strengthened community, and understood their place on campus. Previous literature has emphasized that spaces of dialogue and connection for Black women are essential (Patton, 2006; Porter & Dean, 2015).

Because Black women have a unique position in the world due to their marginalized identities of both race and gender, places and spaces are needed where they understand their particular identity development process. These places and spaces are also required to gain strategies to help Black women navigate college and their sense of belonging. These places and spaces include sister circles, predominantly Black student organizations, African American women's retreats, and student groups where Black women's counternarratives are centered (Croom et al., 2017; Henry, 2010; Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Jones & Sam, 2018). Allowing spaces to center Black women's stories and experiences can highlight the systemic issues that shape their narratives. Counterspaces and storytelling impact Black women's understanding of who they are individually and to others (Porter & Dean, 2015; Roland & Agosto, 2017). This is illuminated by Roland and Agosto's (2017) argument that "safe spaces as rest stops where one [Black women] can escape the onslaught of gendered racial microaggressions and pause the work of navigating social identities, oppressions, and demands to be in service to others" (p. 197).

Black women cannot separate their Blackness and womanness; thus, spaces on campus such as Black cultural centers and women's centers should collaborate to acknowledge the intersectional dimensions of Black women's identity development by providing counterspaces of affirmation and support as they continue to develop (Patton, 2006; Porter & Dean, 2015; Porter, 2017). Just as a holistic perspective is needed to approach college student identity development, the same approach is needed for Black women and their campus spaces. Consequently, spaces need to be created on college campuses that welcome Black women's whole selves, including all their interlocking identities. Creating these physical spaces is not enough without the intentionality of the spaces fostering relationships with other Black women and building community. These spaces of affirmation allow Black women to be present and nurture or mentor each other while being authentic to themselves (Porter & Dean, 2015). Black women's college student identity development can be impacted when they cannot be themselves authentically, and they must continue to wear their academic masks in on campus spaces, which can be viewed as a survival strategy of respectability politics.

Black Women College Students' Experiences at HWI/PWI

A predominately white institution (PWI) is an institution of higher education in which more than half of the student enrollment consists of white students (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). Moreover, a historically white institution (HWI) can be defined as an institution of higher education that no longer is “predominantly white” given the increase in other racial student groups but still acknowledges the dominant, white hegemonic culture that still impacts the student experience (Givens, 2016). There has been a significant increase in Black students’ enrollment at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) over the past four decades. As Black women surpass Black men in college in relation to enrollment rates, there is an added need for research focusing on Black women’s experiences and their endeavors to sustain high achievement levels (Kim, 2011). Many studies have looked at the Black women’s experiences at a PWI/HWI from an asset-based perspective and have shown that Black women who attend PWIs have a more positive experience than Black men and are less negatively impacted by discrimination or oppression (Chavous et al., 2004; Constantine & Watt, 2002; Keels, 2013). As Black women in undergrad are faced with racial and gendered oppression including stereotypes, it can create unique challenges for Black women based on preconceived notions about Black women as they navigate the PWI environment (Collins, 2000; Donovan, 2011; Howard-Vital, 1989; Settles, 2006; A. J. Thomas et al., 2008). Even when Black women college students at PWIs combat the stereotypes and assumptions of who they should be as Black college women, they are still able to resist and thrive. For example, in Winke-Wagner et al.’s (2018) study, Black women in college resisted the stereotypes and expectations that were put on them at their PWI by creating their own unique pathways toward asserting their authentic selves. There is a strong need and opportunity for Black women to take ownership of their racial and gender identity definitions during their experience within the PWI environment and reject those placed on them due to hegemonic systems.

Black college students have actively resisted the many challenges of attending PWIs by creating student organizations, creating spaces for themselves, and creating social media campaigns for their PWI experience (Eakins & Eakins, 2017). Although scholarship has illustrated the positive impact of these acts of resistance on the Black student experience at a PWI, there remains limited literature exploring how identity expression is used by Black, in particular, women college students attending PWIs, to negotiate their multiple identities on campus. Black women's college experience can be affected when they have to constantly negotiate their multiple identities at a PWI, which can be seen as a survival tactic of respectability politics.

Respectability Politics

Evelyn Higginbotham (1993) introduced the notion of the politics of respectability as a critique of changing an individual's behaviors to counter racist, sexist stereotypes and systems. As a survival strategy since the Jim Crow era of lynching and property burning, many Black people utilized means of being "respectable," such as talking in Standard English instead of African American vernacular, adopting Eurocentric beauty standards, etc. as a tactic to try to be accepted and assimilated into the dominant, White culture (Leath & Mims, 2021). As a result, many strategies utilized in the name of respectability politics reinforce the hegemonic norms and the status quo of society (Wolcott, 2013). Perhaps the most critical aspect of respectability politics is the thought that only certain Black people need to assimilate into these respectable ways to be more accepted as a race by the dominant (Toliver, 2019). Moreover, an expected but often incorrect outcome of enacting respectability politics is that these "respectable" ways enable oppressed people to obtain social and financial mobility (Shaw, 1996). According to Toliver (2019), "Respectability politics placed parameters around Blackness, confining Black activities to a finite list of appropriate behaviors. Those who lived beyond those parameters were often relegated to the margins" (p. 4). Signifying that individuals are further marginalized and oppressed if they do not adhere to respectability politics.

For Black women, in particular, there is a unique relationship with the politics of respectability. It references how Black women are expected to embed middle-class values, beliefs, behavioral patterns, speech, and dress into their everyday lives. A part of the assimilation of respectable ways is deemed necessary for Black women to be respected by the dominant group; however, that is often not the case (Higginbotham, 1993; Payne, 2020; White, 2001). Respect is still frequently absent for Black women who engage in respectability politics. Often, Black women being expected to enact respectability politics by their community leaves them being policed individually and collectively while simultaneously being stripped away from their individuality and identity as Black women (Payne, 2020). Black women, especially those in college, are deeply tied to 'controlling images' of Black womanhood that focus on sexual virtue, emotional behavior, and social obedience (Collins, 2000). Controlling images refer to stereotypical images of Black women (i.e., mammy, sapphire, jezebel, and welfare queen) used by individuals and society. These controlling images can cause Black women to shift who they are to offset the stereotypes rooted in the negative images. Despite the copious amounts of literature on respectability politics, there lies a gap in the literature as it relates specifically to Black women college students and respectability politics.

Identity Expression and Shifting

Being both Black and a woman causes Black women to encounter double marginalization with racism and sexism in educational and professional environments (Collins, 1986; Davis & Maldonado, 2017; Dickens et al., 2019; Dickens & Chavez, 2018). Consequently, to avoid their susceptibility to stereotypes and other forms of marginalization, they often feel obliged to present a different self or image they believe will be more welcomed to the world. This usually involves altering their actions, language, appearance, etc., to fit within various environments (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2004). Identity shifting, also called identity negotiation, describes the conscious and unconscious process of shifting one's thinking, behaviors, and speech in interactions with others (Jackson II, 2002a, 2002b; Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 1999). Ting-Toomey (2005) conceptualized identity negotiation theory and described it as negotiating sociocultural membership identity in intercultural and interpersonal communication settings. According to Shih et al. (2013), environmental cues decide whether a setting needs shifting or negotiation. Moreover, code-switching is a type of identity shifting, which refers to switching back and forth between different languages or dialects depending on the context and environment (Auer, 2013).

These notions of identity shifting and negotiations have been researched in the context of the workplace and professional setting. Still, little has been studied on this within the educational or professional settings for Black women in college. Consequently, there is a gap in the literature surrounding Black college women and their shifting of identities within the college environment. Black women employ identity shifting in the workplace to form and sustain relationships vital for professional and social advancement. Despite that, it can be mentally and emotionally taxing, contingent on how often and to what extent someone has to negotiate their identities (Dickens & Chavez, 2018; Dickens et al., 2019). Scott's (2013) study utilizing focus groups explored communicative strategies as Black women cross cultural borders, and findings indicated that with some young Black women, taxing emotions appear when trying to resist perpetuating stereotypes by shifting their actions and behaviors. Constantly switching between gendered racial and professional identities may have some professional advantages, but shifting is also tricky and can come with considerable costs. Although race and gender are prominent identities for Black women, future research must consider other identities of Black women when examining identity shifting, such as class identity, religious identity, sexuality, age, and motherhood status. The gap in literature continues as current research does not examine the identity shifting of Black women college students, particularly. Dickens and Chavez (2018) conducted a qualitative study to explore the identity switching of early career Black women. They found that participants shifted their racial, gender, age, and professional identities to challenge stereotypes while assimilating to the hegemonic structures and culture. Despite the scholarship about Black women and identity shifting, there is little to no examination of the intersection of Black women's multiple identities and what that means concerning their identity negotiation.

Impression Management & Self-Presentation

Impression management emerged from social psychology and is defined as an individual's efforts to control how others perceive them (Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Schlenker, 2003). It is like Goffman's (1959) concept of self-presentation, which asserts that people use strategy to present themselves tactically to influence how others view them to avoid shame or a decrease in status. Past research claims that people alter aspects of their self-presentation depending on the context of whom they are speaking, and those factors include gender, race, class, and social ties power (Banaji & Prentice, 1994; Tice et al., 1995). Thus, this dependency on the environment and those with whom they interact presents a challenge for marginalized groups. The challenges presented by this are often correlated to Du Bois' notion of "double consciousness," which details the challenge of integrating a sense of self while also being aware of the need to strategically create presentations of self based on dominant White culture (Du Bois, 1903).

According to Pitcan et al. (2018), “careful impression management is central to respectability politics, where actors negotiate impressions not just concerning each other, but to broader social norms” (p. 167). For example, Vickery (2015) conducted a study on low-income teenagers of color and found that participants disassociated themselves from peers they considered ghetto or unrespectable to manage impressions of their networks carefully. The specific ways Black women present themselves in public spaces illustrate their attempts to differentiate themselves from “ghetto chicks” deemed unrespectable (Thompson & Keith, 2003; Jones, 2009). Moreover, respectability politics can also yield responses within impression management and shifting self-presentation through hairstyle choices and clothes. This can minimize aesthetic indicators of race between Black women and their non-Black counterparts (Dickens et al., 2019). Johnson et al.’s (2017) study reported that one in five Black women feel pressure from society to straighten their hair to present a more White, Eurocentric look, which is twice as many as White women who were asked the same question. Likewise, McCurn (2018) conducted a qualitative study revealing that young Black women utilize the strategy of “keeping it fresh,” a form of impression management that challenges dominant notions of what poor Black women and girls should look like and how they should be treated. Black women who “keep it fresh” construct and maintain a neat and stylish look reinforced by expensive clothes, shoes, and accessories. The “keeping it fresh” form of self-presentation seeks to refute the assessment of those who keep it fresh as poor and unrespectable, even if momentarily (McCurn, 2018). Nonetheless, there is a lack of literature regarding Black women college students’ impression management and self-presentation.

Black Ratchet Imagination & Ratchet Respectability

Depending on the context and people, “keeping it fresh” and utilizing impression management and self-presentation can still fall short of what is deemed respectable. Thus, Black women are often viewed as a “ghetto” or “ratchet.” Ratchet is a fluid word with contradictory meanings (Toliver, 2019). The term “ratchet” has been popular in urban and Hip-Hop culture since being popularized in 2004 by Baton Rouge rapper Lil Boosie with his remake of the song “Do the Ratchet.” Ratchet can mean many things and evoke many images depending on the context, but it is typically used when characterizing the behaviors of an individual or group (Brown & Young, 2015). Ratchet is defined by George (2015) as a disparaging word used to situate Black women’s actions as indecent, unsophisticated, or ignorant. Despite that, other scholars have defined ratchetness as a space to disrupt or become free from respectability politics (Cooper, 2012; Pickens, 2015). Stallings (2013) expands on the definition of ratchetness, describing it as imaginative and detailing that it provides space for both feminine and queer individuals to express themselves without confinement or restriction.

According to McEachern (2017), ratchetness is a liberatory consciousness. Ratchetness is further defined by Love (2013) as the capability to live with intent and awareness despite living in oppressive systems. Moreover, McEachern (2017) defines ratchet as a “cultural knowledge, performance, and awareness of an anti-respectability that can be shared across Black communities and is not bound by geography, social class, or level of traditional education” (p. 79). The study revealed that ratchet allows Black women to navigate oppression by celebrating creativity and individual expression (McEachern, 2017). Ratchetness and respectability are critical to Black women’s identity development because it is a “hegemonic force that arbitrarily constrains who is considered good (respectable) and who is bad (ratchet); who deserves success (respectable) and who is destined to fail (ratchet); who merits celebration and veneration (respectable) and who does not (ratchet)" (Toliver, 2019, p. 3). Essentially, to only view ratchet as one singular definition will place Black women in a binary space that limits their potential identities that are developed. Boylorn (2016) defines ratchet respectability as "a mixture characterization of hegemonic, racist, sexist, and classist notions of Black womanhood,' which allows Black women to combine ratchet behaviors (generally linked to race) to the politics of respectability (generally linked to class)" (pp. 3).

Created by Stallings (2013), the Black Ratchet Imagination (BRI) is a liberatory, imaginative, and reconstructive space that "is the performance of the failure to be respectable, uplifting, and a credit to the race" (p. 136). It focalizes the creative and transformative practice of ratchetness within Hip-Hop. BRI focuses on the notion that Black people can imagine new worlds, develop new identities, and reconstruct relationships. Stallings (2013) also asserts that the BRI had the capacity to liberate imaginative and activist spaces to challenge the hegemonic definitions of gender and racial identity. Thus, using BRI as a framework, Toliver (2019) found that Black women exhibited both ratchet and respectable traits and suggested eliminating stereotypical binaries by perceiving ratchetness as a space of agency and "Black Girl Magic." Building upon the current work on ratchetness, Payne (2020) explored ratchetness and the BRI as a space for educational possibility and healthy identity development of Black women from a Hip-Hop lens, coining it the Cardi B-Beyoncé complex. The findings related to the participants' ratchet Black girlhood and showed a need for educational spaces where they can not only be themselves but also be who they want to be, free from the gaze of others (Payne, 2020).

As a result of the various images and depictions that young Black women inhabit within Hip-Hop culture, many Black college women may come to identify with the numerous Black women who are both glamorized and demoralized in hip- hop music and videos. Therefore, the messages and images portrayed through Hip-Hop culture can be incorporated into the psychology of young Black women as they are undergoing identity development, which could influence how and if they achieve healthy identities (Henry et al., 2010). This is another reason BRI is essential to the identity development of Black women to break binaries within influential Hip-Hop culture. Especially for Black women college students because Hip-Hop is an influential global and cultural force on college campuses.

Hip-Hop's Influence on Black Women's Identity

Hip-Hop culture is one of our contemporary society's most influential cultural constructions, and it has gained an international appeal to fans from diverse backgrounds (Sulé, 2016). Hip-Hop culture encompasses many aspects, which include rap/Hip-Hop music, fashion, dance, art, and language such as slang, and it has been defined as a type of creative expression of Black and Latino youth that intersects between race, class, and gender (Henry et al., 2010; Kitwana, 2002). Initially, Hip-Hop was seen as a source of identity formation and status by and for young Black and Latinos (Petchauer, 2011; Rose, 1994) through the four elements of Hip-Hop expressions, including emceeing (rapping), DJing (turntablism), forms of dance (b-boying, b-girling), and writing graffiti (Forman & Neal, 2004). According to Payne (2020), participants of the study recognized stereotypes of Black women within Hip-Hop and specifically noted terms such as "angry, aggressive, thug, slut, classy, ratchet, and gold digger," with ratchet and classy being the most referenced identities (p. 38). Scholars have critiqued Hip-Hop for the sexist and violent messages commonly expressed in contemporary Hip-Hop music (Henry et al., 2010; Peoples, 2008). These messages lead to healthy or unhealthy development due to Black college women consciously and unconsciously using these messages as they develop their identities (Henry, 2010), promulgated by Hip-Hop culture.

To further situate Black women's identities within Hip-Hop more fully, Morgan (1999) argues that Black women must explore the gray areas in which contradictions and ratchet respectability are privileged (Payne & West, 2022). In exploring this gray area, Pough (2004) regarded Hip-Hop as a counterspace of Black women's identity development, where Black women "bring wreck" to stereotypes and marginalization that impact how they navigate and manage their identities both within the Hip-Hop sphere and the public sphere (p#). According to Payne (2020), the engagement with Pough's "Bringing Wreck" illustrates the skillsets Black women require in navigating the complications of Hip-Hop and its influence on the public sphere. To bring wreck to their identity, scholars have explored the creation of new tropes such as the "bad bitch Barbie" and the "badass woman." These identities make way for Black women to now use anger as a means to make room for themselves and their voices in male-dominated spaces and for (re)creating ideas of Black women's agency and sexuality (Bradley, 2015; LaVoulle & Ellison, 2017; Payne & West, 2022). Research has mentioned that these contradictory, conflicting messages and stereotypes can often lead to the development of various and shifting identities that Black women use to successfully navigate multiple environments (Williams & Lewis, 2021). However, the research lacks a nuanced examination of this shifting identity development of Black women college students.

Higher Education and Hip-Hop

Hip-Hop is a generational culture that has catalyzed social and political imaginations among college students in the United States and globally (Kitwana, 2002). There have been limited scholarly studies exploring the implications of Hip-Hop within college contexts and its relevance to higher education. Most scholarships in the field of Hip-Hop studies have focused primarily on analyzing the content of Hip-Hop lyrics, films, etc. Still, they are limited in assisting higher education stakeholders in understanding how Hip-Hop operates in students' lives who associate and identify with it (Au, 2005; Kitwana, 2002; Dimitriadis, 2001; Petchauer, 2009). Despite that, Iwamoto et al. (2007) conducted a qualitative study of the meaning of rap music for eight racially diverse college students, and a key finding was that Hip-Hop music functioned as a coping mechanism. This furthers the notion that Hip-Hop can be a positive benefit for college students navigating higher education while going through the complexities of identity development. Other findings of Iwamoto et al.'s (2007) study include college students developing empathy from Hip-Hop with themes of overcoming adversities and love. Rap was viewed as educational to certain students through its storytelling elements of life experiences and real-life topics. Although the author of this study provided critical scholarship on a topic neglected within Hip-Hop studies, it was limited in that it did not examine the connection between the college experience and Hip-Hop.

Wessel & Wallaert (2011) helped address this limitation by conducting a phenomenological study on the relationship between 11 college students who love Hip-Hop and their educational experiences. The study findings include Hip-Hop catalyzing engagement and interaction with other races, Hip-Hop assisting in creating friendships, Hip-Hop influencing personal expression, and Hip-Hop influencing the students' goals and professional plans. Although Hip-Hop can negatively influence the college experience of undergraduate students, the study's findings maintain previous scholars' claims that Hip-Hop has the potential to positively influence undergraduates as well (Forrell, 2006; Kitwana, 2002; Walker, 2006). Especially how Hip-Hop has a positive influence on socialization, personal expression through language and clothing, goals, and cultural appreciation of college students (Wessel & Wallaert, 2011). More specifically, Wessel and Wallaert (2011) found that Hip-Hop music motivated students to achieve their goals. The Hip-Hop lyrics motivated undergraduate students to complete their education, dream big, and do something with their lives, which can, in turn, influence how they develop their identities while in college.

In the book *Hip-Hop Culture in College Students' Lives: Elements, Embodiment, and Higher Edutainment,* Petchauer (2011) provides three ways Hip-Hop operates on college campuses and grows in importance and relevance to higher education. These three ways include formalizing Hip-Hop into higher education. Through courses and curricula in various academic disciplines, higher education institutions now produce and preserve Hip-Hop culture within academia, and students bring Hip-Hop to their college campuses. When students bring Hip-Hop to their higher education institution, it can be correlated to displaying their identities, including "rituals, practices, habits of mind, daily routines, texts, and authoritative bodies of knowledge" (Petchauer, 2011, p. 4). Thus, Hip-Hop is a salient part of many college students' identities and critical to their identity development.

It is also essential to note that Hip-Hop's existence at higher education institutions is not restricted to students on an individual level but also a formal organizational level, such as student organizations on campus. Petchauer (2011) notes that although cultural spaces, student organizations, and subcultures are essential aspects of college student life, Hip-Hop is rarely examined as one of these groups. Hip-Hop within higher education is conceptualized further by identifying Hip-Hop colleagues. According to Petchauer (2011), Hip-Hop collegians are college students who "make their active participation in Hip-Hop relevant to their educational interests, motivations, practices, or mindsets" (p. 7). A Hip-Hop collegian is not a college student who merely listens to Hip-Hop music. Still, they are college students who experience and *feel* Hip-Hop music. They use those feelings to deconstruct, reconstruct, and apply them as a supplemental educational source within their academic classes (Petchauer, 2011). This notion of a Hip-Hop collegian can inform higher education institutions on how to serve individual students better on an educational and pedagogical level.

According to Pennycook (2006), “Hip-Hop both produces and is produced by a cultural context that often thinks differently about questions of language, writing, identity, and ownership from the mainstream discourses of the academy” (p. 150). Hip-Hop brings a critical element to academia that deconstructs the traditional academy. This further illustrates Hip-Hop and higher education’s lack of criticality concerning its practices, campus culture, and college students, as most Hip-Hop scholarship is not positioned within higher education as correlated to student persistence and development.

As a result, Sulé (2016) explored Hip-Hop culture’s role in higher education institutions through the lens of Hip-Hop as a subculture, diversity, and sense of belonging. Sulé (2016) found that Hip-Hop collegians use Hip-Hop while at higher education institutions to find belongingness through self-expression, belongingness through empathetic mattering, and belongingness through counterspaces. Hip-Hop and its culture within higher education should be viewed as a cultural artifact and welcomed through the institution’s policies, practices, and systems. Petchauer (2010) supports this claim with study findings, including putting course material into rhymes, using Hip-Hop texts as bridges to academic texts, or considering Hip-Hop student organizations that can help faculty and staff better understand the influences in students’ lives and identity development.

Hip-Hop Influence on Black Women College Student's Identity Development

As Black women are contradicted in Hip-Hop by being both glamorized and demoralized through the music or videos, many Black college women's identity development is heavily influenced by Hip-Hop. Black college women could easily internalize contemporary Hip-Hop and its positive and negative messages, which could affect, and to what extent, their ability to achieve healthy identities (Henry et al., 2010). LaVoulle and Ellison (2017) speak to this notion in the study centered around their concept called the Bad Bitch Barbie, a term used to identify Black women who embrace their bodies while also using them as a commodity. Moreover, Black college women can internalize to develop identities rooted in empowerment, courage, and resilience while battling a racist and sexist society.

College students participate in a more intense and unique search for identity, which may cause Black college women to include images and messages intentionally and unintentionally from Hip-Hop culture in their developing identities (Henry, 2010). Hunt's (2018) study illustrates the permeating impact of Hip-Hop culture on today's Black undergraduate women and their experiences in college, which influences their identity development. Participants explained how Hip-Hop raised their consciousness, impacting their identities and development. The findings indicate that popular Hip-Hop culture shapes identity around race, gender, and sexuality while shaping relationship expectations (Hunt, 2018).

As images and messages within Hip-Hop are displayed to Black undergraduate women that go against the negative stereotypes supported by society and patriarchal Hip-Hop, they could be encouraged to embrace the more positive and empowering demonstrations of Black women while developing their identities (Henry, 2010). Moreover, Hip-Hop and its continued contradiction of both misogynistic and women empowerment messages are symbolic of Black women as they navigate college. This contradiction is showcased in Payne's (2020) study that depicted Black women's classy–ratchet binaries through the Cardi B-Beyoncé complex. This complex also adds to the idea that Black college women benefit from culturally relevant modes of empowerment that Hip-Hop can with its contradictory messages (Henry, 2010).

Although minimal research is available on Black college women and Hip-Hop, some recent scholarship focuses on how Black undergraduate women leveraged Hip-Hop to (re)construct and showcase their identities (Payne & West, 2022). The study revealed that Hip-Hop gave Black college women multiple representations of Black identity and womanhood. Also, the key findings showcased how Black women are not monolithic through the varied individual representations of Black women in Hip-Hop artists. For example, artists like Solange, Beyoncé, and Megan Thee Stallion each characterize a different type of femininity within Hip-Hop.

Another finding was the impact of the hypersexualization of Black women being normalized within Hip-Hop because consumers see Black women as sexual beings only. The normalized hypersexualization makes Black college women more aware of their over-policing, over-sexualization, and victim-blaming in society; however, Hip-Hop offers them awareness and agency to go against these challenges. In (re)constructing their gendered racial and sexual identities, Black undergraduate women incorporate the complexities in the reclamation of the hypersexualization exhibited by some Black women Hip-Hop artists. Black college women also utilize Hip-Hop to navigate the challenges of respectability politics by negotiating Hip-Hop images to (re)construct and express different identities depending on the setting (Payne & West, 2022).

The Hip-Hop Feminism Model of Multiple Identities (HHFMMI) created by Payne and West (2022) proposes that Multiple Intersecting Identities of Black college women happen at the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality. Furthermore, the model asserts that the identities fluctuate between saliency and permanency and are positioned and influenced by the multiplicity of Black womanhood in Hip-Hop, environmental forces, and contextual influences. Through this exploration, Black college women acknowledge that the different parts of their gendered racial and sexual identities correlate to the multiple varied representations of Black women in Hip-Hop and are influenced by various oppressive or contextual environmental forces. These Multiple Intersecting Identities include stereotypes such as the "Ghetto Hood Chick, Ratchet Black Girl, Baddest Bitch, Hot Girl, Queen, Boss, College Girl but Freak on the Weekend, Strong Black Woman, Hustler, Superwoman, etc., have been repackaged and are expressed by contemporary Black college women to differing degrees, under different conditions, and in different settings" (Keyes, 2000, p. 181). Encouraging Black college women to "leverage simultaneity" as they consider Hip-Hop's influence on their personal developments of identity can also catalyze to empower and broaden their capacity to engage in critical reflection of their identity in other areas of the academic, social, and personal lives (West, in press). This can aid Black undergraduate women in fully situating and understanding Hip-Hop's influence on the identity development and expression of contemporary Black women in college.

Literature Gap

The literature review highlighted Black college women's identity development, respectability politics surrounding Black women's shifting identities, and Hip-Hop's influence on Black college women's development of identity. This literature brings attention to the current gaps in the scholarship that could potentially be explored in a study. First, there is limited literature on how Black college women negotiate their identity. Second, there is little research on how Hip-Hop impacts Black college women’s identity development —much of the literature centers on HHF's identity development rather than Hip-Hop culture. Most literature focuses on Black women, but little to none focuses explicitly on Black women college students. The lack of literature surrounding Black college women leaves a significant gap in understanding their lived experiences during a critical time as they continue to grow within their womanhood.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the qualitative study is to examine how Black college women express their interlocking identities influenced by Hip-Hop influence. I examine how Black women in college and their identity expression through participant stories via interviews, lyric elicitation, and artifacts. In this chapter, I describe the qualitative research design I plan to employ through a BFT methodology to answer the research question that is the foundation of this study. In addition, this chapter contains information on the philosophical underpinnings, participant recruitment and selection, methods for data generation, and data analysis that resulted in the key findings. This chapter concludes with the trustworthiness and limitations of this study.

Philosophical Underpinnings

BFT is guided by a nuanced understanding of how Black women experience racism, sexism, classism, and other interlocking oppressions. I utilized BFT as the philosophical underpinning to guide this study. Dillard (2016) describes a broader understanding of BFT by centering it as "research as responsibility" (p. 5). Moreover, Collins (1990) considers a BFT epistemology rooted in the everyday experiences of Black women. According to Collins (2000), four dimensions of Black feminist epistemology shape one's role as a qualitative researcher: (a) lived experience as a criterion of meaning, (b) the use of dialogue to assess knowledge claims, (c) the ethic of caring, and (d) the ethic of personal accountability. These four tenets will aid me as a researcher in understanding that the participants are individuals with their agency and history.

Black feminist epistemology and ontology recognize that Black women's knowledge and realities are understood through our varied experiences living, surviving, and thriving within intersecting forms of oppression (Collins, 2000; Dillard, 2000; Patterson et al., 2016). According to Patterson et al. (2016), it is a "self-defined, embodied way of knowing" in which Black women can be seen and our lived experiences can be understood (p. 58). BFT will guide this study as its philosophical underpinnings by informing how I approach relationship building with participants rooted in an ethic of care, data collection methods that center storytelling, and ethical data analysis and presentation that critiques systems of domination and Black women's joy. By embracing the influence of Black feminist epistemology within this study, I can name, express, and be in a community with Black women who center their multiple truths.

Research Design

To conduct this study, I will utilize a qualitative methodology. Qualitative research designs allow researchers to understand, interrogate, or deconstruct multiple truths to gain a deeper, richer understanding that is typically hidden within contexts, environments, societal structures, or discourses (Bhattacharya, 2017). Moreover, the main objective of the qualitative research approach is to explore the emotions, actions, and perceptions of people's lives in more depth (Billups, 2020). The foundation of qualitative designs urges participants to reflect on their lived experiences via emotion, action, language, and aesthetics to understand how those elements influence their identity expression. Qualitative research with BFT philosophical underpinnings allows for the focus on social structures of oppression and their impact on the lived experiences of Black women (Collins, 2000; Bhattacharya, 2017). The rationale for a qualitative research design is multifaceted: (a) to understand Black college women and the expression of their interlocking identities that consider environments and interactions, and (b) an inquiry approach that uncovers Black college women's survival and resistance on campus through identity expression.

Methodology

Black Feminist Methodology (BFM) is employed in this study. BFM "privileges embodied knowledge that emerges through the experiences of Black women who name and speak their varied forms truth" (Patterson et al., 2016, p. 60). It emphasizes multiple ways of knowing rooted in the idea that Black women have developed a unique standpoint and are knowledge producers. According to Clemons (2019), using BFT as a methodology allows the researcher to center voices often silenced or missing in White-western approaches to research. The use of BFM allows the lived experiences of Black women to move beyond struggle and oppression to highlight how this population resists oppressive forces and thrives in everyday life.

Researchers must become and remain just as concerned with the research process as they are concerned with the data being collected (Clemons, 2019; Dotson, 2015; Patterson et al., 2016). Employing BFM also means understanding that "research is not an objective endeavor, void of the interrelationships formed and maintained by the researcher and participants" (Givens & Jeffries, 2002, p. 2). Hence, a relationship is developed with the researcher, words, participants, and mission to conduct a study that will assist in a greater understanding of Black communities and, more importantly, an understanding of Black women and their liberation (Clemons, 2019). When researchers apply BFT, they acknowledge that lived experiences are a criterion of meaning, are self-reflexive, and incorporate ethics of caring and personal accountability throughout the research process (Clemons, 2019; Collins, 2000). There are two essential elements of BFM. Thus, BFT as a methodological tool offers a valuable lens to understand the experiences of Black women undergraduate students because BFT recognizes that Black women have a distinctive, unique experience and standpoint as being a part of a community defined by their gender and race coupled with other social identifiers.

Sampling, Recruitment, and Criteria

I selected six participants for this dissertation study. Because of the nature of this BFM qualitative study, the sample will be smaller to focus on in-depth, information-rich data collected to understand the phenomenon of Hip-Hop's influence on Black women college students' identity expression (Koro-Ljungberg & Cannella, 2017). The study participants were selected through purposeful sampling. Purposeful criterion sampling in qualitative studies highlights rich information gathering for an in-depth study, and participants are chosen because they have the knowledge and experience essential for the study (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). The following criteria will be used in the recruitment and selection:

1. Must self-identify within the African diaspora or as Black.
2. Must self-identify as a woman.
3. Must be a current undergraduate student.
4. Must be currently enrolled at a four-year higher education institution.

After I received IRB approval, I created a recruitment flier detailing the scope of the study, its criteria, and my contact information. Then, the study recruitment flier was posted on my social media, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram. I chose to utilize social media for participant recruitment because it can reach a greater audience and expand the opportunity for a diverse participant pool (Sikkens et al., 2016). A diverse participant pool allowed the opportunity to understand Black college women's expression of multiple identities from various lived experiences and positionalities. I also posted the study recruitment flier to social media groups for higher education and professional listservs via email and through my connections in higher education. The recruitment phase remained open for a month as I recruited the six participants who met the criteria for the study.

Before the first interview, study participants were asked to complete an interest form about their demographics, such as college year, institution type, etc. The form was created using a Google document and sent electronically to potential participants through an encrypted Outlook email. All information gathered has restricted access to anyone but the researcher to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of the data provided. The interest form also asked participants to include lyrics from a Hip-Hop song expressing their identity concerning their college experience. The lyric elicitation before the interview was the first data collected in the study, which promoted their active participation in the research as soon as possible. Moreover, to honor anonymity, participants were asked to select pseudonyms representing their multiple identities and their expression of their identities. Also, the interest form included the consent form for participants to review before the first interview. Lastly, the interest form allowed participants to schedule their first interview day and time.

Participant Profiles

The participants detailed their lived experiences, collegiate journey, and perspectives on Hip-Hop and their identity expression in relation to their Black womanhood through the power of storytelling. This section of the chapter profiles the participants, their choice of pseudonyms, their lyric artifact, and their different institutions (See Table 1). This study had six participants: 1) Amber, 2) Nineteen, 3) Pink, 4) Butterfly, 5) Renee, and 6) Barbie.

Amber

"You are but a phoenix among feathers. You're broken by the waves among the sea, and they'll let you die; they'll let you wash away. But you swim as well as you fly. Pretty little bird. Pretty little bird. You've hit the window a few times (the window a few times). You pretty little bird,

pretty little bird. You still ain't scared of no heights when the spiral down feels as good as the flight up." - SZA (Pretty Little Birds)

Amber, a junior at a Historically White Institution that is also a Hispanic-serving institution, is majoring in biomedical engineering with a minor in neuroscience and plans to switch to psychology soon. Amber is highly involved on campus in student government, the Black Student Association, and a women's leadership organization, as well as in her other campus involvement. She can and will walk into the class and be the main character through her identity expression. Although born in the United States, Amber has Senegalese roots. She attributes much of her identity development and expression to her family, especially her mother, who always encouraged her to be as extra as possible. She chose her pseudonym because that is the fake name she gives when ordering food.

The Hip-Hop artists who have influenced her more than others are Drake and Nicki Minaj. She does not listen to Hip-Hop by artists like YoungBoy NBA because she believes you can take on the personality of who you are listening to, and she chooses not to consume that particular type of Hip-Hop. Although Senegalese and fluent in her language, Amber is not a huge connoisseur of afrobeats, which she even said was crazy. She chose the song lyrics by SZA because she related to it as a Black woman in college and interpreted the song as blooming from a girl to a woman with confidence, especially in a world that does not always value and uplift Black women.

Nineteen

*"All them hoes wanna look like me. B*h, most likely only fu*ing you just to spite me. But please don't get it twisted; I ain't tripping. I never put my faith in a n*a, b*h, I'ma die independent (ayy, ayy, woah, woah, woah)." - Megan Thee Stallion (Plan B)*

Nineteen chose her pseudonym based on her age at the time of the dialogic conversations. She had a unique experience as an Afro-Latina woman attending a predominately Hispanic university in the Southwest. She spoke a lot about vacillating between feeling at home. She was accepted within her collegiate environment but also had areas that felt foreign and unexplored, and she did not have a place to properly explore her identity expression as an Afro-Latina woman. As a sophomore in college, she originally started as a journalism major but recently switched to biology in hopes of becoming a dentist. This switch to dentistry accompanies her business as an entrepreneur, putting jewels and gems on people's teeth, which she also says was influenced by indigenous and Hip-Hop culture.

Nineteen accredits her love for Hip-Hop, stemming from her father since childhood; that love has been carried on throughout her life. Rick Ross and A Tribe Called Quest are heavy Hip-Hop influences for her from her father, and she appreciates and is inspired by all things Kendrick Lamar and Tina Snow, as Nineteen said, which is Megan Thee Stallion's alter ego. As someone who loves the hot girl era that Megan Thee Stallion helped lead the charge on, Nineteen selected Meg's *Plan B* as her lyric artifact. She selected the lyrics the same day she switched to her biology major, so she was "feeling like that girl" and really empowered.

Pink

*"Y'all callin' me crazy when a b*h been ballin' all day like Brady. Long hair, this wavy and a bitch been shoppin' all day, no Macy's. Hop out, First Lady. You n*s can't date me; look at your savings." - Doechii (Crazy)*

As a senior graduating this semester, Pink started college, majoring in criminal justice, but switched to business because she wanted to go in a different direction with plans to own a business within the beauty and aesthetics industry one day. She attends a Historically White

Institution that is also a Hispanic-serving institution and notes that she is not involved in many student organizations. Pink chose her institution because it provided the largest scholarships for her, and she takes her academics seriously while always sitting in the front of the class. She admits she holds multiple identities and chooses to express them depending on her mood and comfort level in a given setting. Her pseudonym came from her favorite color and expressed her multiple identities.

As someone who does not listen to men's rap because of the misogyny, Pink listed Megan Thee Stallion, Nicki Minaj, Beyoncé, Doechii, Flo-Milli, Doja Cat, Saweetie, Latto, and City Girls as significant influences on her expression of identities. She emphasized that they not only influence her aesthetics but also affect how she acts. Pink selected the lyrics by Doechii because they reflected her embracing her sexual agency as a Black woman and embodied her high expectations for herself as a Black woman and thinking she is "that girl."

Butterfly

*"I'm a bad b*h, and I got bad anxiety. People call me rude 'cause I ain't lettin' 'em try me. Sayin' I'm a ho 'cause I'm in love with my body. Issues, but nobody I could talk to about it. They keep sayin' I should get help. But I don't even know what I need. They keep sayin' speak your truth. And at the same time say they don't believe, man. Excuse me while I get into my feelings for a second. Usually I keep it down, but today I gotta tell it, not that anybody gives a f*k anyway. But everybody talkin' sh*t probably sucks anyway. Y'all don't even know how I feel, I don't even know how I deal. Today I really hate everybody and that's just me bein' real, yeah. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. Bad bitches have bad days too. Friday, Saturday, Sunday, bounce back how a bad bitch always do. All I really wanna hear is, "It'll be okay" - Megan Thee Stallion (Anxiety)*

Butterfly was raised by her grandmother, and she attributes her grandmother, mother, and sister to being heavy influences on her identity expression and journey to and through college. She is the first in her family to go through the traditional undergraduate college experience, so her family lives through her a lot. As a junior attending a Historically White and Hispanic-Serving Institution, she is an international business major who has already studied abroad in Asia. She considers herself a lifelong learner, and her involvement on campus includes being a Resident Assistant and being involved in various student organizations and the College of Business through diversity groups. Although Hip-Hop does influence her expression of multiple identities, the women in her family are a significant source of influence and confidence in her identity expression as well. She chose Butterfly as her pseudonym for two reasons. It is her favorite insect; two, it reflects her evolving and becoming a Black woman in college.

Megan Thee Stallion and Cardi B are significant influences in Hip-Hop for Butterfly because they can unapologetically be themselves. The 90s and early 2000s women in Hip-Hop like Destiny's Child and TLC also influenced her identity expression through aesthetics like hairstyles, their language, and the confidence they exude. She chose the lyrics Anxiety by Megan Thee Stallion because it embodies her everyday struggles with anxiety as a Black women college student navigating the collegiate environment. She saw herself within those lyrics, and Megan's song validated how she feels about navigating anxiety and various collegiate environments, especially as a Black woman college student. The song helped her embrace that it is okay to have anxiety and bad days, and you are still that girl, regardless.

Renee

"Time to remind me I'm Black again, huh? All this talking back, I'm too arrogant, huh? What would you do, you knew you couldn't fail. I have no fear of anything, do everything well." - The Carters (Nice)

As a senior aerospace engineer major with a minor in mechanical engineering, Renee has a unique experience attending a large Historically and predominantly White institution in the Deep South. With her major, she is typically the only Black person in her classes and takes her academics very seriously as she constantly feels the need to prove she belongs there to her peers and professors. Moreover, she was the only Black person in her internship at a well-known Fortune 500 company, contributing to her desire to succeed in college. Renee is highly involved on campus as a Resident Assistant, an executive member of the National Society of Black Engineers, and a leader in an organization that helps support the matriculation of Black women undergraduates on her campus. Although Renee stands firm in who she is, she does admit to expressing her multiple identities differently depending on the setting.

For much of her childhood, she did not listen to Hip-Hop music because her dad hated it. However, now she listens to it and loves it because she feels it makes her who she is and it makes her feel at home. Don't catch her walking on campus and listening to Hip-Hop music because she will be walking and feeling like she is that girl. The Carters' (Beyoncé and Jay-Z) album and Jay-Z and Beyoncé, in general, heavily influence her as they speak to who they are, and she feels that speaks to who she is while influencing her to carry herself in a certain way. Other influences in Hip-Hop for Renee include City Girls, Victoria Monet, Mary J. Blige, and Coco Jones. She chose lyrics by The Carters because she felt they touched on each point she can identify with as a Black women college student at her HWI. The lyrics affirmed her because she can do everything well regardless of the spaces and places her PWI can try to hold her back. Regardless of what anyone says or thinks she cannot do, she will do it well.

Barbie

"With a little touch of 'Ladies First.' Who said the ladies couldn't make it? You must be blind. If you don't believe, well here, listen to this rhyme. Ladies first, there's no time to rehearse. I'm divine, and my mind expands throughout the universe." - Queen Latifah (Ladies First)

Barbie is a third-year undergraduate student at a HWI in the South majoring in computer science with a minor in cybersecurity. Her journey to and through college has been a little rocky as she tries to figure out the work and student-life balance. She is often one of two Black women in her classes, and she struggles with campus involvement and connecting with people outside of her core friends because if she is not on campus, she is at work making money. Her mother was a major influence on her identity expression, and she recognizes that she is a role model to her younger siblings, which keeps her cognizant of her identity expression through aesthetics. She decided her pseudonym would be Barbie because her friends call her. After all, they say she lives so many different lives and can be different depending on the setting.

Regarding music, Barbie's friends often call her a little boy because of her musical choices in Hip-Hop. She admittedly does not listen to many Black women Hip-Hop artists but appreciates Megan Thee Stallion because she often connects being Black and being a woman to her music. Although she acknowledges that the Hip-Hop music she listens to does not always connect to her life, her favorite artists include NoCap, YoungBoy NeverBrokeAgain (NBA), Rylo Rodriguez, and Kevin Gates. Ironically, Barbie's lyric artifact was Ladies First by Queen Latifah, which many consider one of the first women's anthems in Hip-Hop and foundational to Hip-Hop Feminism. She selected those specific lyrics as they spoke to how she felt within her major, especially when she would be the only woman in the class and still made it through successfully because she is “divine and my mind expands throughout the universe.”

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Participant	**Classification**	**Major**	**Lyric Artifact**
Amber	Junior	Psychology	Pretty Little Birds - SZA
Nineteen	Sophomore	Biology	Plan B - Megan Thee Stallion
Pink	Senior	Business	Crazy - Doechii
Butterfly	Junior	International Business	Anxiety - Megan Thee Stallion
Renee	Senior	Aerospace Engineering	Nice – The Carters
Barbie	Junior	Computer Science	Ladies First – Queen Latifah

Data Generation

The purpose of the data generation process was to build a meaningful relationship between participants and the researcher that does not exploit but further promotes the emancipation of Black women (Clemons, 2019). A qualitative interview approach, lyric elicitation, and photographic artifact were chosen methods for this study to understand how Black women college students express these identities and Hip-Hop’s influence on that expression. This research used interviews to evoke the participants’ lived experiences concerning expressing their multiple identities and Hip-Hop (Patton, 2015). The lyric elicitation and photographic artifact go beyond the participants just being “listened to” passively during an interview; alternatively, they facilitate active participation (Sinclair, 2004). Moreover, the lyrics and photographic artifacts were thought out before the interview, inviting participants to contribute intentionally as co-researchers, not just participants, in some way. These creative methods counter some of the power inequities within traditional methods because they allow participants to be the subject matter experts of their conditions as they discuss their lived experiences and truths (Clark-Ibáñez & Scott, 2008). Inviting participants to discuss their materials with the researcher encourages storytelling instead of traditional questions and answers (Clark-Ibáñez & Scott, 2008). In honoring BFM and challenging the power dynamics, I will now resist the traditional academic term “interview” and use dialogic conversations from this point forward.

Lyric Elicitation

Before the dialogic conversations, participants were asked during the interest form phase to upload a song with lyrics that remind them of their identities and expressions influenced by Hip-Hop. The participants were also asked to denote which specific lyrics stood out within the song concerning their identity expression. The participants uploaded the lyrics with the denotations to me via the same Google document utilized for the interest form. Levell (2019) noted that lyric elicitation is valuable to interviews and provides greater context for the participant and researcher. The music lyrics can be used as a mode of communication by the participant via metaphors or as illustrations of the past, present, or future (Levell, 2019).

Interviews

In a BFM-centered, critical qualitative study, dialogic conversations are a significant data source for co-generating an information-rich, in-depth response to an individual’s lived experiences (Crotty, 2012). The dialogic conversations were two semi-structured, video conferencing interviews lasting 60-120 minutes. The semi-structured interview consisted of a predetermined list of open-ended questions to address specific topics related to the study while leaving space for the participants to offer new insight into the study focus. The semi-structured approach also facilitated reciprocity between the researcher and the participant while centering the participant's voices (Brown & Danaher, 2019; Galletta, 2013). Because the semi-structured approach can provide a range of endless possibilities and versatility, it was appropriate for the study as it explores the versatility and multiple identities of Black women in college (Galletta, 2013). The participants could join the video conference dialogic conversation wherever they felt most comfortable with privacy. I intentionally did not exercise the traditional power dynamics of the academy by not interviewing in a formal office location on campus. According to Tungohan and Catungal (2022), virtual interviews have many advantages, such as flexibility and not imposing geographic limitations on potential participants. All interviews were recorded and transcribed via the Zoom platform.

To guide the dialogic conversation, I used the interview protocol (See Appendix A and B). To further break down the power relations in research, I ensured the participants' agency by allowing them to choose a pseudonym as another form of identity expression and remain anonymous throughout the study (Allen & Wiles, 2016). I kept the participants' personal information and narratives private by storing the data in a safe location with password protection only accessible to me.

Photographic Elicitation

To provide a different frame of reference and additional data, each participant was asked to contribute photographic artifacts that embodied how they expressed their multiple identities related to the college experience. Norman (2008) asserts that artifacts in qualitative research are unique and easily accessible but frequently ignored data methods. According to Clark-Ibáñez (2004), "Researchers can use photographs as a tool to expand on questions, and simultaneously, participants can use photographs to provide a unique way to communicate dimensions of their lives" (p. 1507). Photographs could include on campus spaces such as the classroom and cultural center, clothes, jewelry, nails, shoes, the hair shop, etc. Any photograph participants felt was representative of their multiple identities. After the first interview, participants were asked to collect photographic artifacts reminding them of their identity (Evans-Winters, 2019). Within the second interview protocol, I asked questions such as: 1) What is your picture? and 2) What is the story behind your picture? The goal was for participants to share narratives about the photographs and how they represent their identity expression in college. As an additional data generation method for saturation, the photograph can better understand participants' identity expression in college and Hip-Hop's influence.

Data Analysis

To follow the traditions of other BFT researchers, I did three rounds of coding by employing theoretical-driven prior coding, In Vivo and sociologically constructed coding, and open coding. BFT and its core tenets provide a deductive initial set of codes, including self-definition and self-valuation, power dynamics and relations, resistance, empowerment, sexual liberation, work and family, and negative controlling images. According to Clemons (2019), In Vivo coding with a BFT lens permits the researcher to analyze the participant's narrative inductively. However, sociologically constructed coding allowed me "to identify themes, patterns, events, and actions that are of interest and that provide a means of organizing data sets" with the tenets of BFT in mind (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 32). Moreover, open coding creates an "open" process, allowing the researcher to explore data without making assumptions regarding what the researcher might uncover (Clemons, 2019). This coding process allowed me to engage in data analysis as an iterative process to identify codes, themes, and findings. Each participant's dialogue, lyrics, and photographic artifact were intertwined with the transcripts of the dialogic conversations.

Table 2. Findings from the Broader Coding Process

Findings	**Themes**	**Broader Codes**
Blackness and Womanness Expressed Through Aesthetics and Language	Aesthetics Language	Comfortability Impact Influence Only Black girl in class Front of class Code Switch Workplace Counternarratives Reflection Multifaceted Protection Power dynamics Challenge stereotypes Resistance Representation Self-care Self-definition Culture Community Presence Emotions/self-expression
Using Hip Hop as Inspiration for Multifaceted Identity Expression	Appearance Behavior, Attitude, and Discourse "I'm That Girl" Hip-Hop Supports Participants in Expressing Their Multiple Identities in the College Setting	Confidence Empowerment Self-valuation Liberation Work and Family Authenticity Empowered Blooming Entrepreneurship Support systems Community Unapologetic Affirmation Growth Spaces of affirmation Support systems

Findings	Themes	Broader Codes
		Renaissance Nurture Inspiration Aspirations

Trustworthiness

I employed member checking, triangulation, and reflexivity during my data generation and analysis to ensure this study's trustworthiness. Member checking assisted me in verifying the credibility of the data generated and analyzed through "sharing interview transcripts, analytical thoughts, and drafts of the final report with research participants to make sure you are representing them and their ideas accurately" (Glesne, 2006, p. 36). I conducted member checking by sharing study findings via email with participants to ensure I captured the essence of what they wanted to convey. Moreover, as previously discussed, dialogic conversations, lyric elicitation, and photographic artifacts were used to triangulate emerging themes. The process of triangulating the three methods of data reflected "an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding" (Denzin, 2012, p. 82) of Black women college students' identity expression.

Black Feminist Thought and qualitative data analysis consist of organizing, interpreting, and producing stories that produce reflexivity (Clemons, 2019). Reflexivity is a method to ensure trustworthiness while understanding how my positionality and my own lived experiences impact the research process (Morrow, 2005). I utilized reflexivity to ensure I honored the participant's voices, ideas, and experiences by not overpowering their voice with my own (Few et al., 2003). Being a Black woman in college, reflexivity within my qualitative research and BFM involved critiquing and being aware of my own lived experiences, beliefs, biases, oppressions, and privileges that could potentially influence the generation and analysis of data (Patton, 2015).

Therefore, I employed personal and functional reflexivity during the research process to recognize, understand, and critique my role in creating knowledge. As a result, I engaged in reflexivity by writing journal entries during the research process. The researcher’s journals document my decisions, judgments, reactions, questions, beliefs, and interpretations to remain self-aware and critique my role as a producer of knowledge (Few et al., 2003; Morrow, 2005). My research journals were not included in data generation or analysis.

Delimitations of the Study

Although this study contributes to the knowledge of Black women college students' expression of multiple identities, the delimitations of not situating the study within specific contexts must be acknowledged. First, including participants who are only undergraduate students was intentional, as the historical context of identity development is within the undergraduate context and lends insight into the scarcity of literature. Next, participants who only attend 4-year higher education institutions deliberately addressed the unique experiences that Black women encounter, particularly at a 4-year institution, through structural marginalization (Dillard, 2022). Moreover, centering on Black women college student participants provided further understanding of their identity development and expression. The inclusion of other Black women within the higher education setting, such as faculty and staff, could present a different understanding of how context influences identity expression. Lastly, examining the influence of Hip-Hop on the identity expression of Black women college students provided further knowledge of the relationship between Hip-Hop and Black women in college. The exclusion of other Black cultures, such as gospel music or social media, was intended as Hip-Hop and Black college women are increasingly becoming more influential on each other.

Chapter Summary

In this study, I explored how Black college women express their interlocking identities through aesthetics, language, and community with Hip-Hop’s influence. The goal was to provide insight into how Black women survive, resist, and thrive in college environments while expressing their multiple identities within HWI environments that often devalue cultural identifiers of Black women. This study is designed for Black women and by a Black woman as a reminder to reclaim and control our narratives. The upcoming chapters include the findings from the data analysis and a discussion of the findings with recommendations.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

“I’m That Girl.”

- Beyoncé Knowles-Carter and multiple participants

The following chapter offers findings on how Black college women express their multiple identities in HWI environments. Although collective findings are provided, the individual, unique stories of the participants’ background to and through college, the expression of their multiple identities, and their relationship with Hip-Hop are found throughout the chapter. The findings discussed in this chapter answer the two research questions that guided this study: (1) How do Black women college students express their multiple identities within college environments, and (2) How does Hip-Hop influence Black women college students’ expression of their multiple identities? And to what extent? Two findings were generated from the data that were: (1) Participants expressed their Blackness and womanness through aesthetics and language, and (2) Participants used Hip Hop as inspiration for multifaceted identity expression. First, the two key findings are addressed with related themes, artifact elicitation, and an analysis. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a summary of the findings.

Blackness and Womanness Expressed Through Aesthetics and Language

All six participants spoke about expressing their Blackness and womanness through aesthetics and language dependent on the environment within their college campus. Although there are no monolithic terms for Blackness and womanness, in this finding, Blackness means an individual’s racial identity is within the Black diaspora, which also comes with a sense of cultural identity (Hill, 2012; Veroni-Paccher, 2016). Furthermore, in this finding, womanness means an individual’s gender identity as a woman and underscores womanism, which emphasizes the experiences and concerns of women of color, especially Black women.

All participants used aesthetics to express identity through makeup, hairstyles, clothing, jewelry, and nails. Participants spoke to this by reflecting on their decisions, such as their jewelry for the day or hairstyle, based on where they had to be on campus and why. Moreover, how they expressed their Blackness and womanness aesthetically was negotiated and leveraged in various ways to navigate different environments on campus. Essentially, their identity expression on campus is nuanced in the ability to read the room.

Aesthetics

The aesthetic representations of Black women, particularly in the context of Hip-Hop culture, are often in conflict with white centeredness. All participants came with a knowledge of how these cultural aesthetics were viewed positively or negatively within their HWI environment. As Butterfly shared, leveraging and negotiating her Blackness and womanness sometimes meant “toning it down” and taking certain jewelry off from class to a meeting. Oftentimes, Black women’s Blackness and womanness are policed within majority-white spaces, so “toning it down” means for them to present their Blackness and womanness through aesthetics in a way that the majority can accept. For example, Butterfly has a septum piercing; she does not flip it in daily environments with peers and professors as they know of the piercing, but she flipped it in a professional headshot. In contrast, Amber had a septum momentarily and would keep it in view no matter where she was, but she reflected that it was something that she felt like she could not have long-term because she would not be taken seriously. Butterfly noted, “I don't know why I flip it. It's like, it's like a narrative attached to it. Maybe that I’m reckless.”

Butterfly was contending with respectability politics and presentation management within the context of the environment where, with peers and faculty, the septum was okay because they knew her, and she had a sense of comfort and familiarity with them, but not for her headshot. Moreover, when participants are in majority-white spaces, they typically do not feel as comfortable, and that comfort level often indicates their level of identity expression through the aesthetics they choose. Thus, she manages her self-presentation for her headshot by giving into respectability politics and flipping the septum because it will be viewed by numerous people who do not know her and will attach a narrative to her based on a photograph. Butterfly's choice of when she chooses to flip her septum piercing or not showcases the participants' agency to use various aesthetics based on the environmental factors to navigate college as a student and young professional. Moreover, they can control the negative narratives and challenge the stereotypes that society puts on Black women by actively and consciously expressing their aesthetics when and where they want to within the college environments. Butterfly felt that her septum would attach a reckless narrative to herself, so she chose to display it depending on the environment. However, Amber did not hide her septum piercing despite her thoughts on society not taking her seriously. She made space to challenge the stereotypes by still choosing to show up with her septum piercing regardless. There is power and liberation in deciding when and how to present themselves through aesthetics because they define themselves for themselves – no one else.

Five of the six participants indicated they had been the only Black woman in a class and the only Black person, and they often had to be strategic in their identity expression within classroom environments. For instance, Renee shared a photograph artifact (Artifact 1) from the movie Hidden Figures with the aerospace engineer, played by musical artist Janelle Monae, as it related to her major at her HWI. She shared:

> It spoke to me like the biggest identity I have right now is a Black woman, and just kind of trying to fight through those predominantly white spaces constantly and constantly. Like I said before, having to prove myself and prove to people in the way I talk or even the way I dress like, Oh no, I'm just as smart as you are.

As Renee mentioned, proving yourself as a Black female college student at an HWI goes beyond academics and can entail your identity expression through the aesthetics of dressing or wearing certain clothes to be received in certain ways connected to successfully navigating your educational spaces. As a Black woman in college, she has to prove herself through her clothing and language to counter the negative effects of being in white-centered spaces. Moreover, identity expression is illustrated as complex and negotiable for Black college women, as most participants spoke about the journey of navigating college environments through the use of aesthetics to define themselves and were unapologetic in their identity expression as Black women. For example, Amber showcased this when discussing student organization meetings and her identity expression through aesthetics when she stated:

> And I'm still gonna have my jewelry on. And my objective is always to be as cute as I can be. So, you know, the way I express that versus the way they see that, you know, might be different.

For Amber, regardless of what the people in the majority-white spaces on campus would see or think, she expressed her Blackness and womanness unapologetically through her aesthetics. Amber’s identity expression via aesthetics differed from Renee reiterating that expression of multiple identities has complexities and ebbs and flows. Moreover, Amber reflected on her college journey, expressing her Blackness and Womenness, saying, “I feel like coming to college has made me unapologetically me. You know, like I don't have to compromise. Being a Black woman and being bougie." Bougie has been a popular term within contemporary Hip-Hop, and for Black women, being "bad and boujee" can come with both positive and negative connotations. Just like Megan Thee Stallion maintains a role model of possibilities with her use of savage representing multiple identities of Black women (i.e., classy, bougie, ratchet), Amber was able to model that and blossom into being unapologetic in her being a bougie Black woman as she shifts towards becoming a Black woman in college who defines and expresses who she is without allowing society to tell her how she should.

Self-definition essentially gives Black women the opportunity to create a counter-narrative of the controlling images and stereotypes, thus challenging and pushing back on the controlling images that exist of Black women within the collegiate environment. Self-expression is a type of self-definition where one conveys individuality and identity through various forms like aesthetics, fashion, music, language, etc. Renee spoke to self-defining through aesthetics and language and pushed back on the negative connotation of the word ratchet by saying, "There's a classy way to be ratchet. Like there's like a classy way to do it." She furthered detailed this self-definition of ratchet in terms of aesthetics, the collegiate environment, and Hip-Hop when she said:

> I really do admire that some students, most students on this campus that are Black, like they know who they are and they like wear that outwardly but like on the inside too. So yeah, you can do all three because you can have the long nails, long lashes, locks, and whatever people deem to be, you know, ghetto or ratchet, just like Mary J. Blige. She's like one of my favorite top R&B singers. You know, she had the ghetto fabulous look, but heavy on the fabulous.

Nevertheless, Renee defined what ratchet meant to her by using a positive, asset-based connotation through her favorite Hip-Hop artist and went against society's usual definition of ratchet. She went on to speak about ratchet and her aesthetics, stating:

> Yeah, in certain settings, there's a time and a place to do things, but yeah, you're going to be who you are regardless. So, like you know, always add your little spin on stuff, your clothes, your little personality, and yada yada yada.

Regardless of what society tells a Black woman, the participants choose not to let the majority define them or what ratchet means, especially when they express themselves as Black women through aesthetics.

Pink displayed efforts to control her image in college by self-defining in the majority white spaces by sharing her photograph artifact of a professional headshot at her College of Business with her nose ring and burgundy braids. Pink confidently and proudly asserted:

> Yes, you might not say it's not fully professional 'cause I got my nose ring. It depends on who you ask, of course, but hey, I wanted to keep that in there because I didn't want to let that part go. And plus, my hair is kinda burgundy as well. It was burgundy braids.

She decided nobody could define what was professional for her, so she kept her burgundy braids and nose ring. Despite being on her college campus within the College of Business, Pink was unwilling to "let that part go" of her Blackness and womanness aesthetically, so she used her hair, braids specifically, to self-define herself as she navigated the college environment. She and all the participants utilized their identity expression through aesthetics to self-define as they strategically and successfully navigated the different environments they encountered in college.

Language

The switching or shifting across multiple dimensions of identity through aesthetics also connected to language. Identity shifting and negotiation of a Black woman's Blackness and womanness often rely on different environmental cues, and code-switching is a standard identity expression shift that occurs depending on the context and environment (Auer, 2013; Shih et al., 2013). All six participants were no exception to this phenomenon; thus, language emerged as a major element as they shifted and negotiated their language depending on where they were. In this study, language is both a method of communication and a cultural representative that influences and adds to how people understand the environment around them. Language is not just defined as word choice, but also tone and dialect as well, and for Black women college students, their Blackness and womanness are tied to their language choice within their context and environment.

For instance, Amber spoke directly to this shift of language based on the environment when she shared, "Yeah, I have a friend who says I have a fake voice. But you know, I don't necessarily think that's true. I think I have; I have different settings." In reality, this 'fake voice' is Amber adjusting her style of speech and expression to mimic a language by her majority-white peers that is considered appropriate English to optimize successfully navigating spaces on campus where negative stereotypes of Black women counter what is deemed appropriate for specific environments. She negotiates her language by vacillating between what is believed to be appropriate English (her fake voice) by the dominant group and leverages that language expression to navigate various college environments, such as her student government association meetings versus her Black Student Association meetings. Black women often sustain a hidden consciousness and choose not to express their true selves, language included, for self-protection.

Although the majority-white spaces on campus can be uncomfortable for the participants as Black women, Butterfly discussed the classroom or College of Business meeting setting being comforting once someone speaks in her cultural language (Ebonics):

> I think it's comforting to me because if they do it, then I can match it. You know, I feel like in that setting, once they speak like that, it’s like, OK, it's just not me in this room. I do this for the job but still for my people.

Once she knows the environment is safe for her to express herself, she does not have to negotiate her identity expression or strategically navigate the environment through language. Instead, she can present her whole self without vacillating between her Blackness and Womenness identity expression due to her comfort within the setting.

In reference to Ebonics, it is important to mention the understood language that occurs within the Black community and the subsequent comfort that usually comes with it. Pink noted that when she is around her Black friends in student organizations, she talks normally and speaks in her usual vernacular and dialect. She can express her Blackness through language and not negotiate her identity expression when she is in a college environment that is reflective of her community. On the other hand, Pink talked about being in a student organization meeting or classroom that lacked her Black friends and felt that if she did talk normally, “they wouldn't understand it. Or if they do understand it, it's like they are jacking it up. Kind of like, that's not what that mean.” In this instance, the college environment that lacked her racial community caused her to use language that most people at the HWI could understand, even though that is not normal language to her. Black women are frequently placed in the position of only being listened to if ideas are framed in the language that is common and comfortable for the dominant group, which impacts the identity expression of their Blackness and Womenness in various environments in college. Likewise, Butterfly noted that her Black and White coworkers at her on-campus job both get different versions of her. She stated:

> Even now, in this work spot, my friends are Black, and I'm like a different person, and they understand me. They know who I am, but if you ask the white people, my other coworkers, now they have a different perspective of who I am because they don't get that.
>
> I show them so consistently that I just like switching between the environments.

Butterfly's statement soberingly revealed that even when Black women, participants included, are in a steadfast environment, like an on-campus job or class, their identity expression subconsciously changes when the people in that on-campus environment change. For the participants, it is not always what you say but also how and why you say it that matters for your identity expression.

Every participant emphasized that their language changes depending on the racial demographic of the environment, especially in the classroom or certain student organizations. Similarly, Renee often reflected on this as an aerospace engineer upperclassman at a large PWI who constantly had to prove herself. She explicitly stated that she code-switches often depending on where she is on campus and who is there. As the only Black person in her upper-level classes and internship, Renee has a White lab partner, and with a fresh silk press, she walks across campus to her lab. Within that five-minute walk to her lab, her silk press had "puffed up," walking up to her lab partner, she was visibly upset over her hair. She said:

> Obviously, I feel like when I go to my lab partner, I can't even think or say what's on the top of my head. But if I did say something, she'd probably look at me like, what does that even mean?

With her fresh silk press now puffed out, Renne would have liked to be her full self and express her frustration in her usual cultural language of Ebonics like she would when communicating with her homegirls or friends who are also Black women. However, she recognized she may not be understood, so she expressed herself in a way that others could receive based on the classroom environment and who was or was not in it. Renee innately chose to dilute her Blackness and womanness when there is no one else Black around to understand her identity expression through her language.

Nineteen has a unique standpoint as a Black woman from New Mexico with a Latina mother, sharing, “I haven't really been exposed to the other vernacular. And then when I like getting into predominantly Black spaces being told, ‘Ohh you talk White.’” For her, identity expression went beyond race as a Black woman; it also intersected with her identity, which was related to her ethnicity as Latina. Thus, Nineteen must negotiate a distinctive, unique set of experiences and identity expressions that intersect with being racially Black and ethnically Latino, reiterating that Black women are not monolithic even with everyday experiences. All six participants negotiated the language they chose to use because they recognized that if they did speak it in the wrong setting, they might not even be understood. Regardless, they all consciously used or did not use aesthetics and language as tools to express their Blackness and womanness identities while challenging the narratives and stereotypes of Black women as they navigate college through identity expression.

Using Hip Hop as Inspiration for Multifaceted Identity Expression

A portion of this study’s purpose is to examine if Hip-Hop influences Black college women’s expression of their multiple identities. In this study, Hip-Hop music includes rap, neo-soul, and R&B music. Every participant made reference to feeling more self-empowered or confident as they each discussed their relationship with Hip-Hop and lyric artifacts. When specifically questioned if Hip-Hop influenced the expression of their identities, five participants indicated affirmatively that Hip-Hop has already influenced the expression of their multiple identities. Hip-Hop influenced the participants' expression by serving as inspiration for their multifaceted identity expression rooted in empowerment and confidence to be authentic. The following finding and themes will present the participants' connection to Hip-Hop as it relates to their multifaceted identity expression.

When Nineteen was asked why she selected the lyrics of Plan B by Megan Thee Stallion, she matter-of-factly declared, “I was just feeling really empowered that day,” and she further explained, “And I think that that was literally the week that I switched to biology. I was feeling like that girl because I had just switched majors.” For Amber, her lyrics by SZA embodied her identity expression as she said, “The way I interpret Pretty Little Birds is about blooming as a young girl in like confidence and finding that confidence in this world that's beating Black women down and stuff like that.” Similarly, Renee chose her song lyrics from the Carters as an affirmation to herself, as she explains:

> That's why I chose to leave those lyrics because he kind of touched on each point that a Black person can identify with. So, it's just like just like that affirmation, right? Like I do everything well, regardless of how you try to hold me back. Regardless of what you say, what you think I can't do. I will do it and do it well.

The lyrics were a window to the possibilities of who she is as a Black woman college student navigating the various collegiate environments confidently while embracing the complexities and bringing wreck to stereotypes placed on her by others.

Moreover, Renne, who did not listen to Hip-Hop until her high school years, reflected on Hip-Hop influencing her expression stating:

> Now I love rap music. This is something we're known for, and so I think now when I listen to it like obviously makes me feel empowered. Like I said, like the Carter's album and just Jay-Z in general and like Beyoncé. You know you have these different Black artists and they all, they may all do different things, but it still like speaks to who they are and it speaks to who you are. And for me it helps me carry myself in a certain way.

Renee also shared a picture of Beyonce's *Renaissance* tour and the movie released and reflected on Beyonce's impact on her saying:

> Just her music is powerful. It depends on what you need from the music. Like if you just need to feel like a bad b*h, you know, there's certain songs, certain albums you might turn on, you may listen to *Lemonade*. You may listen to, you know, some music from, like the Sasha Fierce album or from like, you know, *4* to feel empowered. So it's just I feel like with her music, and especially that tour, it just gave so many different aspects to life that kind of like empower who I am like in different roles in life and also like in college as well.

Thus, the empowerment the participants get from Hip-Hop results in Hip-Hop becoming a role model of possibilities, which translates into them becoming more unapologetic in the identity expression of their Blackness and womanness. Moreover, this role model of possibilities from Hip-Hop gives them an exemplar to find their path and their unlimited possibilities of who they are and who they are becoming as Black women.

Nineteen's entrepreneurial pursuits also exhibit Hip-Hop and its ability to influence, inspire, and be a role model of possibilities. As a college student planning to be a dentist, she shared photograph artifacts (Artifact 2) from her tooth gem business. When describing the tooth gem business, she describes Hip-Hop's influence on her entrepreneurship in aesthetics, saying:

> This represents me, my work, and my passion in many ways. And I also think that Hip-Hop definitely influenced me to even start this. Because that's where I saw it pop up most and I was like, this is really cool and I wanna do that too.

For Nineteen, it was Hip-Hop artists she mentioned, like Rihanna, Beyonce, and Drake, who inspired her to start her business. In fact, Beyonce launched grills, another version of tooth jewelry, inspired by her brand Ivy Park. Black women often face racial, gendered oppression, which contributes to them making significantly less money. Hip-Hop and its artists, such as Megan Thee Stallion, City Girls, and Cardi B, encourage participants to redistribute their wealth and chase a bag. Typically, chasing the bag means making money, but it also means working hard to chase and achieve success. Sometimes, chasing a bag means negotiating the identity expression of Blackness and womanness within the collegiate environment to achieve a certain goal. Chasing the bag and redistributing wealth allows Black women to get to the money and success without compromising the expression of their Blackness and womanness, such as Pink sharing her professional headshot while not letting parts of herself go, Barbie sharing pictures of her nails, and Nineteen choosing to wear the same tooth gems she puts on others. Similarly, Pink, who only listens to women in Hip-Hop, hopes to own a business in makeup one day and shared a picture artifact of the word "womenpreneur." When she talked in detail about the artifact and Hip-Hop, she asserted:

> I know for a fact Megan Thee Stallion and Nicki Minaj, they encourage people to have their own business, especially Black women, as well, to have their own. City girls, you know, get it how you gonna get it, you know, no judgment.

Hip-Hop Feminism and ratchet respectability encourage Black women to stand out no matter what and to resist the policing or judgment of how they choose to express themselves – hustle and bag chasing included. Hip-Hop influences the participants to challenge society's notion of what an entrepreneur is supposed to look like or be and to see limitless possibilities for themselves as entrepreneurs, womenpreneurs, and whatever else they want to be. Moreover, they push back on what the dominant group deems Blackness and womanness should look like within the collegiate environment and instead express their multifacetedness unapologetically. The inspiration from Hip-Hop empowered the participants to shift to a more authentic identity expression through both appearance and behavior within the educational setting.

Appearance

Hip-Hop influenced the expression of identity through the aesthetics and appearance of five of the six participants through the artists serving as muses. Many participants discussed the inspiration they got from certain women Hip-Hop artists when it was time to make aesthetic decisions with hair, nails, jewelry, clothes, etc. Pink included a photographic artifact (Artifact 3) of Megan Thee Stallion with red hair because she used that exact picture to show her hairstylist how she wanted her hair done. Pink explained the picture saying, "So you know how you've got to find pictures when you wanna show your hairstylists how you want it done. That was one of these situations. I was like, OK, Megan, for inspiring me to be a redhead." The aesthetics of women in Hip-Hop served as a foundational beacon of hope and expressiveness to Black college women students. It also reinforced their individual appearance expressions as they explored their Blackness and womanness through identity expression within various spaces and places in the collegiate environment.

Butterfly acknowledged both past and present women in Hip-Hop as influences for her aesthetics and identity expression – especially with her accessories that she shared via photograph artifacts (Artifact 4) too. Butterfly referred to old school and new school in empowering her with confidence in her identity expression, citing:

> Destiny's Child and TLC too, especially like with the hairstyles. The language, the confidence they exude in them is what I admired a lot. Currently, Megan Thee Stallion and Cardi B are unapologetically themselves, no matter what point they're at in their life. I appreciate the art. Cardi B's long nails – I think they're so cool.

The women in Hip-Hop are guiding lights for Black college women students like Butterfly as they blossom and get to the point of their lives where they are unapologetic in their Blackness and womanness identity expression regardless of the collegiate environment. Hip-Hop and its artists illustrate to Black women like Butterfly a core tenet of BFT, the ethic of caring, and its component that emphasizes individual uniqueness and personal expressiveness (Collins, 1989). Butterfly also mentioned that she gains confidence from seeing them wear a hairstyle first because then she mimics it. She viewed the women in Hip-Hop as trailblazers as she detailed:

> That's what made me get confident in getting hairstyles. I think a lot of times it's just like seeing them be confident in wearing like those like specific styles. And then I can mimic it and still be confident. I was like, well, the women before me did this and they looked cool, so I know I'm look good too.

Likewise, Nineteen said the lyrics from Megan Thee Stallion's Plan B embody her shift toward unapologetic identity expression of her Blackness and womanhood through aesthetics. She noted, "I think that if I'm feeling good and confident and secure within myself with the music's help, then I won't be afraid to have jewels on my teeth, have extra-long nails, or do whatever with my hair." Megan Thee Stallion's Plan B encourages listeners to f*k with the grays as she asserts her independence, agency of her body, and control of her future rapping, "Poppin' plan B's cause I don't plan to be stuck with you" (Morgan, 1999; Pete, 2022). Plan B's lyrics also serves as vehicle for empowerment as listeners like Nineteen explored their identity expression through aesthetics as Megan encourages self-love rapping, "Ladies, love yourself, cause this sh*t could get ugly" (Pete, 2022). Throughout history, Black women have created their own standards for Black womanhood through self-definition and by valuing their creations (Collins, 1989). Black women in Hip-Hop have always been outspoken about their sexuality, self-preservation, and challenging toxic ideals and narratives, influencing the participants via lyrics to do the same with their Blackness and womanness expression while navigating college. Butterfly and Nineteen articulate an understanding of gaining confidence in expressing their Blackness and womanness by being connected to the Black women before them, who laid the foundation for self-definition within identity expression.

The women in Hip-Hop continue to be aesthetic guideposts for the Black women in this study. Amber echoed similar sentiments about Hip-Hop, influencing her aesthetically with hairstyles, concurring, "I feel like hair maybe a little like, you know when you get your lil inspo and sew-in and it's long, you'd be like, OK, 30 inch sew-in. I'm feeling like Flo Milli or something." For Nineteen, Hip-Hip inspired her and gave her confidence in her aesthetic expression, but it was not always unapologetic, and the confidence was not unwavering depending on the context of the college environment. She said:

> And I put some gems on myself and I was like, this is so cool. I feel so cool. I feel so confident and it was heavily inspired by the Hip-Hop community like obviously. So I put those on and then I would get nervous around like even my other peers like ohh. Like,

> they're just gonna think that I'm not smart or that I'm not taking this seriously, that I shouldn't be here. Then it like spirals into a whole other like anxious moment.

Just as Black women’s relationship with Hip-Hop can be complex, their identity expression can also be complex and negotiable, especially within the collegiate environment. Even when they are inspired by Hip-Hop to be confident and authentic in identity expression, the challenges Black women face on college campuses can circumvent their capacity to stand firm in their unapologetic, confident identity expression.

Behavior, Attitude, and Discourse

Even when participants cannot fully articulate how Hip-Hop has influenced them, there is still an awareness that Hip-Hop has a major influence not just in the aesthetic expression of their Blackness and womanness, but also influences their behavior, attitude, and discourse. Nineteen highlights this when she stated, “Either with my jewelry, my teeth, my nails are inspired by Hip-Hop for sure. And then I think another thing is kind of an attitude like I don't, I don't, I don't really know how to describe it.” Furthermore, Pink echoed similar sentiments when she said:

> Not only do I think it addresses like what I wear, but I think it’s effects like how I act. Sometimes that can be bad, but like, like let’s say, if you listen to Knuck if You Buck now all of a sudden I’m thinking of situations that I should have knucked you know.

Pink highlights the recurring idea that their identity expression, especially situated in the contextual influence of Hip-Hop, is complex and multifaceted. Barbie furthered this notion, particularly with the added layer of the context of the environment, when she discussed one of her artifacts, which was a video of Lil Boosie being carefree and dancing in a Coogi sweater with a bottle of Casamigos Reposado tequila in his hands, which are both prominent items within Hip-

Hop culture. Barbie reflected on the video relating to her multifaceted and negotiable identity expression saying:

> Umm, I feel like once you get to know me, that's who I am like that’s me. I tried to find the video where it's like two friends and it's one like bobbing her head to the music and then it's the other friend like cuttin up dancing around. Like, that's two people in me once you get to know me.

Barbie further reflects the idea that identity expression is negotiable and messy—it is not either/or but both/and.

Renee also noted that Hip-Hop influences how she acts and her discourse such as “Period!” from City Girls. She shared:

> But I think especially like rap, R&B, that literally makes me who I am because it let, I don't know, it makes me feel not only included, but it just makes me feel like at home. So it's just like I can also listen to the music, especially while walking. Don't catch me walking and listening to music because I'd be like, I'll be like I'm that girl. So like I will say like it does like sometimes it'll come out of my dialect. Like certain phrases like Period, but also using those phrases. Like ohh yeah, like I felt that that's a good phrase. But again, in a positive way, and I think with any artists like that's their, that's their intention. It's like to have a positive effect on you to let you know, like, hey, this is like OK To be who you are like, don't stray from that. That's what I admire.

‘Period’ can mean a lot of things and can be used to express multiple attitudes similar to the multiple identities Black women hold. Generally, it is a cultural word or slang word within Hip-Hop culture that became popularized by the women rap duo, City Girls. It is meant to emphasize a final statement and can be accompanied with or without a hand gesture. The participants in this study use the phrase as a common way to add emphasis and an affirming way to mean “and that's that.” The use of period correlates to a practice within BFT that highlights knowledge built around the ethics of caring through dialogue. Moreover, Black women and their discourse can also invoke relationships and connectedness through dialogue (Collins, 1989; Collins, 2000). Furthermore, Hip-Hop influences not only the participants in their identity expression but also the role models' possibilities of their identity expression, such that they end up role modeling for others around them through dialogue. For instance, through the linguistic expression of Period and discourse with others, Barbie reflected:

> I say Period a lot. I passed it down to my 6-year-old sister, so it is just like what she says. It's like, where did you get that from? And Yes, I get inspired by the hair, especially and seeing them express their self and switch up how they express their self no matter what. That's kind of how I am or becoming.

For the participants like Renee and Barbie, HHF and ratchet respectability allowed them to explore the expression of their Blackness and womanness through their attitude and discourse despite the judgment and policing they experience in dominant spaces on campus.

Hip-Hop allows Black women to challenge respectability politics, embrace the contradictions, and champion sexual agency and freedom (Payne, 2020; Brown, 2013; Halliday, 2020; Love, 2012, 2017; Pickens, 2015; Stallings, 2013). Pink emphasized the fact that she does not listen to “the men rap because it's just misogyny and all that.” Furthermore, she highlighted the lyrics she selected from Doechii’s song titled, Crazy, embody her because of the feeling it gives her. Pink used those lyrics to champion sexual agency, remarking:

> This song just really reflected me and how I'm just gonna go around dating. I know this sounds bad, but it's just, I don't know. We twisted it like they used to, like talking about,

> like doing us wrong or being with the next woman, you know, just having sex with them and just leaving. And now that we're embracing, you know, our sex period, talking about us like we got it like that… Now it's now a problem. Like OK.

She then went on to rap some of the lyrics to me saying, “You can't tell me what I can do. And this song to me like in the lyrics it it says ‘You can't date me. Look at your savings. Look at your savings.’” Pink exemplifies HHF tenets with the lyrics correlating to the ratchet imagination as a means for Black women to leverage Hip-Hop as a creative place to challenge respectability politics while exploring their own identities and the expression of them within her college environment (Love, 2017; Pickens, 2015; Stalling, 2013).

Pink also uses those lyrics, similar to HHF, to reject complying with respectability politics surrounding sexual identity and freedom. She instead chooses to be inspired by the Hip-Hop lyrics to embrace her sexual agency and create a counter-narrative through self-definition of her identity expression to exhibit her Blackness and womanness. (Payne, 2020; Brown, 2013; Halliday & Payne, 2020; Love, 2012, 2017; Pickens, 2015; Stallings, 2013). Hip-Hop serves as a role model of possibilities for Black women college students, like Pink, who choose not to conform to society’s respectability politics put on Black women’s identity expression, especially regarding Blackness and womanness. Moreover, Hip-Hop lyrics can serve as a vehicle for participants to express their multiple identities and the personas within the lyrics.

In contrast, HHF insists on living with and embracing the contradictions and argues that Black college women can benefit from the modes of empowerment that Hip Hop can provide with its contradictory messages (Durham et al., 2013; Henry, 2010). Barbie mainly listens to male rappers like NoCap, YoungBoy NeverBrokeAgain (NBA), Kevin Gates, and Rylo Rodriguez. These rappers that Barbie listed are all popular male rappers from the deep South who typically rap about sex, violence, materialism, and misogyny within their lyrics. Nevertheless, Barbie displays HHF notions by embracing the contradiction of misogynistic and women empowerment within Hip-Hop. When asked about her relationship with Hip-Hop and if it influences her identity expression, she answered:

> Yes, but I feel like if I was to listen to more of female rap, especially like Megan Thee Stallion because she she does have a lot of songs where she connects those two, especially being a Black woman in general and just getting things done. And how they look down upon us just because we're Black and we're a woman, I feel like that would influence me, but I typically don't really listen to female rap. My friends say that when it comes to music, they call me a little boy. So, I feel like the rap that I do listen to just doesn't connect with my life.

Barbie personified the notion of percussive feminism in which she tunes out the negative lyrics from the male rappers and embraces the competing contradictory elements of Hip-Hop and feminism can be both disruptive and productive (Crunk Feminist Collective, n.d.; Durham et al., 2013). Despite the conflicting messages within Hip-Hop regarding Black women, Barbie embraces all the contradictions and ‘fucks wit the greys’ to express her Blackness and womanness through her nails, wigs, clothing, etc., while still enjoying the Hip-Hop music from male artists. Moreover, her friends may call her a little boy of her music choice, but through her identity expression, she still displays her Blackness and womanness proudly while showcasing the multifacetedness of Black women in college. The participants remind us that Hip-Hop and its artists can inspire them in varied ways, but they remain role models of possibilities for all of them in expressing their Blackness and gender. They can be “that girl,” whether it means being ratchet, being sexually liberated, or anything else in between as multifaceted Black women.

“I’m That Girl” Influence on Black Women College Identity Expression

In the introduction of Megan Thee Stallion’s song Savage, she also proclaims, “I'm that b*h. Been that b*h, still that b*h. Will forever be that b*h,” and being “that b*h” is synonymous with being “that girl” (Pete, 2009). Oftentimes, Hip-Hop and its artist use the words ‘girls’ and ‘b*hes’ synonymously; therefore, being ‘that b*h’ also means being ‘that girl.’ Although ‘that girl’ has not been academically defined within scholarship, it consistently showed up within my dialogic conversations with the participants. In cultural terms and when participants’ use the trope when referring to themselves, being ‘that girl’ is about having self-confidence and being a Black woman who is unapologetically herself and refuses to be limited by societal expectations or the opinions of others. “That girl” comes from a mindset of self-love and realizing that the confidence of being “that girl” comes from within, not from anybody or anything.

One of Amber’s photographic artifacts (Artifact 5) she shared was a screenshot of the multifaceted Hip-Hop artist Beyoncé’s song on Renaissance titled *I’m That Girl.* In the song, the intro begins with, “These motherf*s ain't stoppin' me, and Beyonce sings in the chorus, “It's not the diamonds, it's not the pearls. I'm that girl. It's just that I'm that girl. It's not my man. It's not my stance. I'm that girl. When Amber discussed the song and the album she shared:

> I love this song, this album has changed me. It's so monumental and the movie. It was so raw to me, so real. I guess it’s like, well, I don't wanna use the word renaissance, but I feel like the album was such a new era for everybody. It made me feel something. I didn’t really like it at first, but when I started listening to the words and the lyrics, I feel like it kind of boosted a little bit of my confidence, especially this song. I love I'm that girl, so yeah.

The reinforcement of being “that girl” from the women artists in Hip-Hop empowered and inspired the participants to continue being confident as they navigated their multifaceted identity expression.

The participants in this study also relied heavily on the Hip-Hop trope of 'that girl' to subvert and resist controlling images of Black womanhood at their HWIs. While they reflected on their college journey, multiple identities, identity expression, and Hip-Hop, the other five participants also mentioned being ‘that girl’ at some point during our conversations. While navigating the various college environments, especially in white-dominated spaces, being ‘that girl’ manifested in various ways for the participants and made a path to a blooming renaissance for them to thrive. Nineteen was reflecting on what Hip-Hop artists influence her when she said:

> Megan, obviously, like I loved all of her Tina Snow, hot girl era, all of that stuff. But her more recent things have just like had me feeling like I'm that girl, I will always like just being confident in who you are. Like I really appreciated that.

Butterfly mentioned being that girl when she discussed her Anxiety lyrics by Megan Thee Stallion stating, “It is because you had bad anxiety. But you are still that girl, you know, you still can come out and express yourself.” For Renee, when she talked about her relationship with Hip-Hop and her expression she said, “Don't catch me walking and listening to music because I'd be like, I'll be like I'm that girl.” Barbie spoke about her photograph artifact (Artifact 6) of her nails and said, “Outside of my hair and everything. I really express myself through my nails, and when I have fresh full-set I’m feeling like that girl.” Lastly, Pink was detailing why she selected the Crazy lyrics by Doechii and rapped some of the lyrics when she explained:

> So me, I have high expectations for myself. I think that I'm that girl. I'm rich, even though it might not seem like it, but when I go out, when I go out, you probably do think

> I'm rich. I'm looking nice so that song to me felt like OK, “Y'all call me crazy when a when a b*h been ballin all day like crazy.” Like yeah, I've been shopping all day, getting this money.

Hip-Hop is more than just music to the participants; it is also expression. It gives the participants the confidence to be “that girl” and express “that girl” through their Blackness and womanness despite what may happen. It also inspires them to be creative in exploring who “that girl” is within their identity expression in various collegiate environments and makes space for them to acknowledge the multifacetedness and unapologetic gendered racial identity expression. The participants all embodied the ‘that girl’ Hip-Hop trope as they navigated their identity expression and subverted controlling images that do not represent the lived realities of Black women in college. However, the experiences of the participants in the study, BFT, and HHF allows their lived experiences with identity expression on their HWI environment to be acknowledged as they really are: unique, complex and nuanced.

Hip-Hop Supports Participants in Expressing Their Multiple Identities in the College Setting

Education has often been a tool Black women used for their liberation (Collins, 2000). Butterfly shared that she has always enjoyed learning and shared a photographic artifact (Artifact 7) of her Macbook and tablet. She related this picture to Hip-Hop because Megan Thee Stallion inspired her to push through her academics despite standing up for herself during a time when she was going through turmoil publicly. Megan Thee Stallion was enduring a public trial with male rapper Tory Lanez, who shot her in the foot, during the end of her undergraduate degree completion. She went on to experience public embarrassment and ridicule from both men and women in the Hip-Hop sphere and public sphere. When Butterfly reflected on the picture and Megan Thee Stallion, she said:

> When she made it, it made me more motivated through her because, like, you know, she has a lot going on her life, especially during the time she graduated and I related to some things that she like was going through helps me push thru too. Like no matter what education is like, the most important thing.

Despite Megan Thee Stallion embodying many elements of BFT and HHF by flipping the script through self-definition, self-valuation, and embracing the contradictions of Hip-Hop that promote violence against Black women, and perpetuate stereotypes about them, she still faced racialized and gender violence (Collins, 1989; Morgan, 1999). Regardless of racialized and gendered violence that Megan experienced, she publicly overcame it and expressed that time of her life through her lyrics which encouraged Black college women like Butterfly to continue pursuing your dreams via education.

Amber further discussed how the Pretty Little Birds lyrics by SZA she selected embodied her and her identity expression as she became more unapologetic throughout her college journey, saying:

> I used to be more self-conscious a little bit about how I'm perceived as a Black woman. Not that I really care, but I'm gonna be myself and express myself, no matter how loud you think I am or how ghetto or whatever the case may be. I'm not gonna hold myself back because of these stereotypes that the world has put out for me.

In the song SZA sings, “You are but a phoenix among feathers. You're broken by the waves among the sea, and they'll let you die; they'll let you wash away. But you swim as well as you fly. Pretty little bird.” These lyrics and Amber’s narrative emphasized that despite the challenges

Black women in college face in the HWI environment, she is inspired by Hip-Hop to not lose herself by retaining her authenticity through her identity expression. Hip-Hop encourages Black women college students, like the participants in this study, to hold on to their multiple identities and their expression in spite of frequently being in a HWI environment that expects them to conform and assimilate. As the various narratives from the participants throughout the findings and themes showcase, the participants may accommodate, but they will not assimilate when it comes to their identity expression within their collegiate environments, and Hip-Hop serves as inspiration for that.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to illuminate how Black undergraduate women find personal liberation related to their multiple identity expressions in relation to Hip-Hop. All lyric and photographic artifacts were discussed with a story of empowerment, love, or confidence, influencing the participants' expression of their multiple identities. The findings included were: 1) The participants used the aesthetics and language from Black female Hip-Hop artists to express their identities, especially their Blackness and womanhood, and 2) The participants used Hip Hop as inspiration for multifaceted identity expression. The findings of this study add to the growing literature on Black women college students. The upcoming final chapter discusses recommendations and implications tailored to the needs of Black women college students and their identity expression.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how Black college women express their multiple identities and to explore if Hip-Hop influences their expression. Furthermore, the goal of the study was to center on Black women college students' expression of multiple identities from an asset-based perspective. The two research questions that guided this study were: 1) How do Black women college students express their identities within college environments? and 2) How does Hip-Hop influence Black women college students' expression of their multiple identities? And to what extent? This research resulted in a blooming renaissance of becoming "that girl" who can be unapologetic in expressing their Blackness and womanness as they navigated various college environments. This final chapter is comprised of a discussion of the significance of the findings in relation to the literature on Black women college students and college student identity development, respectability politics, and Hip-Hop. This chapter also includes implications valuable to student affairs, higher education administrators, and Black women college students. It concludes with a highlight of future research possibilities and a summary of my final thoughts.

Discussion of Findings

This dissertation study's two main findings on Black women college students included: 1) The participants used the aesthetics and language from Black female Hip-Hop artists to express their identities, especially their Blackness and womanhood, and 2) The participants used Hip Hop as inspiration for multifaceted identity expression through appearance, behavior, attitude, and discourse in the college setting. While their college journeys, experiences, aesthetics, and Hip-Hop music choices may vary for each woman, the two main findings were significant factors in understanding how Black college women express their multiple identities and the influence of Hip-Hop on their expression within this study. The findings have an added dimension to them, as what unapologetic identity expression is and how influential Hip-Hop is in that expression varies for each participant, and the upcoming sections will address that. The findings will be discussed in connection to the following: 1) identity definition through the expression of blackness and womanness and 2) hip-hop as an external influence on participants' expression.

Identity Definition through the Expression of Blackness and Womanness

Race and gender shape experiences within education (Zamani, 2003). The interlocking of their racial and gender identity, Blackness and womanness, highlighted in the participants' responses, correlated with the literature on Black women's experiences as college students navigating the college environment. Prior research often describes the experiences of Black women at HWIs with an emphasis on their fights and struggles with racialized gender oppression. The six study participants had to overcome racialized gender bias, prejudice, or discrimination due to their HWI environment. However, most of their challenges related to resisting the stereotypes around Black women and expressing their Hip-Hop-influenced identities. The participants' racialized and gendered self-definitions included various expressions of Black female Hip-Hop aesthetics and language within the contexts of their collegiate environments.

Previous researchers asserted that Black women in college are often perceived as being a group separate and distinct from Black men while also being separate from the larger group of 'women' within society (hooks, 1981). Thus, their identity development and definition are related to their racialized and gendered experiences on campus (Blevins, 2018; Corbin et al., 2018; Croom et al., 2017; Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, 2014; Henry, 2010; West et al., 2016). Some of the gendered racial experiences of exclusion they mentioned were being the only Black person and Black woman in many spaces and places on campus, navigating an environment with people who have minimal interactions with Black women, and trying to define who a Black woman is for themself. These experiences contributed to the Black women in this study defining their identity using aesthetics and language inspired by Hip-Hop to express their racial and gender identity. Renee and other Black college women in this study used their identity expression through the aesthetics of clothes/fashion to be received in a certain way in an attempt to prove they are smart enough or deserve to take space and thrive at their HWI.

The participants used clothing, accessories, hair, nails, and language often inspired by Hip-Hip to outwardly present and express their racial and gender identities to counteract the exclusion, minimization, or misrepresentation often experienced on campus. All the participants were aware of their identities as Black and woman in a predominantly white college environment. However, their identity saliency and its expression through aesthetics and language was fluid and changed based on the environment and contexts in which they described. The findings highlight this when Butterfly would ‘tone it down’ with her accessories or flip her septum in certain places. Likewise, Pink chooses not to ‘talk normally’ using Ebonics with her peers in predominantly white settings on the campus but will ‘talk normally’ on campus with her Black peers. This fluidity of expression corresponds with scholarship that details how identity shifts and context impact saliency identities (Jones & Abes, 2013). The environmental context was also significant in how participants defined and expressed their identity for themselves, particularly with the intersection of their Blackness and womanness. Butterfly and other participants admitted to consistently switching who they were between the environments, like when her identity expression via language would subconsciously change when the people in her on-campus environment changed.

Given their education and experiences at HWIs, participants often recounted occurrences where the saliency of their Blackness and womanness were clearly defined and most centered on the politics of aesthetics and language. For instance, aesthetically, hair and hair politics are critical to Black women, so the participants stood firm in expressing themselves with their bright red wig inspired by Megan Thee Stallion or burgundy braids. Similarly, the participants would switch their language expression or take some jewelry off depending on which student organization meeting they attended, exhibiting their fluidity of identity expression depending on the environment. As evidenced in the findings, participants often contended with respectability politics and presentation of their identities despite understanding the implications of their identities being situated within HWI spaces that often misdefine, misrepresent, and police them (Cooper et al., 2017; Corbin et al., 2018; Flowers et al., 2012; Gibson & Espino, 2016; Henry, 2008, 2010; McPherson, 2017; Porter et al., 2018).

BFT recognizes and challenges the systems that attempt to oppress Black women by intertwining resistance and empowerment. The findings illuminate this resistance and empowerment through the participants’ use of aesthetics and language identity expression to push back and challenge the stereotypes of Black women in college with confidence. The participants continued to be dedicated to learning, involving themselves on campus, and expressing their Blackness and womanness regardless of the hegemonic ideals, stereotypes, or assumptions of Black women’s development and expression in majority-white spaces represents Black college women’s collective commitment to one’s unapologetic self-definition multifacetedness (Domingue, 2015; Flowers et al., 2012; McGuire et al., 2016).

Negotiating their Blackness and womanness identities through aesthetics and language to navigate their collegiate environment gave the participants “the power to name one's reality” (Collins, 2000, p. 300). This is further underscored in participants' narratives of the use of code-switching, impression management, and the creation of counter-narratives through identity expression to navigate various environmental contexts on campus. These actions relate to the literature on the strategies utilized by Black women as they combat the stereotypes of Black women (Dickens et al., 2019; Pitcan, 2018; Shorter-Gooden, 2004; West et al., 2016). Sometimes, the controlling images of Black women caused the participants to shift who they were to offset the negative stereotypes; however, depending on the environment, the participants can and will choose not to shift or negotiate their identity expression (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2004).

Scholars state that respectability politics can also cause impression management and shifting self-presentation through hairstyle choices, clothes, and language choices, which can reduce aesthetic indicators of race between Black women and their non-Black counterparts (Dickens et al., 2019; cite more authors). The participants sometimes displayed this through their differences in aesthetics and language depending on who was in the space or place—such as Amber’s friend calling her out on using her ‘fake voice’ as a strategy in certain classrooms or student organization meetings to mimic the language used by her majority-white peers. While participants used these strategies to challenge and resist stereotypes of Black college women, the scholarship mentions some negative aspects of adjusting one’s presentation and speech to match the dominant narrative as role flexing. Although the participants were confident in their identity expression, it was a journey to get there, and the negotiation of their identity expression could lead to giving up parts of oneself to fit in (Shorter-Gooden, 2004). This continual process of negotiating and renegotiating their identity expression through aesthetics is consistent with literature that elucidates the need to change HWI environments to reduce the mental and physical damage that the college environment can have on Black women (Hotchkins, 2017; Porter & Byrd, 2015; Szymanski & Lewis, 2016).

For many of the women, it was not the first time they thought about their identity as Black women college students. However, this experience challenged some to evaluate their identity expression more closely in terms of their self-definition and environment. The participants used their identity expression to fight against stereotypes defining who they are through aesthetics and language to thrive in the college environment. Self-definition and self-valuation are critical for Black women's individual and collective liberation (Collins, 2000). Moreover, through their identity expression, some participants challenged respectability politics and the double marginalization they experienced as Black women within their educational and professional environments (Collins, 1986; Davis & Maldonado, 2017; Dickens et al., 2019; Dickens & Chavez, 2018).

One participant especially viewed ratchetness through aesthetics and language as positive and multidimensional, like Stallings (2013), who describes ratchetness as imaginative and a space for individuals to express themselves without confinements or restrictions. The participants often drew inspiration from Hip-Hop and ratchetness in support of their multiple identities expressions in the HWI environment that often expects them to conform or assimilate. Moreover, according to Love (2013), ratchetness can be correlated to living intentionally and with awareness despite navigating oppressive systems, and the findings further support this through their unapologetic identity expression of their multifacetedness as Black women. The participants all unintentionally displayed ratchet respectability in some way through their self-definition and self-valuation, incorporating what the dominant considers ‘ratchet’ aesthetics and language, leading to their unapologetic expression of themselves (Boylorn, 2015).

The Bad Bitch Barbie image can be looked at as a Black woman who champions her sexual agency and ratchetness while repurposing the stereotypical representations of Black women (LaVoulle & Ellison, 2017). The findings highlight this bad bitch image through participants like Pink, whose lyric artifact embodied her own sexual agency as a Black woman navigating college. Furthermore, the findings underscore the Cardi B–Beyoncé complex at the intersection of ratchetness and respectability within collegiate settings and the influence of Hip-Hop on the construction of ratchet-respectability identities (Payne, 2020). For instance, when discussing being classy and ratchet, Renee speaks to the very essence of the Cardi B-Beyoncé complex classy-ratchet binary. While the findings align with some of the literature, it is essential to note that the findings posit Hip-Hop, ratchet respectability, and identity expression in the specific context of Black college women in the collegiate environment. Scholars note that as consumers of Hip-Hop, Black women in college must analyze the messages and meanings they take in and learn to develop their self-definition and voices (Henry, 2010; LaVoulle & Ellison, 2017). Regardless, all the participants still came to a point where they found their unapologetic identity definition through expressing their Blackness and womanness.

Hip-Hop as an External Influence on Participants’ Expression

Even when they negotiated their identity expression, self-defining to name their reality allowed them to (re)claim and (re)define as unapologetic, multifaceted Black women college students working towards agency and freedom from society’s labels and narratives of Black women. Expressing their Blackness and womanness included a connection to self-valuation as the participants used aesthetics and language with Hip-Hop’s influence to generate new, authentic images of themselves to replace the stereotypical images the dominant produces within the collegiate environment (Collins, 1986; Henry, 2010; Henry et al., 2010; Hunt, 2018; LaVoulle & Ellison, 2017; Payne & West, 2022).

Although research has noted Hip-Hop's contradictory, conflicting messages and stereotypes can often lead to the healthy or unhealthy development of various, shifting identities that Black women use to navigate various environments successfully, the participants grappled with this connection in some ways (Henry, 2010; Williams & Lewis, 2021). Furthering Black women's identity expression within Hip-Hop, the participants did "fuck with the gray areas" in which they embraced the contradictions and uplifted ratchet respectability despite being in majority-white spaces on campus often (Morgan, 1999; Payne & West, 2022). The participants explored the gray area and used Hip-Hop as a counter space for their identity expression by "bringing wreck" to stereotypes and marginalization that influence how they navigate both the Hip-Hop sphere and the public sphere within college environments (Pough, 2004). For Barbie, it was about embracing the contradictions of the male rappers' lyrics and fucking with the grays through her aesthetic identity expression. In contrast, Pink refuses to listen to male-dominated Hip-Hop music and listens to only women's Hip-Hop music to (re)create the ideas of Black women's agency and sexuality (Bradley, 2015; LaVoulle & Lewis Ellison, 2017; Payne & West, 2022). Even though Black college women can easily internalize Hip-Hop and its positive or negative messages, which can affect their healthy identity development, the participants challenged this notion by not internalizing the lyrics and viewing Hip-Hop as a role model of possibilities for their identity expression to achieve a blooming renaissance of being "that girl" authentically – on or off campus and thriving no matter the circumstances (Henry et al., 2010).

As Hip-Hop Feminism emphasizes fucking with the grays, bringing wreck, and embracing ratchet, all the participants unknowingly demonstrated the values of HHF in their conversations about Hip-Hop's influence on multiple identities articulation (Morgan, 1999; Pough, 2004). The findings add nuance to current literature that asserts Hip-Hop can negatively and to some extent impact the identity development of Black women in college by displaying both the positive elements of Hip-Hop and the (re)defining of Black women stereotypes and images (Durham et al., 2013; Henry et al., 2010; Patterson, 2015; Pickens, 2015; Pough, 2004). The participants were influenced by the positive and empowering aspects of Hip-Hop to unapologetically self-define themselves through their expression, such as Pink using a picture of Megan Thee Stallion as inspiration to her hairstylist for the red hair she wanted. Hip-Hop also went beyond influencing their aesthetic expression and attitude as Black women. Many of the participants mentioned that their lyric artifacts embodied them because the Hip-Hop lyrics made them feel empowered or affirmed.

Black women in Hip-Hop have had a significant impact on controlling their images and status as artists and leveraging their fashion to encourage Black women college students to shape and develop their unapologetic identity expressions. The participants, such as Butterfly, were inspired by past and current women in Hip-Hop to wear their nails or hairstyles unapologetically. While navigating the collegiate environment and its various spaces and places dominated by respectability politics and misogyny, it is important to have Hip-Hop as a tool of liberation to (re)define and(re)claim yourself and your agency. HHF insists on living with and embracing the contradictions and argues that Black college women can benefit from the modes of empowerment that Hip-Hop can provide with its contradictory messages (Durham et al., 2013; Henry, 2010). The findings underscore this through the participants selecting lyrics from Megan

Thee Stallion or The Carters as sources of empowerment, confidence, and affirmations for them as Black women college students navigating their own identity expression.

The participants also used Hip-Hop's influence to become authentically "that girl," as they broke down stereotypes and found agency through their entrepreneurial pursuits, such as Nineteen and her tooth gem business—similarly, the women in Hip-Hop role model the BRI framework for the participants. The findings highlight the confidence the participants gain from Hip-Hop artists such as Nicki Minaj, City Girls, and Megan Thee Stallion, who exhibit both ratchet and respectable characteristics and encourage listeners to get to the bag. The participants also began to role model BRI through Hip-Hop's influence on them to be creative in exploring who "that girl." is within their identities. Many of the participants discussed that the journey towards their unapologetic identity expression and multifacetedness was affected by Hip-Hop and their college journey. Helms' (1990) womanist identity model connects to the participants' authentically becoming "that girl" as the model exhibits Black women shifting from an external, societal definition of herself to an internal-based definition. Being "that girl" is staying true to the core tenets of womanism, BFT, and HHF. The findings illuminate the connection as Hip-Hop served as a foundational element for Black college women students as they blossomed into becoming unapologetic in their expression of Blackness and womanness identity. In various ways, Hip-Hop served as an external influence on the participants' identity expression; however, they all came to the same conclusion of becoming "that girl."

Implications for Practice

The findings of this dissertation study illuminate the need for student affairs practitioners, professionals, and higher education institutions to amplify culturally relevant advising and teaching and support Black college women while navigating the collegiate environment. Black women’s relationship with Hip-Hop is complicated in that the images and messages can be both positive and negative for them. The findings of this study supported this idea by showcasing the various ways Black college women students integrated Hip-Hop into their own aesthetics and language to express their Blackness and womanness while also critiquing the methods Black women are constantly belittled within Hip-Hop culture. This understanding can be leveraged by those working within higher education institutions to assist Black women college students who may be struggling with their agency or identity expression throughout different college environments. Additionally, such knowledge can help those working in higher education better understand their thoughts and perceptions when working with Black women college students expressing their identity.

Student affairs professionals should enhance their familiarity with these multiple identity models and contextual influence frameworks by pursuing formal and informal education opportunities for Black women college students. This formal education can be done through courses and workshops, and informal education can be done by establishing genuine, interpersonal relationships with Black women college students, staff, or faculty who are cognizant of the influences of race, gender, and culture. To help Black women college students move toward developing healthy identity definition through expression, student affairs practitioners can rely on scholarship such as the womanist identity patterns and create programming young Black women in college to participate in programs that provide them the opportunity to unpack and resist the stereotypes of them within the college environment and Hip-Hop culture. In addition, student affairs professionals and higher education practitioners can create counter spaces for Black women college students to provide them with a place on campus that encourages the exploration of their identity expression free from judgment and policing.

Moreover, higher education administrators can intentionally work to create a collegiate environment where Black college women students have the confidence and support to challenge, confront, and redefine society's expectations of Black women and their expression. Even so, student affairs practitioners and higher education administrators must ensure they intentionally support Black women's college identity expression using Hip-Hop, or issues can arise, such as creating the opposite impact of an inauthentic, policed identity expression.

Moreover, using this study's findings to champion Black women college students to leverage and embrace their multifacetedness as they look at Hip-Hop's influence on their identity expression could serve as a role model of possibilities and expand their capacity for engaging in critical thought of their lived experiences, self-definition, and self-valuation throughout all aspects of their life. The inclusion of Hip-Hop and other cultural influences within student affairs programming for Black women could help students achieve their definition of a healthy identity through expression. Lastly, the findings of this study can be used by anyone who wants to uplift and support the collective and individual liberation of Black women. The foundations of BFT were from the Combahee River Collective (1977), which said, "If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free, which leads to liberation for all people." This study can be used to move toward the liberation of the next generation of Black women. This can be demonstrated by anyone working with Black women in college by advocating for them as they continuously show up unapologetically through their hair, nails, language, etc.

Recommendations for Future Research

The research on Black women college students and their identity expression is small but can have a profound impact if expanded. There is a great need to inspire Black women college students to explore their identity expression within various environments. However, scholars must also look at this from an asset-based perspective rather than focus on the challenges. In addition, the study gives a foundation to expand research to further understand the influence of Hip-Hop on identity expression among Black college women students. Thus, further research, particularly studies focusing on other identities beyond race and gender, such as sexual orientation or class, is needed to explore these topics in greater depth. Additional identity intersections can provide a different context of how Black college women students express their identities within college environmental contexts.

The findings also suggest that future research on Black college women and specific components of identity expression such as wigs, bundles, make-up, lashes, or nails should be explored to focus on the small nuances of self-presentation because Black women are held to a higher standard due to misogynoir and the controlling images from society. Future scholarship should further examine how Hip-Hop guides their understanding of their identity expression, and more scholarship should focus on the connection between Black women's college student identity development and identity expression. Lastly, future research should emphasize how Hip-Hop influences Black women college students' creativity through their identity expression.

Recommendations for Black Women College Students

"*Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday / Bad bitches have bad days too. Friday, Saturday, and Sunday bounce back. How a bad bitch always does." - Megan Thee Stallion.*

The journey to being "that girl "and self-definition through identity expression does not happen without struggles and setbacks along the way. Black women in college can experience struggles or setbacks during their collegiate journey; however, there remain elements of hope, confidence, and being unapologetic in challenging stereotypes within the collegiate environment despite the challenges. Anxiety by Megan Thee Stallion was Butterfly's lyric artifact, and Megan's lyrics affirmed her as a Black woman college student.

Despite the anxiety of deciding what identities will be expressed today on campus or whatever challenge the participants faced, Black women college students can personify the lyrics through expression and have Hip-Hop's influence to remind them they are "that girl." Anxiety by Megan Thee Stallion appeared again during my second conversation with Pink. She talked about the picture artifact of 35 journal prompts she had intentionally found after Megan released her album Traumazine while going through her trial with Tory Lanez. Having a prominent Hip-Hop figure such as Megan Thee Stallion exhibit vulnerability through her music can be a major influence on Black women college students as they continue finding and defining themselves despite the challenges or "bad days" they face. Hip-Hop can influence the college expression of multiple identities by giving Black women in college the space to not always be the stereotypical strong Black woman on campus.

Self-definition and self-valuation are key for Black women to challenge hegemonic thinking and achieve liberation through identity expression. Black women college students bring voice to the role model of possibilities and liberation by pushing back stereotypes and creating counter-narratives through their identity expression. All the participants spoke about staying rooted in who they are and being unapologetic in their multifacetedness. Despite a bad day, Black women college students can continue being "that girl" as they bloom and become all they desire to be without allowing society to fit them into a box. Black women college students express their multiple identities within college environments through aesthetics and language, and Hip-Hop influences their expression. However, Hip-Hop also influences their ability to acknowledge that they are still “that girl” even when they are not feeling like that girl because “Bad B* Have Bad Days too.”

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine how Black college women express their interlocking, multiple identities. In uplifting the tenets of BFT and HHF, the findings of this study suggest that participants used aesthetics and language to express their identities, especially their Blackness and women, to experience a blooming renaissance of being authentically “that girl.” Further, BFT and HHF centered on Black college women’s lived experiences and unique standpoints within the contemporary college environments to lead them to self-definition and self-valuation. The findings add depth to the conversations on Hip-Hop's role in influencing Black women through their aesthetics and language within various environments. The importance of building relationships with the Black women participants was demonstrated throughout the dialogic conversations in the study. Authentically becoming “that girl” allowed participants to challenge stereotypes about Black women by recognizing the positive and negative images of Black women in Hip-Hop exist but choosing to embrace those images and leverage their simultaneity with their truths and lived experiences. This study was not created for us by us to encourage Black women to continue to take up space and be who they are regardless of the boxes or labels society tries to give us. Black women can be savage, classy, bougie, and ratchet, and the current Black women college students are leading the charge for all of us to embrace being “that girl” unapologetically.

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Appendix A

Participant Solicitation

Email in Response to Inquiry

Hello there,

Thank you for indicating interest as a participant in my “I'm A Savage. Classy, Bougie, Ratchet": Exploring Black Women College Students’ Identity Expression and Hip Hop” dissertation study. As you know, I intend to examine how Black college women express their interlocking identities, and if Hip Hop influences that expression. Those interested must meet the following criteria:

- Must self-identify within the African diaspora or as Black,
- Must self-identify as a woman,
- Must be a current undergraduate student, and
- Must be currently enrolled at a four-year higher education institution.

All participants are invited to review the attached consent form and fill out the interest form, if interested. As a reminder, those participating are expected to complete two separate 60–90-minute interviews. Please confirm that you meet the criteria and are interested by filling out the interest form. I will then contact you with additional information to schedule an interview. Thank you, again, for volunteering your time and experience. If you have any further questions about participating, please feel free to contact me with any concerns.

Kindest regards,

Fallan S. Frank

Email in Response to Peer Recommendation

Hello there,

I hope this email finds you well. A peer recommended you as a potential candidate for my dissertation study, “I'm A Savage. Classy, Bougie, Ratchet": Exploring Black Women College Students’ Identity Expression and Hip Hop.” My study examines how Black college women express their interlocking identities through aesthetics, language, and community, and if Hip Hop influences that expression, and you could be a great fit in sharing your perspective. Those interested must meet the following criteria:

- Must self-identify within the African diaspora or as Black,

- Must self-identify as a woman,
- Must be a current undergraduate student, and
- Must be currently enrolled at a four-year higher education institution.

All participants are invited to review the attached consent form and fill out the interest form, if interested. Those participating are expected to complete two separate 60–90 minute interviews. Please confirm that you meet the criteria and are interested by filling out the interest form. I will then contact you with additional information to schedule an interview. Thank you for considering your time and experience in this research. If you have any further questions about participating, please feel free to contact me with any comments or concerns.

Kindest regards,

Fallan Frank

Email Request for Member Checking

Hi there,

I hope that you are well! Thank you, again, for volunteering to engage in my study and share your stories with me. I completed my data analysis of the interviews and artifacts. Now, I invite you to read the chapter and provide feedback to ensure that your story is accurately portrayed through the writing.

If you could please share your thoughts with me by Monday, April 1st, I would greatly appreciate it. Please feel free to contact me with any questions in the meantime. It is my sincerest hope to remain connected as we move forward. I cannot wait to read about the fantastic things you will continue accomplishing.

Kindest regards,

Fallan Frank

Appendix B

Informed Consent for Minimal Risk Studies with Adults

TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT

“I'm A Savage. Classy, Bougie, Ratchet": Exploring Black Women College Students’ Identity Expression and Hip Hop”

RESEARCH TEAM

Fallan Frank
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
Fallan.frank@uta.edu

Faculty advisor: Ericka Roland, PhD
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, Assistant Professor
Ericka.roland@uta.edu

IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT THIS RESEARCH PROJECT

This research study is about understanding how Black college women express their interlocking identities through aesthetics, language, and community, and if Hip Hop influences that expression. You can choose to participate in this research study if you are at least 18 years old and

1. Self-identify within the African diaspora or as Black
2. Self-identify as a woman
3. Current undergraduate student
4. Currently enrolled at a four-year higher education institution

Reasons you might want to participate in this study include anonymously sharing your lived experiences as a Black woman navigating the collegiate environment and engaging in creative outlets to discuss your perspectives of multiple identities, self-expression, and Hip Hop. You may also want to participate in this study if you want to further understand and reflect on how your identity development relates to your identity expression. However, you might not want to participate if you cannot commit to scheduling two separate interviews and do not desire to complete additional tasks outside of interviews. Your decision about whether to participate is entirely up to you. If you decide not to be in the study, there won’t be any punishment or penalty; whatever your choice, there will be no impact on any benefits or services you would normally receive. Even if you choose to begin the study, you can also change your mind and quit at any time without any consequences.

This study has been reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board (IRB). An IRB is an ethics committee that reviews research with the goal of protecting the rights and welfare of human research subjects. Your most important right as a human subject is informed consent. You should take your time to consider the information provided by this form and the research team, and ask questions about anything you do not fully understand before making your decision about participating.

TIME COMMITMENT

Participation in this study will include two separate interviews that should last about 60 to 90 minutes each with a total of 120 to 180 minutes for both interviews.

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

If you decide to participate in this research study, the list of activities that I will ask you to complete for the research are:

1. Read through this Informed Consent and talk with the research team to make sure that any questions you may have are answered; then make your choice about whether to participate.
2. Upload Hip Hop song’s lyrics you feel relates to your identity expression and college experience through the interest form.
3. Discuss your thoughts on your multiple identities, identity expression, and Hip Hop.
4. Collect photographic artifacts related to your identity expression and share their meanings in the second interview.

The interview will be audio-visual recorded using encrypted videoconferencing TEAMS. During the interview, the recording will be transcribed, which means they will be typed exactly as they were recorded, word-for-word, and checked for accuracy by the researcher.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS

Possible benefits for participants include the opportunity to further understand and reflect on how your identity development relates to your identity expression. The participants also contribute to the field of study by extending the college student identity development literature to understand how Black college women express their identity and what influences the expression of their multiple identities.

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

This research study is not expected to pose any additional risks beyond what you would normally experience in your regular everyday life. However, some of the questions that I will ask may be about sensitive or uncomfortable topics. If you do experience any discomfort, please inform the research team.

COMPENSATION

You will not receive payment for participating in this research study.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

There are no alternative options to this research project other than non-participation.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The research team is committed to protecting your rights and privacy as a research subject. All paper and electronic data collected from this study will be stored in a secure location on the UTA campus and/or a secure UTA server for at least three (3) years after the end of this research. The interview recordings will be kept with the other electronic data in a secure UTA Box account for the duration of the study.

The results of this study may be published and/or presented without naming you as a participant. The data collected about you for this study may be used for future research studies that are not described in this consent form. If that occurs, an IRB would first evaluate the use of any information that is identifiable to you, and confidentiality protection would be maintained.

While absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, the research team will make every effort to protect the confidentiality of your records as described here and to the extent permitted by law. In addition to the research team, the following entities may have access to your records, but only on a need-to-know basis: the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the FDA (federal regulating agencies), the reviewing IRB, and sponsors of the study.

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS

Questions about this research study or reports regarding an injury or other problem may be directed to Fallan S. Frank (Fallan.frank@uta.edu). Any questions you may have about your rights as a research subject or complaints about the research may be directed to the Office of Research Administration; Regulatory Services at 817-272-3723 or regulatoryservices@uta.edu.

CONSENT

By signing this form, you are confirming that you understand the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and your rights as a research subject. By agreeing to participate, you are not waiving any of your legal rights. You can refuse to participate or discontinue participation at any time, with no penalty or loss of benefits that you would ordinarily have. Please sign below if you are at least 18 years of age and voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

____

SIGNATURE OF VOLUNTEER DATE

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

I. Introduction

    A. First, thank you for volunteering to participate in this study. Your time, experience, and perspective are valuable, and your contribution is appreciated. There are no right or wrong answers. I am interested in your experiences and your unique perspective on how you express your multiple identities within college environments, as well as if Hip-Hop influences your expression. This is an open conversation, so I encourage you to ask questions, clarify, and engage as you feel comfortable.

II. Study's Purpose and Application

III. Consent Forms/Approval

IV. Data Generation

V. Other Questions or Concerns

VI. Key Interview Questions

    A. Please tell me about yourself and your journey to college.

        1. Tell me a little about you in the academic setting (classroom, professor office hours, etc).

        2. Tell me a little about you in the non-academic setting (student organization meetings, student affairs settings, the student union, etc.)

    B. Do you believe you hold multiple identities?

        1. If so, how, and when do you express those multiple identities?

    C. Does Hip-Hop influence the expression of your identities?

        1. Why did you select the lyrics you did?

        2. How do the lyrics you selected embody you and your identity expression?
    D. Does the environment impact your identity expression?
    E. Is there a question I should have asked that I did not address?
    F. What would be something else that you would like to add?

VII. Artifact Homework: At this time, I invite you to consider taking or getting photographs that represent how you express your multiple identities related to the college experience for our following interview. The photographs are ones of your choice, and we will then discuss why that picture was chosen and how it relates to your identity expression.

VIII. Information on the Remainder of the Process

IX. Thank You

Appendix D: Second Interview Protocol

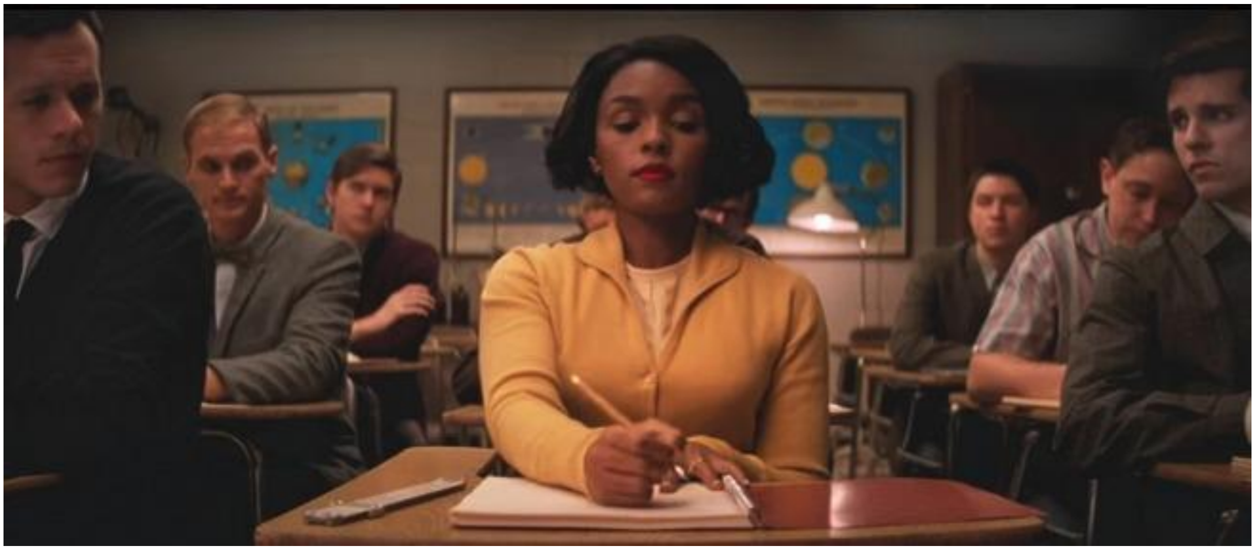
I. Welcome
    A. First, thank you for volunteering to participate in this study. Your time, experience, and perspective are valuable, and your contribution is appreciated. There are no right or wrong answers. I am interested in your experiences and your unique perspective on how you express your multiple identities within college environments, as well as if Hip-Hop influences your expression. This is an open conversation, so I encourage you to ask questions, clarify, and engage as you feel comfortable.
II. Consent Forms/Approval
III. Questions or Concerns
IV. Artifact Exploration
    A. What are your pictures and please tell me about them.
    B. What is the story behind your pictures in relation to your identity expression in college?
        1. Is there a connection to Hip-Hop?
    C. What stories or emotions came to mind as you gathered the photographic artifacts?
    D. What aspects of the photographs relate to your identities, if at all?
    E. Is there a question I should have asked that I did not address?
        1. Is there anything else you would like to share with me?
V. Information on the Remainder of the Process
VI. Thank You

Appendix E

Participants' Artifact Gallery

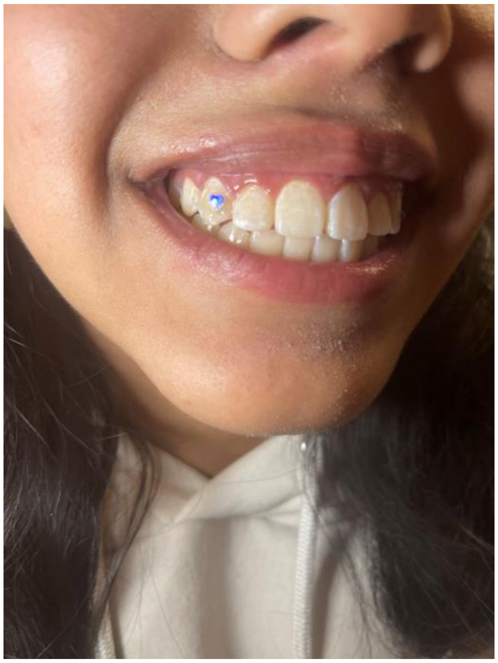
Artifact 1

Renee's Photograph Artifact



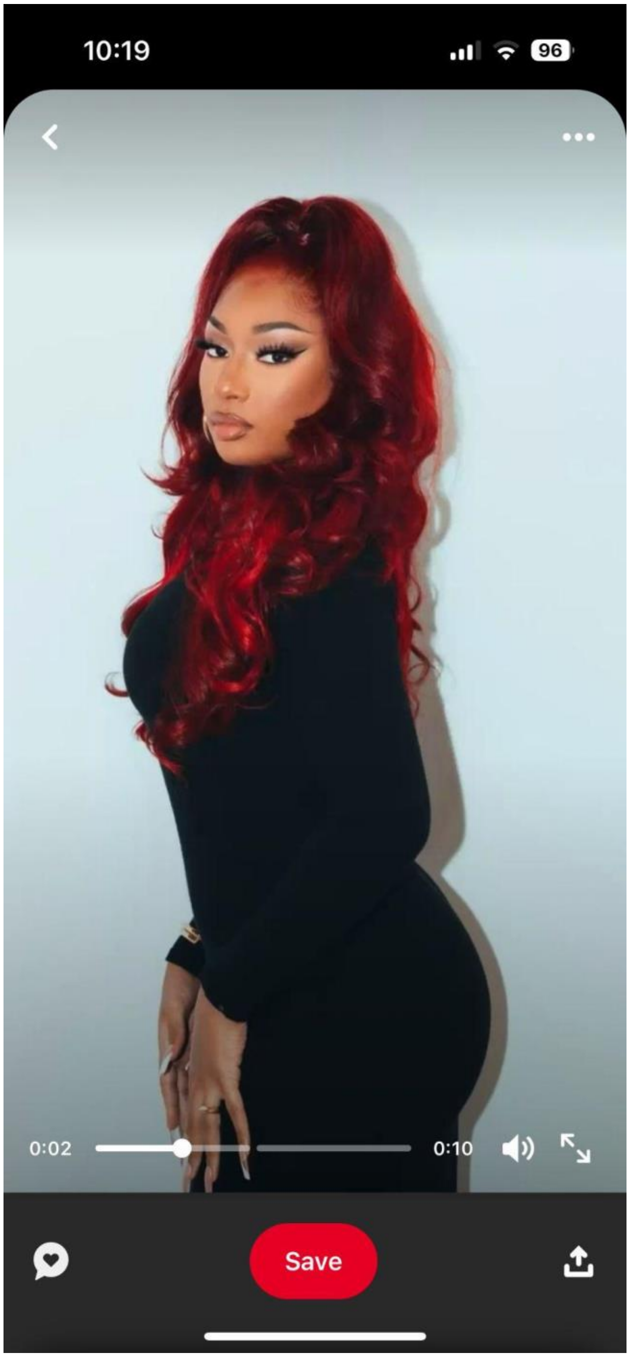
Artifact 2

Nineteen's Photograph Artifact



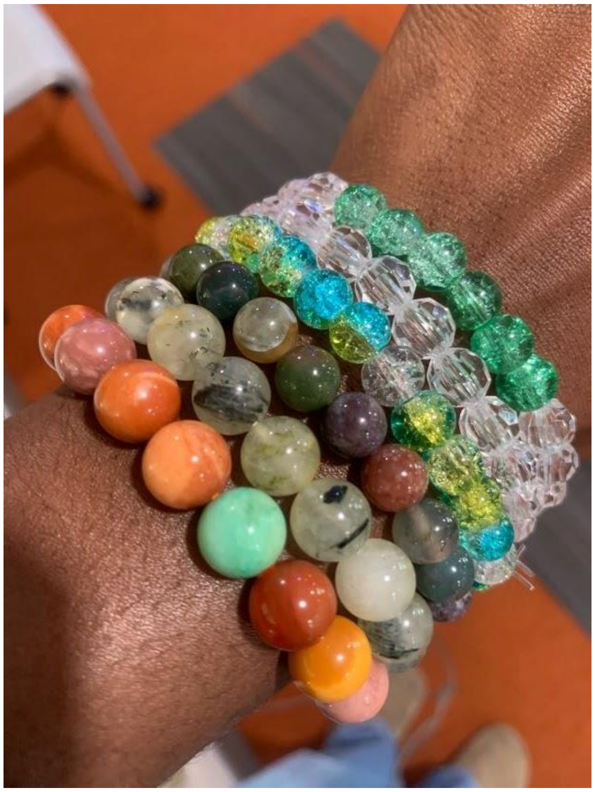
Artifact 3

Pink's Photograph Artifact


10:19
96
0:02
0:10
Save

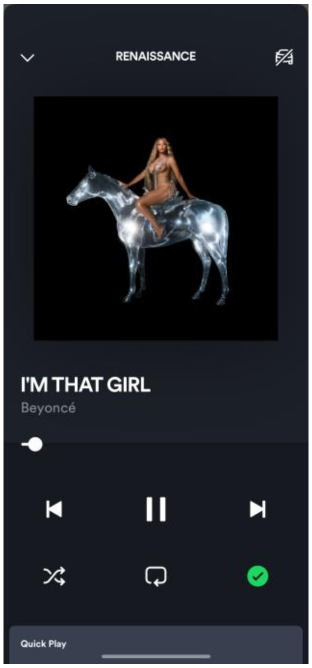
Artifact 4

Butterfly's Photograph Artifact



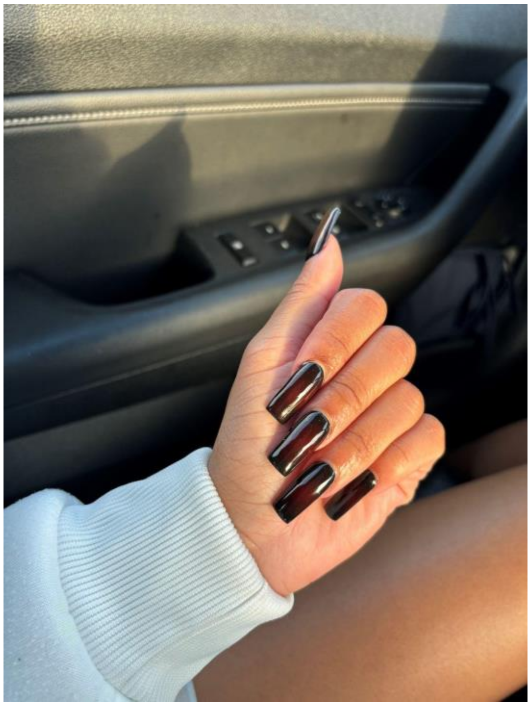
Artifact 5

Amber's Photograph Artifact


RENAISSANCE
I'M THAT GIRL
Beyoncé
Quick Play

Artifact 6

Barbie'sPhotograph Artifact



Artifact 7

Butterfly's Photograph Artifact