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Between Perception and Reality: Why Black Student Opinions of HBCUs and PWIs Matter

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Between Perception and Reality:

Why Black Student Opinions of HBCUs and PWIs Matter

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Education

by

Kiana Foxx

2023

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Between Perception and Reality:

Why Black Student Opinions of HBCUs and PWIs Matter

by

Kiana Foxx

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2023

Professor Walter R. Allen, Chair

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) are a significant and necessary component of American higher education and should be treated and perceived as such. However, this has not been the case. Despite their lengthy track record of making significant contributions toward the advancement of Black people, HBCUs have faced discrimination. Additionally, despite their accomplishments, they have been subjected to heavy criticism in the media, suggesting there are some misconceptions about their value and relevance. This study investigates the beliefs people hold about colleges, how systemic racism and social pressure affect those beliefs, and the effects those beliefs have on social and educational outcomes.

Using a bio-demographic questionnaire, individual semi-structured interviews, and two activities that resulted in files for document analysis, this study explored how systemic racism and social pressure influenced how 20 Black students (10 who attended predominantly white institutions and 10 who attended HBCUs) were socialized to perceive HBCUs compared to predominantly white institutions (PWIs). It also investigated where these beliefs came from and their social and educational effects. To ground the research, the study used The Cycle of

Socialization, two tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT), and introduced and applied a new theory, "The Cycle of Perception Formation."

Several significant findings emerged. First, results indicated very different perceptions of HBCUs compared to PWIs among the participants. Although individuals were socialized to regard PWIs as discriminatory and unconcerned about the well-being of their students, they were instructed to see HBCUs as welcoming environments where they could connect with others, receive care, and feel included regardless of their race. Furthermore, people regarded HBCUs as challenging settings regarding finances, facilities, and academic standards, while they saw PWIs as establishments with superior financial backing, resources, majors and employment prospects. However, these beliefs did not always align with participants' experiences.

In addition, findings also indicated respondents were more familiar with and had greater involvement in PWIs. This finding was primarily due to HBCUs being overlooked in-school when students were discussing which colleges to attend. Moreover, the findings indicated that participants' perceptions of educational institutions were significantly influenced by various socialization factors. These factors included the influence of other individuals, mass media, social media platforms, the participants' surroundings, systemic racial discrimination, and societal expectations.

Lastly, the findings showed participants placed the most value on five factors when forming their perceptions of a collegiate institution: the institution's display of concern for students' well-being; the institution's standing regarding academics, social life, finances, and racial issues; the institution's capability to fulfill the individual needs that were the most important to participants; the institution's environment; and the participants' personal connection to the college.

The study is important because it makes several potential theoretical, methodological, and literary contributions. First, it contributes to the very limited literature on student perceptions. In addition, it offers a new theoretical application of Critical Race Theory, proposes a new theory, "The Cycle of Perception Formation", and employs a mixed-multimethod research design that incorporates activities into qualitative interviews. The study is significant because negative perceptions of HBCUs have called into question their relevance and value. This situation is concerning because HBCUs play a significant role in advancing opportunities for Black and low-income students. Any threat to their existence could pose a danger to the Black middle class, and limit Black and low-income populations' social mobility and advancement. This research can be valuable for identifying how negative perceptions are perpetuated. In addition, it is significant for enrollment and recruitment, as it sheds light on how students perceive institutions and provides them with opportunities to emphasize positive perceptions and address their negative ones.

To address the issues highlighted, the study's implications call for students, parents, and teachers to critically evaluate the suitability of a college, the process of selecting a college, and the messages conveyed about different colleges. These evaluations can help prevent misunderstandings and ensure the college selected is the best option for each student. Finally, it urges lawmakers, educators, and the broader society to reflect on the impact that messaging about colleges has on students and academic institutions.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my loving family and all the scholars who have given me

permission to do research that is true to my heart.

The dissertation of Kiana Foxx is approved.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to all the individuals who have supported me throughout my academic journey. First and foremost, I am thankful to God for helping me reach this point. Achieving this dream has been a long and challenging journey, and I am grateful that I can finally see it become a reality.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION, PURPOSE, & SIGNIFICANCE

Background & Statement of the Problem

In 2008, Republican Georgia Senator Seth Harp stirred controversy when he suggested Georgia close two Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Savannah State and Albany State University. He proposed they merge with nearby predominantly white institutions (PWIs), Armstrong Atlantic State and Darton College. Like most HBCU opponents, he argued they were: 1) no longer necessary and 2) perpetuated an unlawful system of segregation (Brooks, 2010; Sabry & Levy, 2009). Senator Harp was not alone in his critiques. Other opponents of HBCUs have claimed that compared to PWIs, HBCUs are not only unnecessary, but inferior and illegitimate (Brown, 2013; Waymer & Street, 2015). The data and literature, however, show these claims to be untrue.

Despite a long history of discrimination against HBCUs (including underfunding from state and federal agencies, forced segregation, and PWI encroachment on unique HBCU majors) (Harper et al., 2009; The United States v. Fordice, 1992), HBCUs still produce a disproportionate number of educated Black Americans (Toldson, 2018). While HBCUs only represent three percent of colleges and only enroll 12 percent of Black undergraduates, they generate 40 percent of Black STEM degrees, 60 percent of Black engineering degrees, 50 percent of Black teachers, and 40 percent of the health degrees earned by Black undergraduates (Waymer & Street, 2015). In addition, HBCUs graduate low-income Black students at higher rates than PWIs (Nichols & Evans-Bell, 2017). So, HBCUs are very successful at producing Black graduates.

Even more impressive, HBCUs accomplish these feats despite a severe lack of funding (Hardy et al., 2019; Toldson, 2018). For example, research suggests state and federal agencies

have traditionally disproportionately underfunded HBCUs compared to PWIs (Harper et al., 2009; Hardy et al., 2019). Even after Brown overturned Plessy v. Ferguson, white schools were "receiving state appropriations at a rate of 26 times more than Black colleges" (Harper et al., 2009, p. 396). Similarly, a study conducted by Bowles and DeCosta in 1971 discovered Black students were being funded by states at a rate that was only a quarter of the funding allocated to white students. Consequently, HBCUs have had to accomplish a great deal with limited resources.

Systematic underfunding of HBCUs continues today, with researchers linking the practice to negative beliefs about student outcomes (Hardy et al., 2019), racism through unequal state appropriations (Harper et al., 2009), and lower HBCU enrollment numbers, which are caused, in part, by Brown v. Board of Education. While Brown v. The Board of Education opened the door to better-funded PWIs, it also led to the closure of many HBCUs, drastically reducing HBCUs enrollment numbers (Harper et al., 2009). These effects have carried into the present. Today, HBCUs are still underfunded compared to PWIs. Not only do HBCUs have lower enrollment rates (Waymer & Street, 2015), leading to fewer tuition dollars, but they also have smaller endowments and receive less federal aid than PWIs (Gasman, 2009). So, many of the past inequalities have persisted.

Still, even with the lack of funding, HBCUs continue to be especially effective at graduating Black students (Nichols & Evans-Bell, 2017; Hardy et al., 2019). However, despite their successes, they have come under attack since the passage of Brown v. Board of Education in 1954 (Broady et al., 2017; Allen et al., 2007). These results imply there are some misconceptions about the value and significance of HBCUs. That raises the question: If the criticisms of HBCUs are unfounded, what other misconceptions do people have about colleges?

Where do these ideas originate? And what impact do they have on students? Institutions?

Enrollment? And HBCUs? These are the questions that motivated this research. Additionally,

because people do not live in a vacuum, and given America's history of racism and prejudice,

this study also investigated how racism and social pressure have contributed to the formation of

such perceptions. Scholars have extensive knowledge of issues such as students' college selection

approaches, negative perceptions of HBCUs, and the impact of systemic racism on education.

However, there is relatively little information about the impacts or significance of perceptions,

systemic racism, and social pressure on college decision-making or institutional outcomes.

Purpose of the Study

Keeping the aforementioned questions in mind, this mixed-multimethod study

investigated how systemic racism (which refers to racism ingrained in laws and practices that

support white supremacy) and social pressure influenced Black students' perceptions of HBCUs

compared to PWIs. It utilized a combination of in-depth semi-structured interviews, a bio-

demographic questionnaire, and document analysis to explore how systemic racism (including

negative racial attitudes, stereotypes, limitations on funding and programs at HBCUs, low

national academic rankings for HBCUs, and misconceptions about their value) and social

pressure (such as the influence of society or socialization agents) impacted the way 20 Black

former and current college students were socialized to view HBCUs compared to PWIs during

their college application process. In addition, it examined which socialization agents influence

the students' perceptions and analyzed the consequences of those perceptions.

The goals were to: 1) challenge race and racism-neutral notions of college choice; 2) push

students, parents, and educators to critically examine college fit, college choice, and college

messages; and 3) encourage policymakers, advertisers, and society at large to consider the

consequences of how messages about college affect college students and higher education institutions. To guide the investigation, I asked the following research questions:

1. How do Black students perceive HBCUs compared to PWIs?

2. How are these perceptions influenced by racism and social pressure?

3. Where do these perceptions originate?

4. What are the educational and social consequences of these perceptions?

Study Contributions

This work has the potential to contribute to literature, theory, and methods. First, it can contribute to the very limited literature on student perceptions and the impact of society on college decision-making. While research on student perceptions has increased over the years (Clayton et al., 2023; Patterson, 2009; Scott, 2014), the literature has mostly focused on media, families, and students—without considering the role of race or the processes that have led to perception formation. This study uses Critical Race Theory (CRT), socialization theory (used interchangeably with The Cycle of Socialization), and "The Cycle of Perception Formation" to investigate how racism and societal pressure combine to affect perception, enrollment, and institutional inequality. Second, this project can make theoretical and methodological contributions. For example, it uses Whiteness as Property and Racism as Endemic, two tenets of Critical Race Theory, to analyze how America's history of racism and oppression has affected minority institutions' power and access to the benefits associated with whiteness and white schools (such as prestige, money, and desirability), an understudied area.

In addition to investigating college decision-making with CRT and socialization theory in mind, I offer a new theoretical application of CRT which expands race and racism beyond individuals to include structures and institutions. For example, I argue because HBCUs and

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PWIs are racialized structures, or entities organized and privileged by race (Ray, 2019), I suggest they can experience racism just as individuals do. Therefore, I propose researchers can broaden the principles of CRT that currently apply to individuals to include institutions. One example is the tenet Whiteness as Property, which argues whiteness provides white people access to opportunities unavailable to non-white people. I argue just as individuals experience whiteness as a property right and the privileges associated with it, institutions have similar experiences. In this way the study can help scholars consider how to expand applications of theory. Additionally, I present a new theory called The Cycle of Perception Formation, which aims to explain the process of socialization by highlighting the relationship between personal experiences, cognitive processes, external influences, and systemic factors.

Finally, the study utilizes a research approach that includes activities aimed at assisting participants in responding to interview questions and critically reflecting on their answers. For instance, it employs a mixed-multimethod research design, which combines a bio-demographic survey (a quantitative technique) with document analysis and semi-structured individual interviews (two qualitative methods). It also incorporates two activities, a college ranking activity and a perception activity, to facilitate participants in answering the research questions and elaborating on their initial responses. By utilizing these various techniques, the study attempts to broaden the methodological approaches used in previous research. Overall, the study may be valuable for expanding methodological approaches, introducing a new theory, and contributing to existing literature by adding a race and systemic racism-conscious perspective to college decision-making.

Study Significance

In addition to its potential contributions to literature, theory, and research methods, this study is significant because HBCUs are important (Allen & Jewell, 2002; Nichols & Evans-Bell, 2017; Redd, 2020); however, they are typically portrayed negatively in the media (Gasman & Bowman, 2011). These depictions have led to some serious consequences in the past. First, they have perpetuated an inaccurate view of HBCUs (Gasman & Bowman, 2011), calling into question their relevance and value. In addition, they have led to inequities in HBCU funding compared to their PWI counterparts and unfair perceptions of HBCUs' impact (Gasman & Bowman, 2011; Hardy et al., 2019). Even more important, negative perceptions of HBCUs have led some people to call for these higher education institutions to be closed or merged with predominantly white institutions (Brooks, 2010; Sabry & Levy, 2009; Gasman & Bowman, 2011). These requests can have a substantial, negative impact on Black advancement since HBCUs contribute so much to Black educational access and social mobility (Allen & Jewell, 2002; Nichols & Evans-Bell, 2017). Therefore, addressing negative perceptions and stereotypes about HBCUs is critical to ensure they continue to play an essential role in Black students' academic and professional development. This research can be valuable for identifying how these negative perceptions of HBCUs are perpetuated.

Additionally, this study holds significant value for HBCUs and PWIs in terms of enrollment and recruitment, as it sheds light on how students perceive these institutions and provides them with opportunities to emphasize positive perceptions and address negative ones. This benefit is especially important in the current climate where institutions are competing to attract students (Renn & Reason, 2021; Rutter et al., 2016; Tomlinson, 2017). Knowing how to appeal to students can improve an institution's reputation and prove invaluable for attracting

students and supporting diversity. This study's results can assist institutions in developing initiatives to attract and support Black students, who are the focus of this study.

The findings can also be useful for any institution aiming to attract and enroll Black students. However, they can be particularly beneficial for HBCUs, who rely more heavily on tuition dollars, and for institutions that face challenges in meeting their enrollment goals (Williams & Davis, 2019). Note: In this study, PWIs refer to four-year institutions that were historically established to serve predominantly white communities, including schools that have a majority white population and those that may not but still exhibit white leadership, curriculum, and focus. It is worth noting the "B" in Black is capitalized purposefully to acknowledge that Black is a proper noun, a shared cultural identity, and an ethnicity, whereas the term "white" is not capitalized as it has not consistently operated in the same manner and has frequently been used to indicate the absence of any other race (Gosztyla et al., 2021; Laws, 2020).

Organization of Dissertation

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive overview of the research on racism in higher education. The chapter covers topics such as systemic racism, how racism has evolved over time, socialization, media portrayals of HBCUs, and the significance of HBCU and PWI perceptions. Chapter 3 outlines the methods used in the study, including a discussion of the rationale for using qualitative research techniques, the methodological approach, procedures, analysis, and study limitations.

Chapter 4 is the first of three results chapters and discusses the first major finding, which is differences in exposure. Chapters 5 and 6 cover the other major themes: the major influences on participant perceptions, the areas where perceptions matter most, and the differences and similarities between participants' perceptions of HBCUs and PWIs.

The final chapter, Chapter 7, summarizes and discusses the findings, details the study's implications, and provides recommendations for educators, policymakers, parents, students, and

society, as well as suggestions for future research and a short conclusion. Before diving into the literature on perceptions, systemic racism, and social pressure, the following section provides a historical overview of historically Black colleges and universities. It begins by discussing their origins and continues by providing information on their objectives, impacts, and continued relevance. The next chapter begins the literature review.

Historical Overview: The History, Purpose, and Significance of HBCUs

HBCUs are educational institutions that were founded before 1964 with the purpose of providing people of African descent access to higher education, as they were initially prohibited by law from enrolling in American PWIs (Gasman, 2009). HBCUs were first established in 1837 with the founding of what is now Cheney University of Pennsylvania (Redd, 2020). They grew in number after the end of slavery in the mid- to late-1800s, and with the passage of the second Morrill Act of 1890 (Allen & Jewell 2002; Redd, 2020). Following the landmark case of Brown v. Board of Education in Topeka, PWIs began to integrate and diversify, attracting Black students away from HBCUs (Harper et al., 2009). Despite this, HBCUs remained committed to educating the most historically disadvantaged students (Gasman, 2013).

Those efforts have proved to be successful, and HBCUs have had and continue to have notable success in graduating students regardless of their economic status, race, or ethnicity (Redd, 2020). Despite having fewer resources, such as lower endowments and less funding (Harper et al., 2009), according to research, HBCUs have been found to be more successful at graduating low-income Black students than many PWIs (Nichols & Evans-Bell, 2017). In addition, according to Allen and Jewell (2002), a significant proportion of the Black middle class in North America earned their degrees from HBCUs. Similarly, Perna et al. (2006) note in their study of 19 southern states that "public 4-year HBCUs [were] the only sector [within higher

education where] Black [students] consistently approach[ed] or achieve[d] equity in enrollment and degree completion" (p. 223). So, HBCUs have been successful.

In addition to equalizing Black enrollment and degree completion, research suggests HBCUs add more value to students' college experience than some PWIs, as they often prepare students who enter higher education less prepared for college. Research finds HBCUs are more successful at graduating Black STEM majors, Black engineers, and Black teachers than many PWIs (Waymer & Street, 2015). These accomplishments are even more notable, considering Black students who attend HBCUs tend to have lower incomes (Hardy et al., 2019) and lower standardized test scores than those attending PWIs (Nettles & Perna, 1997). For instance, research has shown approximately 71 percent of HBCU enrollees are recipients of the Pell Grant, a federal program that provides financial aid to students from low-income families (Gasman, 2013). These findings, however, are rarely considered in media attacks on HBCUs.

Findings about incoming student characteristics are even more significant because research shows low-income students and students who are less academically prepared tend to have more issues in college. Increased obligations for low-income and academically unprepared students, like work responsibilities and inability to keep pace with coursework, often result in lower retention and graduation rates (Hardy et al., 2019). So, HBCUs graduating a large proportion of the Black middle class shows they have a significant impact on the upward mobility of their students. Therefore, it is surprising that despite their many accomplishments, HBCUs continue to come under attack (Waymer & Street, 2015); and are often labeled immaterial (Brown, 2013; Riley, 2010), and academically inferior to PWIs (Abdul-Alim, 2016). This study contributes to the literature on HBCUs by examining how these messages affect students, the roles racism and social pressure play in what the messages are and how they are

spread, where these messages originate, and their social and educational impacts. In the next

section, I review studies that highlight systemic racism's effects on higher education, HBCU

representation in the media, the changing face of racism, and the process, drivers, and impact of

socialization on individuals.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW & THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section is the literature review, which provides an overview of the literature on HBCU messages, socialization, systemic racism in higher education, and covert racism. The literature review is divided into five parts: (1) Systemic Racism in Higher Education, which details how institutional racism has affected education and HBCUs; (2) Stereotypes, Racial Attitudes, and the Changing Face of Racism, which examines how racism has evolved from overt to more subtle forms; (3) The Process of Socialization, which defines both socialization and racial socialization, describes how they occur, and who drives them; (4) HBCUs in the Media, which discusses how HBCUs have been portrayed in the media; and (5) The Significance of HBCU and PWI Perceptions, which explains previous literature on perceptions and how this study contributes to the conversation on institutional perceptions and inequality in higher education. The second part of this chapter explains the theoretical framework utilized in this study.

Review of the Literature

Systemic Racism in Higher Education

Previous research has extensively examined systemic racism and identified that America has a history of practicing racism and discrimination against Black individuals and other people of color (Barber et al., 2020; Better, 2008; Feagin, 2013; Lawrence & Keleher, 2004; Tourse et al., 2018). This prejudice has resulted in several continuing, explicit, and implicit racial disparities between Black and white Americans (Barber et al., 2020; Feagin, 2013; Tourse et al., 2018). Today, Black Americans are much more likely to experience poverty and have less access to wealth than their white counterparts (Feagin, 2013; Tourse et al., 2008). In addition, structural racial inequality has led to inequities in employment (Pager & Shepard, 2008), housing

(Rothstein, 2017), voting (Acharya et al., 2015; Keele et al., 2021), healthcare (Gee & Ford, 2011; Yearby, 2018), mental and physical health (Bailey et al., 2017; Shim, 2021), income (Feagin, 2006), justice (Clemons, 2014; Stolzenber et al., 2013), and ultimately, several educational inequalities (Barber et al., 2020; Feagin, 2006; Merolla & Jackson, 2019).

Many educational inequalities are apparent in the differences between HBCUs (Black institutions), PWIs (white institutions), and in HBCUs' social and historical treatment compared to PWIs. For example, HBCUs have much smaller endowments, receive less federal aid (Gasman, 2009), are not prioritized in government funding, and do not comprise a sufficient portion of programs leading to higher degrees (Boland & Gasman, 2014). In addition, American society has perpetuated inequalities between HBCUs and PWIs through: stereotypes about the inferiority of HBCUs (Feagin, 2006; Gasman, 2007), negative stereotypes about Black Americans (Abdul-Alim, 2016; Higginbotham Jr., 1995), and systemic racial discrimination in the form of inequitable funding and negative media portrayals of HBCUs (Gasman, 2007), and intentional competition through program duplication from PWIs (Ayers v. Fordice, 1995; Douglas-Gabriel, 2022; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2010). These stereotypes, combined with systemic discrimination, have led to significant problems for HBCUs.

HBCUs have faced various challenges, including closures, mergers (Redd, 2020), and reductions in student enrollment (Harper et al., 2009). These issues are particularly concerning because HBCUs have historically received inequitable federal funding, forcing them to rely more heavily on college tuition (Williams & Davis, 2019). This inequality not only affects HBCUs but also creates issues for Black individuals and furthers disparities between Black and white people because HBCUs produce a disproportionately high number of Black graduates and substantially contribute to the development of the Black middle class (Allen et al., 2007; Nichols & Evans-

Bell, 2017). Without the contribution of HBCUs, Black people risk setbacks in social, economic, and educational advancement. Therefore, it is essential to address systemic racism and the challenges faced by HBCUs to promote equity and opportunity for Black communities.

While researchers have examined educational inequity, examining the impacts of structural discrimination on education and K–12 institutional outcomes (Feagin, 2006; Merolla & Jackson, 2019), significant facets of systemic racism remain understudied. Few studies explore how systemic racism reinforces white supremacy in students' minds. Additionally, while numerous scholars have examined college enrollment and decision-making (Astin & Cross, 1981; Bergerson, 2009; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; McDonough et al., 1995), and some have even investigated the effects of race and academic reputation on college choice (Vaughn et al., 1978; Murphy, 1981), few studies have explored how systemic racism influences student beliefs, HBCU enrollment, or seemingly race-neutral educational and social ideas, such as a student's college decision process. This study seeks to fill this gap, and its findings become particularly consequential as competition for students increases across the nation.

Stereotypes, Racial Attitudes, and the Changing Face of Racism

It is crucial that educators, parents, students, and policymakers not only consider systemic racism but also examine stereotypes, racial attitudes, and the changing face of racism when investigating the effects of these factors on students' beliefs about colleges. Because although many individuals believe racism is no longer an issue, continued discrimination shows otherwise. Although some studies have shown attitudes toward racial equality have improved over time (Bobo, 2001; Moberg et al., 2019), negative racial stereotypes toward minoritized populations have persisted (Bobo, 2001). For example, survey evidence has shown support for notions such as integrated schools and interracial marriage has been increasing, and there is

tangible evidence of a growing Black middle class. However, policies to improve disparities involving interventions have consistently been unpopular among white Americans (Bobo, 2001).

Research indicates although many white people profess support for racial equality, they often oppose policies that would help implement it, such as affirmative action and reparation policies (Clair & Denis, 2015). In fact, some scholars suggest that rather than a decline in racism, there has only been a decrease in the social acceptability of racism, and it is possible some individuals intentionally harbor racist beliefs but conceal them when questioned (Clair & Denis, 2015). This theory has been supported by additional research.

For instance, some studies suggest, as time has progressed, many racial concerns and policies have faced stagnation in public interest, with increasing disappointment, and indifference toward them (Bobo et al., 1997; Moberg et al., 2019). Furthermore, studies have also shown despite improvements in some areas, such as rising support for integrated schools and interracial marriage, anti-black housing and employment discrimination, neighborhood and school segregation, and Black social alienation have persisted regardless of social class standing (Bobo, 2001; Bobo et al.,1997). These persistent issues indicate racism is still prevalent in society today, despite the belief and proclamations by some that it has declined. Nevertheless, these inconsistent trends have led to deeply divided interpretations of the state of American racial attitudes and race relations.

While some scholars have asserted anti-black racism is less significant than it once was, others have argued its continued centrality in politics, everyday encounters, and social outcomes (Clair & Denis, 2015). One reason anti-black racism may appear less substantial is its manifestations have changed over time. As previous researchers (Bobo et al., 1997; Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000; Forman, 2004) have maintained, instead of moving from a racist to an anti-

racist nation, America has moved from overt Jim Crow racism to more implicit forms of racism. This racism is often expressed through subtler means such as colorblind ideology, racial apathy, and laissez-faire racism, which includes negative racial stereotyping—blaming Black people for racial wealth gaps, and resistance to policy efforts aimed at eliminating racist social conditions and institutions—as opposed to past expressions such as color-coded water fountains. While these changes have made it appear like racism is ending, in contrast, it has taken on new forms (Bobo et al., 1997; Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000; Forman, 2004).

In addition, some evidence suggests racial prejudice has increased in recent years, particularly in response to the United States' demographic changes and political polarization (Fryberg et al., 2017; Oliver & Wong, 2021). According to a report by the FBI, between 2019 and 2020, racial violence against Black Americans increased by 40 percent, making them the most targeted racial group in America (Mangan, 2021). While explicit expressions of racism may be less common than in the past, implicit biases and microaggressions remain contributions to systemic racism and inequality. With racial discrimination, prejudice, and anti-black stereotypes persisting, scholars must acknowledge and investigate their impact on college perceptions, enrollment, and social and educational outcomes like college decisions—several understudied areas of higher education. Furthermore, because perceptions are not innate, it is valuable to understand their origins.

The Process of Socialization

Broadly defined, socialization is the process by which a person, born with enormous behavioral potentialities, is guided to act in a way that is considered appropriate for them by the standards of the group (Child, 1954). The socialization process is twofold. From the group's perspective, it involves new members learning the organization's values, norms, knowledge,

beliefs, interpersonal skills, and other duties to advance group objectives. From the individual's perspective, it involves the new member learning how to socially interact with others. At the very least, socialization requires consistent and predictable behavior from participants, which can either be established at the outset of acculturation or they can evolve gradually over time. While biological changes and distinct individual experiences can also affect personality and behavior, socialization primarily involves gaining knowledge pertinent to social interaction and/or role-playing, rather than changes in genetic or neurological makeup (Mortimer & Simmons, 1978).

Socialization is driven by socialization agents, which can include schools, parents, peers, communities, and mass media (Moschis & Moore, 1979). These agents can be individuals, groups, or institutions and they are responsible for teaching an individual the norms, values, knowledge, beliefs, interpersonal skills, and duties of the group. Parents, for example, play an essential role in the socialization process. They are among the primary socialization agents and teach children how to behave through what is commonly referred to as child-rearing practices (Grusec et al., 1988). Likewise, peers are also a critical source of influence, especially for adolescents (Campbell, 1969), and research suggests their function often extends beyond friendship. This is particularly true during adolescence when individuals begin to seek independence from their parents (Coleman, 1961). In addition, research indicates peers influence adolescents' feelings, self-perceptions, and behaviors (Bukowski et al., 2015). Therefore, the opinions of peers and parents are essential in forming individuals' beliefs, behaviors, values, and choices. These findings suggest peers and parents can be valuable in influencing how individuals perceive, evaluate, and choose colleges.

In addition to parents and peers influencing individuals, merely being frequently exposed to an experience or stimulus can result in greater positive affect for an object (Zajonc, 1968). For

instance, as youth engage with mass media, they are exposed to an array of advertisements that may result in positive inclinations toward brands (Moschis & Moore, 1979). Moreover, cognitive development can also play a role in decision-making. As individuals mature, they develop knowledge and abilities that enable them to evaluate products and develop brand preferences while using a range of knowledge sources (Moschis, 1978; Ward et al., 1977; Guest, 1944). This is significant because repeated exposure to specific colleges can result in people developing positive attitudes toward them, as exposure aids in the socialization process. Peers, parents, and media can play a significant role in providing exposure to colleges.

Race also plays a critical role in the socialization process, and therefore, numerous studies have explored racial socialization. In previous studies, scholars have defined racial socialization as the process by which Black youth are taught how to navigate between their communities and broader society (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Jackson et al., 1988; Stevenson, 1995). However, in recent years, the definition has expanded (Hagerman, 2014). In this study, racial socialization is defined as the process of transmitting race-related verbal and non-verbal messages to individuals about group norms, values, information, beliefs, interpersonal skills, and duties. Racial socialization research is valuable for uncovering how youth understand racial dynamics, understanding how race-related messages are transmitted, and determining who communicates the messages. Some researchers have already investigated these topics and found race-related messages are disseminated in a variety of contexts, including homes, schools, the media, and religious institutions (Marin & McAdoo, 2007).

Additionally, several studies indicate Black and white families socialize their children differently. Based on previous research, racial socialization occurs less often in white families compared to families of color (Hughes et al., 2006). In addition, white individuals are less likely

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to see themselves in relation to race compared to people of color (Herman, 2004; Lewis, 2004). Furthermore, while some white parents may not consider race a critical topic to discuss with their children (Katz, 2003), others may see it as significant but choose not to initiate discussions about it (Vittrup, 2018). On the contrary, instead of shying away from race conversations, Black parents take a lead role and raise their kids to understand: Black culture; how to get along with Black people; how to get along with other racial groups; and how to handle being a member of a marginalized group in society (Boykin & Toms, 1985).

While white families frequently utilize colorblind and race-neutral approaches to minimize race and the white identity in their children's socialization (Freeman et al., 2022), Black families often do the opposite (Lesane-Brown, 2006). Research on socialization and racial socialization is crucial because the verbal and non-verbal messages socialization agents send during socialization can contribute to the perpetuation of oppression against people of color (Freeman et al., 2022). This research can also aid scholars in gaining a deeper understanding of systems of oppression, privilege, and allyship, as well as how being Black shapes the experiences of Black students and institutions.

HBCUs in the Media

Finally, it is important to consider how HBCUs are portrayed in the media because media has the potential to influence attitudes, judgments, behavioral patterns, and emotional characteristics, resulting in long-lasting personality changes among those it reaches (Prot et al., 2015). Additionally, media powerfully impacts public perceptions and worldviews (Muzzatti & Rigato, 2007). Therefore, this review includes an examination of the literature on the media's portrayals of HBCUs. The findings suggest HBCUs are often portrayed negatively in the media,

which can further exacerbate the negative issues many HBCUs already face (Gasman &

Bowman, 2011).

For example, research has shown there is very little representation of HBCUs in the

media. When they have been included, most portrayals are inaccurate or problematic. For

instance, Parrott-Sheffer (2008) argued there have only been three noteworthy portrayals of

HBCUs on television: *The Cosby Show, A Different World*, and the highly provocative series

College Hill (this is not inclusive of movies), and while some portrayals have been positive, such

as *The Cosby Show*, and others have been negative, such as *College Hill*, they have either

stereotyped, limited, or distorted the purported purpose of HBCUs. In addition, Gasman and

Bowman's (2011) investigation of media coverage of HBCUs demonstrated HBCUs have

experienced a pattern of unjust news coverage and intense scrutiny. They found that news

accounts directly painted negative situations at HBCUs as the norm, and implied negative

situations at HBCUs were unique to HBCUs and uncommon at PWIs by not covering or

acknowledging similar situations at PWIs. In addition, they found reports often dismissed or

suggested HBCUs "never measure up" or are "lost cause[s]" by continuously highlighting their

failures without acknowledging their successes. Finally, Gasman, in her review of 300 national

articles over a two-year period, found HBCUs were rarely mentioned in publications about

mainstream higher education (Gasman & Bowman, 2011).

This unequal representation is not only problematic because it persistently leaves HBCUs

out of the conversation or portrays them in an unfavorable light, but also because it fails to fully

consider essential elements important to HBCU performance. For example, compared to PWIs,

HBCUs underperform on graduation rates, first-year retention rates, selectivity, and graduation

salaries (Hardy et al., 2019; Jones, 2013). Taken out of context, this underperformance

contributes to unfavorable perceptions of HBCUs (Gasman, 2013; Hardy et al., 2019). However, as Hardy et al. (2019) point out, these measures do not acknowledge incoming student characteristics like low socioeconomic status (SES) or pre-college factors such as student academic preparedness on their entrance to college. When Hardy et al. (2019) controlled for SES, pre-college factors, and the unique challenges of low-income students (HBCUs' primary population) they found HBCUs demonstrated comparable or more favorable outcomes than PWIs. In addition, because long-established measures do not consider HBCU missions or their decades of prejudicial underfunding (Jones, 2013), their evaluations of HBCUs are often unfair and inaccurate. Much research fails to consider these factors, the influence of media on perceptions, or the educational and social consequences of these perceptions. However, there are exceptions, and I have found four studies that do consider these factors, which I discuss in the next section.

The Significance of HBCU and PWI Perceptions

While research on college perceptions is insufficient, four core studies—two dissertations, one academia.edu paper, and one journal article—consider how perceptions affect student decisions: Allen et al. (n.d.), Patterson (2009), Scott (2014), and Clayton et al. (2023). Allen et al. (n.d.) studied how racial bias influences college enrollment by looking at Latinx parent perceptions of HBCUs and their impacts on student decisions. Taking a different route, Patterson (2009) investigated Black high school students' perceptions of HBCUs and PWIs and school and popular culture's influence on those perceptions. Patterson's qualitative case study of 16 Black high school students attending secondary schools in North Carolina (a state with HBCUs and PWIs) found family and media significantly contributed to their perceptions of HBCUs and PWIs. Patterson showed students' families perceived HBCUs to be positive, and

Black youth saw HBCUs as supportive, safe havens and a place for entertainment and Black history. Contrarily, they saw PWIs as uncomfortable, inaccessible, and academically demanding. They also thought PWIs put a heavy emphasis on sports. In both studies, the researchers found perceptions mattered.

Scott (2014) studied 13 college-bound Black high school students' opinions about attending an HBCU and found although Black youth were aware of the intellectual, cultural, and social benefits of attending an HBCU, many believed other considerations, such as cost and academic standing, were more important when choosing a college. Finally, Clayton et al. (2023) examined how 24 Black students who applied to both HBCUs and PWIs chose to attend one college over the others. They found their participants used cost, campus climate, and location to make their final decisions. Like Patterson (2009) and Allen et al. (n.d.), Scott (2014) and Clayton et al. (2023) found perceptions were significant.

In addition to the overall findings on student perceptions, Patterson (2009) and Allen et al. (n.d.) found stereotypes played a role in student perceptions, as many students' and parents' beliefs about colleges were based on preconceived notions instead of actual experiences. However, Patterson did note most of the participants in her study were familiar with the nearby HBCU. So, familiarity could have played a role in students' perceptions of comfort. Finally, Patterson acknowledged, while some participants were aware of stereotypes others had about HBCUs, students were not often aware of the stereotypes they themselves had about the different institutions. Still, even with these perceptions, six of the 16 students said they would be open to a PWI or an HBCU, two said they wanted to attend an HBCU, and two said they wanted to attend a PWI. These findings are interesting considering the participants' perceptions of PWIs as uncomfortable and unsupportive, which can be perceived as negative. Since community colleges

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were included and were often PWIs, this could have played a role in this finding. All in all, both studies found that, like perceptions, the race associated with the institutions mattered.

While some of the limited numbers of studies on perceptions, like Allen et al. (n.d.), Patterson (2009), Scott (2014), and Clayton et al. (2023), have considered the role of parents and media, studies that examine the wide-ranging impact of systemic racism and socialization on student perceptions are noticeably lacking. So, previous research had some gaps. Patterson's study touched on negative media portrayals of HBCUs, parental input, and stereotypes, but did not assess the impacts of social institutions on these factors. In addition, it did not explore if other factors, such as systemic racism influencing counselor inputs or the availability of college information, impact perceptions or college decisions. Additionally, because Patterson (2009) and Scott (2014) examined the perceptions of high school students who had not yet enrolled in college, their studies could not explore whether perceptions truly influenced college decisions.

Finally, although Scott (2014) asked participants about race and many said it was not an issue, the study did not consider racism, and even its author argued beliefs about a post-racial society may have influenced participants' perceptions. Therefore, this project addresses these gaps by considering systemic racism and the role of socialization (social pressure) in influencing perceptions of HBCUs. Moreover, it not only identified student perceptions, but also investigated their origins by employing The Cycle of Socialization and CRT as frameworks.

Furthermore, in addition to utilizing The Cycle of Socialization and CRT, this study also proposes a novel model of perception formation that could be useful in understanding how socialization and systemic racism influence perceptions, individual choices, such as college decision-making, and institutional inequality. Allen et al. (n.d.), Patterson (2009), Scott (2014), and Clayton et al. (2023) serve as a strong foundation for the research presented in this study.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study uses Bobbie Harro's Cycle of Socialization and Critical Race Theory (CRT) as frameworks to investigate the impacts of systemic racism on student perceptions. Socialization is the process of learning the behaviors and attitudes considered appropriate by society. The Cycle of Socialization helps individuals understand how they are socialized into and aid in maintaining oppressive systems. In addition, it describes how individuals are socialized through various agents, such as family, peers, education, and media, to internalize the values, beliefs, and assumptions of their society. These values and beliefs are then reinforced by societal structures and institutions, which perpetuate and maintain these oppressive systems (Harro, 1982; Harro, 2000).

The Cycle of Socialization

Researchers theorize people are socialized (or taught what is acceptable) by powerful forces in their environments, including people and institutions (Harro, 2000). "This socialization process is *pervasive* (coming from all sides and sources), *consistent* (patterned and predictable), *circular* (self-supporting), *self-perpetuating* (intra-dependent), and often *invisible* (unconscious and unnamed)" (Harro, 2000, p. 15). Researchers primarily apply The Cycle of Socialization to studies on oppression, intergroup bias, and ally building (Broido, 1997), and to research that seeks to explain socialization in institutions (Hurtado et al., 2012).

With The Cycle of Socialization, Harro theorizes socialization begins before birth when humans are born into a world where "assumptions, rules, roles, and structures of oppression are already" at play (Harro, 2000, p. 16). According to Harro, this world consists of a series of systems created based on history, customs, traditions, beliefs, biases, myths, and stereotypes. Dominant groups are considered the standard, and as a result, they receive and wield social

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power, privilege, recognition, and attention. Subordinate groups are often ignored, exploited, and victimized by bigotry, discrimination, and structural oppression. Both groups are dehumanized by being socialized into a system that neither wanted nor is even cognizant of the process. Directly following birth, people are socialized first by their home environments and later by institutions. This socialization (or set of rules and assumptions) forms people's sense of self and the world. Society then reinforces these rules and beliefs by offering benefits to those who conform and punishments to those who do not.

The purpose of The Cycle of Socialization is to help individuals recognize how they have been socialized into oppressive systems and how they can work to challenge and change them. By understanding the cycle, individuals can identify their own biases, privileges, and assumptions, and work to become more self-aware, develop empathy and understanding for others, and ultimately take action to address and dismantle oppressive systems. The Cycle of Socialization is often used in diversity and inclusion training, as well as in social justice and advocacy work. The Cycle of Socialization serves as the basis for my model of perception formation. I describe the theory in detail in a later section.

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

In addition to The Cycle of Socialization, I incorporate Critical Race Theory (CRT) in my investigation of the impacts of race and racism on perceptions. CRT is a movement, methodology, and analytic framework that was created to examine how power, privilege, oppression, and race have impacted the law and society. Legal scholars developed CRT in the late 1970s and 1980s in response to colorblind ideology that was becoming prominent in critical legal studies (Crenshaw, 2002). Later, education scholars expanded CRT to educational contexts (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). However, it has since been used in several other fields. Today,

CRT aims to examine the ways in which race and racism intersect with other forms of social stratification such as class, gender, sexuality, and ability, and how they shape social structures, institutions, and practices.

CRT is critical of the notion of colorblindness, which is the idea that racism can be overcome by ignoring race and treating everyone as equals. CRT argues this approach fails to acknowledge the ongoing impact of racism and systemic inequality in society. Instead, CRT asserts racism is not just an individual bias, but is deeply ingrained in social structures and institutions, perpetuating ongoing social and economic disparities. CRT aims to uncover and challenge these systems of oppression and to bring about social justice and equity (Crenshaw, 2002; Ladson-Billings et al., 1995).

For this study, I apply legal CRT tenets. While there is no list of set CRT tenets (Ladson-Billings, 1998), according to Patton, Haynes, Harris, and Ivery (2014), CRT scholars converge over two goals: (1) to illuminate how white supremacy is built and maintained, and (2) to show how race affects law. Scholars reach these goals using (counter)narratives, called counter-storytelling, as their methodology (Patton et al., 2014). In this study, I apply two tenets: Racism as Endemic and Whiteness as Property. Racism as Endemic theorizes that while a social construct, racism is common, everlasting, and so normalized it is often invisible. Whiteness as Property postulates whiteness has evolved from a racial identity to become a property right that gives privileges to white groups that are not afforded to people of color.

In this study, the concept of Racism as Endemic (Bonilla-Silva, 2014) is used for two purposes. First, it justifies my decision to investigate systemic racism and to include the impacts of race and structural factors, such as racism, in my investigation of the effects of college perception. Second, it is used to highlight the invisibility of white privilege and to explain why it

is essential for scholars to review systemic racism's impact on HBCUs, a racialized institution, and consider their outcomes. Since racism is commonplace, unlikely to end, and interwoven through all areas of life, it must be acknowledged in our investigations. I employ Whiteness as Property to analyze potential advantages whiteness may afford to PWIs over HBCUs. The concept of white property rights is applied to institutions and informs the interpretation of the findings. CRT serves not only as a tool for comprehending how oppression operates in society but also as a framework for amplifying the narratives and perspectives of marginalized groups.

The Cycle of Perception Formation

In addition to using CRT and socialization theory as frameworks, I propose a new theory, The Cycle of Perception Formation. Informed by The Cycle of Socialization, The Cycle of Perception Formation argues communities, cultures, and institutions begin socializing individuals into society at birth. Next, after the initial socialization process, individuals venture into the world, where the perceptions they developed during their early socialization process are either reinforced or contradicted; this can occur both consciously and unconsciously. After these perceptions are challenged and/or upheld, individuals begin to form their own perceptions, where they internalize or reject the information they are receiving. Following perception formation, individuals recreate the messages they accept; this results in a reproduction of or challenge to the original messages they received. These recreations can affect decisions and impact other people's perceptions as individuals become perception-pushing community members for others. As individuals continue interacting with the world, their perceptions continue to be reinforced or contradicted, creating a cycle. This cycle occurs in a world that is perpetually being influenced by systemic racism.

Since racism is endemic and enduring (Bell, 1991), it affects the socialization process and, as a result, impacts perception formation. The Cycle of Perception Formation differs from The Cycle of Socialization because it transitions from a societal level down to the individual. The Cycle of Socialization explains how institutions socialize individuals by punishing or rewarding them for behaviors. The Cycle of Perception Formation theorizes how messages are transmitted and explains what happens after the messages are received. In this way, it theorizes how individuals' perceptions are formed, internalized, and changed. I use this model to explain how societal factors like systemic racism and socialization can impact student perceptions and college decision-making, an example of a real-world consequence of perception formation. The proposed theory is displayed below in Figure 1.

Figure 1
The Cycle of Perception Formation
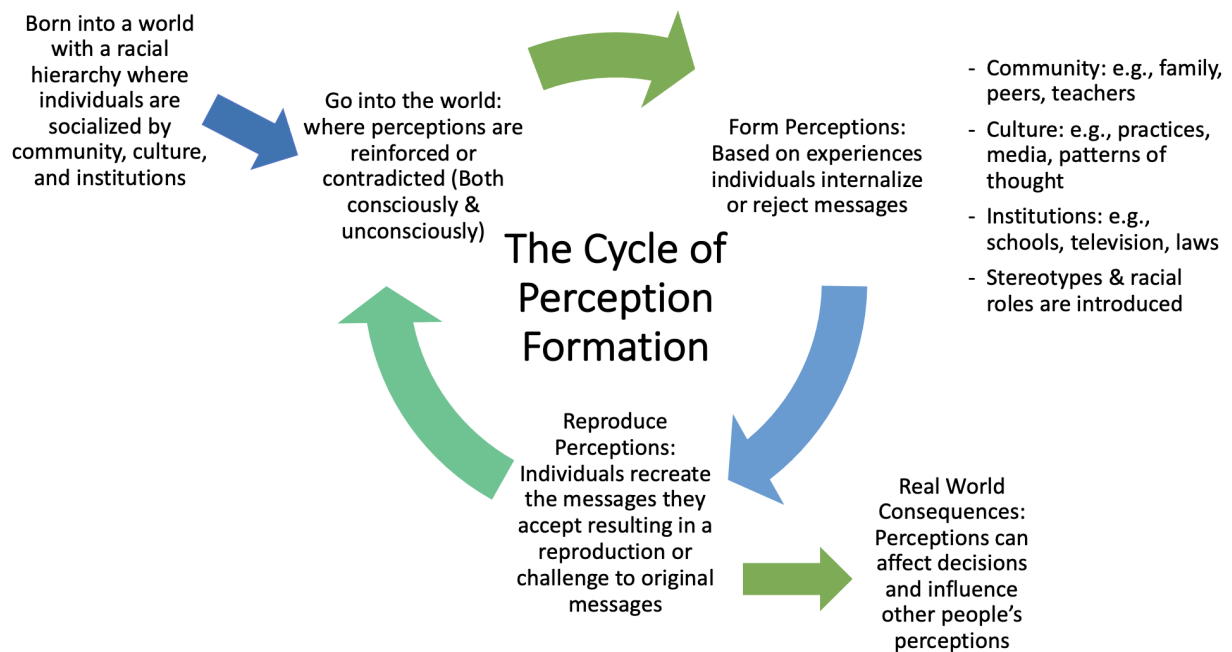
This model is appropriate for examining systemic racism and socialization's impact on college perceptions and enrollment choices because it can consider how societal factors such as

anti-blackness and socialization agents like mass media, peers, parents, and others influence individual perceptions and actions. Previous studies have used theories such as Human Capital Theory, which asserts when choosing a college, students evaluate the anticipated benefits of enrolling against the anticipated costs (such as evaluating future employment and earnings against lost wages and college expenditures). They have also employed Habitus, which considers contextual factors such as social and cultural capital, as well as student attributes such as race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, to explain enrollment decisions (Becker, 1993; Perna, 2006).

Researchers have also used other theoretical views to discuss perception development. For instance, Afrocentricity (also called Afrocentrism) criticizes the centering of Eurocentric viewpoints (Scott, 2014), while Culture is viewed as the means through which people converse and acquire life information (Patterson, 2009). Additionally, Familismo, a Latino cultural value that emphasizes the importance of deep familial ties, connectedness, getting along with others, and supporting the well-being of the immediate, extended family, and family networks, has also been used (Allen et al., n.d.). However, while these theories are valuable for understanding choice and considering ethnicity, culture, or family influence, none comprehensively consider the impact of social pressure or social factors like systemic racism's impact on perception development or its consequences. Race, racism, and social-conscious theoretical models like the one proposed in this study can alleviate this issue.

Chapter Summary

While many studies show improvements in racial attitudes, with support for racial equality increasing over time, research also reveals negative racial stereotypes about minoritized populations have persisted and, in some cases, worsened. This systemic racism has had a

significant impact on every aspect of American life, resulting in multiple implicit and explicit racial inequalities between Black and white Americans in various life areas, including K–12 and higher education. While many researchers have investigated educational inequality, studying how structural discrimination has affected education and institutional outcomes, many elements of the consequences of systemic racism remain understudied. For example, few studies have examined systemic racism or socialization's influence on student beliefs, HBCU outcomes, or race-neutral appearing notions like college enrollment or students' college decision-making processes. These gaps are crucial to consider because research has found race and racism have had impacts in the past. Studies by multiple scholars have found race affects the factors students consider when applying to college and the colleges their students attend (Astin & Cross, 1981; Freeman, 1999a; McDonough et al., 1995). Patterson (2009) found stereotypes and assumptions have influenced how students perceive colleges and universities. In addition, a study by Allen et al. (n.d.) found stereotypes impact how parents perceive colleges and universities. So, they are important to acknowledge.

While previous studies have considered the impact of race, few studies fully examine the effects of systemic racism or socialization's effect on how schools are perceived or their influences on real-world consequences. While Patterson (2009), Allen et al. (n.d.), Scott (2014), and Clayton et al. (2023) investigated student perceptions, they did not look at the effect of social institutions or the effects of systemic racism on what and how perceptions are formed. This research aspires to fill these gaps using The Cycle of Socialization, CRT, and The Cycle of Perception Formation. Together, The Cycle of Socialization, CRT tenets (Racism as Endemic and Whiteness as Property), and The Cycle of Perception Formation provide the lens necessary

to explain how systemic racism, socialization, and external influences intersect to impact

perceptions.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODS

This chapter provides an overview of the methods used to answer the research questions. It begins with a discussion of the rationale for using mixed-multimethods and continues with a description of the study's methodological approach, instruments, participant selection process, data collection procedure, and data analysis method. Following a discussion of the analysis process, this section details the limitations of the research methods. Finally, it concludes with a positionality statement that describes how my identities, beliefs, and experiences impact my research design, decisions, and study interpretations.

Purpose and Use of Qualitative Methods in Research

Qualitative researchers generally rely on multiple open-ended data sources that allow participants to freely express themselves without being restricted by specified scales or instruments. They gather data by evaluating behaviors, conducting interviews, and analyzing documents. While researchers can employ protocols, which are tools used to capture data, the researchers themselves acquire and analyze the data. They do not frequently depend on or utilize surveys or tools created by other researchers, and after data is collected, they review it, interpret it, and organize it into codes and themes that span all the data sources (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Unlike quantitative research, whose purpose is to predict future occurrences, qualitative research seeks to comprehend how individuals make sense of their lives and evaluate their experiences. It also aims to explain the process of meaning-making rather than detail an outcome or product (Merriam, 2009). Thus, qualitative research is a process that is inductive (observations, data, or trends are used to make broad conclusions) rather than deductive (conclusions or inferences are proven to be true by observations, trends, or data). Overall, it aims

to uncover new knowledge about the world via the experiences and perspectives of the research participants. This project uses aspects of both qualitative and quantitative research methods.

Mixed-Multimethods

To give a comprehensive picture of the issues detailed in this research, this study employed a mixed-methods strategy that included semi-structured in-depth interviews, a bio-demographic questionnaire, and activities that led to document review. A mixed-methods research process consists of researchers using both qualitative and quantitative data in a single research study (Johnson et al., 2007). In this case, I gathered quantitative data through the bio-demographic questionnaires to inform the instruments used to collect the qualitative data. Additionally, the responses in the interviews corroborated each other and allowed participants to elaborate and clarify their answers to the questionnaire. While this study used mixed methods, the methods I used to answer the research questions were qualitative in nature.

Qualitative methods were most appropriate for answering the research questions because they focused on examining student perceptions and asking not only what students believed but how and why they came to believe it. These types of research questions required open-ended interview questions which were only truly possible with qualitative research methods. Additionally, as a researcher, I focus on encouraging social justice and challenging oppressive systems by emphasizing the voices of traditionally marginalized populations. This is not often possible with quantitative research methods, which can obscure marginalized voices and homogenize similar populations, creating the myth that group experiences are monolithic. Finally, the choice to use qualitative methods is supported by CRT, one of the frameworks used in this study. CRT highlights the benefit and significance of using experiential knowledge and amplifying participants' voices in research (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Within the qualitative methods, I used various research approaches, also called a multimethod research design. Multimethod research occurs when numerous quantitative or qualitative methodologies are synthesized in the same study. Multimethod research differs from mixed-methods research because it refers to multiple qualitative methods or multiple quantitative methods in one study, whereas mixed-methods designs refer to both qualitative and quantitative methods within one study (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). This project uses a quantitative method (a bio-demographic questionnaire) and multiple qualitative methods (semi-structured interviews and activity/document analysis), making it a mixed-multimethod research project.

I used a mixed-multimethod approach because it helped me triangulate the findings, establish validity, and collect demographic data to provide context for the study and build the participant profiles. Furthermore, using multiple methods was particularly significant because qualitative research requires qualitative scholars to be conscious of how their methodologies or biases may affect the way they gather and analyze their data (Merriam, 2009). Utilizing multiple sources and methods decreased the likelihood of researcher bias and strengthened the validity of the findings presented in this study. Additionally, drawing from both qualitative and quantitative sources addresses some of the limitations of both qualitative and quantitative research.

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis for this study were Black students who attended four-year non-profit colleges in the United States. The goal of this study was to investigate how Black students perceived Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) compared to predominantly white institutions (PWIs) and to determine how social pressure and racism influenced those perceptions. The study also sought to determine where these perceptions originated. Given the

study's purpose and goals, a purely quantitative approach would not have been appropriate for answering the research questions.

Instruments

The research design for this study consisted of three instruments: a bio-demographic questionnaire, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and activities that led to document review.

Bio-demographic Questionnaire

The bio-demographic questionnaire was administered first and consisted of 36 questions (see Appendix D: Biodemographic Questionnaire). The questionnaire was distributed via Qualtrics, an online survey platform that supports researchers in creating, distributing, and analyzing survey data. The questionnaire concentrated on five areas: 1) participant background information (e.g., age, race, geographic location, high school GPA); 2) family information (e.g., family income growing up, parent and sibling educational levels); 3) college information (e.g., colleges that students applied to and attended); 4) early college influences (e.g., where they heard about college and who they heard about college from); and 5) participants' general knowledge about HBCUs and PWIs.

The bio-demographic questionnaire was beneficial for recruiting eligible participants, gathering crucial information about participants' backgrounds, providing context for and developing interview and activity debrief questions, and screening for eligible interview participants. To be considered eligible for interviews, participants' survey responses had to meet the following criteria: they had to have attended or graduated from a 4-year college or university, identify as Black (either partially or fully), be 18 years or older, and express interest in participating in a paid interview.

The questionnaire was distributed in May of 2022, and 114 students participated, 60 of those students (those who identified as Black) were included in the final sample. The bio-demographic questionnaire was not meant to be generalized to a broader population, but rather to paint a picture of and provide context for the population that participated in the study.

In-depth Semi-structured Interviews

The in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted following the questionnaire and were divided into three parts. The first part was the initial activity, which asked participants to rank a list of 20 colleges from best to worst, with one being the best and 20 being the worst, in whichever way they interpreted it. The list included the top 10 predominantly white institutions and the top 10 historically black colleges and universities according to the 2022 U.S. News rankings (see Appendix B: Interview Protocol). After ranking the colleges, the students participated in a debrief where they were asked questions about their decisions to rank in the order they chose and the influences and reasonings behind their choices. The second part of the interview comprised participants being asked questions about their personal experiences of considering and applying to college. This section included 12 questions that focused on students' backgrounds and college thought processes but also allowed space for participants to lead the interview in the directions they saw fit. Interviews were semi-structured, so follow-up questions were often incorporated to get participants to elaborate and expand on their thoughts.

Finally, the third part of the interview was another activity. However, this activity asked participants to write down all the things, both positive and negative, that they had heard about both HBCUs and PWIs. Like the first activity, the second activity was followed by a debrief session where participants were asked to talk about what they wrote, where they heard the messages, and if they believed them. Interviews were one-on-one and ranged from 50 to 90

minutes. All were conducted online in a private area via Zoom, a software that allows individuals to create and join meetings over video. Interviews were conducted via Zoom due to the geographic diversity of participants and because interviews took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, which had been ongoing for two years at the time of the interviews.

The virtual nature of the interview ended up being advantageous because it enabled participation from people who otherwise would not have been available, and it gave participants greater control over their environments during the interviews (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014). Like the interviews, the activities were administered remotely via Google Docs, which allowed participants to fill out the related documents online. At the conclusion of the interviews, I screenshotted all the documents for further analysis. Interviews played a valuable role in clarifying and elaborating on bio-demographic questionnaire data.

Activities & Document Review

The activities carried out during the interview resulted in two documents from each participant: one list of college rankings and one list of HBCU and PWI perceptions, for a total of 40 documents. The college rankings documents that participants created were valuable for showcasing students' beliefs about different colleges and their beliefs about how colleges compared to each other. The HBCU and PWI perceptions lists were beneficial for showing what messages society has conveyed to the participants about HBCUs and PWIs (see Appendix 3 and Appendix 4).

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Data Collection Procedures

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Data collection for this study began in May 2022 and was completed by September of the same year. Since this study focused on Black students, purposeful sampling and snowball sampling were used to recruit participants. To ensure enough Black participants and participants

who attended HBCUs committed to the study, I purposefully sent questionnaires to admissions representatives at HBCUs, along with representatives at PWIs. The participants also employed a method called snowball sampling, where they recommended and forwarded the questionnaires to eligible friends and acquaintances. Those who attended HBCUs were more likely to know others who attended HBCUs. Similarly, PWI attendees often had a larger network of friends who also attended PWIs. In addition to recruiting participants through representatives and interviewees, new participants were also recruited through my networks; I then asked them to send flyers and blurbs out to their networks. In addition, advertisements were posted in virtual spaces including GroupMe, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, and email listservs. Flyers included links to Qualtrics questionnaires and provided information about who was eligible to participate, the study's purpose, the interview length, and compensation (see Appendix F: Recruitment Flyer).

After completing the questionnaire, the participants who were interested and eligible to interview were contacted via email. Emails included a request to interview and a link to schedule interviews via Calendy, a software that allows individuals to easily schedule meetings based on the host's availability. The respondents who did not respond to the initial interview request email were contacted via email a second time before I moved on to other candidates. Those who scheduled meetings received a confirmation email with Zoom meeting information.

Of the 114 people who filled out the questionnaire, 53 percent of them (n = 60) claimed to be at least partially Black; this included identities such as U.S. African American, African [from the African continent], Black Caribbean, and Black Central or South American. Twenty of those 60 potential participants were interviewed. Part of this loss was caused by the fact that many respondents took the survey but indicated in their questionnaire responses they were not interested in being interviewed. Others said they were interested but did not respond to requests

to schedule an interview. One reason for the decline in interest may have been that some students felt uncomfortable with interviewing. In addition, participant numbers were limited due to researcher time and financial constraints, as just the 20 participants resulted in a significant amount of data.

All questionnaire participants were entered into a raffle for 25 dollars cash, and all interview participants were paid 25 dollars in cash for their participation. Cash was paid out immediately after interviews via Venmo or Cashapp, two mobile applications that allow individuals to transfer money. The University of California, Los Angeles, Institutional Review Board approved all study procedures, and participants were given informed consent forms to review and agree to before engaging in research activities.

Transcription

All of this study's interviews were recorded via Zoom with the permission of the participants. After the completion of each interview, the videos were uploaded to virtual automatic transcription services—Otter or Happy Scribe—to be transcribed. To guarantee accuracy, I read over each transcription whilst listening to their audio recordings to correct mistakes and cut out false starts and filler words such as "like." During this time, I also noted laughter and recorded when participants emphasized words (which are italicized when quoted). While this process was tedious, it ensured I was well-informed about the contents of each interview. Additionally, it helped with analysis by making it easier for me to create categories and form codes as I had already begun to analyze while editing transcripts. After completion, participants' names on transcripts were immediately changed to pseudonyms. All data were kept in Dedoose, a qualitative coding software that is password protected.

Participants

The study included 20 participants, 10 who attended HBCUs and 10 who attended

PWIs—for their undergraduate education. The 20 participants were all respondents who

indicated they were interested in being considered for an interview on their questionnaire. To

participate, respondents had to identify as Black and be a student or a graduate of a four-year

non-profit college. Therefore, all interview participants self-identified as Black. In addition, all

participants had the option to select a pseudonym. The participants who did not want to select

their own pseudonym were provided one. Table 3.1 includes a summary of the participants'

demographics.

Table 3.1
Interview Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Gender	Ethnicity	Undergraduate Institution	HBCU or PWI
Alyssa	Female	Black Caribbean	Bryn Mawr College	PWI
Benjamin	Male	U.S. African American, African (From African continent)	Morehouse University	HBCU
Brielle	Female	U.S. African American	UCLA	PWI
Chuck	Male	Black Caribbean, European/European American, South Asian (ex: India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka)	Occidental College	PWI
Darren	Male	U.S. African American, Other African Ancestry, Native American	Hampton University	HBCU
Dionne	Female	U.S. African American	North Carolina A&T	HBCU
Erica	Female	U.S. African American, Korean/ Korean American, Native	North Carolina Central University	HBCU

		American		
Gene	Male	U.S. African American, Black Caribbean	Queens University of Charlotte	PWI
Jay	Male	U.S. African American, Latino or Spanish Central American	UCLA	PWI
Kalvin	Male	U.S. African American, U.S. White American	Sacramento State University	PWI
Lewis	Male	Black Caribbean	Hampton university	HBCU
Oliver	Male	Black Central or South American, European/European American, Latino or Spanish Central American (Brazilian & Italian)	Frostburg State University	PWI
Raina	Female	Black Caribbean	Howard University & USC	HBCU & PWI
Sam	Female	U.S. African American	Howard University	HBCU
Sandy	Female	U.S. African American	Smith College	PWI
Shawn	Male	U.S. African American	Claflin University	HBCU
Talia	Female	U.S. African American	University of Maryland Eastern Shore & Delaware State University	HBCUs
Tyra	Female	Black Caribbean	St. John's University	PWI
Val	Female	U.S. African American	Hofstra University	PWI
Victoria	Female	U.S. African American	Dickinson College	PWI

Participant Profiles

Of the 20 participants, nine identified as male and 11 identified as female. Most of the participants were either graduate or undergraduate students at the time of interview, with only two students being recent graduates. Below I provide a brief overview of each participant's background and experience applying to undergraduate institutions. All this information was gathered from participant interviews and questionnaire responses.

Alyssa was a graduate student who identified as Black Caribbean. She grew up in Massachusetts and, as an undergraduate, attended Bryn Mawr College, a predominantly white all-girls institution in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania. In high school, she participated in the Posse program and applied to the following colleges: Bryn Mawr College, Fordham University, and Northeastern University. She had one sibling who attended Harvard, and her mom went to Curry College.

Brielle was a third-year undergraduate student who identified as U.S. African American and African (from the African continent). She was a second-generation immigrant student and grew up in California. As an undergraduate she attended UCLA, a highly selective public, predominantly white institution in Los Angeles, California. In high school, she applied to the following schools: Spelman College, UCLA, UC Berkeley, the University of Southern California (USC), Stanford University, and a few others whose names she did not mention. Brielle was the oldest child in her family and did not have any siblings in college at the time of her interview. Her mother did not go to college, but her father attended the University of La Verne, a private, predominantly white college in California.

Chuck was a recent college graduate who identified as Black Caribbean, European/European American, and South Asian (e.g., India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka). He grew up in New Jersey and attended Occidental College, a predominantly white private liberal arts college in Los Angeles, California. In high school, he participated in a college prep program at Princeton University. He applied to the following colleges: Occidental, Rutgers, and Rice, and a few others he could not remember the names of. He had a sibling who went to Gettysburg College, a private liberal arts college in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, but his parents did not attend any four-year colleges.

Kalvin was a graduate student who identified as U.S. African American, other African ancestry, and Native American. He grew up in California and spent his undergraduate years at California State University, Sacramento, a predominantly white college in California. He attended community college for two years before transferring to Sacramento State. Because he had a child and was a single father, he only applied to Sacramento State so he could remain close to his support system. He did not have any siblings or parents who went to four-year colleges.

Oliver was a graduate student. He identified as U.S. African American and grew up in Maryland. As an undergraduate student, he attended Frostburg State University, a public, predominantly white college in Frostburg, Maryland. In high school, he applied to two colleges, Frostburg State and Towson State. He did not have any siblings or parents who went to four-year colleges. However, his football coach, who was also his high school teacher, mentor, and influential in pushing him to attend college, went to Manchester College, a private predominantly white liberal arts university located in North Manchester, Indiana.

Raina was a graduate student who identified as U.S. African American, Korean, or Korean American, and Native American. She grew up in California and was a part of her high school's International Baccalaureate (IB) program. IB is a rigorous academic program that is offered to some high school students. As an undergraduate, she attended Howard University, a private, predominantly Black college in Washington, D.C., for two years before transferring to the University of Southern California (USC), a private, predominantly white university in California. In high school, Raina applied to the following schools: Howard, Spelman, Stanford, Yale, Columbia, Barnard, and American University. She had two siblings who attended college: a sister who went to Howard and a brother who attended Morehouse College, two historically Black colleges and universities (Howard in Washington, D.C., and Morehouse in Georgia). Both of her parents went to California State University, Long Beach.

Sam was a fourth-year undergraduate student. She identified as U.S. African American and Black Caribbean. She grew up in Antigua and attended Howard University for her undergraduate education. In high school, she applied to the University at Buffalo, Howard University, Princeton University, and New York University (NYU). She had a sibling who went to Brock University, a public, predominantly white university in Ontario, Canada; her parents did not attend college.

Sandy was a graduate student. She identified as U.S. African American and U.S. and White American. She grew up in New York. In high school, she applied to Brown University, Vassar College, Boston College, Boston University, Cornell University, Brown University, Binghamton, Smith College, and Hofstra University. As an undergraduate, she attended Smith College, a private, predominantly white liberal women's college in Northampton, Massachusetts. She did

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not have any siblings who went to college, but her mother attended Hofstra University, a private, predominantly white university in Hempstead, New York.

Tyra was a recent graduate. She identified as Black Caribbean and grew up in Jamaica. She graduated from high school in Jamaica, which is completed in the 11th grade. After she graduated and moved to the U.S., Tyra completed the 12th grade. Because of this, she did not begin to think about college until much later than most U.S. students. Her late start and her unfamiliarity with the U.S. system rushed her college application process and the strict timelines eliminated some of the options she could have applied to. In high school, she applied to several colleges: Purdue, Pennsylvania State, Indiana University, St. John's University, and Molloy College. As an undergraduate, she attended St. John's University, a private, predominantly white college in Queens, New York.

Val was a graduate student. She identified as Black Central or South American, European/European American, and Latino or Spanish Central American (Brazilian & Italian). She grew up in Italy and applied to American colleges and universities as an international student. While she was in high school, she applied to Montclair University, Sarah Lawrence College, Hunter College, Marymount Manhattan College, and Hofstra University. She did not have any siblings who went to college, but her father attended university in Italy.

Victoria was a graduate student. She identified herself as Black Caribbean, was born in Jamaica, moved to the U.S. when she was seven years old, and grew up in New Jersey. When Victoria was in high school, she applied to Spelman, Howard, University of Richmond, Dickinson

College, Lafayette University, University of Maryland Eastern Shore, and College of Charleston. She thought there were a few more, but those are the colleges she remembers applying to. She spent her undergraduate years at Dickson College, a private liberal arts college in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Her older sibling went to Trinity College and then transferred to Rutgers University-Newark. Her mom did not graduate from college but did briefly study at Mico University College, a teacher's college in Jamaica.

Talia was a graduate student. She identified as U.S. African American and grew up in New Jersey. In high school she applied to the College of New Jersey, the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Pittsburgh, the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, UC Davis, and Rutgers University. As an undergraduate student, she attended the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, a public, historically black, land-grant, research university in Princess Anne, Maryland, before transferring to Delaware State University, a public, historically black, land-grant, research university in Dover, Delaware. Her dad, who worked in higher education at both of her undergraduate institutions was very influential in encouraging her to attend college. He earned his doctorate from a predominantly white institution.

Lewis was a fourth-year student who identified as U.S. African American. He grew up in Arizona and applied to multiple colleges as a high school senior, including Hampton University, Xavier University, Clark Atlanta University, Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU), Loyola University in New Orleans, Louisiana State University (LSU), Tulane University, and California State University, Monterey Bay. He had two siblings who went to Northern Arizona University and Idaho State University, both predominantly white public

institutions. His parents both attended college, one at Arizona State University, a predominantly white, public college in Arizona, and the other at Hampton University, a historically Black private university in Hampton, Virginia. For his undergraduate degree, Lewis followed in one of his parents' footsteps and attended Hampton University.

Darren was an undergraduate in his senior year at the time of his interview. He identified as U.S. African American and grew up in Georgia. In high school he applied to Tennessee State, Florida A&M (FAMU), Morehouse University, Howard University, Hampton University, Harvard, and Norfolk State. He did not have any siblings who went to college, but his mother attended Clayton State University, a public, predominantly white university in Morrow, Georgia. Additionally, a heavily influential band director and mentor involved in his life attended Tennessee State University, a public historically Black land-grant university in Nashville, Tennessee.

Benjamin was a graduate student. He identified as U.S. African American and grew up in Maryland. When he was in high school, he was involved in Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), a program that provides academic support within school settings for students in grades seven through twelve. He applied to the following colleges: the University of Maryland at College Park, Morehouse University, the University of Delaware, Ithaca College, the University of Miami, and Cornell University. His undergraduate institution was Morehouse University. He did not have any siblings, and his parents did not attend college.

Erica was a fourth-year undergraduate student. She identified herself as U.S. African American and grew up in North Carolina. In high school, she applied to three schools: Fayetteville State University, North Carolina A & T, North Carolina Central University, and Winston-Salem University. She attended North Carolina Central University. Her dad attended the University of North Carolina at Pembroke (UNCP), a public university that was originally founded to educate Native Americans, and both her mom and her sibling attended North Carolina Central University, a public, historically Black university in Durham, North Carolina.

Dionne was a graduate student who identified as U.S. African American and grew up in Massachusetts. She had been a long-time participant in the Girls, Inc. program, a non-profit group that advocates for and directly supports girls to be "Strong, Smart, and Bold". The organization focuses on providing girls with the abilities to overcome economic, gender, and social obstacles and to develop into self-sufficient individuals. In addition, she participated in a 10-week summer program where she had the opportunity to live on Boston University's campus for two summers (right before her junior and senior years). In high school, she applied to several colleges, including North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University (North Carolina A & T), Boston University, Tufts University, Harvard University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), FAMU, and three more schools she could not remember. She chose to attend North Carolina A & T, a historically black public land-grant research university in Greensboro, North Carolina. She did not have any siblings who went to college, and both of her parents attended Morgan State University, a public, historically black, research university in Baltimore, Maryland.

Shawn was a graduate student who identified as U.S. African American. He grew up in Georgia and applied to the following institutions: Claflin University, South Carolina State University, and Morehouse College. Of those schools, he chose to attend Claflin University, a private, historically Black university in Orangeburg, South Carolina. Shawn's parents did not go to college, but he had a brother who attended Allen University, a private, historically Black university in Columbia, South Carolina.

Gene was a graduate student who identified himself as U.S. African American and Black Caribbean. He grew up in New York. In high school, he applied to approximately 30 colleges; the colleges he remembered included Barton College, Queens University of Charlotte, City University of New York, and New York University. Gene decided to attend Queens University of Charlotte, a private, predominantly white university in Charlotte, North Carolina. He did not have any siblings, and his mom attended Cornell University, a private, predominantly white Ivy League college in Ithaca, New York.

Jay was a graduate student. He identified as U.S. African American and Latino or Spanish Central American. He grew up in California and applied to many California colleges and universities, including the University of California, Riverside, UC Berkeley, University of California, Irvine, UCLA, the University of San Francisco (USF), Stanford, the University of Southern California (USC), and Pomona College. He had siblings who attended the University of California—Santa Barbara, San Francisco State University, and Johns Hopkins, and his father attended San Diego State University but did not finish. His undergraduate institution was UCLA.

Data Analysis

Bio-demographic Questionnaire Analysis

A review of the bio-demographic questionnaire included using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and cross-tabulations to highlight significant information about the study participants and illustrate key areas for future examination in the interviews. For example, the bio-demographic questionnaire revealed some students were unaware of what PWIs were, even though they attended them, while other participants found out what HBCUs and PWIs were during later years (e.g., undergraduate studies). These findings prompted me to ask interview questions and look for codes surrounding students' exposure and timeframe for exposure to information about different colleges. Because this study focused on Black students, I paid particular attention to their questionnaire answers. None of the questionnaire data were continuous, and the majority were categorical; thus, utilizing frequency tables and cross-tabulations was the most appropriate analysis approach. The cross tabulations were conducted via Google Sheets, a web-based application that allows users to create, edit, and revise spreadsheets and share the data live online.

Interview Data Analysis

To analyze my interview data, I first browsed through all the transcripts and made notes of my initial thoughts in a researcher notebook. These initial notes led me to create categories to help develop codes. For example, I wrote category titles like "Helped inform college decisions," "Considerations when ranking colleges," and "Considerations when applying to college" to assist my code development about the factors students thought were important in their ranking of colleges or deciding on which institution to attend. Following a quick scan of each transcript, I thoroughly read each one, labeling pertinent words, phrases, sentences, and sections about the

student's perceptions (i.e., value coding), thought processes (i.e., evaluation coding), and physical processes (i.e., process coding) when they were considering and applying to colleges. I also circled phrases, sentences, and words that expressed how students said they felt during their decision phases, when they were considering and applying to college, and their decision processes, when they were ranking colleges (i.e., emotion coding) (Saldana, 2013). For graduate students, this included their actions, thought processes, and opinions about considering and applying to undergraduate and graduate schools. In many cases, codes were created using the participants' own words (i.e., In Vivo coding) (Saldana, 2013). To ensure I labeled the most relevant information, I coded excerpts that were repeated in multiple places or by multiple applicants, excerpts that surprised me, and excerpts participants made it a point to emphasize. After coding new transcripts, I returned to old transcripts to see if newly created codes could be applied to additional excerpts.

In the second cycle coding, I coded excerpts that supported or contradicted previous literature and excerpts related to my theoretical framework. Thus, I looked for codes related to race, socialization, and perceptions. The most common themes centered around the impact of other people's reactions to students' college decisions (which were sometimes influenced by racism), the exposure students had to collegiate institutions, and the significant number of outside influences that helped form students' perceptions about college. I also noticed while many participants' reactions to HBCUs were neutral, when juxtaposed with favorable responses to PWIs, students' reactions to HBCUs appeared to shift from neutral to negative.

After creating a list of codes, I read through the list, creating new codes and combining some old ones (i.e., focused Coding). Throughout this process, I dropped various codes and kept the ones that were the most relevant to this study's research questions and purpose (i.e., eclectic

Coding). I then began grouping the remaining codes together (i.e., pattern coding). Finally, I identified the code's relationships to one another (i.e., axial coding) (Saldana, 2013). Throughout the process, I documented my thoughts and reactions in memos to provide more context for the data, create an audit trail, and catalog my reactions, hunches, and coding decisions (Rudestam & Newton, 2014). In all, interview data included 310 pages of transcripts and 113 codes. I evaluated the data using Saldana's (2013) method of analysis and coded all the interview data using Dedoose. I used Dedoose to write mini notes and documented my thoughts and interpretations in online researcher memos, as Creswell & Creswell (2018) stated memos were valuable for qualitative research analysis. Notes in this study refer to brief comments left on excerpts in Dedoose, while memos refer to the longer passages of interpretations, charts, concept maps, tables, or bulleted ideas around specific topics that I created in my Google documents researcher journal. Thus, memos incorporated reflections as well as emergent themes, ideas, questions, and areas for future examination.

Activity Data Analysis

College Ranking Activity

Activities documents were examined for patterns and trends. For example, analysis of the College Ranking Activity consisted of examining which colleges participants most commonly ranked first and comparing rankings to interview responses. Since interviews included a debrief about the College Ranking Activity that addressed questions about students' rationale for ranking colleges in their specified order, analysis of ranking sheets primarily focused on whether participants' actions during the activity supported or contradicted their stated beliefs. For example, examining if a student said they did not care about name, but ranked the most well-known colleges first on the sheets (see appendix E: Rankings Charts).

Perceptions Activity

Analysis of the Perceptions Activity included comparing what students heard about institutions to what they said about institutions during their interviews. Additionally, analysis of the Perceptions Activity was used to compare students' responses and see if they heard similar things or different things. When analyzing the perceptions list, I searched for frequency in responses and noted if there were outliers or one student whose views were unlike all others. Much of this data was analyzed in the interview section. However, analysis of the lists participants created during this activity resulted in the two charts (see Appendices 2 HBCU Messages and 3 PWI Messages). These charts were valuable for highlighting the messages students heard about HBCUs and PWIs and comparing PWI perceptions to HBCU perceptions.

Validity & Trustworthiness

To guarantee validity in qualitative studies, researchers must ensure their findings and methods are indicative of their participants' life experiences (Merriam, 2009). Thus, to substantiate validity I employed three tactics: reflexivity, peer debriefing, and data triangulation. Reflexivity, also called clarification of researcher bias, is the process of critically analyzing one's own views, opinions, and assumptions to see how they affect the research process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Maxwell, 2013). In this study, I used memos and routinely journaled to assess, track, and evaluate the impact of my individual biases and experiences on development of the research questions, design of the project, and interpretation of the findings. The second strategy, peer debriefing, consists of collaborating with one or more peers who are impartial, neutral, and have no personal stake in the project (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Maxwell 2013). It entails giving a knowledgeable, objective colleague the opportunity to analyze and evaluate transcripts, research methods, and conclusions. For this project, peer debriefing included soliciting input

from peers about the findings, research methods, and study implications. Finally, I utilized data triangulation. Data triangulation refers to combining data from several sources to reach a more thorough understanding of the issue being examined (Sargeant, 2012). To triangulate the data, I drew from three sources: participants' interview data, bio-demographic questionnaire data, and the documents participants created during the activity portion of the interviews. Employing all these strategies was essential for me to uncover assumptions and be cognizant of issues in my perspectives and attitudes toward the study.

Limitations

Although this study produced multiple significant findings, it still had several limitations. First, because this study used qualitative data, the generalizability of the study might be considered a restriction (Maxwell 2013). Thus, this study relied on rich, comprehensive, and thorough descriptions so that everyone interested in transferability would have a strong framework for comparison (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Another limitation of this study was that many participants were interviewed in their junior year of college and beyond. So, many of them were several years removed from their undergraduate college choice process, leading to a perceived limitation because, of course, there are restrictions to recall.

To improve participants' recall I asked similar questions in different ways and repeated the participants' answers back to them to check if they were correct. Additionally, the perceived fallacy of participants' memories was still valuable because it provided insight for the research by showcasing what participants failed to remember. For example, not every student remembered all the schools they applied to, however, many remember how people and schools (campus representatives and tours) made them feel. They could also remember their first choices and the schools they were most excited about and interested in. Additionally, many participants

were able to recall more information when I asked them similar questions in different ways (e.g., asking who informed their decisions about college and later asking them who told them the things they "knew" or heard about college). Furthermore, evaluating participants at later stages was valuable because it allowed me to analyze if students' thoughts about college were different later in life and if their college processes changed between undergraduate and graduate school (or between high school and college for those who did not attend graduate school). Finally, many of the questions asked participants about their current perceptions of HBCUs and PWIs. So, the main component of the study was not based on recall.

Two additional limitations of this study were that: I was familiar with some participants, and given the time and resource restrictions, everything could not be investigated. In terms of the latter, for instance, I did not examine the impact of participants' ethnicity (e.g., being second-generation African immigrants), identity (e.g., their proximity to Black culture), or socioeconomic status. Furthermore, I was partially familiar with four interview participants before the study: one I met because I participated in their research study, another was in one of my educational programs, and I had seen the other two out and about in the city (city withheld to ensure anonymity). I did not ask any of these participants to participate; they all chose to volunteer on their own. This is important to note because their familiarity with me may have had an impact on participation and results. First, familiarity with me may have made those participants more likely to participate in the study. Additionally, it may have made them more likely to be forthcoming in their interviews, particularly as it concerned sensitive issues such as those related to race and racism. I noticed those who were familiar with me gave me some of the richest data, and they seemed to be the most forthcoming and the most comfortable discussing and disclosing negative racial incidents and negative racial messages about colleges.

Furthermore, some populations (California participants and women) were overrepresented in the questionnaire data. I accounted for this in the interview participant selection. First, I selected participants based on the concept of "first come, first served," which surprisingly and organically resulted in a diverse interview pool. After conducting approximately 16 interviews, there was a relative balance between men and women in the sample. Similarly, there was a comparable representation of Californian and non-Californian residents. However, it became evident that women and California residents were overrepresented in the sample. If I had continued using a first-come, first-serve approach, the interview sample would have remained skewed toward women and California residents. Therefore, to ensure a diverse range of perspectives, I decided to prioritize men over women and non-California residents over California residents after the initial 16 interviews.

Finally, the students who grew up in states with HBCUs were not equally represented among the interview participants. Specifically, among the interviewees, five were raised in states with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), while three attended high schools outside of the country, and twelve resided in states in the Northeast or on the West Coast that did not have HBCUs (seven interviewees lived in the Northeast, five on the West Coast, and five in the South). Participants who lived in states with HBCUs may have had more exposure to and different perceptions of HBCUs compared to PWIs. Further exploration of the impact of the region could be a valuable area for future research.

However, it is important to note that despite participants not living in states with institutions like Harvard, Yale, and other Ivy League colleges, almost all the participants were familiar with those institutions. In addition, despite not having familiarity with some HBCUs, most participants had heard messages about them. Additionally, all participants claimed they

knew what they were. These findings suggested that perceptions could and did transcend regions.

Additionally, interviewing participants who did not live in regions with HBCUs provided an

opportunity for me to investigate: 1) where perceptions originated if they were not influenced by

the institution themselves and 2) why some schools' reputations transcended regional boundaries

while others did not. These findings proved to be interesting and valuable. Finally, not having

HBCUs in the states students lived in allowed for some insight into the factors that influenced

them to attend an HBCU from out of state, since half of the interview participants and a large

portion of the interview participants (n = 25) did attend HBCUs. Even with these limitations, the

study provides some contributions to the educational literature on college perceptions, college

choice, and college recruitment and enrollment.

Positionality Statement

Positionality is an essential part of the research process, as a researcher's world views

(their beliefs, narratives, and assumptions about the world around them), how they approach and

respond to research tasks, and the social and political context in which the research is conducted

all influence their methods, conclusions, how they evaluate their findings (Bourke, 2014; Foote

& Bartell, 2011; Holmes, 2020; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013; Rowe, 2014), and the topic they

choose to examine (Grix, 2019; Malterud, 2001). Little to no social or educational research is or

can be value-free (Carr, 2000). Therefore, researchers must acknowledge how their values,

beliefs, and opinions shape their research design, execution, and results (Holmes, 2020). Thus, I

present my positionality here.

I am a Black American graduate student who was raised in a racially diverse but

residentially segregated town in northern California. In addition, despite going to a school with

an evenly split population of Black, Latinx, and Asian students, my AP and honors courses had

few Black or Latinx students, and I often found myself as one of two or three Black students in almost all of my classes. Growing up, I was unfamiliar with many higher education institutions and had not heard of many colleges outside of well-known schools like Harvard and Stanford until much later in life, when I began to participate in a college access program. The program I participated in exposed me to the A-G requirements, took me on college trips to local UCs and CSUs, and helped me apply to and decide on a college, but the program primarily focused on UCs and CSUs. Sometime after I got involved in the program, I became a debutante with a Black sorority, and most of the organization's leaders were graduates of HBCUs. However, although they went to HBCUs, they did not talk to me or the other debutantes much about HBCU offerings or their experiences attending them as students.

Additionally, although I was briefly exposed to HBCUs through the media via shows like A Different World, a Black sitcom that chronicled the lives of students attending a fictional HBCU, Hillman College, I really did not know or hear much about HBCUs. The biggest exposure I had to HBCUs occurred sometime in my junior year when they came to a college fair at a church in a town near mines. While I was able to apply to and get accepted at many HBCUs, I already had my heart set on one of the local UCs. After high school, I went on to attend predominantly white institutions for my bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees. Along the way, I still did not learn much about HBCUs. I did not learn about the genuine value of HBCUs until I began attending PWIs, reviewing the literature, and later examining HBCU court cases for a project I was working on with my advisor.

As I began to read and learn about critical theories and deficit thinking in education, I began to think more critically about the messages I heard or did not hear, and the ways racism may have informed them. My identities and these experiences have certainly shaped my

approach to this project. As a low-income, first-generation college student who has experienced plenty of racism and seen it play out (externally and internally) in the lives of my peers, friends, and relatives, I know firsthand how systemic racism can intentionally and unknowingly affect lives. I have no doubt these experiences have influenced my worldview, values, and understanding and interpretation of my research and the world around me. These experiences have led me to approach this subject through a critical social justice-oriented lens. Like critical race theorists, I believe race is embedded in everything. Therefore, I believe race can affect everyone, even when they are unaware. This approach recognizes people and institutions are not race-neutral, even if race is unacknowledged. These beliefs have pushed me to focus my study on acknowledging and foregrounding race and urging research to challenge and help society reevaluate how, even unwittingly, it may drive white supremacist values and narratives.

Being a Black researcher, a previous undergraduate student, and a graduate had several benefits: (1) my being Black made participants feel comfortable honestly answering questions about race and racism; (2) I was able to ask more interesting, informative, and impactful questions (due to having prior knowledge); (3) I was able to develop a detailed understanding of the students culture; (4) I did not have to grapple with culture shock; and (5) I had no trouble understanding spoken, nonverbal, and even informal communication (Holmes, 2020). While in many ways I was an insider, in some ways I was also an outsider, both as a researcher and as someone who did not attend an HBCU. For instance, in one interview, Shawn asked me if I went to an HBCU because he wanted to know if I could relate to or understand his experience. Additionally, there were some other drawbacks. For example, because some participants saw me as one of them in some ways, I had to ask them to elaborate and delve deeper on questions they likely viewed as obvious to someone who they believed may have had similar experiences. In

addition, my being Black at times made people feel embarrassed or be fearful of my judgment of their statements about or knowledge of HBCUs.

Chapter Summary

Previous studies convincingly illustrate the significance of socialization processes and college perceptions. However, little if any research connects the two or considers the impact of systemic racism. Thus, this study investigated the impact of all three. Given the research questions, this study took a primarily qualitative approach. However, to provide a more comprehensive overview and to triangulate the findings, it utilized mixed-multimethods and used one quantitative method, bio-demographic questionnaires, and two qualitative methods, document analysis, and semi-structured in-depth interviews. These methods were also beneficial because they enabled participants' voices, insights, and experiences to be highlighted and placed at the center of the findings. This chapter provided an overview of the methods used to investigate this phenomenon and answer the research questions. It also discussed the study's limitations, my positionality, and its impact on the study. For example, my positionality as a Black graduate student, my personal experience applying to college, my association with some of the participants, and my critical worldviews were critical to how I collected, analyzed, and drew conclusions from the data.

Multiple precautions were put in place to minimize limitations. The structure of the interview, the interview methods, the types of questions asked, purposeful sampling, reflexivity, peer debriefing, and data triangulation were all utilized to circumvent the study's shortcomings. Still, even with these protections, the study's conclusions are tied to the experiences, feedback, and insights of the participants. However, the results of this study still have significant

ramifications for institutions, school officials, practitioners, researchers, students, their families, and society at large.

CHAPTER FOUR: DIFFERENCES IN HBCU AND PWI EXPOSURE AND AWARENESS

This chapter presents findings from bio-demographic questionnaires of 60 participants and individual, semi-structured interviews and virtual activities of 20 participants. In addition, it presents findings from the analysis of 40 documents collected from the 20 interview participants. Variables from the questionnaire include several categorical questions addressing factors such as participants' race and ethnicity, gender, educational level, and undergraduate awareness of HBCUs and PWIs. In addition, it includes open-ended, fill-in-the-blank response sections that were used to collect information about topics, such as how participants first heard about HBCUs and PWIs and how people influenced participants' college choices. Several themes emerged from these findings. One significant finding was the notable differences in participants' exposure to and awareness of HBCUs compared to PWIs. Overall, most participants had more exposure to PWIs than they had to HBCUs. These differences transcended race, age, and geographic location. However, some students, particularly those who attended HBCUs, had more exposure to HBCUs than other participants. I discuss these findings in detail in this chapter. Before doing so, I begin this section by describing the research setting and the population that participated in this study.

Research Setting

Normally qualitative research is conducted face-to-face; however, since the interviews were conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic (between May and September of 2022), they were conducted virtually via Zoom. This method was used to prevent the potential spread of the virus. However, it was also advantageous because it allowed me to interview participants who were located in different states. Without this option, this research would not have been possible since I could not afford to travel to various locations to interview participants, and many of the

individuals who participated in the interviews lived in different states from me. One disadvantage to the interviews being conducted via Zoom was a few participants had their cameras off, so I had to rely solely on what they stated via audio. Additionally, the interviews were conducted about a year after the Howard students' housing protest over poor housing conditions and during a time when people were confined due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This protest, which was popularized on social media, was mentioned during multiple interviews. Additionally, there was an increased reliance and concentration on social media due to the pandemic, consequently the impact of negative press about the housing situation and social media more broadly could have had a more substantial effect on participant responses than they otherwise might have in different circumstances.

Population Demographics & Background Characteristics

This study examined HBCU and PWI perceptions and considered the socialization process, racism, and the influence of participants' environments on their perceptions. Therefore, it was important to note participant demographics and background characteristics to provide context for the population that participated in this study. Appendix 1 displays the participant characteristics and responses gathered specifically from Black students who participated in the virtual questionnaire. As this study solely focused on Black student perceptions, only the data from Black students were utilized.

Analysis of the survey data showed participants came from different age groups ranging from 18 to 25+ and had different educational backgrounds, socioeconomic statuses, and education levels. While socioeconomic status differed, there was equal representation between those qualified for the PELL grant and those who did not. Graduate and professional-level participants represented much of the population at 60 percent (n = 36), and participants hailed

from 18 states and three countries outside the U.S. (see Table 4). Because Graduate and

professional-level participants were overrepresented, the data was skewed to their perspectives.

Lastly, results included people from various ethnic backgrounds. A deeper dive into participants'

ethnic backgrounds is presented below in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1
Participant Breakdown by Ethnicity

Ethnicity	n	%
African (From African continent)	3	5.0%
African (From African continent), Black Caribbean	1	1.7%
African (From African continent), Other African Ancestry	1	1.7%
Black Caribbean	3	5.0%
Black Caribbean, European/European American, South Asian (ex: India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka)	1	1.7%
Black Central or South American, European/European American, Latino or Spanish Central American	1	1.7%
U.S. African American	36	60.0%
U.S. African American, African (From African continent)	2	3.3%
U.S. African American, African (From African continent), European/European American	1	1.7%
U.S. African American, Black Caribbean	4	6.7%
U.S. African American, Chicano/Mexican American	1	1.7%
U.S. African American, European/European American	1	1.7%
U.S. African American, Korean/ Korean American, Native American	1	1.7%
U.S. African American, Latino or Spanish Central American	2	3.3%
U.S. African American, Other African Ancestry, Native American	1	1.7%
U.S. African American, U.S. White American	1	1.7%
Grand Total	**60**	**100.0%**

This table provides a more detailed breakdown of the race and ethnicity of the questionnaire participants. It further disaggregates the data presented in Appendix 1 under the categories "U.S. African American," "African", "Black Caribbean", "Black (various Black ethnicities)" and "Mixed race w/ Black (Black + non-Black ethnicity)." This sample comprises the population from which interview participants were drawn. The table above and Appendix 1 reveals U.S. African Americans were the most represented group at 60 percent (n = 36), followed by participants who are mixed with non-Black ethnicities at 17 percent (n = 10), and then Black participants with various Black ethnicities at 13 percent (n = 8). In addition to U.S. African Americans, women were a sizable portion of the population—exactly 70 percent of participants (n = 42). Moreover, participants were more likely to have higher GPAs, 3.0 - 4.0. This finding is not surprising considering one of the requirements for respondents to participate was having attended or graduated from a four-year, non-profit college. Table 4.2 shows respondent participation by state.

Table 4.2
Participation by State

What state did you grow up in?	n	%	Geographic Location
Antigua	1	1.7%	Out of Country
Arizona	2	3.3%	West Coast
California	23	38.3%	West Coast
Colorado	1	1.7%	West Coast
District of Columbia	1	1.7%	Northeast
Georgia	2	3.3%	South
Illinois	1	1.7%	Mid-west
Italy	1	1.7%	Out of Country
Jamaica	1	1.7%	Out of Country
Kentucky	1	1.7%	South

Maryland	5	8.3%	South
Massachusetts	2	3.3%	Northeast
Minnesota	1	1.7%	Mid-west
Mississippi	1	1.7%	South
Missouri	1	1.7%	Mid-west
New Jersey	5	8.3%	Northeast
New York	4	6.7%	Northeast
North Carolina	4	6.7%	South
Ohio	1	1.7%	Mid-west
Tennessee	1	1.7%	South
Virginia	1	1.7%	South

This table reveals that participation varied, and study included participants from all four regions (Northeast, West, Midwest, and South). However, the majority of participants (43.3%, n = 26) hailed from the West (refer to Appendix 2), with the majority of participants coming specifically from California (38.3%). Following California, the states with the most significant representation were Maryland (8.3%), New Jersey (8.3%), and New York and North Carolina (6.7% each). California participants were overrepresented within the sample because my connections and their contacts primarily resided in California.

Because I was curious about students' pre-college educational experiences, I asked participants questions about the demographic makeup of their high school. This varied as well; however, there was near equal representation in most of the reported categories (predominantly white schools, 27 percent; predominantly Black, 30 percent; and racially diverse schools, 33 percent). Students attending schools that were predominantly an ethnicity that was neither Black nor white had the lowest representation at 10 percent. Parents' education level also had several

variances, but 57 percent (n = 34) had a bachelor's degree or higher. Finally, most participants had siblings who attended college—about 57 percent of participants (See Appendix 1).

Unequal Exposure

A review of the interview data, questionnaire data, and document data produced four significant themes. The *first theme* was that compared to PWIs, there were observable disparities in the participants' exposure to and awareness of HBCUs. Typically, more individuals had experience with PWIs, such as exposure to information about PWIs, than HBCUs. This was evident from participant interviews and bio-demographic questionnaire responses. Several interview participants mentioned they just did not have a lot of experience with HBCUs. Val, an international mixed race, Black Italian student claimed,

> Some of these schools (referring to the list of schools provided in the activity), I never heard of. So, I personally put my values in more of the programs that I know out there. And I know that, for example, I visited Spelman and I know Howard and Morehouse and I tended to have more preference [referring to her graduate application process]. Probably if I had known the existence of HBCUs when I came to America, I would have considered them. However, I didn't have that choice. I was never exposed to these kinds of institutions. So, of course, throughout the years, my ranking and my choices changed when it comes to education. (Note: this quote and the ones that follow were reduced for clarity and succinctness)

So, although Val did become familiar with HBCUs later in life, in high school she had no experience with them at all, so much so that she did not know they existed until she enrolled in college.

This inexperience with HBCUs was also true for some participants who attended HBCUs. Talia, who ended up attending two different HBCUs during her undergraduate years, said, during her interview, "I didn't hear about HBCUs really in high school." And although her father worked at the HBCUs she eventually attended she said,

> My dad, he's worked in higher education since I was a kid, so he was the one who was kind of pushing me to apply to certain schools. He didn't really push me to apply to HBCUs, though, so that was interesting. Then I ended up going to one, well two. My guidance counselor told me about all these schools I should apply to, but again, these were still schools that were close to home and PWIs.

Like Val, Talia did not have adequate exposure to HBCUs. Despite Talia having high school counselors who talked to her about college—something many students do not experience—and a father who was an HBCU employee, she still had insufficient exposure to HBCUs.

Furthermore, participants' schools' failure to expose them to HBCUs was further supported by the results from the bio-demographic questionnaires. Survey responses revealed noticeable differences between students' sources of information about the different types of institutions. While participants commonly mentioned being exposed to PWIs through school and their daily lives, they most often mentioned being exposed to HBCUs through their family members, peers, or mass and social media. Only about 12% of respondents claimed their school told them about HBCUs. In contrast, one participant responded to the question, "If you know what a PWI is, how did you hear about them?" by stating, "These were the schools most heavily advertised by my high school." Furthermore, some students did not recognize the difference between their exposure to HBCUs and PWIs until after they enrolled in college. One respondent noted, "I didn't know the acronym 'PWI' until I got to college, but looking back, the majority of

the colleges (if not all) that my guidance counselor recommended to me were PWIs." So, not only did multiple students note the lack of HBCU exposure, but they also highlighted, whether intentionally or unintentionally, that HBCUs were excluded from the conversations people had with them about college.

Interestingly, while participants knew what HBCUs were, as evidenced in Appendix 1, knowing what HBCUs were did not equate to having adequate exposure to them. All the participants claimed they knew what HBCUs were. However, despite this general awareness of HBCUs' existence, many participants still did not know or hear much about them. As Alyssa, who attended Bryn Mawr an all-woman PWI, said,

> I didn't really hear many positive things about HBCUs, not that the inverse is true, that I've heard only bad things. I just didn't hear much about them in general. I've heard their names like, everyone knows Howard, but I haven't heard much outside of that.

Here Alyssa demonstrates an important distinction: even though participants knew *of* HBCUs, they did not know much *about* HBCUs. When individuals discussing college options with students overlooked or omitted information about HBCUs, it led to the perception that HBCUs were less valuable in society, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Additionally, it suggested that even if society did not believe HBCUs were less desirable, that was the message it was broadcasting to prospective students. This was supported by Talia's responses in her interview. While talking about her experience applying to colleges in high school, Talia, who ultimately attended Delaware State University, a public, historically Black, land-grant university, said, "[In high school] I would have thought, I've never heard of these HBCUs, and because I didn't hear about [them], they're probably not as good." So, not hearing about HBCUs gave students the

impression they had less quality than other schools, making it clear that what is not said about colleges and universities is just as important as what is said about them.

Additionally, although most participants applied to both types of institutions, they were more likely to apply to and attend PWIs. About 82 percent of participants (n = 49) claimed they applied to PWIs, and 70 percent claimed they applied to HBCUs (n = 45). However, the number of participants who applied to PWIs was closer to 85 percent (n = 51) since the 3 percent who claimed they had not applied to either type of institution were attending PWIs. Additionally, Fifty-five percent of participants (n = 33) applied to both types of institutions and 58 percent (n = 35) of participants attended PWIs (refer to Tables 5 and 6).

Table 4.3
Undergraduate Institutions Participants Attended

College Name	n	School Type
Bryn Mawr College	1	PWI
Claflin University	1	HBCU
California State University, Sacramento	2	PWI
Delaware State University	1	HBCU
Dickinson College	1	PWI
Florida A&M University (FAMU)	2	HBCU
Frostburg State University	1	PWI
Hampton University	3	HBCU
Howard University	4	HBCU
Jackson State University	2	HBCU
Lehman College (CUNY)	1	PWI
Lincoln University of Pennsylvania	1	HBCU
Middle Tennessee State University	1	PWI
Morehouse College	1	HBCU
North Carolina A&T State University (NCAT)	4	HBCU
North Carolina Central University (NCCU)	2	HBCU

Occidental College	1	PWI
Pennsylvania State University	1	PWI
Queens University of Charlotte	1	PWI
Rutgers University New Brunswick	2	PWI
Smith College	1	PWI
Spelman College	2	HBCU
St. John's University	1	PWI
Tennessee State University	1	HBCU
The Ohio State University	1	PWI
University of California, Berkeley (UCB)	2	PWI
University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)	13	PWI
University of California, San Diego (UCSD)	1	PWI
University of Maryland Eastern Shore	1	HBCU
University of Miami	1	PWI
University of Southern California (USC)	3	PWI
Vanderbilt University	1	PWI
Virginia Union University	1	HBCU

This table shows the undergraduate institutions questionnaire participants said they attended. The participants mentioned 33 different institutions, 14 of which were HBCUs and 19 of which were PWIs. This table adds up to 62 total students instead of 60 because two participants transferred schools during their undergraduate education. One transferred from Howard to USC, and the other transferred from the University of Maryland, Eastern Shore to Delaware State.

Table 4.4
HBCU & PWI Applications

Did you apply to any Historically Black Colleges or Universities (HBCUs)?	***Did you apply to any Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs)?***

	No	Yes	Grand Total
No	3.3%	26.7%	30.0%
Yes	15.0%	55.0%	70.0%
Grand Total	**18.3%**	**81.7%**	**100.0%**

To determine the number of participants that applied to HBCUs and PWIs, a a cross-tabulation table was created. According to the table results, 18.3 percent of the participants (n = 11) reported that they did not apply to PWIs, while 81.7 percent (n = 49) claimed they did apply to these institutions. Again, PWI applications are closer to 85 percent (n = 51) since some participants were not aware that they were attending PWIs. This finding may be attributed to the fact that the term "PWI," which was used in this study to refer to historically white and culturally white colleges, was not defined for the participants. As a result, some participants may have indicated that they did not attend PWIs because they assumed that the term only referred to institutions with a majority white population. However, this number was low, as only 3.3% of participants reported not attending either an HBCU or a PWI.

Comparatively, 30 percent of participants (n = 18) claimed they did not apply to any HBCUs, while 70 percent of participants (n = 42) claimed they did apply to HBCUs. The application status of participants to HBCUs was easier to determine compared to PWIs because HBCUs have a clear legal definition. Therefore, there was no confusion about the accuracy of the participants' HBCU application claims. Applicants and attendees of HBCUs were well-represented. This representation may have been influenced by my targeted efforts to recruit HBCU applicants to participate in the study. These efforts included reaching out to HBCU representatives and their listservs and using snowball sampling to recruit HBCU participants. Further research is required to determine if this proportion of Black students' applying to HBCUs

is typical.

Lastly, because all the institutions in this study were either HBCUs or PWIs, no students should have stated they did not attend either an HBCU or a PWI. One hundred percent of participants claimed that they knew what PWIs and HBCUs were. However, the slight lack of awareness about PWI attendance that a few students demonstrated suggests that some participants either had an unclear definition of the term PWI or were unaware colleges and universities could be categorized as PWIs in the same way that colleges and universities can be classified as HBCUs. Again, this number was low, with only 3.3% of participants being unaware that they were attending a PWI.

However, while participants claimed they knew what HBCUs and PWIs were, it is important to note that several participants claimed they did not hear the term or understand the concept of a PWI until after they had enrolled in college. Specifically, 23% of participants (n=14) indicated that they had only heard about PWIs after enrolling in college or attending a PWI. So, although some participants knew about college, they did not recognize colleges as PWIs until they were already enrolled in them. One survey participant, in their statement about PWIs, remarked "[I] just observed [PWIs] as the default college." (Note that several participants did not specify when they learned about PWIs, only identifying who informed them. Therefore, the 23% mentioned earlier could potentially be higher.)

Low Rankings

Having less exposure to HBCUS, such as fewer interactions with and less information about them, was significant to participants because familiarity, or how well participants knew colleges, was shown to be the most influential factor influencing participants' college rankings. Several participants discussed this during their interviews. After the rankings activity, which

required participants to rank a list of 20 colleges (including the 10 top-rated HBCUs and the 10 top-rated PWIs according to U.S. News) from best to worst, all interview participants were asked their rationale for ranking colleges in the orders they chose. When asked why they ranked their last choices last, all 20 participants said they ranked schools last solely because they were unfamiliar with them or less familiar with them than the other institutions listed. When referring to his rankings list, Oliver said, "[The] bottom five I don't know much about, but the rest of them I have familiarity with either from reading about them randomly or knowing people who have attended." Similarly, when I asked Brielle why she ranked Tuskegee University last, she said,

> Honestly, I don't know much about that school, so I was just doing it very randomly. I
> don't even know where it's located, so I kind of feel bad [that] that was the one that
> ended up last, but I really wasn't familiar [with it].

Both Oliver and Brielle listed the schools most unfamiliar to them as their lowest rankings. In both cases, unfamiliarity resulted in colleges and universities being ranked lower and viewed as subordinate to the higher ranked schools.

Findings revealed participants were often less familiar with HBCUs, so they were most likely to come in last. The activity documents revealed 13 out of the 20 participants ranked HBCUs last, with nine participants ranking Claflin University as their last choice. In addition, Claflin was ranked in the bottom four schools by 13 participants, and their rationale for this was most often what Alyssa stated, "I've never heard of Claflin".

In addition, there was a clear difference between which schools were listed last (or as the worst) and which students ranked them last and why. Interestingly, of the seven participants who ranked PWIs last, five of them were current HBCU students or alums (Shawn, Dionne, Erica, Sam, and Darren), and three of them did not rank the colleges last due to unfamiliarity. Dionne,

Erica, and Darren ranked the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Chicago, and MIT (the Massachusetts Institute of Technology) last because they had not heard of them. Similarly, Kalvin ranked the University of Chicago last because he had not heard of it and ranked it based on his perceptions of safety in the city of Chicago, which he said was "just one of those cities." However, the others (Gene, Shawn, and Sam) ranked the PWIs last due to personal experience, loyalty to HBCUs, or information they had heard from other people. For example, Gene ranked Harvard last, and he said it was because,

> It is extremely hard for someone like myself, and on top of that, their history speaks for itself. And they have a direct tie to owning and selling slaves, as well as using it to help build their university.

So, he ranked Harvard last because of its racist history and the difficulties he thought he would experience as a person of color and a person with a disability, the latter being something he mentioned some schools were unwilling to accommodate. Shawn ranked HBCUs high and most PWIs low due to his loyalty to HBCUs and his perceptions about them being a better starting point for Black students. He said, "I prefer HBCUs. As a Black person, I would rank all HBCUs first." When I asked him why, he said,

> For me, I guess I found myself and who I wanted to be while at Claflin. So, when I [sit] on panels to talk to minority students, I tell them the reasons to attend an HBCU first is just for that. Specifically, to find out who you are while you are around your people. Because I think it would be a bit tougher, transitioning straight from high school to a PWI…Being around us, coaching us, [and] just having that community was very Important. And [it is] still important.

For Shawn, community was important, and he thought the best way for Black students to access and build community was to attend HBCUs, where they would find support and encouragement from people who looked like them. Shawn also believed HBCUs would be the best place for Black students to find themselves and learn about themselves and their culture before possibly moving on to a PWI as a graduate student. Finally, Sam ranked HBCUs high and PWIs low due to her loyalty to HBCUs and her perceptions of PWIs as racist spaces. When I asked her what she deliberated when ranking the colleges, she said,

> I considered the experiences that Black students have had at them. I had a cousin
>
> that went to Harvard, and he was Black, and he had a very terrible experience to the
>
> point of him having to drop out of school. So, truly, I was like, that's absolutely just going
>
> to go last for me. And I've heard similar situations at different PWIs, like those top
>
> schools.

Sam's fears about the treatment of Black students on predominantly white campuses, fueled both by her cousin's experience and the experiences of other people she encountered, made her wary of PWIs. She did not want to rank schools highly when she felt they would be detrimental to people who looked like her. After ranking schools based on whether they were safe for Black students, Sam then ranked them based on her familiarity with them or their names, choosing to put the California Institute of Technology last because she had never heard of it before. So, although unfamiliarity played a significant role in schools being ranked last, some students also ranked schools last when they perceived them to be racist as with Sam, or not community-oriented while also being racist and unaccommodating as with Shawn.

Chapter Summary

Through bio-demographic questionnaires, participant interviews, and analysis of the

participants' documents, this chapter revealed participants' exposure to and knowledge of

HBCUs was dramatically different from their exposure to and knowledge of PWIs. Both survey

participants and interview participants, including those who attended PWIs and those who

attended HBCUs, reported they had less experience with and exposure to HBCUs compared to

PWIs. For most participants, school personnel, family members, and the movies and TV shows

they had seen did not mention or feature HBCUs as often as they did PWIs. Thus, they learned a

lot less about what HBCUs had to offer compared to PWIs. While participants knew the names

of HBCUs, often that was all they knew. This unequal exposure that participants experienced

impacted how they perceived HBCUs and how they believed the world perceived HBCUs and

PWIs. For example, some participants believed HBCUs were "probably not as good" as PWIs

because they had not heard much about them.

Additionally, this chapter indicated some participants either lacked a clear understanding

of the term PWI or were unaware colleges and universities could be classified as PWIs in the

same way that schools could be classified as HBCUs, until much later in life. For instance, a

review of the survey data indicated that although 100 percent of participants said they knew what

HBCUs and PWIs were, several students did not know about PWIs until they got to college.

Moreover, some participants were still unclear on what PWIs were because they claimed to not

have applied to any despite having attended one. Finally, the sources of students' information

differed. While participants commonly mentioned that they heard about PWIs from their schools,

they most often heard about HBCUs from relatives, peers, and mass and social media. These

findings suggest: (1) students need more exposure to HBCUs, particularly they need exposure

beyond their name; (2) what is not said about colleges and universities is just as important as

what is said; and (3) the norming of whiteness has characterized PWIs as colleges while

depicting HBCUs as *Black* colleges.

CHAPTER FIVE: MAJOR INFLUENCES ON PARTICIPANT PERCEPTIONS

This chapter contains additional findings from 20 semi-structured interviews with participants and 40 documents created during the interview process. Chapter 4 discussed the first key finding: participants' exposure to and knowledge of HBCUs, compared to PWIs, differed noticeably. This chapter explains the second noteworthy finding: people, mass media, social media, and the participants' environment had substantial impacts on students' college perceptions. In addition, I discuss five areas where perceptions mattered the most for shaping how participants thought about colleges. The influences of people, mass media, social media, and the participants' environment are covered first, followed by a discussion of the five areas where perceptions are most crucial. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings and a preview of the final results chapter.

The Influence of Other People

The second significant *theme* from the data was outside influences had a substantial impact on participants. One of those influences was other people. In the interview data, participants repeatedly mentioned that other people had a significant bearing on how they perceived and developed their perceptions about colleges. Participants shared how family members, peers, mentors, church members, organization members, and school personnel all talked to them about college and reacted to their choices in ways that let them know whether a college was considered a good choice. Sometimes, other people directly stated to a participant that a school was or was not a good choice, and other times they communicated a school was or was not a good choice through their non-verbal reactions. For instance, when I asked Dionne what influenced her college choice process, she said,

> Other people's perceptions of that school. Like my physics teacher getting excited when

I said I was applying to MIT, and then people not knowing what [North Carolina] A & T

was. So, they weren't as excited when I told them I was applying to that school.

Not only did Dionne's physics teacher's reactions tell her MIT was perceived to be a good

school, but their reaction, or, in this case, their indifference, lack of excitement, and ignorance

about North Carolina A&T, sent a clear message that MIT was more valuable than A&T. Their

apathy and lack of enthusiasm showed Dionne North Carolina was not a good choice, or at least

not as good a choice as MIT. Similarly, Raina said,

There was one girl that said some really negative things. I think most of my peers

didn't really say negative things. It was just more like when I told them I was applying to

Howard or Spelman. They would just have this blank look on their face and be like, oh,

where's that? Or like a senior year everyone was talking about where they got into

college and where they were going. And there were students who said, like, Oh, I'm

going to UC San Diego, I'm going to UC Berkeley, and people were really happy for

them. They were like, Oh, my gosh, congratulations. But when I said I'm going to

Howard, they were just like, oh. Especially the Black people because they knew it was a

HBCU. And they told me not to go and they were just like, oh. Like, no one was happy

for me.

Raina's experiences, like Dionne's, show reactions of others do not have to be negative to be

detrimental; merely not being positive was enough to send negative messages about institutions

to the students. This finding is noteworthy because it demonstrates other people's perceptions

and negative messages had power. Participants were so eager to please others and avoid the

uncomfortable feeling of causing disappointment that the responses of others had the power to

cause them stress and shape their behavior. Dionne demonstrated this when I asked her if she wanted to share anything else about her college experience. She responded,

> One thing that's coming to mind is how I felt at this moment in time when I announced to my church that I accepted the offer at A&T and people were very happy. I'm sure if I had announced any school, they would have been very happy. But like having had that family sort of adds pressure, like not wanting to give them a reason to wipe the smiles off their faces.

Although Dionne's church supported whatever decision she made, she noted that fearing other people's negative reactions or indifference added another layer of pressure to the college choice process. Pleasing other people was also a significant force for several other participants, including Brielle, who wanted to please her mom by going to the school her mom chose for before her mom sadly passed away. In Raina, Dionne, and Brielle's cases, among others, other people's perceptions pushed students toward and away from schools.

In addition to negative reactions, messages, and indifference deterring students from applying to colleges, positive responses encouraged students to apply to colleges or made them feel good about their choices. For example, when I asked Darren how he knew his circle considered his school to be prestigious, he said,

> So, like talking to my auntie about [college], she was very happy to hear I was going to Hampton, and she told me all about it. How it kinda had the same effect of Harvard and Ivy League schools but within HBCUs. Same as Howard, it was like neck and neck.

His aunt's excited reaction let him know she considered Hampton a good choice; this made Derrick feel good and validated his decision to select Hampton for his undergraduate education.

In the same way that negative reactions worked to invalidate participants' choices, positive responses worked to validate them.

Finally, as with their reactions, people influenced participants through their suggestions and conversations about their own experiences. Several students mentioned their teachers, parents, mentors, counselors, peers, siblings, and community members, among others, suggested they attend or not attend specific schools based on what these other individuals heard or experienced when they themselves were in college. When people had good experiences, they encouraged their institutions, and when they had negative experiences, they discouraged their institutions and institutions they deemed similar to the ones they attended. For instance, when talking about her college choice process, Raina said,

> I think my parents influenced my decision-making process a lot because they went to a PWI. They went to Cal State Long Beach in the early 70s and didn't have great experiences. So, they really pushed my siblings and I to go to HBCUs. But I felt like none of them were really a good fit for me.

This excerpt shows Raina's parents' adverse experiences at CSU Long Beach pushed them to discourage their children from attending. Raina's parents' influence was so strong she did what they said even when she felt that it did not make sense for her situation. Later, she stated, "When I visited, it didn't really click. But I started at Howard anyway because I felt like it was the right thing to do." So, although Raina did not feel connected to her school, she still enrolled because of the pressure she felt to satisfy her parents. She later transferred to a school she felt better suited her needs.

Alumni

Among the people who had an impact, the results showed alumni had a particularly prominent influence on participants' college knowledge and selection. Multiple participants mentioned alumni—including parents, peers, friends, church members, or acquaintances—as having influenced whether participants considered or thought highly of colleges by sharing their experiences at their former institutions. Like Raina's experience with her parents, when alums shared positive experiences with participants, they wanted to attend the schools or ranked them highly. Similarly, when alums shared negative experiences, the participants did not desire to attend the schools or ranked them lowly. However, even without alums specifically telling participants not to attend specific colleges, sharing negative stories deterred participants from considering schools.

Alums also influenced participants just by being successful. Participants mentioned wanting to go to certain schools or ranking specific colleges highly because the school had notable alums like Michelle Obama and Steve Jobs and graduates who held high-profile jobs like judges, lawyers, doctors, and world leaders. Additionally, participants desired schools and ranked them highly because they had met alums whom they regarded favorably. One example is Oliver, who attended Frostburg State University, a PWI, as an undergraduate student. He spoke very highly of Cornell. When I asked him what schools he considered to be prestigious, he mentioned Cornell, and when I asked him why he thought Cornell was prestigious, he said,

> The work Cornell has done over the years just in terms of the people they churn out and they tend to do it somewhat under the radar, unless you're in that orbit, of course. But when you consider the wealthiest African American in the United States, [who] graduated from Cornell and over the last three years has given them $65 million to the

School of Chemical Engineering, that made me pay attention more to Cornell [it made

me be] like let me understand this.

Oliver had a similar positive view of Spelman because of its alumni. He said, "When I look at

women that I know attended Spelman, I'm in awe [of them]. Like, one of the few Black female

mathematicians or PhDs in mathematics [I know] attended Spelman." In both instances, Oliver

made it clear his experiences with a school's alumni had a profound impact on how he viewed

the colleges. Other participants had similar sentiments—often mentioning alums, whether they

graduated or not, as being influential in shaping their thoughts about colleges.

Close Networks

In addition, of the people who influenced participants' perceptions, the most influential

were those who were close to the participants, such as their peers, family members, mentors,

community members, church members, and high school and program personnel (e.g., AVID

staff). However, participants' network members affected them to different degrees. Relatives

such as aunts, uncles, cousins, siblings, and parents were very influential in their impact on

participants' college interests and selection. However, participants who did not have parents and

relatives who spoke to them about college relied heavily on peers, programs, older students, high

school counselors, and college representatives, among others. Interestingly, even though some

participants knew parents, siblings, relatives, teachers, and others who attended college, they

mentioned many of them did not talk to participants about college. Thus, knowing people in

college and knowing people who knew about colleges were not enough; those people also had to

talk to participants about their experiences and beliefs about college.

The Influence of Mass Media

Like people; mass media, such as TV shows, movies, college brochures, college rankings lists, the internet, and the news, exerted significant influence on how participants perceived and developed their perceptions about colleges. Several participants mentioned learning about college and thinking about college in particular ways because of what they read on the internet, saw on TV, or read in news articles and newspapers. For example, when I asked Val where she heard the negative messages she mentioned about colleges she said,

> Yeah, the local newspaper at Hofstra. The local newspapers, local media coverage, and the school paper as well. It would cover a lot of news related to microaggressions [and other] problems. A lot of non-white folks would denounce the problems. [For example] at Hofstra, there was a big issue. All the Asian Americans, queer, [and] Black and Brown Latino folks wanted to tear down this statue of Thomas Jefferson. And I think it took them two years to make their voice heard, and there was little coverage on that. But you would see the campus filled with protests and people denouncing that, but nobody would pay attention for real. So, yeah, like reading newspapers and media and of course, blogs and forums for the school.

This passage exemplifies how influential the media was in shaping Val's perceptions of college. She looked to it for information, and in doing so, it gave her some insight into what was happening at her school; that experience began to play into how she perceived PWIs. Val's experience at Hofstra was one of the main reasons why she believed that PWIs paid "poor attention to microaggressions on campus."

In addition, while some students did not consider media-produced college rankings lists, several students mentioned how U.S. News and World Report rankings lists were important for

not only how they perceived colleges, but also how they ranked them from best to worst in the

study's ranking activity. When I asked Benjamin what he considered when developing his

personal ranking list, he said,

> It was a bit of different things; one, my top preference, of course, was based on a personal
>
> bias, because that's where I attended school. So, I'm definitely identifying and
>
> acknowledging this bias. But after that, I kind of ranked it in terms of how reputable it is,
>
> and also based off the former [news media] rankings lists that I've seen. And then, you
>
> know, towards the end, I kind of listed the ones that I'm not too familiar with last.

For Benjamin, media-produced college rankings list did matter, particularly when he did not

have any experience with an institution itself. He ranked Morehouse first because he attended

and had a positive experience there. In contrast, because he did not have a personal experience to

base his other decisions on, he ranked them all based on rankings lists and his familiarity

institution's names. So, news media rankings mattered more when participants had no other

experience with institutions. Several other students also mentioned the significance of rankings.

TV Shows and Movies

Like news outlets and college rankings, movies and TV shows were particularly

influential in participants' perceptions of colleges. Movies and TV shows were significant

because they had a subliminal effect on participants long before they began the college

application process. For instance, when I asked participants about their earliest recollections of

hearing about college, several participants mentioned movies and television shows like *The Suite

Life of Zack and Cody, High School Musical, A Cinderella Story, A Different World, Legally

Blonde, Drumline*, and *Stomp the Yard*, among others. These shows were so influential that they

sometimes inspired students to desire attending specific colleges. Sam discussed this during her

interview. When I asked if she had thought about attending any college on the lists presented in the first activity, she said Princeton. When I asked her why Princeton, she replied, "My favorite movie is *A Cinderella Story.* I don't know if you've watched it, but that's literally the only reason (laughter)." In the movie, *A Cinderella Story,* the main character, Sam (also chosen as the pseudonym for this participant), wanted to attend Princeton because, while telling her a bedtime story, her father told her princes go to Princeton.

Chuck had a similar experience. When I asked him about the places, he learned about college he said,

I think the topic and idea of college are pretty pervasive in pop culture in general. Whether it be consciously or subconsciously, I picked up on what college is and what it looks like [through the media]. They have all those college movies where they have people partying. You got like *Stomp the Yard* and stuff like that. So, I think in the media, I've seen a lot of references to college. And I don't think anyone that I'm close to in my family went to college. Not my mom, dad, grandma, et cetera. So, yeah, I guess the Media.

In both instances, TV and movies had a profound impact on how students thought about college. The media inspired Sam to consider Princeton and motivated Chuck to consider college, as no one in his family had attended before him. In this way, the media ignited participants' interest in college by increasing their exposure to higher education and their exposure to institutions.

Finally, Disney Channel TV shows and original movies, which are shows and movies aimed at children, were mentioned by several different participants. This was particularly noteworthy because not only did the characters in shows have an impact, but findings revealed

the actors' personal choices were influential as well. Kalvin demonstrated this when he talked about how he knew which schools were prestigious. He claimed,

> The biggest outlet was the media. Growing up, I used to watch the Disney Channel and see all those kids from "The Suite Life of Zack and Cody." People like that, and when they talked about their backgrounds, they all said things like, "I went to Princeton and got my degree in X, Y, and Z, or I went to Harvard." And then there was this battle over which school was better and why. So, the media definitely played a huge factor [because I] listened to it on TV shows. I didn't really see any commercials, but yeah, definitely TV shows.

To Kalvin, the actors' college choices told him a lot about which schools were valuable. The colleges characters attended in shows had the same effect on Val, who said,

> The first memory I have that actually influenced me a lot was because of Disney Channel and High School Musical because I used to learn English through those TV shows. And on High School Musical 3, they were mentioning all these big names of colleges, and there was this thing about the concept of college throughout the plot. And so that was my first exposure to colleges.

Similar to how the actors who played Zack and Cody influenced Kalvin, *High School Musical* characters' college choices and dialogue about college sent messages to Val about how society regarded those colleges. Val learned the schools mentioned in High School Musical were well-known and respected institutions because of the movie's plot and the fact that the characters referenced them at all. Kalvin learned schools were highly regarded because famous child actors were proud to say they attended them.

Celebrities

Like movies and TV shows, celebrity influence was significant in and of itself because celebrities could shape perceptions with their actions. During the interview, participants used two examples to discuss this topic: Beyoncé's Coachella concert, which was filmed and streamed on Netflix as the documentary "Homecoming" and paid homage to HBCU majorette dance teams, and Deion Sanders' coaching of the football team at Jackson State, an HBCU in Jackson, Mississippi. Participants mentioned how both the concert and Sander's coaching brought attention to Black culture and HBCUs, something some participants felt had not been done much before. For example, when I asked Alyssa if she would like to share anything else about the things she had heard about HBCUs and PWIs, she said,

> I think about Beychella and Beyonce, like her whole Coachella performance. I just feel like maybe there's a little bit more consciousness about Blackness and the ways in which Blackness can be expressed and the ways in which you can connect to Blackness. Obviously, HBCUs are tied directly into that. And maybe that's why I feel like there's more of an emphasis. Or even like Master P's son and how he was getting recruited and consciously chose to go to a HBCU over the other offers, stuff like that. I feel like it's becoming more kind of publicized.

Similarly, when talking about Deion Sanders, Shawn stated,

> I'm loving what Deion Sanders is doing at Jackson State University. What he's doing is what we need. I feel like we, as HBCUs, need more support from Deion Sanders and other sports stars. The influence he has and the connections he's able to bring to the school. [Because of him], now top Black athletes are looking at HBCUs instead of saying, "Let me go play for a PWI." I think that's the great part in terms of what he's

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doing. It's giving those there an opportunity, and I'm sure other HBCUs will hopefully

follow suit if other big-name people help out.

In both cases, the participants felt celebrity attention had the power to bring more exposure to

HBCUs. Alyssa felt Beyonce's performance highlighted Black culture, which she felt was

prominent at HBCUs, and that rapper Master P's son attending an HBCU pushed HBCUs into

the spotlight. Likewise, Shawn felt Deion Sanders' presence at Jackson State enticed athletes

who would have otherwise gone to PWIs to start considering HBCUs.

The Influence of Social Media

In addition to people and mass media, social media, including platforms like Twitter,

TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, had a pronounced impact on participants as well.

For starters, a lot of the information students received about college was disseminated via social

media. In addition, because it was so easily accessible, social media had a much wider reach than

other forms of information diffusion. Thus, it provided participants with exposure to more

messages and more collegiate institutions. As a result of its ability to reach more students and

spread more messages, social media had some significant impacts.

First, social media had the power to paint schools in a positive or negative light for

participants. For example, when I asked Talia how she knew which schools were top schools, she

said,

> I guess from everyone around me, what I saw online, and just kind of the way our
>
> society lifts up people. On Twitter, for example, someone will say, "I just got into
>
> Harvard Law School," and it'll go viral. So many people will like it. But if somebody
>
> said, "I got into a lesser-known law school," people would like it, but would it go viral?
>
> So, when I was thinking about schools, I was thinking about who gets talked about the

most, especially in social circles.

Something as simple as the number of Twitter likes and the virality of one video over another told Talia which institutions were considered the best. It also taught her which institutions society valued the most.

Second, social media had the power to expose participants to colleges they otherwise may not have considered. Victoria demonstrated this finding when I asked her if there was anything else she would like to share about what she had heard about HBCUs and PWIs. Her response was,

> I feel like now, especially with social media, it's a little bit easier to be exposed to HBCUs and what you could possibly experience there, including the culture and everything, but it's also easier to see places where [HBCUs] may not be doing so well, especially with housing and funding and different things like that.

Not only did Victoria think social media was good for exposing people to HBCUs and helping them envision themselves there, but she also talked about how it could show the negative aspects of colleges and the areas in which they may be struggling. So, social media could be valuable for uplifting or seriously damaging schools' reputations and thus their consideration as a potential applicant's college option.

Lastly, social media had the ability to alter participants' perceptions. This power was illustrated by Kalvin when he talked about why he had started to consider schools like Howard University as for graduate school when he had not considered them when he was in high school. He claimed the big change came from social media, stating,

> Going on to social media on Twitter and Instagram, you see Black folks just living it up, enjoying themselves, and going to school. When I was younger, that wasn't presented. I

think Myspace was the first social media I ever had, and college wasn't even a topic of conversation there. But as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter came, I started to get a glimpse into other people's lives and see that there was culture there. The students are learning, and they're around people who look like them. And so, my perception changed. I'm like, "oh, it is possible to be around my people and get work done." Whereas when I was going to high school, all we did was laugh and chop it up in class and not get any work done. I think the culture shift and being able to gain insight into people's lives who are going to HBCUs really changed my perspective on what it meant to go to a HBCU.

Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter had a substantial impact on Kalvin because they offered him a preview of how his experience could be if he attended an HBCU, and he liked what he saw. In addition, the exposure to others' experiences challenged the misconceptions he had developed about how effectively Black students could learn when surrounded by people who looked like them and had similar life experiences. Being presented with people who had fun but were still successful opened his eyes to a perspective on the college experience he had not previously considered.

The Influence of Environment

The last major factor that influenced participants' perceptions was their environment, which included their geographic location and how their communities or closest networks thought about colleges and universities. Results revealed the region participants lived in, the communities they were a part of, and what those communities thought and said about colleges were all influential in shaping how participants thought and spoke about colleges. While some schools like Harvard and Stanford were perceived to be prestigious and well-known to most students, other schools rose or fell in prominence based on the participant's geographic location or the

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beliefs of their community. For example, although some participants had not heard of HBCUs and some ranked them low, when I asked Sam about what she had heard about HBCUs, she stated,

> HBCUs are very big in the Caribbean, so I think it was just people saying, "Oh, yes, you have to be really smart." Even now, someone told me a couple of months ago, "You have to be really smart to go to one of those schools."

In contrast, Raina, who grew up in Sacramento claimed,

> In my high school, I wasn't going to be respected as much if I didn't go to a college that had prestige. And like I said, my history teacher had told me not to go to Howard. And I felt like if I had said that it was a more prestigious college, then some of these teachers would have respected that decision or wouldn't have had negative reactions.

So, participants' environments and communities played a role in how they perceived institutions. While HBCUs were valued and respected by Sam's community in the Caribbean, they were perceived differently and mostly negatively or apathetically by Raina's community in Sacramento.

Similarly, Ivy League institutions and schools that were highly ranked by some participants were unknown to others. For example, although the University of Chicago, Columbia University, and the University of Pennsylvania are well-known in some areas, Darren, who is from Georgia, was unfamiliar with them, and his unfamiliarity with them affected their rankings in his eyes. He respectively ranked them as numbers 18, 19, and 20 (at the very bottom) on his list of the best to worst colleges. So, the environment not only affected what communities said about institutions, but it could also affect participants' familiarity with different colleges.

Finally, proximity was important, as participants placed more value on schools that were highly regarded and located near them. Shawn demonstrated this in his interview when he compared Georgia Tech to USC (the University of Southern California). He said,

> Georgia Tech has more prestige, at least from what people perceive, than USC. So, for a PhD program, would I want to attend Georgia Tech or stay here at USC? All things being equal, if it comes down to USC versus Georgia Tech, I'm not sure which one I'm going to choose. Because, prestige-wise, Georgia Tech is what they say is better.

Shawn perceived Georgia Tech to be more prestigious than USC because he was from Georgia, and Georgia Tech was more well-known for being a highly respected school than USC was in his community. Similarly, participants who grew up in or attended schools in California were more likely to rank Stanford as the best school, while those who grew up on the east coast were more likely to rank east coast colleges like Harvard as the best. Lastly, participants who had environments that included community members who spoke highly of HBCUs were more likely to rank HBCUs highly. (Please note *community* is different from *people* because instead of individuals, it refers to the impact of groups, such as the messages schools, organizations, or peer groups communicate to students.)

Five Areas Where Perceptions Mattered the Most

The *third theme* was: while many perceptions had a meaningful impact on participants' college processes, those that mattered the most fell into five areas. Those areas were: 1) care, or how the school made participants feel; 2) the college's academic, social, financial, and racial reputation; 3) whether the school met the participants' most important, self-identified, individual needs; 4) the college's environment; and 5) the participant's connection to the college.

Care

Again, care referred to how institutions made participants feel. In addition, it also referred to how participants thought institutions would make them feel once they attended. Several participants mentioned asking themselves if they would feel comfortable on campus, if they felt professors would support them, and if they would be able to build meaningful relationships with other students as being significant for their college choice considerations. In addition, participants mentioned thinking about how they felt when they toured campuses and how they felt when they encountered people from campus. Their high school experiences also influenced what they looked for in a college. For example, Talia mentioned,

> [In high school], it didn't feel like I was being pushed. It was like, "Just apply to this community college or just apply to these safe schools" and just go there instead of really being pushed to try my best. So, I felt that disconnect. I feel like that was a key thing for me. That the experience I got in the HBCU would be different from what I had experienced before because I had people who looked like me saying, "Hey, I believe in you. You should apply for this." or even if they didn't look like me, they were still people of color and would say, "Hey, I believe in you." Rather than a white teacher just kind of seeing I did well in their class and that's it, my teachers of color would be saying, "I see you're doing well in my class; let me help you." So, I think that was the key difference in why I value HBCUs or minority-serving institutions more than PWIs.

Talia valued and wanted to attend HBCUs over PWIs because she perceived PWIs to be lacking in care. Because Talia's high school counselor had dismissed and ignored her aspirations and accomplishments, she feared she would have similar experiences with the faculty and staff she encountered at PWIs. Thus, she avoided PWIs.

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Academic, Social, Financial, and Racial Reputation

In addition to care, the school's academic, social, financial, and racial reputations were also important. Academic reputation refers to how participants perceive the quality of education they would receive, available majors, opportunities to do research, the school's selectivity, the school's professors, and the school's advances in science, research, and history. Social reputation refers to the activity's schools offered, including the organizations and social programs, what there was to do in the city surrounding the school, if attending the school would be fun, and if participants would make friends. Financial reputation refers to how participants perceive an institution's cost, funding, and the generosity of their financial aid packages, and finally, racial reputation refers to how participants perceive a school's racial climate, level of diversity among students, and acceptance of them as students of color. Many students wanted schools that appealed to them socially. For example, when talking about qualities he looked for in a college, Lewis stated, "My main concern was the social life around there, such as what to do, where it was in the city it was in, and if it would be fun." Therefore, being able to enjoy himself socially was important to Lewis. Similarly, participants mentioned choosing colleges that felt racially safe, homey, and financially wise. When I asked participants what they considered when ranking their college choices, Brielle claimed,

> Something I was thinking about was demographics, to be honest. I wanted to know, do they have lots of people who look like me? And I know in Arizona, I've never been there before, but from what my friends are telling me, there's not really lots of people there that look like me.

Additionally, Erica said,

Central was first and A&T was second, because the energy I felt from Central I felt from A&T. They were very helpful, the resources were there when you needed them. And it felt like a family.

Furthermore, Jay stated, "[I was considering] Stanford and Princeton because the Ivy League and private schools were in my head. Like, those are the ones. Like if you get in, you can get so much money because you're poor." Jay thought that attending an Ivy league college would provide him with a substantial financial aid package.

Finally, many participants wanted to attend colleges that were considered prestigious, meaning they were well-known, influential, and held in high regard by other people. While prestige was not a factor or the main factor for everyone, several participants mentioned prestige played a significant role in their college choices. Those participants wanted to attend prestigious colleges because they provided a "stamp of approval," to prove something to themselves, and because of the message it sent to the world about their intelligence and academic abilities. For example, when I asked Benjamin why he would have chosen Harvard if he could attend any college in the world, he said,

> I mean, just the name speaks for itself. For example, if you say, you went to Harvard. It's like, "Okay, you're smart." You have a great job, perhaps. It's just like a lot of positive assertions tied to attending Harvard. I think I also idolized being just like a Black scholar who might have received a full ride to Harvard. Like, that was showing my merit. It would show that they want me, and I felt like going to Harvard would be a stamp of approval, even if you didn't see the rest of my resume.

Jay believed attending Harvard would not only likely guarantee him a great job, but he also believed it would show the world he was intelligent and someone employers should notice. For

Jay, Erica, Brielle, and Benjamin, finances, comfort, racial acceptance, or having an endorsement were at the forefront of their minds. However, participants did not consider these elements equally. For some students, racial acceptance or diversity were the most important, while others found aims like debt avoidance or academic acknowledgement to be more pertinent.

Fulfillment of Participants' Most Important Individual Needs

Because students were so different and had different desires, goals, and challenges, it was also important that institutions meet their individual needs. Thus, a school's resources were significant. Participants repeatedly mentioned considering resources, opportunities, and what institutions had to offer them when they were choosing their colleges, whether that be institutions having an engineering program, as in Chuck's case, or institutions offering internships or research opportunities, as considered by Shawn. For example, when I asked Chuck what the most significant factor he considered when he was ranking colleges in the ranking activity, he claimed,

> The most significant factors were the teachers they have there and who the past alumni are because they usually partner with companies, which typically go to certain schools and try to pick talent. I also considered what programs were available for those fields. Because that's mostly why I picked the school I went to. It's just like, what does that school offer? Once I know they have the field of research I'm looking for and that they have a good program, once you are in that program, [I want to know] what are my options? Like, where's your track? Once you're in it, where can you go? What can you do with it?

Chuck's main concern was what schools had to offer. He wanted to know schools had the program he wanted, would provide him the field research he wanted, gave him academic and

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professional options, and had alumni and professors who were successful. Because their desires were different, participants viewed and valued institutions differently. So, while one participant valued a school for its funding and ability to provide generous financial aid packages, another participant valued a different school for its ability to provide an environment that felt racially safe and physically comfortable.

College Environment

Participants' perceptions of the school's environment were also significant. In this case, environment refers to weather, the school's geographic location, the institutional size, the campus' facilities, and the school's campus culture. For instance, participants discussed wanting to attend schools in specific locations, either to be close to or far away from family, wanting to avoid or live in locations with certain kinds of weather, attending schools with small or large class sizes, or wanting to gain admittance to schools that had a collegial culture and centered student wellness. For example, several participants perceived HBCUs to have smaller class sizes and thus be more attentive to students than PWIs. One participant who believed this was Darren. When I asked him what colleges he thought would offer the best education, he said,

> I say HBCUs, because classroom sizes. The smaller the classroom is, I feel like the better the interaction with the teacher. You know they can have personal conversations with you or they're willing to work with you if it's like 20 people in the class rather than like 65 people.

From this quote it is clear Darren did not believe there were PWIs with small class sizes. Additionally, Shawn stated,

> When I hear about my friend at the University of Pennsylvania, I'm like, "Oh, cool, great, amazing." The same with my friends at Yale and Harvard. It's like, "Oh, that's amazing,"

but not for me. I am not trying to go there at all. Like MIT, I'm not trying to go there. It's

too cold. Now put MIT here in LA. That might be a different story. The weather

definitely plays a role. If I could drop any school here in LA, I would, and that's the

school I'd go to.

So, weather was very important to Shawn; it even superseded the academic and programmatic

draw of MIT, a school he may have considered if it were in a warmer climate.

Connection to the College

Finally, several participants mentioned applying to and even ranking colleges highly

because they had relatives, mentors, teachers, friends, or even acquaintances who attended them.

Participants mentioned applying to colleges because they were attended by their siblings, older

students from their high school and community, church members, and more. Lewis demonstrated

this in his interview. When I asked him why he chose Hampton University, he said, "I'm a fourth

generation Hamptonian, so I didn't really have much choice." Because several of Lewis' relatives

attended Hampton, he felt it was his duty to continue the legacy. Darren also demonstrated the

importance of connections in his interview. When I asked him how he ranked the colleges he

was considering in high school, he stated,

One main thing was connections, like people I know that go there or that went there. For

example, I knew Tennessee State would have been the best school when it came to

networking because my band director went there. So, he knew a lot of people there, and

he would have had me plugged into a lot of things. But I also knew two people who went

to Hampton. We became friends through a community drumline. So, knowing that they

were great people and the decisions they made went fairly well, I thought, "It will be

something new, a different location, far from home, by the water. And I know people up

there, and they'll make sure I'll be good." That's how I ranked it.

Darren was interested in joining the band, so his band director and the friends he made in the community band all influenced his college decisions. Ultimately, he chose to go to Hampton because he knew people who attended, he liked the experiences they were having, and he knew his friends and his band director's connections would look out for him.

Chapter Summary

This chapter was broken into two parts: a section focused on the origins of participants' perceptions and a section focused on where perceptions mattered the most. Findings revealed participants' perceptions came from four notable sources: other people, mass media, social media, and participants' environments or communities. The following all had significant influences on how participants perceived colleges: people such as participants' family members, peers, mentors, church members, organizational members, and high school staff; mass media, such as TV shows, movies, college brochures, college rankings lists, the internet, and the news; social media platforms like Twitter, TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube; and participants' environment, such as their geographic location and how their communities or closest networks thought about schools. Most noteworthy, the results indicated other people's reactions, such as generally not knowing about schools or reacting to participants' choices with indifference or apathy, were particularly consequential. Not responding to participants,' or other peoples, prospective college selections with excitement and interest was enough to negatively affect how participants thought about colleges and which ones to apply to.

Additionally, analysis revealed several other significant findings. First, I found alumni and close network members had the most influence, but when participants did not have parents and relatives who spoke to them about college, they relied heavily on peers, programs, older

students, and college and university personnel like college counselors or college representatives. Second, celebrities had the ability to sway participants by drawing attention to schools, increasing the schools' exposure. Third, social media had the ability to portray schools favorably or unfavorably by introducing participants to new choices, changing participants' preconceived notions, or exposing students to a school's housing, financial, or social issues. Fourth, movies and television programs had a subliminal effect on participants long before their college application process. They often induced participants to desire attending specific colleges and could also encourage them to consider college in general. Fifth, TV show characters' and actors' personal college choices could influence perceptions. For example, when actors or their characters attended colleges on shows or in real life, it indirectly communicated to participants those schools were valuable. Finally, participants' environments, including their geographic locations and their communities or closest networks, told them which colleges to value. While some schools were seen as renowned and well-known by most students, the status of other institutions fluctuated depending on the participant's region or the beliefs of their community. For instance, one participant saw Howard as an elite institution because it was valued in her community, while another saw it as subpar because her community members disregarded it and suggested she avoid attending it.

Lastly, the second part of the chapter focused on areas where perceptions mattered the most. These findings revealed perceptions mattered for five sectors: 1) *care*, or the way the institutions made the participants feel; 2) *reputation*, or how the institution was academically, socially, financially, or racially perceived; 3) *needs*, or the degree to which the institution satisfied the participants' most crucial educational needs, such as financial aid or belonging needs; 4) *environment*, such as the weather, institutional size, and facilities; and 5) *connections*,

or whether the participant had any affiliations with the institution. These findings support socialization literature and indicate outside influences—such as individuals, institutions, and media—have a significant impact on college perceptions. In addition, the findings suggest several entry points for college intervention, as colleges that want to attract Black students can work to improve their financial, social, or academic reputations, level of care, or ability to appeal to student needs. The next chapter presents findings about participants' perceptions of HBCUs and PWIs.

CHAPTER SIX: HBCU V. PWI PERCEPTIONS

This chapter presents findings from the review of 13 bio-demographic questionnaires, 20 semi-structured interviews, and 40 documents developed during the interviews. While Chapter 4 discussed findings about participants' exposure to and awareness of HBCUs and Chapter 5 discussed the importance of people, mass media, social media, and the participants' environment on their perceptions, this chapter discusses differences and similarities between participants' perceptions of HBCUs and PWIs. It begins by describing participants' perceptions of PWIs and HBCUs and segues into discussing how participants' expectations differed from their realities. It ends with a summary of the chapter findings.

PWI Perceptions

The last major finding from the data was that participants' perceptions of HBCUs and PWIs differed considerably. Interestingly, these perceptions were often direct opposites. For instance, for PWIs, participants often perceived them as being racist and apathetic to students' feelings and mental health. However, they also perceived them as having more resources, more funding, and more opportunities. This finding was due to messages participants heard about PWIs.

Negative PWI Perceptions

Racism was the most common negative message participants mentioned hearing about PWIs; this was true for most participants, whether attending PWIs or HBCUs. For example, when I asked Kalvin, who attended a PWI, about the negative messages he had heard about PWIs, he said, "Racism and discrimination at every single level in the classroom; not hanging out with peers or having a hard time trying to find friends. Those are some of the negative things that I heard, but also experienced as well." So, not only did Kalvin hear PWIs were racist and

would be a difficult place for him to find friends, but he also felt like his beliefs aligned with his personal experience. Similarly, Val, an international student who also attended a PWI, said,

> [I heard that there are] little resources for non-white students. For example, for clubs or events, you would see a lot of events that would satisfy the needs and the interest of certain people, but not necessarily other people at all. And then also poor attention to microaggressions on campus. That's a negative thing.

Val felt clubs and events on her campus catered to white students and were inconsiderate of Black students and the racism they faced on campus.

In addition to racism, some participants believed PWIs were uncaring toward all students but were particularly ambivalent toward marginalized students. In the perceptions activity, participants wrote messages such as, "[PWIs] want money and will let you waste your time to get more money from you," "[At PWIs] professors don't care about you," and "[They only care about] education and that's it." Talia, elaborated on this further in her interview. She stated,

> I don't think the PWI experience is talked about enough, not just for students of color but for all students, including white students. For example, I had to take an undergraduate class my first semester because I needed it as a prerequisite to take a graduate class. And I saw how they just threw this old, tenured professor, who was not meant to teach anyone, onto these students because it was an elective class, and I saw how hard they struggled. So, I feel like people don't talk enough about how a lot of issues are avoided, not just with racism but also with sexism and classism, and in general, just the way people should be treated in college. I feel like it's more of a business than it is a school. Like, they primarily focus on charging their students way too much for stuff that should not cost that much, and they also just kind of ignore their students' concerns.

Like many other participants, Talia did not view PWIs as caring, helpful places. She viewed them as businesses that were only operating to make money and perceived them as being harmful spaces for all students when it came to care and concern for students' wellbeing.

Positive PWI Perceptions

While participants mentioned several negative beliefs about PWIs, they also revealed some positive beliefs. For example, in the perceptions activity, participants mentioned they heard PWIs had "great curriculum," "nice dorms," "more funding," "more programs and majors," "better quality education," "offered better opportunities post-graduation," and were "more rigorous." In addition, participants made comments such as, "[I heard PWIs] have large endowments; they're more competitive and selective. They offer better opportunities post-graduation. The classes and programs are more rigorous. And they have more money to give towards scholarships" (Benjamin, a graduate of Morehouse graduate and graduate student at UCLA). So, participants heard many positive messages about PWIs, and for the most part, they believed these messages were true. However, Chuck, a recent graduate of Occidental College, believed many of the perceived positive realities of PWIs were due to years of PWIs having social, economic, and academic advantages coupled with HBCUs experiencing disadvantages. He said,

> I feel like PWIs are in the place they are due to systemic reasons and years of being
> supported, unlike HBCUs. So, we get this feedback cycle of them proclaiming they are
> the best, so they attract the best, and that furthers the cycle. So, they are good, but I don't
> know if it's necessarily of their own accord; maybe in some instances, but overall, it is
> because they have been propped up to be the best schools in the media, and they had to
> kind of just fill that space by default. HBCU might be good, but I think there's just an

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overall stigma that they are not, and I feel like they don't necessarily attract people because of that. PWIs are good because they have the resources. I know a lot of these schools have billion-dollar endowments. So, they can afford to be the best. Does it necessarily make them the best? Like I was saying before, the environment when I went to a PWI wasn't necessarily the best for me.

Chuck believed PWIs received a level of support in their early days that HBCUs did not, and this support put them in a position to be the best. So, while he did believe PWIs were good academically and provided beneficial opportunities for students, he also believed HBCUs may be better than they are perceived and PWIs may not be the best in all areas, such as in the on-campus or in-class environments they can create for students.

Most messages participants heard about PWIs came from other people and the media, however the school's perceived age, cost, and selectivity also affected how some participants perceived their quality. For instance, Chuck claimed, "When things are older, we tend to be like, oh, look, it's been around that long, so it must be good." So, some participants believed the school's age affected perceptions of its quality. In addition, participants made comments about cost. After talking about exposure (hearing about colleges all the time in the media) and connections (knowing successful people who went to the college), Kalvin stated he thought schools were prestigious because of price and selectivity. When detailing which schools he thought were prestigious, he noted something he saw as a positive, saying: "It would definitely be, unfortunately, the white schools like Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, because they receive so much support and have so many resources, and they're kind of hard to get into." In addition, when discussing some of the reasons for their prestige, he claimed,

I guess they cost more. Right. What I know in particular is that when things are more

expensive, they tend to be of higher quality. For example, a Louis bag [referring to Louis

Vuitton]. When you buy a Loui bag, you know it's expensive, but the quality is going to

sustain. So, definitely, the money factor.

Like name-brand clothes and bags, Kalvin and some other participants viewed an institution's

cost and inaccessibility as reflections of their quality.

Finally, participants' personal experiences affected their perceptions. Several participants

specifically mentioned their personal experiences with racism and microaggressions as the

reasons they perceived PWIs to be racist or uncaring spaces. Similarly, some participants'

perceptions of PWIs as having impressive facilities and being academically rigorous came from

their personal experiences attending them.

HBCU Perceptions

In contrast to perceptions of PWIs, participants often perceived HBCUs as having

inadequate funding and facilities, insufficient educational quality, and less opportunity.

However, they also perceived HBCUs as having more community, being more caring, and being

more racially inclusive. Like PWI perceptions, participant beliefs about HBCUs were due in

large part to the messages they received.

Negative HBCU Perceptions

Several participants mentioned hearing messages about HBCUs' academic, financial, and

structural inferiority. When speaking about HBCUs, Chuck stated, "The narrative overall, it's just

like it's not as good as the white schools. I haven't necessarily done my research to see how good

they are or what they offer." Similarly, Benjamin said,

[I heard HBCUs] don't offer the best education, they're easier to get into, they don't offer

much money or scholarship, it's harder to receive federal financial aid and finish, it's

harder to find jobs after graduating, and they have less funding.

Both Benjamin and Chuck had heard PWIs were of lower quality in terms of financing, education, and what they offered in terms of majors, internships, and opportunities.

In addition, participants heard messages about scandal and poor leadership, both those who attended HBCUs and those who attended PWIs. Jay, who attended a PWI, stated,

> [I heard at HBCUs] all skinfolk ain't kinfolk; you have anti-blackness, colorism, and identity politics; people assume they're going to do right by me because they're Black, but there is bullying, embezzlement, and people out here trying to run your pockets, like, the actual administration; and they have bad dorm buildings. Like the dorm buildings, they are just garbage.

Likewise, Dionne, who attended an HBCU, claimed,

> One thing I saw recently was someone who was like, "Sure, I went to a PWI, but I have housing." So, it seems like they were taking digs at scandals that occurred specifically at HBCUs, such as Howard University having mold in their residence halls or A&T bringing in a large number of freshmen claiming to have on-campus housing but not having enough space. So, having to put them in hotels and having parents call and stress the housing office out.

She also stated,

> I think part of the argument is also that because people are at PWIs, and you have to choose to make friends with Black people, those bonds are stronger than at HBCUs, and your experience is more real-world because the demographic percentages [at PWIs] are closer to what they are [in society]. You're outside the microcosm if you're at a PWI as opposed to an HBCU. The quality of education [is poorer].

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Jay heard people were making assumptions about Black colleges he believed untrue, such as Black college personnel were supportive and HBCUs did not have any racial issues. He had heard that not all Black folks at HBCUs were supportive and people were discriminated against based on their skin color. He also heard Black people were expected to behave a certain way, the administration was stealing money from and bullying students, and Black colleges had poorly maintained residence halls. Similarly, Dionne heard about housing issues at HBCUs. However, she also heard people argue Black student friendships were stronger at PWIs, an HBCU education was inadequate, and HBCUs did not offer a real-world experience because their demographics were not reflective of the American population.

Some, though not all, participants believed many of the negative messages they had heard about HBCUs were true. For example, when I asked Darren his thoughts about what he heard of HBCUs, he said,

> I feel like everything I've said that they've told me is actually true. Financial aid is not the best at an HBCU. The cafeteria is really just not that good. It's okay. And when it comes to technology, the whole campus-wide internet is not great. It's not strong at all. So, it's like, it's crazy to have all this money, but the money obviously is not going towards, you know, advancing the technology on campus or making the student life less hard.

Darren believed the financial aid at HBCUs was insufficient and the cafeteria and technology could have been better. Comparably, when I asked Gene about the criteria he considered when applying to college, he said,

> Yeah, [I considered] the quality of education provided. For example, it is a known fact that even though HBCUs can be quality in some spaces, in others they're not so great. [Like, in terms of] the quality of living, we've all heard about the dorm crises, where

students were essentially homeless for weeks on end.

Gene believed the HBCUs fell short in some areas, such as students' living conditions.

Positive HBCU Perceptions

In addition to the negative messages, participants heard several positive messages about HBCUs. These messages were often in direct contrast to the messages participants heard about PWIs. For example, while participants heard PWIs were racist and apathetic toward students, they heard HBCUs provided high levels of care, community, and racial inclusivity. For instance, in the perceptions activity, participants mentioned they had heard HBCUs were "family-oriented," "[had] professors [that] care about you," "[a] safe space [for Black students]," "fun," "[offered] a great sense of community for Black students," and "[students] didn't have to worry about racism." Participants elaborated on this in interviews. Darren, for example, claimed,

> I heard you'll be surrounded by Black people and you'll learn more about your culture at an HBCU. What else? [Also that] being around your people, it's less of a hostile environment. So, it's more comfortable walking on a campus just seeing your people.

Likewise, Dionne, said,

> [The] positive things had to do more so with the soft skills like being family oriented, and being able to find friends for life. [For example,] when my mom got pregnant [with me] her math teacher offered to babysit and watch me, so she could stay in school. She did not take him up on that, but like when I was visiting Morgan State she took me to that person. So, just the feeling of it was very, very rich. So, those were some of the things I've heard and felt at HBCUs.

So, participants heard HBCUs did a successful job of making their environments welcoming, fun, and mentally safe for students. In Dionne's case, participants even heard of HBCUs going out of their way to serve students.

Neutral Perceptions

Of course, it is important to note the perceptions and messages differed, and not every participant heard or believed the same claim or assumption. While some participants believed the negative and positive messages to be true, some were not as sure. Additionally, although almost all the participants could list positive and negative factors they had heard about PWIs, several said they had not heard anything good or bad about HBCUs. For example, when I asked Sandy, a UCLA graduate student and former undergraduate at Smith College, if there was anything else she'd like to share about her decision-making process during the ranking activity, she said,

> Well, I did notice on the left-hand side in the table, those are mostly Ivy Leagues, I think.
> And then on the right-hand side, I've never heard of any of those (referring to the list of
> Top 10 HBCUs according to U.S. News rankings). And so, for me, when I was
> categorizing, I noticed that while I was making my choices.

Additionally, when I asked Sandy about the positive and negative messages she had heard about HBCUs and PWIs, despite attending a PWI, she could not name anything she had heard about either.

Finally, direct exposure (personal experience) and indirect exposure (media, environment, social media, and other people's experiences) played a significant role in whether perceptions were positive, negative, or neutral. Participants who had no experience with institutions were more likely to believe what they had heard about them. In addition, students

who had peers, parents, siblings, and others who went to HBCUs were more likely to perceive these colleges and universities positively.

Expectations v. Reality

Concerning both HBCUs and PWIs, there were outliers in terms of perception. Not all participants saw PWIs as racist or bad at facilitating belonging and not all students saw HBCUs as safe and supportive. While many students believed the messages that were conveyed to them to be true, some did not. Two examples were Alyssa, who had a very positive experience at her PWI, and Raina, who had a very negative experience at her HBCU. Raina, who transferred from Howard to USC, claimed,

> My parents just made me think Black people should go to HBCUs and that HBCUs
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> were created for Black people and PWIs were created for white people. So, they just
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> made me feel like, since I'm Black, I should go to an HBCU. But it's not that simple.
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> There isn't an HBCU for everybody, in my opinion. And I think the fit with the peer
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> culture is important. It wasn't a good fit academically or socially for me. So, I think
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> there's a lot more that should have gone into that process of choosing a college than just
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> whether I was black or not.

She also said, "I didn't feel like many of the professors were really affirming and supportive. I felt like they were more degrading a lot of the time. I had a lot less racism at predominantly white high schools and colleges." So, Raina did not enjoy her experience at her HBCU. She did not feel like the school she chose was a good fit, and she believed that despite being at an HBCU and surrounded by Black students, she still experienced racism. Thus, Raina's experience was contrary to what many students expected to experience at an HBCU.

Similarly, Alyssa, who went to the all-womens PWI, Bryn Mawr, did not feel a heavy level of racism or exclusion at her institution. She claimed,

As somebody who went to a PWI, it is funny. Granted, Bryn Mawr is not perfect, but I was not always having the negative experience people think about when they think about Black people going to PWIs. I remember there was, I think, a Tweet or a post or a meme or something where HBCU students were like, "Oh, you went to a PWI?" And it was like me and my PWI, and I was like, "Oh, they kind of treat me nice here." I don't know if it's Stockholm syndrome or what, but while I was writing that, I was thinking, "These are things people are saying, but they were not always the things I was experiencing.

Alyssa, like Raina, had experiences that differed from what other people would have expected. Although no school is perfect, for the most part, she enjoyed her experiences at her PWI.

Additionally, much like Alyssa's and Raina's experiences, other participants' experiences contradicted the messages they had received about PWIs and HBCUs. Darren demonstrated this when he talked about his experience at Hampton. Although HBCUs were said to lack academic and experiential opportunities, that was not Darren's experience. He said,

Hampton has a lot of opportunities that I've never thought I could get out of any college. Currently, like right now, I am in Moorea, French Polynesia, because of the opportunities that Hampton has given me in my major.

When I asked him to talk more about the program, he stated,

It's a 10-week program between UCs and HBCUs. I'm getting my certification in AEA (Aquatic Exercise Association) diving here. So, currently, I'm diving in French Polynesia, just getting acclimated to scientific diving and applying the skills I've learned with scientific diving to conduct research. So, right now I'm actually doing research, gathering

data, and using diving as another tool to be a scientist.

As an undergraduate student, Darren accessed the chance to conduct research in French Polynesia through an opportunity he got at his HBCU. Similarly, Talia, who attended an HBCU, received two internships while she was an undergraduate. Raina, Alyssa, Darren, and Talia all had experiences that undermined many of the messages participants had received about HBCUs and PWIs.

In addition to participants' having experiences that differed from what most people perceived about HBCUs and PWIs, some participants did not subscribe to many of the common messages being spread. For example, some participants did not believe HBCUs were academically inferior to PWIs. When asked during his interview, Lewis shared what he thought about what he heard about HBCUs.

> For the most part, I just think you don't really understand what they are until you're there. I think they get a bad rap, but HBCU grads come out just as qualified, if not more qualified, than other candidates that went to PWIs or other colleges. It hurts a little bit when I hear people talk badly about it, but I just understand that it's just from ignorance. So, I don't take it to heart.

Not only did Lewis not believe HBCUs were inferior, but he was hurt by the insinuation that they were. He believed HBCU graduates did just as well and sometimes better than those who graduated from other higher education institutions.

Changes in Perceptions Over Time

Another interesting finding was changes in participants' beliefs. For many participants, beliefs about HBCUs and PWIs shifted as they progressed through college. Many participants became more critical (meaning they began to question the validity of the information they were

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told to believe) as they experienced people and situations that contradicted what they had been told or had come to believe. For instance, when I asked Oliver what he thought about what he wrote or heard about PWIs, he said, "I wish I would have been given a more fair assessment of them because I think they were false positives, because at the end of the day, each institution should be judged on its own merits." He also said,

> As I began working with young people and youth and paying more attention to college and the college selection process, I realized working alongside these people, "Frostburg taught me better than what you got." And when you compare them, there really isn't much difference. It's just because, after all those decades of folk believing they were the best, they received the dollar, and now all the Supreme Court justices get chosen from these schools. So, you want to go to those schools if you want to be an attorney and a judge. That just furthers the myth, unfortunately. So, yeah. Just now, it's just knowing. Oh, you really did a number on us.

As Oliver aged and advanced through his education, he began to see his colleges, Frostburg State University and Morgan State University, in a new light. His experiences with graduates of more "prestigious" institutions made him realize they were not more intelligent or better prepared than he was. Additionally, he started to believe the idea that PWIs were superior was a myth perpetuated by people with resources. Similarly, Sam also began to question what she had been told:

> I think that any school could offer the best education, I don't think it matters. I think literally New York two-year community colleges that everyone looks down upon, they have professors who teach at NYU as well. It's literally the same professors teaching the exact same thing. And it is valued more because you went to NYU.

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Sam also began to believe name-recognition of colleges did not matter. This transition began after she realized some community colleges were instructing the same content and hiring some of the same professors that were teaching at big-name universities. In both instances, the participants began to question their thought processes around colleges when they were in high school. Sam's, as well as Oliver's, thought processes changed as they began to consider what really makes a school the best and what criteria are important when looking at colleges. Before attending college, Sam and Oliver thought the name of an institution was significant; however, as they advanced through college and had more experiences, they began to doubt the veracity of these beliefs.

In addition to exposure and personal experiences with institutions affecting perceptions, participants also began to recognize college fit was more important than what they had heard or initially thought about institutions. College fit refers to how well a given college or institution matches a student's intellectual, social, and personal demands. The shift towards recognizing the importance of college fit was triggered by participants' realization that they had overlooked significant factors in their college selection process, such as how their race would be perceived on campus and the overall environment of their intended college. The recognition of these factors prompted a reevaluation of the criteria used to make college decisions. For example, Chuck stated,

> At one point in time, there were like 94 black people at my school, and being from my background and going to this white school and being around these teachers that were only used to being around white kids, the way that I would sometimes communicate with the teachers would be difficult. I just don't think the teachers were used to talking to black kids, and I'm not saying they were really racist, but I guess the microaggressions

were there. Sometimes it was tough being in that environment and not really having

strong support. I could have learned better, maybe depending on my environment. What

I'm trying to say is that they may have the best teachers. But then I also feel like the

environment comes into play. So, how do the teachers teach? What's the class make-up?

Where are the teachers from? I feel like a lot of that stuff comes into play.

Chuck, like Sam and Oliver, experienced a dramatic shift. After attending his institution,

Occidental College, a private liberal arts college in Los Angeles, he began to consider the

significance of environment, teacher background and experience with diverse student

populations, and the racial/ethnic demographics of his peers. He began to believe "good" could

be subjective, as what was good for another student may not have been good for him.

Finally, many students developed or acquired more positive beliefs about HBCUs as they

gained more exposure through their schooling. Seventeen out of 20 participants mentioned

appreciating HBCUs more later in their life and college trajectories or wishing they had truly

considered applying to them. Alyssa claimed,

Sometimes, when I meet women who went to Spelman, I kind of wish I went there. I feel

like I could have gotten similar things as Bryn Mawr but been surrounded by more black

women, which I think would have been such a beautiful experience.

Similarly, Tyra said,

I guess. One thing I wish I had considered more was HBCUs, like my sister. By the time

I finished high school [in America] and she finished high school in Jamaica, we started

college at the same time, and she applied to Howard and some PWIs. I never considered

HBCUs because I just wasn't aware of them before. I don't even know how my sister

found out about Howard. But I think, thinking back now, I probably would have

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considered HBCUs.

Although Alyssa had a positive experience at Bryn Mawr, getting a comparable experience at Spelman College, an all-women's HBCU, while also being around women who shared her racial identity, appealed to her and made her wonder how life may have been. Likewise, although Tyra enjoyed St. John's, a school she felt was diverse, she still wished she had given more thought to HBCUs when she was in high school.

Chapter Summary

This final results chapter described differences and similarities between participant perceptions of HBCUs and PWIs. It revealed participants had very different perceptions of HBCUs and PWIs. Interestingly, it also demonstrated these perceptions were often in direct opposition to each other. For example, while participants frequently perceived PWIs as prejudiced and uncaring toward students' feelings and mental health, they often perceived HBCUs as being more racially inclusive, community-oriented, and caring. In addition, while participants typically perceived HBCUs as having inadequate financing, facilities, educational quality, and chances, they perceived PWIs as having extensive funding, resources, and opportunities.

These findings were not true for every participant. While some believed common messages about HBCUs and PWIs, others were not quite as sure. For instance, some participants felt HBCUs prepared HBCU graduates just as well, if not better, than some PWIs. Furthermore, participants were more likely to believe misconceptions and assumptions when they had no direct experience with institutions. In addition, although nearly all the participants could cite both positive and negative attributes they had heard about PWIs, some claimed they had not heard anything positive or negative about HBCUs. While "neutral" perceptions may appear to be

good, when juxtaposed with positive perceptions, neutral perceptions had the same effect as negative ones. Finally, the results demonstrated participant perceptions changed over time and assumptions did not always match up to reality. For example, some participants had positive experiences at their PWIs and did not feel like they were heavily discriminated against due to race, while others participated in wonderful opportunities at their HBCUs. Additionally, most participants developed more favorable attitudes towards HBCUs as they gained more exposure to and knowledge about them in college.

These findings are indicative of several significant points. First, the messages students receive about HBCUs and PWIs differ and are in many ways influenced by systemic racism. For example, many participants' negative perceptions about HBCUs (such as beliefs about poor facilities and limited funding) can be linked to structural issues like discrimination and inequitable federal funding. Second, the findings indicate there are many misconceptions about both PWIs and HBCUs being spread to students considering their college options. People tend to generalize the situation at one type of or even one singular institution to the entire system of institutions, which can lead to inaccurate perceptions. Finally, results suggest more attention must be paid to students choosing colleges based on personal fit, needs, and desires rather than presumptions about what is best, because what is best for one student may not be so for another. The next chapter discusses these findings and their implications and provides recommendations for policy, practice, and future research.

CHAPTER SEVEN: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Study Overview

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) are a significant and necessary component of American higher education and should be treated and perceived as such. However, this has not been the case. Despite their lengthy track record of making significant contributions toward the advancement of Black individuals, HBCUs have faced discrimination. Additionally, despite their accomplishments, they have been subjected to heavy criticism in the media, suggesting there are some misconceptions about their value and relevance. This study investigates the beliefs students hold about colleges, how systemic racism and social pressure affect those beliefs, and the effects beliefs have on social and educational outcomes.

Using a bio-demographic questionnaire, individual semi-structured interviews, and two activities that resulted in files for document analysis, this study explored how systemic racism and social pressure influenced how 20 Black students (10 who attended PWIs and 10 who attended HBCUs) were socialized to perceive HBCUs compared to predominantly white institutions (PWIs). It also investigated where these beliefs originate for students and their social and educational effects. To ground the research, this study used The Cycle of Socialization, two tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT), and introduced and applied a new theory, "The Cycle of Perception Formation."

The purpose of this study was to investigate how social pressure and systemic racism influenced how Black students were socialized to perceive different higher education institutions. Furthermore, it sought to investigate where these perceptions originated and their educational and social consequences. The goals were to: 1) challenge race and racism-neutral notions of

college choice; 2) push students, parents, and educators to critically examine college fit, college choice, and college messages; and 3) encourage policymakers, educators, and society to consider the consequences of how messages about college affect college students and educational institutions. To guide the study, I asked the following research questions:

1) How do Black students perceive HBCUs compared to PWIs?

2) How are these perceptions influenced by racism and social pressure?

3) Where do these perceptions originate?

4) What are the educational and social consequences of these perceptions?

This chapter discusses the significance, impact, and relevance of this study's findings and describes its contributions to theory and the literature on enrollment management and college perceptions. It begins with a discussion of the research questions and their answers, continues with a discussion of the study's contributions, and then explains the implications for policy and practice. It concludes with recommendations for future research and suggestions for how educators, policymakers, parents, students, and society can address racism and social pressure in higher education.

Summary of the Findings

Research Question 1: How do Black students perceive HBCUs compared to PWIs?

Participants perceived HBCUs and PWIs in dramatically different ways. While they perceived PWIs as racist and apathetic to student feelings and mental health needs, they perceived HBCUs as beneficial spaces for finding community, receiving care, and experiencing racial inclusivity. In addition, while they perceived PWIs as better institutions in terms of funding, resources, and opportunities for students, they saw HBCUs as difficult spaces for funding, facilities, and educational quality. However, in several cases these perceptions did not

align with reality. While some students did indeed experience racism at their PWIs or issues with facilities and their financial aid at HBCUs, participants also reported feeling happy and comfortable at their PWIs and accessing amazing opportunities to conduct research and participate in internships through their HBCUs. These findings suggest society has socialized students to believe some misconceptions about student's experiences at both HBCUs and PWIs.

In addition to the perceptions of colleges participants did have, in many cases, participants were not exposed to HBCUs, so they had no perceptions of them at all (this is referred to as a neutral perception). Although this may appear to be a plus, neutral perceptions of HBCUs were just as harmful as negative perceptions. When neutral perceptions of HBCUs were juxtaposed with what were most often positive perceptions of PWIs, participants' reactions to HBCUs appeared to shift from neutral to negative. This finding was illustrated by the low rankings in the exercise that unknown HBCUs received from participants. While unknown PWIs were also ranked lowly by participants, most often HBCUs were the unknown schools. As a result, HBCUs were the most likely to be ranked low and not considered in participants' college application process.

HBCUs being unknown was often linked to their being left out of conversations about college. In many cases, HBCUs were intentionally or unintentionally excluded from some participants' college conversations and physical environments. They were not discussed by many teachers, counselors, and other network members; they were not physically represented via school flags and posters; and they were not recognized in the media in a positive light nearly as often as PWIs were. Furthermore, when HBCUs were recognized, it was often for their social environments rather than their academic qualities, opportunities, or student's outcomes post-graduation.

This exclusion is reflective of the norming of whiteness in higher education. Whiteness as property suggests HBCUs were not included in conversations about college because they were not white and therefore not the norm. For many participants, PWIs were perceived as colleges, while HBCUs were perceived as Black colleges. When participants reached college, some became more aware of HBCUs and their value, but in high school many did not know more than what HBCUs were in name. This finding was reflected in participants' interview responses. Additionally, it was further demonstrated by the fact that some participants did not recognize the term "PWI" or realize that they were attending PWIs until they arrived at college, although they were able to recognize and understand the term and concept of an "HBCU," even without much prior knowledge about them. Many participants understood that schools could be classified as HBCUs and were aware of the term HBCU. Fewer participants were aware that schools could be categorized as PWIs until after they applied and enrolled in college.

Furthermore, Racism as endemic suggests that invisible and unconscious racism was involved in both the lack of experience students had with HBCUs and the assumptions that the people in student's environments made about HBCUs deficiencies and PWI successes. While participants did hear positive messages about HBCUs, they were almost always related to their environments instead of their academics or opportunities. In addition, many of the negative perceptions participants heard about HBCUs were related to academics and funding, two topics that are reminiscent of stereotypes about Black academic inferiority and financial irresponsibility.

Research Question 2: How are these perceptions influenced by racism and social pressure?

Racism and social pressure had a significant impact on participant perceptions. First, systemic racism resulted in the norming of whiteness and the exclusion of HBCUs from

conversations about college. Second, systemic racism in the form of historical discrimination against HBCUs in federal funding and policies created many of the conditions for which HBCUs were condemned and ignored, and finally, social pressure—illustrated by the reactions of other people—pressured participants to make decisions they thought would please other people regardless of institutional fit and personal desire.

For example, as mentioned above, the HBCUs were not offered equal exposure to PWIs in the media and conversations about college; this was due to white privilege and their lack of whiteness as a property right. PWIs had white privilege because they were white institutions, and like white people, they were perceived to be neutral, normative, average or default, and ideal, something HBCUs did not experience because they were not white. HBCUs' lack of whiteness and society's emphasis on them being Black spaces resulted in these colleges and universities being denied opportunities available to white institutions, such as media exposure. This is an example of whiteness as property (Harris, 1993) and covert or subtle, unobvious racism (Bobo et al., 1997).

Additionally, through a history of discrimination in funding and policies against HBCUs, overt racism has prevented them from being able to offer the same resources and opportunities that many white institutions could. For example, laws and policies prevented HBCUs from teaching certain courses and offering specific degrees and practices allowed PWIs to illegally encroach on their academic programs. Furthermore, a history of inequitable funding between HBCUs and PWIs has hindered HBCUs in providing equal facilities, financial aid packages, degrees, majors, and courses (Ayers v. Fordice, 1995; Douglas-Gabriel, 2022; Harper et al., 2009).

Some of the most prevalent critiques participants voiced about HBCUs were their belief

that these institutions did not offer a sufficient range of majors, did not offer adequate financial aid packages, had inadequate facilities, and did not offer as many opportunities to study abroad or participate in internships. While this was not the case for every participant, some participants agreed HBCUs did not offer them or people they knew optimal funding packages, and they did not have the laboratory equipment they needed. In this way, the historic and ongoing underfunding of HBCUs led to negative perceptions about these institutions, disadvantages in their ability to meet some students' desires, and limitations on their ability to recruit and enroll students.

Finally, social pressure, demonstrated by the reactions and anticipated reactions of other people, compelled some participants to ignore or reject personal desire and institutional fit to appease others in their college selection. When participants did not want to listen to others, they feared the repercussions of not behaving in the expected manner, a process depicted by The Cycle of Socialization (Harro, 2007). However, when participants were exposed to multiple people or perspectives, they found it easier to make decisions about which colleges they wanted to attend for themselves. For example, although Dionne's teachers and some of her schoolmates had negative or neutral responses to her decision to attend North Carolina A&T, an HBCU, she had positive reactions from her mentors and church community. The reactions of her church community and mentors contradicted the messages she received at school, and this allowed her to choose which message she wanted to follow. This example illustrates the concepts presented in The Cycle of Perception Formation, which demonstrates the impact that society and systemically racist structures have on individuals' beliefs.

Research Question 3: Where do these perceptions originate?

Most of the participants' perceptions originated from four sources: (1) other people

(friends, family members, peers, teachers, recruiters, church members, counselors, program/organization leaders, and community members); (2) mass media (*TV, movies, college brochures, the internet, and the news);* (3) social media (TikTok, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, or YouTube); and (4) their environments (their community and geographic location). This finding supports previous research on the role of socializing agents (Moschis & Moore, 1979). For example, other people had the power to influence students' perceptions and their college decisions to apply to, attend, or disregard a college. Participants were so determined to please others and avoid the unpleasant feeling of disappointing them that the reactions of other people could cause stress and influence their behavior. One student's desire to appease her parents was so intense she chose to attend a college she knew was not a true cultural and academic fit for her.

In addition, among the people who influenced participants, alumni and people in participants' closest networks were often the most influential. Alums were influential because of the insider knowledge they were able to share about their experiences, and by virtue of their success. Several participants thought schools were high quality simply because they had famous or well-to-do alumni. So, alumni were influential, whether they knew or spoke to students or not. Schools having a large population of alumni who were lawyers, judges, or U.S. presidents was enough to show participants schools were valuable. Moreover, when close network members spoke to participants about college, they helped them establish a connection to institutions; this, however, was dependent on the network members sharing their experiences with participants. When participants' closest friends, families, or peers did not talk to them about their experiences, they focused more heavily on distant network members (e.g., acquaintances, friends of friends) and other sources like mass media to help them form their thoughts about college.

For participants, mass media and social media had the same effects as people because,

like people, they could impact students' decisions and opinions about specific colleges. However, instead of influencing students with reactions, they influenced them with exposure or subliminal messages about what colleges were better for them. Some schools were just not mentioned, and that conveyed the message that the schools that were not explicitly mentioned or named were less valuable than the ones that were specifically identified. When characters or actors in films or TV shows went to specific colleges, it communicated to participants they should aspire to attend those colleges. This finding supports previous literature on the effects of media (Moschis & Moore, 1979; Muzzatti & Rigato, 2007). Moreover, social media gave participants a glimpse into what was happening on campuses and the lives of students enrolled at various colleges. These glimpses had the potential to uplift or damage a school's reputation. An example of this is coverage of the housing issues that occurred at Howard University in the fall of 2021. Student protests over housing conditions captured in mass and social media caught some participants' attention, and they discussed how it affected how they and those around them perceived HBCUs.

Finally, several student's geographic location and community proved significant because they affected how participants viewed institutions. Some institutions that were ignored or seen as acceptable to attend in some areas were highly regarded in others. For example, one participant noted how Howard University was highly regarded in her community, while another student mentioned no one at her school respected her decision to attend Howard because they did not see it as a prestigious enough school. These findings are also supported by The Cycle of Perception formation, which suggests that social environments can shape beliefs and subsequently influence actions.

Research Question 4: What are the educational and social consequences of these

perceptions?

Participant perceptions had several significant effects. The most obvious consequence was its impact on education and college-choice processes. When participants perceived schools to be less desirable by society or their communities, they were more likely to remove them from consideration in their college choice processes. In addition, perceptions affected participants' college enrollment decisions, personal college rankings in the activity, and beliefs about HBCUs compared to PWIs. The most significant way perceptions affected decisions was if they did not exist. For example, results indicated, if participants could not form a perception of a school, they did not consider applying to it, even if they had heard of it.

Additionally, hearing about and knowing about schools were not equivalent. While some students knew names like Howard or the University of Chicago, when they did not have a connection to the school via someone like a friend or a peer or if they could not think about what the school offered, what it was known for, or how it was perceived in society, they ranked it low and removed it from consideration in their college application process. Because participants were more likely to be exposed to PWIs, they were more likely to have a perception of them than HBCUs. As a result, they were more likely to rank PWIs highly, consider them in their application processes, and apply to them. These findings support previous literature on the significance of exposure (Zajonc, 1968).

In addition to the educational ramifications, the study's findings have various social consequences. For one, enrollment losses and consolidation of educational institutions can have severe implications for society, including reduced life expectancy, higher divorce rates, slower economic growth, persistent labor shortages, fewer voters, and an increased need for social services despite decreased government revenues (Marcus, 2022). In addition, enrollment losses

can lead to school closures and educational mergers (Busta, 2019; Colston et al., 2020; Harper et al., 2009). These findings can be particularly impactful for HBCUs. Students removing HBCUs from their college considerations can make these institutions more likely to face the chopping block. This problem is particularly consequential for Black communities, low-income students, and academically disadvantaged students, to whom HBCUs have historically given access to higher education. If colleges are closed and formal education declines, all the issues listed above are more likely to occur. Additionally, if HBCUs are closed, those issues may be concentrated in Black, low-income, academically disadvantaged communities, leading to problems for already historically marginalized populations.

Contributions

Contributions to the Literature

This study offers a deeper dive into our understanding of Black students' perceptions of PWIs and HBCUs. To date, there have been few scholarly studies on Black student perceptions of HBCUs and PWIs. The limited research I have found primarily consists of dissertations focused on campus racial climate (Napoli, 2019; Rivard, 2014), articles focused on student perceptions of diversity and inclusion (Campbell-Whatley, 2021), and articles focused on student perceptions of belonging (Booker, 2007; Stebleton & Aleixo, 2016). There is little research on how Black students perceive HBCUs and PWIs. However, I did find two exceptions: Patterson (2009), whose dissertation investigates factors that influence Black high school students' perceptions of HBCUs and PWIs, and Scott (2014), whose dissertation examined how Black college-bound students perceived attending an HBCU. In many ways, this study confirms and extends previously held knowledge regarding the impact of family, school, and media on Black students (Hooks, 1992; Patterson, 2014).

This study differed from Patterson (2009), Scott (2014), and other research because in addition to examining perceptions, it also investigated the effects of racism and social pressure. Additionally, it focused on messages students hear, the consequences of their perceptions, and the roles society and the socialization process play in how perceptions are formed. In this study, The Cycle of Socialization was used to examine society's impact, and the tenets of Critical Race Theory were employed to investigate the role of racism. The primary goal was to challenge race- and racism-neutral notions of college choice. Furthermore, the study aimed to encourage students, parents, educators, and policymakers to critically analyze the messages they hear and perpetuate about different colleges. Additionally, it sought to urge parents, students, and educators to critically analyze factors related to college fit, college choice, and college communications. Thus, this study explored several areas that have received limited attention in previous research, contributing to a better understanding of these topics.

In addition to its contributions to the literature on Black students' perceptions, this study also contributes to the conversation on Black students' college enrollment and college choice decisions, which tend to focus on individual choices rather than the impact of society and systems. Because while there is a substantial amount of research on college choice processes (Astin & Cross, 1981; Cabrera & Nasa, 2000; Chapman, 1981; Freeman, 2012; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Ihanfeldt, 1980; Kotler, 1976; Litten, 1982; McDonough et al., 1995; Perry, 2004), and even some studies that consider the effects of race (Astin & Cross, 1981; Freeman, 1999a; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; McDonough et al., 1995) and the roles other people play in influencing choice (Astin & Cross, 1981; McDonough et al., 1995), much less research considers racism, a systemic issue, or how other people and society work to shape choice or impact enrollment. Findings from this study suggest these are crucial factors to ponder.

Methodological Contributions

This study also made methodological contributions by combining methods and incorporating activities to help participants answer and think through their answers to interview questions. For example, most investigations use a single quantitative or qualitative process, a mixed-method approach (combining quantitative and qualitative methods), or a multimethod technique (using two kinds of the same procedure, such as two qualitative techniques) (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). Fewer studies use a mixed-multimethod design (which involves using two or more methods from one style and at least one technique from the other, such as using two quantitative and one qualitative method). This study used a mixed-multimethod approach that included collecting quantitative data from bio-demographic questionnaires and qualitative data from two techniques—document analysis and individual semi-structured interviews. Together, these three methods helped me develop richer data and triangulate the findings.

In addition, this study used activities, including a ranking activity and a perception activity, that led to the development of two documents per participant: a list of personal college rankings and a list of messages participants had heard about PWIs and HBCUs. Few researchers conduct activities during interviews that require participants to develop materials for document analysis, so these activities were unique. Using activities during interviews allowed participants to answer the research questions and elaborate on their responses in the Q&A that followed. In addition, they had the added benefit of allowing participants to think more critically about and reflect on their beliefs. I noticed with the ranking activity, some participants commented on not wanting to rank HBCUs low or being embarrassed by how little they knew about them, suggesting the exercise helped them question their own thoughts.

Theoretical Contributions

Finally, this applied Critical Race Theory concepts, which scholars usually apply to individuals or groups, to institutions. For instance, this study argues because HBCUs and PWIs are racialized structures (Ray, 2019) (meaning HBCUs are associated with Blackness and PWIs are associated with whiteness or racial neutrality), they can experience the benefits (PWIs) and drawbacks (HBCUs) of racism. Thus, researchers can explain institutional experiences with white privilege and discrimination using theories like "Whiteness as Property" or "Racial Realism." Most often, scholars use CRT tenets to understand individual experience, group experience or actions, or policy decisions or outcomes. This study offers a unique application by using CRT to explain differences in institutional experiences and outcomes.

Furthermore, the study provided a theory to explain how the socialization process occurs. It combines concepts from Critical Race Theory with elements of The Cycle of Socialization to hypothesize how society influences how people form perceptions in a world shaped by race and racism. The Cycle of Perception Formation illuminates the relationship between personal experiences, systems, thoughts, and external influence, and shows how they work together to form and reform perceptions. The Cycle of Socialization argues people, institutions, and culture teach people how to behave in society; The Cycle of Perception Formation extends this by explaining how socialization occurs and is perpetuated at the individual level. Additionally, the theory illustrates how people come to develop their beliefs which then influences their behavior. In doing so, it explains some of the ways subliminal, intentional, and unintentional behaviors perpetuate racism and inequality.

Implications for Policy and Practice

In addition to having social and educational consequences, this study has multiple implications for policy and practice. This section discusses the significance of the findings and their implications.

Significance for Educators, Policymakers, Parents, and Researchers

This study has several significant implications for research, policy, and practice. First, it suggests it is vital society—including researchers, educators, policymakers, and parents—consider perceptions because they have substantial consequences for education and society. Not only can perceptions affect student rankings, but this study and others like it (Patterson, 2009; Scott, 2014) suggest they can also mold student beliefs about different types of institutions and, ultimately, influence whether they choose to enroll in them. In addition, enrollment decisions can affect school survival (Busta, 2019; Colston et al., 2020; Harper et al., 2009), which may impact social areas like life expectancy, divorce rates, economic growth, labor shortages, social service needs, and government revenues (Marcus, 2022). These ramifications can be especially significant for HBCUs, which are already struggling to survive in a world that questions their necessity (Riley, 2010), and for Black and disadvantaged populations, who would be harmed the most by their extinction (Nichols & Evans-Bell, 2017; Waymer & Street, 2015).

Therefore, educators, policymakers, parents, and society must be more cognizant of how they inform perceptions. They must evaluate the messages they send students about college and consider what they do and do not include in the conversations. In addition, they must analyze their own beliefs and consider how overt and covert racism affect their perceptions and the messages they spread. Furthermore, they must challenge race and racism-neutral policies. Finally, students, parents, and educators must critically evaluate the messages they receive about

college and examine if colleges are good fits for specific students' needs because what is beneficial for one student may not be valuable for another. Just as students are not monoliths, neither are institutions. Evaluating what students need and matching them with institutions that can fulfill those needs will be the best way to ensure students have the tools they need to succeed.

Significance for Educational Institutions

Findings from this study also offer important implications for educational institutions. The results are significant for HBCUs as they identify negative perceptions held by students and provide these institutions with intervention points. These findings let HBCUs know where they can intervene to improve student experiences and change negative perceptions. Likewise, results from this study are significant for PWIs for the same reason. They highlight some of the participants' negative perceptions of PWIs and their origins, letting PWIs know where they can intervene to improve student experience and institutional reputation. The changes higher education institutions make based on these findings can be valuable for college enrollment and diversity efforts, as a favorable reputation will attract students, facilitating enrollment efforts. Additionally, results from this research specifically will aid in attracting and supporting Black students, the subject of this study.

In addition, while the results are valuable for PWIs, they are even more consequential for HBCUs because they are the most affected by the results, not only because they are the educational institutions most excluded from conversations but also because the findings suggest perceptions of racism and apathy do not appear to affect PWIs to the same extent that they affect HBCUs. For instance, results from this study indicate exclusion and a lack of information about HBCUs resulted in their not being included in students' college choice processes. However,

perceptions of racist experiences and apathetic environments rarely stopped PWIs from being considered by applicants.

Many of the participants who believed PWIs would be racist still applied, contemplated them, and, in half of the cases, attended because, for several of them, the benefits of factors like prestige, financial aid, and opportunities outweighed the habitual, daily racism they were already experiencing or anticipated experiencing as Black people in America. One participant shared an argument they had heard in favor of attending PWIs over HBCUs. According to this argument, the ethnic/racial student body demographics at PWIs, and by default the racism that students would inevitably face on these campuses, would better prepare them for the real world, where racism and discrimination were expected to be everyday experiences. So, while anticipated racism could divert students from PWIs, it was not as detrimental as the exclusion from college conversations that HBCUs experienced. Furthermore, even if racism prevented students from attending PWIs, it would not have the same detrimental impact on a well-funded and highly endowed PWI as not attending an already severely underfunded HBCU would have.

Significance for Society, Policy, and Practice

In addition to their benefits for researchers, educators, policymakers, parents, and educational institutions, this study's findings on the impact of racism and social pressure are noteworthy for society. First, because they demonstrate that racism affects institutional outcomes, and second because they suggest that, as a society, we can influence other people's actions. In the study, covert racism, like the unequal social and media exposure HBCUs received compared to PWIs, reduced participants' considerations of HBCUs and lowered these institutions' rankings in their eyes. In addition, overt racism, through underfunding and discriminatory policies, reduced HBCUs' ability to compete with PWIs for students.

Furthermore, social pressure and the messages society disseminates through social media, mass media, and conversations influenced what participants perceived as the right choice. So, recognizing and addressing covert racism by evaluating bias and acknowledging and addressing overt racism by eliminating discriminatory policies and repairing a history of underfunding at HBCUs may change institutional outcomes and have a more positive impact on student decisions (e.g., students choosing colleges based on fit instead of unverified beliefs and pressure from other people).

Lastly, this study demonstrates the significance of naming PWIs as such. Naming PWIs is crucial to avoid centering whiteness and the experiences that students have at predominantly white institutions as the norm. Portraying PWIs as college and HBCUs as Black college, reinforces the notion that whiteness and white ways of doing are correct and normal, while HBCUs and all other minority-serving institutions are abnormal and incorrect. Additionally, depicting PWIs as "college" suggests white colleges should be the model or ideal for all colleges, which is problematic. Naming PWIs can be one way to interrupt this white supremacist narrative.

Recommendations For Educators, Policymakers, Parents, Students, and Society

Given the findings in this study, I have outlined several recommendations for how various groups, including parents, students, educators, policymakers, institutions, and more, can address systemic racism and combat the effects of social pressure on college perceptions. In addition, I offer some suggestions for future research. While not exhaustive, this list can be a starting point for implementing change. This section begins with a summary of these recommendations and ends with a discussion of my suggestions for future research.

Address Perception Issues

First, since findings suggest participants had several negative perceptions of institutions driven by media, other people (especially close network members, school personnel, community members, and college alumni), organizations and college-focused programs, media such as movies and TV shows, and social media—including applications like TikTok, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram—I suggest institutions work to improve their campuses and elevate public perceptions. If the negative perceptions are true for institutions, they should focus on addressing those issues. For example, if they have an unwelcoming or racist campus culture, they should work to improve it; they should consider underrepresented student experiences and work to include them in the curriculum. Additionally, institutions should create environments where students, both those who are represented and those who are underrepresented, feel welcome and cared for.

Likewise, if they are known for having inadequate facilities, colleges and universities should focus on upgrading them to attract students. (Note: I am aware funding issues may be out of their control; I discuss suggestions for this complication in a later section.) If changes are out of an institution's control, the entity should lean into its strengths and focus on promoting what they can successfully offer. For instance, if they provide caring familial environments and stellar internship opportunities, they should advertise those qualities in ways that are accessible to students and parents.

For example, one perception of HBCUs is that they are not selective, easy to gain admittance to, and thus academically inferior. However, many HBCUs are purposefully accessible to offer education to students who otherwise would not be able to access college. Promoting this message and showing how they academically challenge students once admitted

can help HBCUs change this portrayal. Furthermore, if perceptions are inaccurate, institutions should work on dismantling false narratives by exposing prospective students to the truth through the mediums they use most: social media sites (TikTok, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram), mass media (TV shows and movies), and other people. This suggestion brings me to my next point.

Try to Appeal to More than Just Students

Other people's reactions and suggestions and beliefs were some of the most prevalent factors influencing perception, so institutions should appeal to and work with parents, communities, churches, and organizations that work with students and children who may be future students, like AVID, Girl Scouts, and Boys and Girls Club. Additionally, institutions should treat their current students well, both because it is what best serves students and so they speak highly of their college(s) once they are alumni. Alums are particularly influential, so creating a thriving environment for current students can be valuable in affecting future, potential applicants. Likewise, parents, teachers, community members, and other network members are influential in students' college exploration and selection, so schools should work with them as well as the students they seek to enroll. Visiting and developing partnerships with churches, organizations, and elementary, middle, and high schools, and working with parents, counselors, and other school personnel will introduce network members to higher education institutions so they can then share what they learn with prospective students.

Work on Improving Student Perceptions of Five Areas

Second, results show five categories were most important to students' perceptions of institutions: care; academic, social, financial, and racial reputation; fulfillment of participants' most important individual needs; college environment or climate; and participants' connection to

college, so institutions should focus most of their attention on those areas. Institutions should show students they care by routinely evaluating how they perceive students' treatment on campus and adjust accordingly, especially for marginalized groups. Institutions that can afford it should also be generous with financial aid, focus on promoting a racially inclusive and supportive campus environment, and try to establish connections with students by supporting current students and helping them achieve their career and life goals successfully. This suggestion is significant because results suggest students can feel connected to colleges simply because they know or know of successful individuals who attended the institution. For example, if a school produces a lot of engineers, teachers, judges, or leaders, they should promote this fact and establish themselves as key contributors to that field. Similarly, if a school has famous alumni, whether they be entertainers, historical figures, inventors, or others, they should promote them. It will help students develop connections with schools and help them develop beliefs about what the schools can offer them upon graduation and exiting with their degree. Finally, higher education institutions should provide and promote resources that meet student needs, such as scholarships, internship, and career opportunities, and academic or major options.

Focus on Early Messages

Third, results found early messaging (received during youth) and early exposure to colleges through content broadcast on the Disney Channel, movies, and other TV shows were significant. Therefore, institutions and people should target young audiences, as well as those deciding which college to attend, because, by the time students enter high school, many have already started to develop perceptions about college from the media and what they have witnessed other people experience. Institutions should intervene early and create or help develop

programs that target young elementary aged students. Television programs and social media outlets would be a valuable place to start.

Ask Questions

Finally, results indicate society has a considerable influence. Therefore, as a society, we should question what we hear, what we believe, and the policies we reject or support. People, including parents, students, teachers, and community members, should critically examine the messages they hear. They should ask themselves and honestly answer questions such as: Where did I get this information? How do I know it is true? Is it an accurate source? Is it factual for everyone? Am I considering other perspectives? Is this what is best for this person? Are these perspectives biased? What might have contributed to these messages? What does this person need? Am I considering what this person needs?

Increase HBCU Funding

In addition, because HBCUs substantially contribute to the success of marginalized populations and offer educational access to students who otherwise would not have it, society should support contributions to HBCU funding. Moreover, people should support policies that provide or increase HBCU funding and reject policies that suggest cuts. Likewise, since education and an educated population are valuable to society (Marcus, 2022), cuts to higher education should be denounced by legislators, voters, and parents alike.

Strategize With the Media to Increase Exposure

Findings revealed that mass media and social media were particularly influential. Therefore, institutions should focus on working with the media to strategically promote their institutions. Partnering with movie and television networks, celebrities, and social media companies to promote institutions can help increase student exposure. Institutions can also

sponsor events and partner with other educational institutions to demonstrate the significance and value of both colleges. Highlighting alumni and encouraging them to share their stories and experiences can also be an inexpensive way to reach a wide audience, particularly if the alumnus has a revered profession. Furthermore, it is important to target young as well as older students and avoid limiting promotion to solely students since other people and society as a whole are influential in affecting students' perceptions.

Talk About Experience

One interesting finding was that although some participants had siblings and parents who went to college, those relatives did not always discuss their experiences. As a result, even though some participants were not first-generation students, it was almost as if they experienced college as first-generation students because they did not benefit from the knowledge and prior experience of their networks. Therefore, it is essential for family members, peers, friends, teachers, and community members to not only take students to colleges and universities but to also talk about their experiences and share their knowledge.

Stop Norming Whiteness

Lastly, society should recognize and stop norming whiteness. Whiteness norms are repeating patterns of conduct enacted by all people that systematically favor white individuals (Chandler & Wiborg, 2020). These practices are typically unidentified and unrecognized (Frankenberg, 1993), and visibly and invisibly uphold white supremacy by setting white norms as the racial, cultural, political, economic, physical, and scientific norm (Morris, 2016). It is why when searching for information online, people must add words like "Black" or "female" in the front of their searches, so the search engine does not default to White and Male (Noble, 2018). However, while white normativity upholds white supremacy, it is not the same as white

supremacy. White normativity, unlike white supremacy, can acknowledge white people's shortcomings while maintaining white privilege and centering whiteness (Morris, 2016); this is because, rather than portraying whites as superior, white normativity exploits minoritized groups' actual or perceived differences to diminish their humanity and paint anything non-white as abnormal or non-human. In this way, whether minoritized groups perform better or worse than white people, they are perceived as non-human or unusual. In addition, because white normativity paints whiteness as neutral, anything not white is seen as a deviation from the norm. This is how whiteness operates as a property right that is only available to white people (Harris, 1993).

Recognizing white normativity is valuable for various reasons. However, in the context of this study, it is beneficial for addressing some of the issues with student perceptions of PWIs and HBCUs, especially because white normativity explains why participants tended to see PWIs as neutral and HBCUs as Black. Since whiteness is the norm, many participants did not view PWIs as white institutions. As a result, these institutions' privilege of being included in conversations about college was often not visible or recognized as an advantage. As the interviews progressed, some interviewees began to notice and see evidence of HBCU exclusion. However, few thought much about it during their college decision processes, leading to advantages for PWIs and disadvantages for HBCUs. This finding is just one example of many ways systemic racism can hinder HBCUs. To truly equalize college choice and develop accurate perceptions of institutions, society must displace whiteness as the norm; and white experiences and institutions must be seen as just one experience, one example, or one type of institution among many.

Suggestions for Future Research

While this study provided valuable insight into the significance of perceptions and the importance of investigating the effects of systemic racism and social pressure, it also left me with several unanswered questions. Because I saw shifts in participants' perceptions over time, I wondered about the experiences that were most effective at changing perceptions. Thus, a longitudinal study that follows students and tracks their beliefs over time could provide valuable insights. In addition, this study did not consider several factors that future research would benefit from investigating such as the significance of ethnicity, like how having African immigrant parents affects Black students' perceptions; the ways in which schools develop a sense of belonging for incoming students during tours and visits; and the differences in how Black students perceive HBCUs and PWIs compared to non-Black students.

A preliminary analysis of the data collected from non-Black students indicates that they are even less likely to be familiar with HBCUs or recognize the term and concept of a PWI than Black students. Therefore, it is an essential area that requires further investigation, particularly because policymakers and government officials, who are primarily responsible for making funding decisions about HBCUs, and those who are well-positioned to shape media and social perceptions of HBCUs, Blackness, and society (i.e., producers, politicians, entertainment and news writers, institutional leaders), are not often Black.

Additionally, while I briefly touched on some impacts of geography, there is still much to discover about how factors like geographic region and racial identity influence Black students' college perceptions. Furthermore, future research can investigate student perceptions of other MSIs like TCUs (Tribal Colleges and Universities) and different types of schools like community colleges. Finally, further research can investigate the influence that perceptions,

systemic racism, and anti-blackness have on other populations like faculty and other areas like medicine or the criminal justice system. In these areas, perceptions can literally be the difference between imprisonment and freedom or life and death.

Implications

HBCUs continue to generate the highest percentage of educated Black people despite a long history of prejudice against them. Yet they are often threatened in the media. In addition to having low rankings on many of the best colleges lists, they are frequently targeted for closure, continue to receive inadequate funding, and are consistently deemed redundant and unneeded. The little respect they are given for their accomplishments suggests there are some misconceptions about what they do and what they offer. Wanting to know where these and other student perceptions about colleges originated and the effects they had on students and institutions led me to this study, and the results were eye-opening.

Not only did this study discover many of the origins of Black students' perceptions of HBCUs and PWIs, but it also examined the effects of systemic racism and pressure from outside influences. In doing so, it challenged racism-neutral notions of college choice and called for students, parents, educators, and policymakers to critically examine the messages they heard, and the messages perpetuated about different types of colleges. Along the way, it provided a framework for examining how perceptions are formed and provided some insight into the changes educators, policymakers, parents, students, and society can make to improve higher education inequality.

However, the work is not done. Racism is embedded in culture, media, law, and the way we unconsciously think about so many aspects of our lives, even how we unconsciously exclude people, institutions, or experiences from our thoughts and conversations. Something so simple as

how we talk and think about colleges can have significant ramifications for their funding, enrollment, and survival. Thoughts matter and words matter. What we think has the potential to influence what we do, and what we say has the power to influence what others do. So, we must critically examine and be mindful of all we say and do. Exposure alone is not enough. One positive experience or singular conversation about an institution will not be enough to combat years of programming and systemic discrimination. So, as a society, we must constantly and actively work to undo and unthink. Unlearning will not be easy, but in the end, it will be worth it.

Conclusion

American higher education cannot be complete without historically Black colleges and universities, and these institutions deserve equal recognition and value as other components of the higher education system. However, this is not reality. Despite their long history of notable achievements, HBCUs have continued to experience discrimination. Furthermore, they have garnered severe media criticism, implying there may be some critical misunderstandings concerning their significance and worth. This research examined people's perceptions about colleges, the ways systemic racism and social pressure affected those perceptions, and the impact those perceptions had on social and educational outcomes.

Using a bio-demographic survey, individual semi-structured interviews, and two activities that produced data for document analysis, this study investigated how systemic racism and social pressure impacted how 20 Black students (10 who attended PWIs and 10 who attended HBCUs) were conditioned to view HBCUs compared to PWIs. In addition, it examined the origins of these ideas and their impact on society and education. To establish a foundation for the study, I used The Cycle of Socialization, two tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT), and proposed and implemented a novel theory, "The Cycle of Perception Formation."

There were several important findings. First, results revealed that HBCUs and PWIs were seen in significantly different ways. Although individuals were taught to view PWIs as racially prejudiced and indifferent towards the welfare of their students, they were taught to view HBCUs as inviting settings where students could bond, receive care, and feel included, whatever their race. Furthermore, individuals perceived PWIs as institutions with superior financial support, resources, and opportunities while viewing HBCUs as challenging environments in terms of money, amenities, and educational standards—though these opinions were not always consistent with participants' experiences.

The results also showed that respondents were more knowledgeable about and involved with PWIs. This finding was primarily attributable to the underrepresentation of HBCUs in discussions regarding higher education, especially when participants were in their k-12 institutions. Additionally, results indicated that numerous socialization characteristics had a substantial impact on participants' views of higher education institutions. These characteristics included the participants' environment, systemic racial discrimination, and the effects of other people, the media, social media platforms, and societal expectations.

Finally, the results revealed that when forming their perceptions of an institution, participants gave the greatest weight to five factors: the institution's demonstration of care for students; its standing regarding academics, social life, finances, and racial issues; its capacity to satisfy the personal needs that were most important to participants; the institution's climate; and the participants' connectedness to the college.

The research offers multiple prospective theoretical, methodological, and literary advancements. First, it has the potential to add to the scant body of knowledge on student perceptions. Additionally, it can provide an innovative application of Critical Race Theory,

introduces a new theory called "The Cycle of Perception Formation," and uses a mixed-multimethod research approach that includes activities in the qualitative interviews. The research is crucial because unfavorable perceptions of HBCUs have led to questions about their relevance and worth. This situation is alarming because HBCUs play a vital role in expanding possibilities for Black and low-income students. Any threat to their survival could further endanger the Black middle class and restrict social mobility and advancement for Black and low-income groups. This study can aid in comprehending how unfavorable perceptions are spread. Also, it is valuable for enrollment and recruitment since it shows how students view institutions and offers them an opportunity to highlight their strong attributes and rectify their negative ones.

The study's recommendations encourage students, parents, and teachers to critically assess a college's suitability, the college-selection procedure, and the messages transmitted about different colleges to prevent misunderstandings and make sure the college chosen is the best choice for each individual student. Lastly, it implores policymakers, teachers, and the public to consider the effects that messaging about colleges has on students and higher education institutions.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Participant Questionnaire Responses

Variables	n	%
Age Range		
18 - 21	12	20%
21 - 24	21	35%
25+	27	45%
Gender		
Female	42	70%
Male	18	30%
Ethnicity		
U.S. African American	36	60%
African	3	5%
Black Caribbean	3	5%
Black (various Black ethnicities)	8	13%
Mixed race w/ Black (Black + non-Black ethnicity)	10	17%
Education Level		
1st Year	4	7%
2nd Year	5	8%
3rd Year	4	7%
4th Year or beyond	11	18%
Graduate or Professional Degree Student	36	60%
Institution Classification		
HBCU	25	42%
PWI	35	58%
Parents Highest Education Level		
2-year Degree	4	7%
4-year Degree	13	22%
Doctorate	5	8%

High School Graduate or GED	10	17%
Less than High School	1	2%
Master's Degree	13	22%
Professional Degree (MD, JD, Ed. D, etc.)	3	5%
Some College	11	18%
High school GPA		
2.0 - 3.0	7	12%
3.0 - 4.0	35	58%
4.0+	18	30%
Pell Grant Eligible		
No	30	50%
Yes	30	50%
High School Demographics		
Predominantly Another Ethnicity	6	10%
Predominantly Black	18	30%
Predominantly White	16	27%
Racially Diverse	20	33%
Had Siblings Who Went to College		
Yes	34	57%
No	17	28%
No Siblings	9	15%
Had Parents Who Went to College		
Yes	35	58%
No	22	37%
Don't Know	3	5%
Knows What a PWI Is		
Yes	60	100%
Knows What an HBCU Is		
Yes	60	100%
In or Out-of-State Student		
In-state	28	47%

Out-of-state	32	53%
Parents' SES During High School Applications		
$25,000 or less	17	28%
$25,000 - $50,000	8	13%
$50,000 - $75,000	13	22%
$75,000 - $100,000	6	10%
$100,000+	16	27%

Note. This table shows the participant responses to the questionnaire.

Appendix 2
Participants by Geographic Region

What geographic region did you grow up in?	n	%
Northeast	12	20%
West Coast	26	43.3%
Midwest	4	6.7%
South	15	25%
Out-of-country	3	5 %
Grand Total	**60**	**100.0%**

Note. This table shows respondent participation by geographic region.

Appendix 3
HBCU Messages

Positive HBCU Messages	Negative HBCU Messages
(Black) culture - Community/ better community - Fun/ you have a good time - Connection/bonds over collective experience with racism - You're the majority instead of a minority - Black students have a voice	- Fewer international students/ less diverse - Not in big cities - Lack of communication - No resources - Inferior - Students don't study/party too much - Students unprepared and unmotivated

- It's easier to form relationships
- Lower requirements/less selectivity
- Better Greek life
- You get to have cultural experiences
- It's easy to do well
- No racist experiences
- It's easier to get a job as employers go there to fill diversity quotas
- More diverse
- Usually smaller than PWIs
- See people like you succeeding,
- Party schools/good parties
- Will help you get opportunities if you care and want them
- Small classroom sizes
- Not enough professors
- Not enough professors known for their research
- Better relationships with faculty/staff
- More comfortable on campus as a Black student / racially safe
- More understanding/aware
- More reasonable,
- People can relate better to some struggles
- People there will watch out for you
- People there treat you like family/it's welcoming
- Great sports
- Relatively inexpensive compared to PWIs /less expensive
- You'll never feel left out or alone
- Many actors and artist have come from HBCUs
- Taught by Black professors
- They'll know you by name
- High level of care
- HBCU bands are good
- Able to find friends for life
- Rich experiences - supportive
- It's a spiritual journey
- Better pledging for frats and sororities
- Better sense of belonging/belonging
- HBCUs give you confidence in your skills and abilities

- Only some kinds of blackness are accepted
- Less selective/lower requirements/ easier to get into
- Hard to find jobs after graduation
- Too easy to get good grades/not advanced enough
- Fewer resources - have less money/fin aid
- Students not serious about school
- Poor facilities compared to PWIs
- Slang AAVE/"poor English"
- Students don't have to do work in classes
- Financial aid offices are really bad (in terms of leadership)
- Bad leadership/poorly run
- Scandals - embezzling money
- Slow and very inefficient
- Unprofessional
- Not enough fin aid/offers poor financial aid packages/must pay out of pocket
- There's a lot of classism and sexism & homophobia
- Underfunded
- Less known
- Not able to give similar opportunities as PWIs
- Bad dorms
- Campus not up to par/bad facilities/ haven't remodeled in years
- Incomparable/inferior technology
- Ghetto
- Bad advisors
- No real-world experience because the demographics are not like what society is
- Weaker Black bonds because you must have Black friends, at PWIs you choose your Black friends
- Party schools
- Are in bad neighborhoods/Lack of safety
- Classes don't go into depth so you

• Gives Black students better experiences than PWIs • Smaller classroom sizes so more attention/great student to teacher ratio • Helps you develop as a person • Great for the humanities • Many actors or artist come from HBCUs • Where Black people are going to find their people and fight for their people. • Better Greek life • Better shows • Better bands • Better people to meet • Better food • Great home • Diversity in student orgs • Diverse outcomes for graduates (medical school, entertainment, teaching) • Strong networks • Family-oriented • Care from faculty • Are underestimated • Black students can show up as themselves * Daily fashion show/student's need to dress better (unclear if this was meant to be a positive or a negative)	don't learn as much • Harder to finish/takes longer than 4 years to graduate • Low graduation rates • Harder to get federal aid • Racism from Black faculty • Bad advisors • Not enough professors • Not enough professors known for research • For graduate programs they are not good when it comes to the hard sciences/don't have hard science graduate degree programs • Lack of opportunity • All skinfolk ain't kinfolk • Anti-blackness • Colorism • Identity politics, people assume because they're Black they're about to do right by me • Bullying

Note. This chart details the messages students heard about HBCUs written in the participants' own words. Some messages were positive for some students but negative for others, so they are located on both sides of the chart. Additionally, duplicated phrases were combined for ease and clarity.

Appendix 4
PWI Messages

Positive PWI Messages	Negative PWI Messages
• More resources	• Racism/macro- and microaggressions

- More money/large endowments
- Better quality education/more rigorous
- People will respect the name/Better reputation
- Get more out of education
- Nicer housing and facilities
- Less restrictions on visitation
- Get jobs easier upon graduation because of name recognition
- Full scholarships
- Opportunities to travel abroad
- Older
- Higher level professors
- Better programs /Great programs
- Readily available resources
- Prepares you in a way that HBCUs don't
- Can take you far
- Gives you distinction and opens doors for you/ offer better opportunities post-graduation
- Often positive associations with attending one
- More standardized education
- Amazing networks/Better networking (eventually you're going to run into a white guy)
- Great curriculum and places to learn
- Sports games go crazy
- Nice dorm buildings
- Fun traditions
- Black students = stronger connections because you choose them/shared experience
- Students gain real world experience (because the world is not predominantly Black)
- Significant financial aid for people of color

- Discrimination/not inclusive of people of color
- Hard to find friends/community
- Hazing
- Party schools/Students do hard drugs and heavily drink
- More like a business than a school
- Rape culture
- Silencing POCs
- Mental toll (of racism)
- Violence against people of color
- No consequences/protection for/from racism (lack of accountability)
- Too many people so you can't talk to faculty/big
- Ignore student concerns
- Large classroom sizes
- More Expensive
- Teachers don't mean Black people well
- Hard for Black students to succeed at them
- Few resources for non-white students
- Boring
- Are overestimated
- White-centered/designed to serve white students
- Professors don't care about you
- Too much work
- Poor quality of life for students
- Hard for people of color to be successful at them
- Detrimental to student's mental health in general
- Tougher transition from high school to a PWI for Black students
- Not diverse/no Black folks or not enough Black folks
- Larger classroom sizes so less attention
- Feels isolating for POCs/contributes to them leaving them
- White frats are destructive
- White people have dirty hygiene, especially in the dorms

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	• Dating is trash for Black students (especially women - i.e. Black men at PWIs don't deal with/date Black women) • Not a lot of diversity in the classroom • Anti-blackness • Ignore Black voices • Feeling "othered" on campus • Black fraternities and sororities are dispersed at PWIs

Note. This chart details the messages students heard about PWIs. Similarly, to the HBCU chart, all the statements and phrases were written in the participants' own words. Some messages were positive for some students but negative for others, so they are located on both sides of the chart. Likewise, duplicated phrases were combined for ease and clarity.

University of California, Los Angeles
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH
College Choices Study

INTRODUCTION
Kiana Foxx, Ph.D. candidate and Dr. Walter P. Allen, Ph.D., from the Higher Education and Organizational Change program in the Education department at the University of California, Los Angeles are conducting a research study. You were invited to participate in this study because you identify as a current or former undergraduate student. Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

WHAT SHOULD I KNOW ABOUT A RESEARCH STUDY?
- Someone will explain this research study to you.
- Whether or not you take part is up to you.
- You can choose not to take part.
- You can agree to take part and later change your mind.
- Your decision will not be held against you.
- You can ask all the questions you want before you decide.

WHY IS THIS RESEARCH BEING DONE?

This study is designed to contribute to academic and professional understandings of student experiences considering and applying to undergraduate institutions, including both predominantly white institutions and minority-serving institutions like Historically Black Colleges and Universities. The researcher hopes to gain insight into the mechanisms that influence students' decisions to attend their chosen colleges. So, interview content will include questions related to your experiences applying to and choosing a college.

This study is being conducted in part to complete the requirements of a dissertation degree; research may be used as the basis for future academic scholarship, including publishing and presentations.

HOW LONG WILL THE RESEARCH LAST AND WHAT WILL I NEED TO DO?

Participation will take a total of about one and a half hours. If you volunteer to participate in this study, the researcher will ask you to answer some questions regarding your experiences considering and applying to colleges. Interviews will take place online via zoom. The study involves a survey and interview. By the time you interview, you will have already participated in the survey. For scientific reasons, this consent form does not include complete information about

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the study hypotheses and the research questions being tested. You will be fully debriefed following your participation in the research.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS IF I PARTICIPATE?
There are no foreseeable risks if you participate. However, if you experience any psychological distress from participating in this study, if you are a UCLA student you can reach out to the UCLA Counseling and Psychological Services at (310) 825-078. If you are not a UCLA student, please contact the national hotline at (833) 317-4673.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS IF I PARTICIPATE?
You will not directly benefit from your participation in the research.

HOW WILL INFORMATION ABOUT ME AND MY PARTICIPATION BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?
The researchers will do their best to make sure that your private information is kept confidential. Information about you will be handled as confidentially as possible but participating in research may involve a loss of privacy and the potential for a breach in confidentiality. Study data will be physically and electronically secured. As with any use of electronic means to store data, there is a risk of breach of data security.

Use of personal information that can identify you:
Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can identify you will remain confidential. It will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. You will be referred to exclusively by pseudonym in any writing or presentation that stems from this research unless you specifically wish to be referred to by name for any reason.

The principal investigator will have sole access to audio recordings, and other intimately identifiable data sources. The principal investigator and faculty advisor will have primary access to transcribed interviews, observational notes, and other completed representations of data; the identity of participants will be removed at this stage of the process. As this data is being conducted in conjunction with an academic course, redacted interview transcriptions and field notes may be shared with dissertation committee members. This will strictly be to provide the researcher feedback on data collection, as well as to evaluate the researcher.

How information about you will be stored:
Confidentiality of data will be maintained by means of storing data on encrypted, password-protected databases. Audio recordings will be recorded and subsequently saved on the researcher's password-protected computer until they can be transferred to an encrypted, password-protected database. While the researcher does have access to Apple's iCloud storage servers on both phone and computer, no recorded data will be stored on cloud storage.

People and agencies that will have access to your information:
The research team and authorized UCLA personnel may have access to study data and records to monitor the study. Research records provided to authorized, non-UCLA personnel will not contain identifiable information about you. Publications and/or presentations that result from this study will not identify you by name.

Employees of the University may have access to identifiable information as part of routine processing of your information, such as lab work or processing payment. However, University employees are bound by strict rules of confidentiality.

USE OF DATA FOR FUTURE RESEARCH
Your data, including de-identified data, may be kept for use in future research.

WILL I BE PAID FOR MY PARTICIPATION?
You will receive $25 in cash paid via Venmo for your participation in this research study. In addition, you were entered into a raffle for $25 for your participation in the survey.

WHO CAN I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY?

The research team:
If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about the research, you can talk to one of the researchers. Please contact: Kiana Foxx at ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓ or ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓ or my faculty sponsor Walter Allen at ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓.

UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP):
If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researchers, you may contact the UCLA OHRPP by phone: (310) 206-2040; by email: participants@research.ucla.edu or by mail: Box 951406, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1406.

WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS IF I TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?
- You can choose whether you want to be in this study, and you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time.
- Whatever decision you make, there will be no penalty to you, and no loss of benefits to which you were otherwise entitled.
- You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and remain in the study.
- Please note participation in the study is not required to participate in the raffle.

You will be sent a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Survey Consent Form

The purpose of this research project is to investigate your college decision making process. This is a research project being conducted by Kiana Foxx, a doctoral student at UCLA. You are invited to participate in this research project because you are a current or former undergraduate student.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate. If you decide to participate in this research survey, you may withdraw at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you withdraw from participating at any time, you will not be penalized.

The procedure involves filling an online survey that will take approximately 10 - 15 minutes. Your responses will be confidential, and your data will not be shared with anyone other than the research team. The survey questions will be about your experience applying to college.

I will do my best to keep your information confidential. All data is stored in a password protected electronic format. The results of this study will be used for scholarly purposes only. Your de-identified data may be kept for use in future research.

If you have any questions about the research study, please contact Kiana at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ or faculty sponsor Walter Allen at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researchers, you may contact the UCLA OHRPP by phone: (310) 206-2040; by email: participants@research.ucla.edu or by mail: Box 951406, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1406.

This research has been reviewed according to UCLA IRB procedures for research involving human subjects. If you are still interested in participating, please continue. If you are not, please exit this survey.

By continuing you agree that:
• you have read the above information
• you voluntarily agree to participate
• you are at least 18 years of age

If you do not wish to participate in the research study, please feel free to exit this study.

Individual Interview Protocol

For my study I will be conducting virtual face-to-face semi-structured interviews. The following protocol details the purpose of the interviews and the questions I intend to ask. While I hope to ask all the questions listed below, I will also include additional questions based on my participants' experiences and the direction of our conversations. The questions are subject to change based on the flow and direction of the interview. Furthermore, follow up questions may be included to advance conversations or get clarifications on the information that my participants share.

I expect each interview to last an hour to an hour and a half. The interview will examine the participants' experiences applying to college, focusing specifically on exploring how participants decided where to go, what factors (people, institutions, media etc.) influenced their decisions, and their considerations of minority-serving institutions. If students did not consider minority-serving institutions (in this case HBCUs) they can still participate. Questions will focus on why or why they did not consider them.

Interview Script

First, I want to start by thanking you for agreeing to participate in this study. You have been selected to interview because you have been identified as someone who has a great deal to share about your experience applying to college. My research project focuses on your college choice, the factors, people, and institutions that affected your college choice, and your perceptions of them. The interview should be about an hour to an hour and a half long. Before we get started, please review the consent form. It essentially states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary, and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) I do not intend to inflict any harm to you. Let me know once you have finished reviewing it. (*After review*). Do you still want to participate? (*If yes.*) Great! Is it okay if I record this conversation? Do you have any questions before we begin?

Pre-interview Activity
(Will be completed immediately before interview questions below)

Activity 1:
Rank these schools from best to worst.

Princeton Columbia	Stanford University of Chicago	Howard Morehouse	Hampton Fisk

Harvard MIT University of Pennsylvania	Yale	Spelman Tuskegee Xavier	Florida A&M North Carolina A&T Claflin University

- What did you consider when ranking the colleges?
- What was the most significant factor for you when you were ranking the colleges? What was the least?
- What schools did you put first? Why did you choose that one first?
- What school did you put last? Why did you choose that one last?
- Were you familiar with all these schools before today? Which ones?
- Do you know anyone who has attended any of these schools? Which ones?
- Did you consider attending any of these schools? If so, which ones and why?
- Is there anything else you would like to share about your decision-making process for this activity?

Interview Questions:

Background Questions
1. Tell me about your college decision process. How did you decide which college to go to?
   a. What things did you consider when applying?
   b. Why did you consider (insert mechanism)?
2. Tell me about the people who helped inform your decisions about college.
   a. What did they tell you about college?
   b. Did any of them go to college?
   c. If no one, what was the most influential thing affecting your decision?
3. Did you learn about college from anything else? (ex: TV, brochures, etc.)
   a. What was your first memory of hearing about college?
4. What do you remember the most about applying to college?

College Thought Process
5. If you could have gone to any college in the U.S., where would you have gone and why?
   a. Would you have said the same thing when you were in high school? Why or why not?
6. Which colleges did you consider?
   a. How did you rank them?
   b. How did you come up w/ the list and those rankings?
7. What colleges did you apply to?
8. Did prestige play a role in your college selection?
9. How would you define prestige?
10. Which schools do you think are the most prestigious in the U.S? Why those colleges?

a. Would you have said the same thing when you were in high school? Why or why not?

11. What schools do you think society thinks are the best in the U.S.?
    a. Why do you think society thinks those are the best?
12. What college do you think would offer you the best education? Why?
13. Is there anything else you would like to share about your decision-making process?

(Will be completed immediately after interview questions above.)

Activity 2:

In the boxes below, write everything you know or heard about HBCUs and PWIs.

Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs)	Historically Black Colleges or Universities (HBCUs)

- What are some of the positive things you heard/wrote about HBCUs?
- What are some of the negative things you heard/wrote about HBCUs?
- Where did you hear/learn about the things that you wrote about HBCUs?
- What are some of the positive things you heard/wrote about PWIs?
- What are some of the negative things you heard/wrote about PWIs?
- Where did you hear/learn about the things that you wrote about PWIs?
- What do you think about what you wrote about HBCUs?
- What do you think about what you wrote about PWIs?
- What words/statements do you agree with and why? Which ones do you disagree with and why?
- Is there anything else you would like to share about what you wrote/heard about HBCUs or PWIs?
- What do you think institutions can do to increase their exposure to students?

Thank you for participating in this interview. Do you have any questions? Would you like to say anything else about the college application process?

Interview Debriefing Script

Thank you for spending the time helping me with my research. I greatly appreciate your participation in this study.

I would now like to tell you a bit more about the study. When you began the study, you were told the purpose of this study was to examine college decision making. However, I left out a few details. I am also looking at the differences in how students perceive HBCUs and PWIs. Some studies involve leaving out some information, so participants' behavior and attitudes are as natural as possible. This is one of those studies. Thus, I could not give participants complete information before their involvement in the study because it may have influenced participants' behavior in a way that would make investigations of the research question invalid. If participants knew the objectives of the study beforehand their behavior and attitudes may have been influenced by this knowledge. Do you have any questions?

I apologize for omitting details. I hope that you understand the need to leave out a few details. Do you have any questions about why I left out some details in this study?

After you leave, if you have questions, comments, or concerns about the study or any feelings of discomfort, please contact the study researchers or the Office of Research Ethics.

This study involves some aspects that you were not told about before starting therefore it is very important that you not discuss your experiences with any other students who potentially could be in this study until after the end of the term. If people come into the study knowing about our specific predictions, as you can imagine, it could influence their results, and the data we collect would not be usable.

Even though this study involved leaving out details, the information given to you about confidentiality, data storage, and security still applies. All data collected is confidential and securely always stored. No one other than the researchers have access to the data.

Because some elements of the study were different from what was originally explained, I would like to ask for your consent again. Will you allow me to use the information you provided?

I really appreciate your participation, and hope that this has been an interesting experience for you.

APPENDIX D: BIODEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Online Questionnaire:
- Name (First, Last)
  - Fill in the blank.
- School email address
  - Fill in the blank.
- What year in school are you?
  - 1st Year
  - 2nd Year
  - 3rd Year
  - 4th Year or Beyond
  - Graduate student
- What is your race/ethnicity?
  - African American/ Black
    - U.S. African American
    - African (from African continent)
    - Black Caribbean
    - Black Central or South American
    - Other African Ancestry
  - White/Caucasian
    - U.S. White American
    - European/European American
    - Other White Ancestry
  - Asian/Asian American
    - Chinese/Chinese American
    - Filipino/Filipino American
    - Japanese/Japanese American
    - Korean/Korean American
    - South Asian (ex: India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka)
    - Other Asian/Asian Ancestry
  - Pacific Islander
    - Guamanian/Chamorro
    - Native Hawaiian
    - Samoan
    - Other Pacific Islander Ancestry
  - Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish
    - Latino or Spanish Central American
    - Chicano/Mexican American
    - Cuban/Cuban American
    - Puerto Rican

- - - South American
    - - Other Latino/Hispanic Ancestry
  - ○ Native American
  - ○ Mixed Heritage
    - ■ Fill in the blank.
- ● What is your gender?
  - ○ Male,
  - ○ Female
  - ○ Non-binary
- ● What was your high school GPA?
  - ○ 1.0 - 2.0
  - ○ 2.0 - 3.0
  - ○ 3.0 - 4.0
  - ○ 4.0+
- ● Was your high school…
  - ○ Predominantly Black
  - ○ Predominantly White
  - ○ Racially Diverse
- ● What is your age?
  - ○ 18 - 21
  - ○ 21 - 24
  - ○ 25+
- ● What was your family's socioeconomic status (SES) when you applied to college?
  - ○ $25,000 or less
  - ○ $25,000 - $50,000
  - ○ $50,000 - $75,000
  - ○ $75,000 - $100,000
  - ○ $100,000+
- ● What state do you live in?
  - ○ Fill in the blank.
- ● What city do you live in?
  - ○ Fill in the blank.
- ● What city did you grow up in?
  - ○ Fill in the blank.
- ● What college do you attend?
  - ○ Fill in the blank.
- ● How did you hear about college? (Check all that apply.) (multiple choice)
  - ○ Family
  - ○ Friends/Peers
  - ○ Teachers
  - ○ Counselors

- ○ Media (TV, brochures, etc.)
  - ○ Other_____
- In 1-2 sentences please elaborate on how you heard about college.
  - ○ Fill in the blank.
- Which people helped you inform your decisions about attending college? (Check all that apply.)
  - ○ Counselors
  - ○ Teachers
  - ○ Parents
  - ○ Siblings
  - ○ Peers
  - ○ Other _____
- In 1-2 sentences please elaborate on how people helped you decide which college to attend.
  - ○ Fill in the Blank.
- Did you apply to any Historically Black Colleges or Universities (HBCUs)?
  - ○ Y/N
- Did you apply to any Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs)?
  - ○ Y/N
- Are you an out-of-state student or in-state student?
  - ○ Out-of-state (go to school in a different state than you are from)
  - ○ In-state (go to school in a state where you are from)
- Did any of your siblings go to a 4-year college?
  - ○ Yes
  - ○ No
  - ○ No Siblings
- If yes, what type of college did they go to? (Check all that apply.)
  - ○ A Predominantly White Institution (PWI)
  - ○ A Historically Black Colleges or University (HBCU)
  - ○ Another type of minority-serving institution
- Which college(s) did they (siblings) go to?
  - ○ Fill in the blank.
- Did either of your parents go to a 4-year college?
  - ○ Yes
  - ○ No
  - ○ I don't know.
- If yes, what type of college did they go to? (Check all that apply)
  - ○ A Predominantly White Institution (PWI)
  - ○ A Historically Black Colleges or University (HBCU)
  - ○ Another Type of Minority-serving Institution

- Which college(s) did they (parents) go to?
  - Fill in the blank.
- What is the highest level of education attained by your parent(s)/guardian(s) you reside with?
  - Less than High School
  - High School Graduate or GED
  - Some College
  - 2-year Degree
  - 4-year Degree
  - Master's Degree
  - PhD
  - Professional Degree (MD, JD, Ed. D, etc.)
- Which college did they go to?
  - Fill in the blank.
- Do you know what an HBCU is?
  - Y/N
- Do you know what a PWI is?
  - Y/N
- Do you know what a minority-serving institution is?
  - Y/N
- Do you qualify for the Pell grant?
  - Y/N
- If you know what an HBCU is, how did you hear about them?
  - Fill in the blank.
- If you know what a PWI is, how did you hear about them?
  - Fill in the blank.
- Would you like to be considered for a paid interview (online or via a phone)?
  - Y/N
- Would you like to be considered for future research?
  - Y/N

Alyssa:
1. Harvard
2. Princeton
3. Yale
4. Columbia
5. UPenn
6. MIT
7. Stanford
8. Duke
9. CalTech
10. UChicago
11. Spelman
12. Hampton
13. Howard
14. Xavier
15. Morehouse
16. Tuskegee
17. Fisk
18. NCAT
19. FAMU
20. Claflin

Sam:
1. Spelman
2. Howard
3. MIT
4. Hampton
5. Morehouse
6. Xavier
7. FAMU
8. Tuskegee
9. NCAT
10. Claflin
11. Fisk
12. UPenn
13. Columbia
14. UChicago
15. _____
16. Stanford
17. Princeton
18. Yale
19. Harvard
20. CalTech

Oliver:
1. Stanford
2. MIT
3. UChicago
4. Spelman
5. Morehouse
6. UPenn
7. Yale
8. Tuskegee
9. Harvard
10. Duke
11. Howard
12. Columbia
13. Princeton
14. Hampton
15. NCAT
16. CalTech
17. Fisk
18. Xavier
19. FAMU
20. Claflin

Tyra:
1. Harvard
2. Yale
3. Stanford
4. MIT
5. Princeton
6. UPenn
7. CalTech
8. Howard
9. Columbia
10. UChicago
11. Morehouse
12. Spelman
13. FAMU
14. Duke
15. Hampton
16. NCAT
17. Tuskegee
18. Xavier
19. Fisk
20. Claflin

Victoria:
1. Princeton
2. Spelman
3. Harvard
4. Columbia
5. Yale
6. UPenn
7. Howard
8. NCAT
9. MIT
10. Stanford
11. Morehouse
12. Duke
13. FAMU
14. UChicago
15. Hampton
16. CalTech
17. Xavier
18. Tuskegee
19. Fisk
20. Claflin

Chuck:
1. MIT
2. Harvard
3. Princeton
4. Stanford
5. Columbia
6. Yale
7. UChicago
8. UPenn
9. CalTech
10. Howard
11. Morehouse
12. Tuskegee
13. Duke
14. FAMU
15. NCAT
16. Fisk
17. Claflin
18. Xavier
19. Spelman
20. Hampton

Brielle:
1. Harvard
2. Yale
3. Princeton
4. Duke
5. UChicago
6. Stanford
11. Morehouse
12. UPenn
13. FAMU
14. Xavier
15. Hampton
16. NCAT

Val:
1. Stanford
2. Columbia
3. Howard
4. Harvard
5. Morehouse
6. Spelman
11. Yale
12. CalTech
13. FAMU
14. NCAT
15. Hampton
16. Claflin

7. Columbia	17. Fisk
8. MIT	18. Claflin
9. Howard	19. CalTech
10. Spelman	20. Tuskegee

Kalvin:

1. Harvard	11. Stanford
2. Princeton	12. Tuskegee
3. Yale	13. Fisk
4. Howard	14. FAMU
5. Morehouse	15. NCAT
6. Spelman	16. UPenn
7. Duke	17. Xavier
8. MIT	18. Claflin
9. CalTech	19. Hampton
10. Columbia	20. UChicago

Raina:

1. Stanford	11. Spelman
2. Columbia	12. Howard
3. Harvard	13. Morehouse
4. Princeton	14. Hampton
5. Yale	15. Fisk
6. MIT	16. Tuskegee
7. UPenn	17. Xavier
8. CalTech	18. NCAT
9. UChicago	19. FAMU
10. Duke	20. Claflin

Lewis:

1. Harvard	11. Morehouse
2. MIT	12. CalTech
3. Yale	13. UChicago
4. Princeton	14. Spelman
5. Columbia	15. Howard
6. Stanford	16. UPenn
7. Duke	17. Xavier
8. Hampton	18. Tuskegee
9. FAMU	19. Fisk
10. NCAT	20. Claflin

Erica:

1. NCAT	11. Fisk
2. Duke	12. Xavier
3. Howard	13. Tuskegee
4. Yale	14. Stanford

7. Duke	17. Tuskegee
8. UPenn	18. UChicago
9. Princeton	19. Fisk
10. MIT	20. Xavier

Sandy:

1. Stanford	11. Spelman
2. UPenn	12. Duke
3. Columbia	13. Morehouse
4. Harvard	14. Tuskegee
5. Princeton	15. Xavier
6. Yale	16. Hampton
7. MIT	17. Fisk
8. UChicago	18. FAMU
9. CalTech	19. NCAT
10. Howard	20. Claflin

Talia:

1. Stanford	11. Princeton
2. Harvard	12. Columbia
3. Duke	13. UChicago
4. MIT	14. Howard
5. Morehouse	15. Tuskegee
6. Spelman	16. Hampton
7. NCAT	17. Xavier
8. Yale	18. FAMU
9. UPenn	19. Fisk
10. CalTech	20. Claflin

Darren:

1. Harvard	11. Hampton
2. MIT	12. Tuskegee
3. Princeton	13. Claflin
4. Yale	14. FAMU
5. Xavier	15. NCAT
6. Duke	16. Fisk
7. Stanford	17. CalTech
8. Morehouse	18. UChicago
9. Spelman	19. Columbia
10. Howard	20. UPenn

Dionne:

1. Stanford	11. Xavier
2. NCAT	12. Hampton
3. Morehouse	13. Princeton
4. Spelman	14. Harvard

5.	Harvard	15.	CalTech	5.	Columbia	15.	UPenn
6.	Spelman	16.	UChicago	6.	Howard	16.	Claflin
7.	Morehouse	17.	UPenn	7.	Yale	17.	Fisk
8.	Florida	18.	Columbia	8.	Duke	18.	CalTech
9.	Hampton	19.	Princeton	9.	Tuskegee	19.	MIT
10.	Claflin	20.	MIT	10.	FAMU	20.	UChicago

Benjamin:

1.	Morehouse	11.	UChicago
2.	Harvard	12.	Howard
3.	Stanford	13.	FAMU
4.	MIT	14.	Tuskegee
5.	Columbia	15.	Hampton
6.	Princeton	16.	NCAT
7.	Yale	17.	Fisk
8.	Duke	18.	Xavier
9.	Spelman	19.	CalTech
10.	UChicago	20.	Claflin

Shawn:

1.	Claflin	11.	Harvard
2.	Stanford	12.	MIT
3.	Tuskegee	13.	Yale
4.	NCAT	14.	Xavier
5.	Morehouse	15.	Princeton
6.	Spelman	16.	Columbia
7.	Howard	17.	UPenn
8.	FAMU	18.	UChicago
9.	Hampton	19.	CalTech
10.	Fisk	20.	Duke

Gene:

1.	Morehouse	11.	Stanford
2.	Tuskegee	12.	FAMU
3.	Xavier	13.	UPenn
4.	Duke	14.	Claflin
5.	Fisk	15.	MIT
6.	Hampton	16.	Princeton
7.	Spelman	17.	Howard
8.	CalTech	18.	NCAT
9.	UChicago	19.	Yale
10.	Columbia	20.	Harvard

Jay:

1.	Harvard	11.	Spelman
2.	Princeton	12.	Morehouse
3.	Columbia	13.	Hampton
4.	Stanford	14.	Xavier
5.	Yale	15.	FAMU
6.	MIT	16.	Tuskegee
7.	UChicago	17.	Fisk
8.	UPenn	18.	NCAT
9.	Duke	19.	CalTech
10.	Howard	20.	Claflin

APPENDIX G: KEY TERMS & DEFINITIONS

➢ *Anti-Blackness:* the belief that Black people are inherently inferior.

➢ *Critical Race Theory (CRT):* a movement, a methodology, and an analytic framework that explores how race, power, privilege, and oppression affect the law (used to study policies and institutions).

➢ *Cycle of Socialization:* a theory that postulates people are socialized (taught what is acceptable) by powerful forces in their environments, including people and institutions.

➢ *Historically Black College and Universities (HBCUs):* higher education institutions established before 1964 to educate freed slaves and their descendants (while established to educate Black Americans, they never had policies against the education of non-Black Americans).

➢ *Mixed-multimethod:* a research process that consists of researchers using both qualitative and quantitative data in a single research study.

➢ *Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs):* colleges or universities created to educate white students. While a school may not be majority predominantly white, if its curriculum is Eurocentric and its leaders are predominantly white, it is considered a PWI for the purpose of this study.

➢ *Privilege:* the absence of barriers that leads to advantages for certain groups/individuals at the expense of others.

➢ *Racial Realism/The Permanence of Racism*: A Critical Race Theory tenet that theorizes that while racism is a social construct, it is common, permanent, and so normal that it is often invisible.

➢ *Racialized Structures:* organizations organized and privileged by the race associated with them.

➢ *Socialization:* the process of learning the behavior and attitudes considered appropriate by society.

➢ *Systemic Racism:* the process of upholding white supremacy and counteracting efforts to combat it (also called institutional racism).

➢ *White Normativity:* the process of painting whiteness as neutral, normative, average, and ideal.

➢ *Whiteness as Property*: a Critical Race Theory tenet that theorizes whiteness has evolved from a racial identity to become a property right that privileges white groups at the expense of non-white groups.

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