An Exploration of Self-Identity Experiences Within the Lives of Afro-Caribbean Women Undergraduate College Students: A Feminist Phenomenological Study

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this feminist phenomenological dissertation was to explore the self-identity experiences of Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students. In doing so, self-identity experiences, ethnic marginalization, and counseling experiences were explored for six participants. Data was collected and analyzed using Simone De Beauvoir’s feminist framework of self-discovery/rediscovery where two semi-structured interviews were conducted for each participant. This study resulted in six individual profiles illuminating the voices of each participant as well as collective themes. Findings from this study show that Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students filter their self-identity experiences through their ethnicity; meaning that participants understand other pieces of their self-identity (i.e., gender and race) and self-identity as a whole through their primary social location of ethnicity. Also, the findings represent that ethnic marginalization fueled participants’ push back against stereotypical and colonial narratives about the Afro-Caribbean community and having an inadequate counseling experiences affects college social and academic success. Based on the findings of this data, implications center on multicultural and intersectional training of college counselors and counselor educators; as well as implications for Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students. Recommendations for future research also showcases the need for larger research sample sizes, including qualitative and quantitative studies about self-identity and related subjects (i.e., self-concept, self-esteem, and ethnic identity development).
AN EXPLORATION OF SELF-IDENTITY EXPERIENCES WITHIN THE LIVES OF AFRO-CARIBBEAN WOMEN UNDERGRADUATE COLLEGE STUDENTS: A FEMINIST PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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Dissertation
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Counseling and Counselor Education

Syracuse University
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother and father – Jean and Lydie Gelin. Thank you for always pushing me to follow my wildest dreams.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Chapter one includes an overview of the need to explore the narratives of Afro-Caribbean college students (with emphasis on Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students). In doing so, it will introduce the need to illuminate the self-identity experiences of Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students in providing different intersectional narratives when exploring the Black race in counselor education.

The National Center for Education Statistics (U. S. Department of Education, 2020) reported an enrollment of three million undergraduate Black students within colleges and universities during 2015-2016. This enrollment number for Black students remained consistent during the academic years of 2016-2017 and 2017-2018. The Afro-Caribbean population is one of the largest subgroups within the Black population in the United States (Deaux et al., 2007; Gustave, 2016; Matthews, 2012; Mitchell, 2005). Despite the larger number of Afro-Caribbean individuals broadly, most higher education institutions do not report ethnicity when reporting about Black college students. Not doing so continues a monolithic narrative of all Black people and denies the rich cultural complexity of the Black identity as a whole. Consequently, there needs to be more education research and resources for Afro-Caribbean college students. The lack of attention towards this concern may continue issues of cultural assimilation, isolation, decrease in retention rates for Black individuals, and an overgeneralization of Black students’ experiences in college (Campbell, 2017, Chapman-Hilliard & Beasley, 2018; Malcolm & Mendoza, 2014; McClain et al., 2016; Woldoff et al., 2011). With this lack of information about Afro-Caribbean college students, institutional personnel (specifically, counselors) lack critical information needed to support these students as they enroll within their institutions. If counselors do not have this information, they are limited in their ability to advocate and serve this population which
could bring potential harm to Afro-Caribbean students’ self-identity and reaffirm cultural stereotypes. Not taking these students’ ethnicity into account misses core components of how they understand moral decision-making, understand adulthood, and potential career choices and how they engage in social environments (Katsiaficas, et al., 2015; Malcolm & Mendoza, 2014; McClain et al., 2016).

Counseling research may conflate race and ethnicity without acknowledging the nuances that can be understood when explored separately (McClain et al., 2016). Race is referred to the biological components that may phenotypically present in physical appearance, as ethnicity is not as biologically consistent but comprised of a group shared culture from a specific nation or tradition (Agyemang et al., 2005). Not seeing the nuances in race and ethnicity may miss the ethnocultural differences of many Black people and the sensitivity of seeing how other ethnicities understand their Black race (Matthews, 2012). In addition to the lack of ethnicity exploration, expression of intersectionality is also scarce (Crenshaw, 1991; Jones & Pritchett-Johnson, 2018; Whaley & Dubose, 2018). In studies on Black college students, researchers continue to examine the dichotomy of college concerns with male against female and/or articles about Black women or men (Allen & Jacques, 2020; Jones & Pritchett-Johnson, 2018; Leath & Chavous, 2017). This is significant because it brings understanding to counseling perspectives towards gender and race, but ethnicity is also missed within such research.

If ethnicity was explored, it could illuminate further nuances of cultural differences that impact mental health (e.g., religion, generational trauma, and xenophobia; Cokley, Beasley, et al., 2013; Grace-Williams, 2016; Whaley & Dubose, 2018; Wilson, 2008). Counseling courses (i.e., multicultural counseling) that teach on the perspectives of women may not go in-depth about intersectional issues about women (Dupuy & Ritchie, 1994), which includes women of
If Afro-Caribbean women college student narratives were explored, their experiences could illuminate how the intersection of gender, race, and ethnicity impact the lives of Afro-Caribbean students. This population could acknowledge how marginalized identities within multiple social locations could impact self-identity and their experience with helping professionals on college campuses (specifically, counselors). Therefore, this dissertation will explore the lived self-identity experiences of Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students. This chapter includes details on the need for research about Afro-Caribbean undergraduate college students (with emphasis on undergraduate women), the importance of self-identity, the rationale for this present study, and the author’s positionality.

**Afro-Caribbean Undergraduate College Students**

Research in the counseling profession sometimes fails to mention the many ethnicities that exist in the Black race (Chapman-Hilliard & Beasley, 2018; Guiffrida & Douthit 2010; Jones & Pritchett-Johnson, 2018). This racial marker of being Black can represent anyone who directly identifies with one’s Black African ancestry. This identity includes more than African American people, such as, individuals from the Caribbean and South America for examples (Hood, 2019). Ethnic cultural differences such as language, colloquialisms, mannerisms, and nationality reflect within-group differences amongst Black people, including college students. The Black race is full of diverse ethnicities, which includes Afro-Caribbean – an ethnicity comprising individuals who identify with being Black and are born in the Caribbean (Gustave, 2016). Individuals who are Black and have Caribbean descent (i.e., parents and grandparents born in Caribbean) may also ethnically identify with being Afro-Caribbean (Gustave, 2016). Because of the collapsing of ethnicities into the Black race, there is a gap in understanding the experiences of Afro-Caribbean college students in counseling research. Focusing on Afro-
Caribbean women undergraduate college student narratives may fill this gap of identifying the ethnic nuances, intersectional perspectives, and resources needed to aid this population.

The continuation of Afro-Caribbean college students being collapsed together in counseling research may lead to diminishing their individuality, rich culture, and misrepresenting this population (Malcolm & Mendoza, 2014). Racial homogeneous categorization for Afro-Caribbean students may also result in ethnic injustice, cultural assimilation, and autoplasticity on college campuses (Campbell, 2017, Malcolm & Mendoza, 2014). For example, Afro-Caribbean college students have high rates of ethnic pride (Gustave, 2016; Matthews, 2012; Thompson, 2011), and can feel detached from college social settings when their ethnicity is not represented (Campbell, 2017, Malcolm & Mendoza, 2014). Despite these associated risks and consequences, the stress of Afro-Caribbean college students’ population has received minimal exploration to date (Campbell, 2017; Matthews, 2012).

When counseling articles acknowledge different ethnic groups, they express a more complex perspective about the Black college student experience. For instance, ethnicity is linked to Black students’ well-being and a source of resilience when managing psychological stress (Cokley, McClain, et al., 2013; Matthews, 2012; McClain et al., 2016). Emphasizing the importance of ethnicity, both conceptual and research articles interchangeably use terms such as “Black American” and “African American” to express knowledge about all individuals of African descent in the United States (Cokley, McClain, et al., 2013). Using “African American” as a proxy for all Black people continues to perpetuate racial homogeneous categorization and disregards the significance of differing ethnicities within the Black race. As there is a dearth of research in the counseling field exploring other Black ethnicities, singularly exploring Afro-Caribbean students and their self-identity experiences will add to the current counseling
knowledge base. Exploring the Afro-Caribbean college student experience can begin to fill this gap and construct a more nuance understanding of the Black identity through multiple Black ethnicities. As such, the current study will illuminate the narratives of Afro-Caribbean students and serves to disrupt homogeneous categorization in counseling research.

**Self-Identity and Afro-Caribbean Undergraduate College Students**

The college campus environment is a unique atmosphere that fosters actions of personal and interpersonal development (Mendoza & Malcolm 2014; Renn, 2004, 2005). College is an atmosphere that cultivates independence, career guidance, critical thinking, and explore new passions and abilities to help students invest in themselves (Bok, 2013). However, in this same atmosphere, Black undergraduate college students can experience racial identity challenges that contribute to psychological stress while living on campus (Charles et al., 2015; McClain et al., 2016; Rose & Firmin, 2013). Afro-Caribbean college students may also have feelings of isolation and rejection from being underrepresented within their race, in conjunction with college racial challenges previously mentioned (Gustave, 2016; Malcolm & Mendoza, 2014; Thompson, 2011). Afro-Caribbean individuals share a similar racial identity with other Black people but may feel strong ethnic ties to their subscribed nationality and/or familial ethnic country of origin (Charles et al., 2015; Malcolm & Mendoza, 2014; Stewart, 2009). The lack of ethnic representation or misrepresentation may cause Afro-Caribbean college students to hesitate when joining Black student associations, stop using racial labels for personal categorization (e.g., instead using Caribbean, Jamaican, Bahamian, etc.), and unsure about how to navigate their self-identity in college (Malcolm & Mendoza, 2014; Matthews, 2012; Thompson, 2011). As self-identity development of college students can be formed by both race and ethnicity (Ortiz & Santos, 2009), conceptualizing oneself as “Black” does not encompass the complexity of these
students’ self-identity. Not examining this issue continues to pathologize the stereotypical narrative of a Black monolithic culture.

**Self-Identity Theories: Erik Erickson (1950, 1959) and James Marcia (1966)**

Self-identity is simplistically defined as a collection of cultural associations that creates someone’s self-perception (Erez & Earley, 1993). Self-identity has been explored through theorists such as Erik Erickson (1950, 1959) and James Marcia (1966) who conceptualize identity from adolescence to emerging adulthood (average college aged students). These theorists have defined self-identity using terms such as ego and personal identity to represent the *self*. Erickson’s (1950, 1959) theory of psychosocial development approaches identity with eight stages of ego development, with the fifth stage being identity vs. role confusion. This stage reflects adolescence who are finding their personal identity through social groups (e.g., friends, family, classmates, etc.) and societal norms. Marcia’s (1966) identity status theory represents identity in four statuses (i.e., foreclosure, identity achievement, identity diffusion, and moratorium). The decisions that the adolescent/adult made thus far about their current identity formation process, determines the identity status. For example, if a person is not clear about their identity at all, they are in identity diffusion; but if another person is having a consistent cognitive process about their identity and made a choice about who they are/who they want to be, they are in identity achievement. Erik Erickson (1950, 1959) and James Marcia (1966) created theories that exemplify the commitment needed by the individual to invest in themselves in cultivating who they are. However, these theories do not center cultural issues such as how Caribbean history of colonization, colorism, or sexism may affect current identity development; or consider implications of being in a collective culture that may influence personal decision-making. Self-identity and identity development are complex for all Black students (Phelps et al., 2001), and
may increase for Afro-Caribbean students who may feel pressure to conform to a monolithic version of the Black identity (Stewart, 2009).

This combination of being Black (but not African American) in conjunction with self-identity issues, raises questions about the need to explore Afro-Caribbean college students’ narratives in complexifying Black identities. A transcendental phenomenological pilot study on Afro-Caribbean college students was conducted to explore their narratives about self-identity development (Gelin, 2017). Centered around two Afro-Caribbean students (one male and one female), the primary research questions explored were the experience(s) of Afro-Caribbean college students when understanding their self-identity and ethnic marginalization (being black but not African American). Findings from this study expressed that these Afro-Caribbean college students assimilated to African American cultural stereotypes and felt social pressure from African American students; for example, listening to hip-hop instead of Soca, Kompa, or other forms of Caribbean music. Also, participants reported feeling like they needed to have two sets of friends, one set with African American individuals and the other with Caribbean individuals.

Not having multiple Afro-Caribbean college student narratives to identify different understandings of self-identity, was a point of contention in qualitative research trustworthiness in this pilot study. Exploring multiple narratives about women would provide more thick descriptions about the phenomena, including an intersectional perspective of gender, race, and ethnicity. Not including gender in the research findings continues to exclude significant gender narratives needed to disrupt power and illuminate marginalized voices in research (Fisher & Embree, 2000; Hesse-Biber, 2012; Shabot & Landry, 2018). This dissertation will address these concerns mentioned and include multiple self-identity narratives of Afro-Caribbean undergraduate women college students.
Research Focus on Afro-Caribbean Women Undergraduate College Students

Topics of homogeneous categorization and self-identity have been introduced, but the addition of gender further complexifies and introduces specific narratives within the Black population. From the national cohort year of 2012, out of the three million undergraduate Black students who attended college, 52% who graduated were women (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). Black women in college are usually being compared to the success of Black men instead of focusing on their well-being and specific needs (Jones & Sam, 2018). Black women college students face issues of sexism, colorism within societal beauty and body image standards, academic and social isolation, and stereotyping within intersecting identities (Jones & Pritchett-Johnson, 2018; Jones & Sam, 2018). Highlighting these issues about Black women college students may illuminate the Collegiate Mental Health 2014 report of 70% of Black students who receive counseling are women (Jones & Sam, 2018). Subsequently, if Black women college students are attending college and seeking counseling at higher rates, Afro-Caribbean women are also embedded within such data. With previously iterating the lack of Afro-Caribbean ethnic identity expression on college campuses (Campbell, 2017, Malcolm & Mendoza, 2014), considerations about Afro-Caribbean women are also significant as gender highly impacts the college experience (Jones & Pritchett-Johnson, 2018).

Afro-Caribbean Women and Intersectionality

Centering this intersectional perspective (e.g., gender, race, and ethnicity) for Afro-Caribbean women college students emphasizes the distinct needs of this group instead of comparing differences between genders. The term intersectionality was created to conceptualize Black women’s experiences in America (Creshaw, 1988, 1991). Afro-Caribbean woman college students are a significant group to be explored in counseling (and other fields) because of
stereotypes and gendered cultural norms that exist within this group. The intersectional narrative of Afro-Caribbean women students may advance the understanding of race, gender, colorism, and classism in the counseling field. Afro-Caribbean women college students have diverse narratives that come from their experiences of cultural and gender norms, racial and ethnic marginalization, and religion (Blank, 2013; Mohammed 1998, 2002). These experiences can affect Afro-Caribbean women college students’ self-identity as these personal and historical impressions may impact their decision-making in the future.

Exploring the narratives of Afro-Caribbean women college students will bring a unique perspective within the counseling field, while illuminating intersectionality within the Black identity. In doing so, this dissertation will bridge the gap of Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students, thus exploring more Black ethnicities within the counseling field. It will explore if and how Afro-Caribbean women college students’ ethnic marginalization and participation in counseling may impact their self-identity.

**Rationale for the Study and Research Questions**

Research on Afro-Caribbean women college students is necessary to provide narratives about college students from different ethnicities within the Black identity in order for counselors to provide appropriate services for this population. Although there is survey research that included Afro-Caribbean students there is limited qualitative research that explored their narratives (Campbell, 2017; Gustave, 2016; Malcolm & Mendoza, 2014; Matthews, 2012; Thompson, 2011). Counseling intersectional research has more conceptual literature compared to empirical studies (Ali & Lee, 2019; Chan et al., 2019; Cor, 2018; Shannon, 2020), and this study could add more qualitative research using an intersectional methodology (detailed in chapter 3 – feminist phenomenology). To date, the counseling field has yet to explore the narratives of Afro-
Caribbean women college students in-depth about their needs, life experiences, and cultural conflation within Black communities. Consequently, the purpose of this dissertation is to explore the self-identity experiences of Afro-Caribbean undergraduate women.

In doing so, the three main research questions for this dissertation are:

1) What are the self-identity experiences of Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students?
2) What are the experiences of ethnic marginalization for Afro-Caribbean women college students?
3) What are the experiences of Afro-Caribbean women students who attend or have experienced counseling?

**Positionality**

It is essential within qualitative research to understand the position of the researcher (Hays & Singh, 2012). This dissertation includes experiences of Afro-Caribbean women college students, which are three identities that I currently hold (Afro-Caribbean, woman, and college student). During my undergraduate studies, I experienced ethnic marginalization within my racial group (being Black but not African American). Being an Afro-Caribbean woman, students, professors, staff, and other university affiliates of a variety of races would assume my ethnicity based on my race. After expressing my ethnicity to people, some still did not understand the reason why correcting them was relevant or valuable towards my own self-identity. Some Afro-Caribbean women on campus were vocal about this same notion of expressing their ethnicity, and felt neglected, culturally dismissed, and not represented on campus. It was through conversations with other Afro-Caribbean individuals that I noticed ethnic marginalization had potential negative implications for Afro-Caribbean students.
I remember many experiences where my counselor colleagues didn’t acknowledge cultural and ethnic differences when counseling Black individuals. They saw them as Black and used a “one size fits all” approach to conceptualizing Black narratives. As an emerging counselor educator, I have noticed that little research has been conducted to express the complexity of ethnicities within the Black community – specifically exploring Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students. I am aware of the need to bracket my assumptions because of my own experiences. I have been impacted by my friendships with other Afro-Caribbean women, seen how Afro-Caribbean women may feel offended from being stereotyped as an African American, and observing other Afro-Caribbean women in discussion groups about racism/colorism. In doing this research, it is important to continuously remember that the Caribbean is a compilation of many countries; therefore, there is no monolithic Afro-Caribbean woman experience. Also, knowing that Afro-Caribbean women may not feel affected at all by ethnic marginalization.

In conducting a study that acknowledges lived experiences are not absent from intersectionality, I conducted a feminist analysis about Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students. I will continuously be aware of these assumptions presented above, actively listening to participants, and leaving room for storytelling/ recollection (Fisher & Embree, 2000; Hesse-Biber, 2012). Attending to trustworthiness factors (will be explored in Chapter 3), will articulate authentic narratives about Afro-Caribbean women college students that will aid cultural counseling interventions.

**Definition of Key Terms**

This dissertation encompasses significant key terms that need defining. Below are how these terms are being used in this dissertation study.
Counselors: When referring to counselors, these are individuals within the counseling/counselor education field who belong to the accrediting body of the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Programs (CACREP). Counselors within this dissertation are not referring to psychologist, marriage and family therapist, and other counseling related professions. Though information within this dissertation is relevant to many fields, potential implications are geared towards training, supervision, and clinical work of counselors and counselor educators.

College Student: A college student refers to a person who is enrolled at a post-secondary institution (college/university) and engaging in courses at the institution.

Undergraduate: An undergraduate, is a college student who is enrolled in undergraduate courses at a post-secondary institution (college/university) to receive an associate or bachelor’s degree.

Woman: An individual human being who socially identifies as a “woman” (includes but not limited to transgender women and intersex women).

Black: The United States Census Bureau (2018) defines “Black” as persons who identifies themselves with any of the Black racial groups of Africa. This will include a diverse population of people from the United States, South America, the Caribbean, and other areas within the Pan-African diaspora. Being that there are people who are from Africa yet may not identify with being Black (i.e., Morocco, Alegria, etc.), it is important to mention not all people with African decent identify with being Black (Agyemang et al., 2005; Hood, 2019). Black is a race and should not be mistaken for a nationality or ethnicity.

African American: Most people who identify as African American are descendants of sub-Saharan Africans who were forced into slavery and brought to United States from the 17th – 19th
century (Agyemang et al., 2005; Hood, 2019). As Africans who were enslaved procreated, children were born in the United States and the social location of African American later emerged. The term “African”, as a description for African American is not the same cultural group. African without context or qualifiers is too vague for the purpose of this research (Agyemang et al., 2005).

**Afro-Caribbean:** Afro-Caribbean is a racial and ethnic marker that identifies Black people who are born in any Caribbean country (Anguilla, Antigua & Barbuda, Aruba, Bahamas, Barbados, BES Islands (Bonaire, Sint Eustatius, and Saba), British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Cuba, Curaçao, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guadeloupe, Haiti, Jamaica, Martinique, Montserrat, Puerto Rico, St. Barthélemy (St. Barts), St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Martin, St. Vincent & The Grenadines, St. Maarten, Trinidad & Tobago, Turks & Caicos, and United States Virgin Islands) (Agyemang et al., 2005; Gustave, 2016; Hofman & Hoogland, 2016; Hood, 2019; Thompson, 2011). In the late 15th/16th century, sub-Saharan Africans were enslaved and forced onto Caribbean soil (Klein, 1986). As colonization continued in the Caribbean, different cultures unfolded by the colonizers implanting their values, beliefs, and social norms into the different Caribbean territories (i.e., French colonizing Haiti and Spain colonizing Cuba)-influencing language spoken in each country, race relations/ colorism, and economic status (Gustave, 2016).

As Afro-Caribbean individuals began to migrate to the United States and other countries around the world, they had children who were not born in a Caribbean country. The three most common ways that these individuals may identify themselves are: (a) Afro-Caribbean, (b) Afro-Caribbean descent, and/or (c) by specific ethnic country of origin and race (i.e., Black and Dominican, Black and Bahamian, etc.) (Agyemang et al., 2005; Gustave, 2016; Hood, 2019;
Thompson, 2011). The commonality within all these identifications is race and ethnicity. For the purpose of this dissertation, women undergraduate college students who identify with being Afro-Caribbean in its literal sense (being both Black and ethnically Caribbean) will be appropriate for this study.

**Greater Antilles:** The word “greater” is not an adjective of its significance to the Caribbean but the geographical size. The Greater Antilles are the larger islands of the Caribbean which are Cuba, Haiti/ Dominican Republic (a shared island), Jamaica, and Puerto Rico (Fitzpatrick, 2015).

**Lesser Antilles:** Similar to the Greater Antilles, the word “lesser” is also associated with geographical size. The Lesser Antilles are the smaller islands of the Caribbean (except Bahamas), which are Anguilla, Antigua & Barbuda, Aruba, Barbados, BES Islands (Bonaire, Sint Eustatius, and Saba), British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Curacao, Dominica, Grenada, Guadeloupe, Jamaica, Martinique, Montserrat, St. Barthélemy (St. Barts), St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Martin, St. Vincent & The Grenadines, St. Maarten, Trinidad & Tobago, Turks & Caicos, and United States Virgin Islands (Fitzpatrick, 2015).

**Self-Identity:** The *self* is a product of social systems and a shared understanding of members within a particular group and cultures. This socialization transcends within generations and builds an individual’s understanding of self (as known as self-identity) (Erez & Earley, 1993). Self-identity is a complex term because it is influenced by interpersonal and cultural relationships built during the course of an individual’s life (Mendoza & Malcolm 2014; Sue, 2001); therefore, continuously evolving over a person’s lifetime. Many use words such as self-concept, personal identity, and ego identity (Erickson, 1950, 1959; Marcia, 1966) to express one’s understanding of self. Within this dissertation, self-identity is defined as all cultural factors within a student’s life that has consistent impact on a student’s perception of themselves. This
includes but is not limited to ethnicity, interpersonal relationships, race, religion, social economic status, gender, and an intersection of multiple elements of different cultures.

**Intersectionality:** Intersectionality is a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, that is defined as multiple forms of social identities that overlap (intersect) and contribute to continued discrimination and oppression of marginalized groups – specifically, within the narratives of black women (Crenshaw, 1988, 1991). This term is important as Afro-Caribbean women college students talk about their self-identity experiences and if/how multiple social identities collide in understanding their sense of *self*.

**Ethnic Marginalization:** Ethnic marginalization is the mistreatment felt from being a different ethnicity from someone in another ethnic or racial group (Ashely, 2013; Diver-Stamnes & Lomascolo, 2001; Milo, 2013; Park, 2017). Complexity within such a term progresses as ethnic marginalization can be experienced within race, and with other races. For example, an Afro-Caribbean woman can feel marginalized for listening to a Caribbean podcast from another Black person (e.g., Afro-Brazilian, African American, etc.) and someone who identifies as East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, etc.). This may lead to feeling judged within her own racial group and misrepresented by another racial group. As narratives from Afro-Caribbean women college students are represented within this dissertation, these experiences may be revealed in expressing how participants come to understand their self-identity.

In exploring the self-identity experiences of Afro-Caribbean women college students, defining these terms will bring a grounding to the current research perspective that frames this dissertation. Knowing how these terms are being conceptualized and implemented provides insight to the upcoming chapter in providing a literature review about Caribbean history, the history and experiences of Afro-Caribbean women, current research about Afro-Caribbean
undergraduate students (with emphasis on Afro-Caribbean women experiences), development of identity and research framework.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will provide a brief introduction of Caribbean history and explore literature and research about Afro-Caribbean women, self-identity, and Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students. Also, this chapter will highlight how ethnicity is a crucial factor in developing identity for Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students, Erik Erikson and James Marica’s theories on identity, and the strength historically documented of the Caribbean people. The objective of this dissertation is to bring knowledge towards a larger understanding of the Black identity as a whole through valuing the narratives of Afro-Caribbean women.

To explore the self-identity experiences of Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students, it is important to first introduce the history of this ethnic group and its significance to the formation of identity development. As scholars have learned more about this population and their history, they have recounted an intersectional experience including the importance of gender, ethnicity and race within Caribbean history (Blouet, 2007; Bobb-Smith, 2003; Davis & Goodwin, 1990; Flynn, 2011; Gustave, 2016; Higman, 2011; Hofman & Hoogland, 2016; Hood, 2019; Mustapha, 2013; Reid, 2009; Reid & Gilmore, 2014; Rouse, 1992; Taylor, 2012). Situated within the Caribbean Sea, the Caribbean are a collective of islands rich in culture, diversity, and history (Blouet, 2007; Gustave, 2016; Higman, 2011; Hood, 2019; Mustapha, 2013; Reid, 2009; Reid & Gilmore, 2014; Rouse, 1992; Taylor, 2012). These islands were (and still are) inhabitant with people who are intuitive, innovative, and resilient (Bobb-Smith, 2003; Gentles-Peart, 2014; Lalla, 2019; Reid, 2009). As this chapter introduces Caribbean history, it will represent the Caribbean as a whole, with specifics about different Caribbean nationalities throughout. In introducing the Caribbean in this perspective, there are limitations in writing about the Caribbean
within a monolithic scope when individualistic cultural distinctions exist within each country. The Caribbean identity entails having a national and/or ethnic association to a Caribbean country, but also a shared admiration for cultural heritage and Caribbean people (Bobb-Smith, 2003; Gentles-Peart, 2014). Some countries are Anglophone, Francophone, Spanish-speaking and yet still share the cultural identity of being Caribbean (Gustave, 2016; Higman, 2011; Roper, 2018). History brings understanding to these language experiences (Higman, 2011; Mustapha, 2013; Reid & Gilmore, 2014; Taylor, 2012), and is recognized that countries have their own distinctive traits that may be significance to how many Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students understand their self-identity. Consequently, within this dissertation Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students were encouraged to speak about their narratives without generalizing their experiences with other participants.

**Introduction of Caribbean History**

**Naming the Indigenous and Precolonial People of the Caribbean**

The introduction of Christopher Columbus and colonization is how the history of the Caribbean is often explained and is a myth towards the genesis of these nations (Reid, 2009). Long before Columbus, Indigenous people were living, cultivating, and creating civilization for themselves on these islands (Reid, 2009; Rouse, 1992). The history of the Indigenous people in the Caribbean is quite complex. A portion of the complexity stems from racist ethnohistorical sources in the 15th to 16th century by European colonizers that include racial bias and discrimination towards these Indigenous people. For example, European narratives described Indigenous Caribbean people as cannibalistic warriors who ate their opponents’ bodies after battle (Reid, 2009; Reid & Callaghan, 2014). There is no archeological evidence or current data for these descriptions yet is still recorded as truth in Caribbean literature in the United States.
(Rouse, 1992). Scholars have exposed that Indigenous people who did not cooperate with the European demands of enslavement and servitude were labeled cannibalistic (Higman, 2011; Reid, 2009; Reid & Callaghan, 2014). Both archeology and racist European narratives have been used to explain the origin of the Caribbean, but these European accounts have also shaped research and knowledge production about the Caribbean (Reid, 2009; Reid & Callaghan, 2014). To combat these myths about Caribbean history, this section will start with naming Indigenous groups and honor their history as the first people of the Caribbean. Fundamentally, this history will present how the Caribbean became ethnically and racially diverse, and the continued resilience of the Caribbean people.

The Ortoiroid and Casimiroid People

Since approximately 5000 BC – 4000 BC migrants from South America and Central America were hypothesized to be the first to inhabit the islands (Reid, 2009; Reid & Callaghan, 2014; Rouse, 1992; Sajo, 2014). Considered the Archaic people of the Caribbean, the Ortoiroid and Casimiroid people were the first to occupy the region before the invasion of Europeans in 1492 (Reid, 2009; Reid & Callaghan, 2014; Rouse, 1992; Sajo, 2014). From approximately 5000-200 BC the Ortoiroid people lived within the Lesser Antilles up to Puerto Rico. They were assumed to be the first farmers and potters of the Caribbean as artifacts were found within the Banwari Trace. Located in present day Trinidad and Tobago, Banwari Trace is the oldest archeological site in the Caribbean where presumed Ortoiroid gardening tools, spears, jewelry, and pieces of pottery were found (Fitzpatrick, 2015; Higman, 2011; Reid, 2009; Reid & Callaghan, 2014; Rouse, 1992). Trinidad and Tobago are also hypothesized to be geographically attached to South America and was detached after the Pleistocene period (during the global rise of sea level/ ice age) (Boomert, 2014; Fitzpatrick, 2015). This prehistoric link is contributed to
how countries in South America and the Caribbean have similar historical traces of Native people in both geographical areas (Fitzpatrick, 2015; Reid & Callaghan, 2014).

The Casimiroid people are historically linked as migrants from Central America (Belize) from 4000-400 BC. Entering present day Greater Antillean islands of Cuba and Hispaniola (Haiti and Dominican Republic), the Casimiroid people were considered to be both hunters and marine life gatherers (Fitzpatrick, 2015; Sajo, 2014; Reid, 2009; Rouse, 1992). Evidence of these characteristics are present by more historic artifacts found such as hammerstones and sharp flakes used to create knives and tools for survival. Casimiroid people are also seen as beginning the rise of economic multiplicity in the Caribbean from using sea life interactions and animal hunting as means for trade and personal resources (Fitzpatrick, 2015). Evolved from the Ortoiroid and Casimiroid people came a multiple migration of other groups who settled within the Caribbean (e.g., Saladoids, Troumassan Troumassoids, and Ostionoids) (Fitzpatrick, 2015; Reid, 2009; Reid & Callaghan, 2014; Rouse, 1992). These groups are significant because they go unmentioned when explaining Caribbean history and the Indigenous people who first settled on the islands in textbooks and historical non-fiction books about the Caribbean (Mustapha, 2013; Reid, 2009). Not mentioning these groups continues to combat that history existed long before colonization and illuminating the rich history of the Caribbean.

**Amerindian, Taínos, and Kalinago People**

After considering these Archaic Caribbean groups, many Caribbean scholars believe that the Amerindian, Arawakan, and Caribs (Kalinago) were the three major ethnic groups that inhabited the Caribbean (Higman, 2011; Hofman & Hoogland, 2016; Mustapha, 2013; Reid, 2009; Roper, 2018; Rouse, 1992; Taylor, 2012; Whitehead, 1995). Within many different writings about Caribbean history, different names have been used to identify precolonial people
who lived in the Caribbean (Reid, 2009). This creates confusion about the cultural heritage and how to differentiate between the ethnic groups on the islands (Reid, 2009). Within these ethnic groups European colonizers renamed these Native Caribbeans while they also had their own ways of culturally identifying themselves (Higman, 2011). For instance, The Arawakan people are also called Taínos, Igneri and/or Ciboney (Blouet; 2007; Hofman & Hoogland, 2016; Hulme, 1993; Reid, 2009; Rouse, 1992), while the Carib people were given their name (Caribs/Black Caribs/Caribee) by European colonizers but locally identified as Kalinago, Kalipuna, Kalina and Garifuna (Beckles, 2008; Davis & Goodwin, 1990; Higman, 2011; Mustapha, 2013; Reid, 2009; Roper, 2018; Taylor, 2012). With these complicated extractions of these ethnic groups, the history of the Caribbean continues to be complex. In making sure that there is no confusion within this dissertation about the precolonial people of the Caribbean, the names that will be used are Amerindian, Taínos, and Kalinago. These names are used to maintain historical cultural individuality in the plight not to erase native ethnic components of Caribbean history.

Though Amerindian, Taínos, and Kalinago people were three significant groups who settled within the Caribbean, it is also postulated by Caribbean literature that both the Kalinagos and Taínos people were subgroups of the Amerindians (Fitzpatrick, 2015; Blouet; 2007; Reid, 2009; Reid & Callaghan). This alludes to Amerindians being a race of people with different ethnicities (i.e., Taíno and Kalinago), therefore seeing how confusion may persist in literature. Reid (2009) defines the Taíno people as “indigenous Amerindian inhabitants of the northern Caribbean whom Columbus encountered when he arrived in 1492” (p. 136). This information illuminates the reason why Caribbean literature may use both Amerindians and Taínos when introducing the beginning of European colonization (Blouet; 2007; Hofman & Hoogland, 2016;
Mustapha, 2013; Reid, 2009) – both correct, but not fully explained to the reader. Expanding on this naming dilemma begins to demystify the introduction to Amerindian history in the Caribbean.

Through the artifacts in the Banwari Trace, it historically represents the existence of Amerindians inhabiting the Caribbean. This is significance because Ortoiroid tools were also found at this site (Reid, 2009), showing the hypothetical racial connections and cultural dynamics of generations prior. Some parts of the Amerindian culture are unknown because many were nonliterate, leaving no writings that describe their history within the Caribbean (Reid, 2009). It is important to recognize this to continue to illuminate an inclusive narrative of Caribbean history and see why Taíno and Kalinago people are usually being named. With less information on previous Amerindian people, the Taíno people were left to be the first most common ethnic group more widely known to inhabit the Caribbean.

**Taíno and Kalinago.** The Taíno people mainly resided within the Greater Antilles and were seen to have occupied large communities organized by caciques (chiefs) – where many were women (Higman, 2011). Migrating from South America, Taínos had large ceremonial plazas where ancestral worshipping, intermarriages, and entertainment were conducted (Higman, 2011; Fitzpatrick, 2015; Reid, 2009; Reid & Gilmore, 2014; Rouse, 1992). It is presumed that these Natives frequently played a ball game in these plazas that scholars believe to be either soccer (Fitzpatrick, 2015) or basketball (Higman, 2011). The Taínos were considered to be farmers and fishermen (Reid, 2009). They were mostly a homogeneous group; so much so, that a single language was spoken throughout the Greater Antilles (Reid, 2009; Rouse, 1992).

The Kalinago people are considered to have arrived in the Caribbean approximately 1450 AD from the mainland of South America (Reid, 2014; 2009; Wilson & Virgin Islands
Humanities Council, 1997). In the Caribbean they mostly occupied the Windward Islands/ Lesser Antilles (Martinique, Dominica, Grenada, Guadeloupe, and St. Vincent) and Trinidad and Tobago (Reid, 2014; 2009). In other accounts, the Kalinagos were also recorded in the Greater Antilles within parts of Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic and Haiti (Wilson & Virgin Islands Humanities Council, 1997). Kalipuna (Reid, 2014) and Kalina (Reid, 2009) were the names of the women within the community instead of the plural and male form of Kalinago. As a people, they were farmers who had small gardens and grew sweet potatoes as the main crop, baked Cassava, and prepared pepper pots (soup) for nourishment (Reid, 2014; 2009). Also, different from the Taínos people, Kalinagos were seen to drink beer during intervillage gatherings, and prioritized warfare (Reid, 2014; Wilson & Virgin Islands Humanities Council, 1997). They even fought the Taínos people for land and raided their villages to gain additional wives (Reid, 2014). Kalinagos are also historical known for resisting the European colonizers (Higman, 2011; Hulme, 1993; Reid, 2009; Rouse, 1992, Taylor, 2012; Wilson & Virgin Islands Humanities Council, 1997), and more combative compared to the Taínos. The two major ethic groups (Taíno and Kalinago) who call the Caribbean their home, they were blindsided by foreigners who wanted to invade their land.

Caribbean Colonization and Enslavement

In 1492 Christopher Columbus sails across the Atlantic Ocean in search to find a quicker route to Asia for spices, gold and any additional means of economic wealth (Higman, 2011; Reid, 2009; Rouse, 1992; Sued-Badillo, 1992). Leaving on three Spanish ships (Santa María, Pinta, and Niña) with approximately eighty-nine men in total, instead of finding Asia he lands on present day Bahamas (Higman, 2011). He claimed to have found a New World or the end of the world (Alleyne, 2005; Sued-Badillo, 1992) while the land was already occupied by the Taíno.
people. On October 12th, 1492 he puts a Spanish flag on the land (Bahamas) and called it “San Salvador” in honor of Jesus Christ – a pivotal person within the Catholic faith (Blick, 2014; Higman, 2011). In part of this voyage to gain more power and prosperity for Spain, Columbus also had a mission to convert masses amount of people to Christianity to make the world Roman Catholic. Catching the Taíno people by surprise and unsure of the means of the Spanish intrusion, they were kind and peaceful to Columbus and his men. These Native people showed them their culture, livestock, beliefs, trading, and other means for wealth and survival (Higman, 201; Reid, 2009; Reid & Gilmore, 2014; Sued-Badillo, 1992). In return, Columbus begin to plot how he could exploit the people and rich soil of the Caribbean.

Before leaving the Caribbean during his first trip, Columbus also traveled towards present-day Cuba and Haiti (which he named Hispaniola) (Higman, 2011). Columbus needed to report back to King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella about the outcome of his trip to Asia and used a plan to colonize the Caribbean as his leverage for a successful voyage. Sued-Badillo (1992) writes that “Christopher Columbus is the first great symbol of modern capitalism” (p. 1). This indicates capitalism of Caribbean bodies and disruption of power began during his first visit when he claimed land that he did not own, made plans for the Taíno people to abide by his authority, and left the Caribbean with Spanish men to “gentrify” the island (Higman, 2011). On January 3rd, 1493 Columbus sailed back to Spain bringing Taíno people and animals specific to the Caribbean as bargain for another voyage. In November 1492, Columbus voyages back with priest to convert the Native people to Christianity, Spanish vegetation (e.g., wheat, olives, and grapevines), and animals not domestic to the Caribbean (e.g., pig, cattle, and horses) (Higman, 2011; Mustapha, 2013; Reid & Gilmore, 2014). As he entered the Caribbean, he found villages burned to the ground and all the Spanish men were dead. Spaniards died from fights that broke
out from raping Native women, confiscating their gold and other goods, and diseases (Higman, 2011). Because European men guarding the land for Spanish advancement was not successful, they continued the search for finding gold on the islands. Columbus found gold in Haiti but failed in finding a continued mining source because of the difficulty to extract from the rich forest. This meant that Columbus was not bringing revenue or prosperity to his mission of elevating himself and Spanish monarchy (Sued-Badillo, 1992). This led to Columbus changing how Taíno and Kalinago people traded with one another by taxing ten percent of each earning of what was being exchanged (Higman, 2011). Still not making enough revenue in gold or trading taxes, Columbus began to enslave the Native people of the Caribbean.

Abusing the kindness of the Taíno people, Columbus believed that they were “easily ordered about” and continued to manipulate, degrade, mistreat, and murder Caribbean Natives (Higman, 2011, p. 62). Smallpox, influenza, and other diseases plagued the land and caused death to many Taínos people in Haiti/Dominican Republic to flee towards the Lesser Antilles. Columbus believed that anyone who disagreed with enslavement or fought about against Spanish power were cannibals (as previously mentioned). He claimed that these “cannibals” deserved to be enslaved and needed a Christ messenger like himself to propose order on the islands. Though this claim of cannibalism has been debunked (Higman, 2011; Reid, 2009; Reid & Callaghan, 2014) many Indigenous people believed Columbus’ rhetoric of psychological manipulation through religious abuse; yet others didn’t understand how the attractiveness of the religion was not represented by how they were being treated (Higman, 2011; Taylor, 2012). The incongruency between man and the words of Christianity brought many Native people to understand peace was not Columbus’ motive, but to overtake their land.
Repartimiento systems (Spanish enslavement of Indigenous people) and African slavery (through the Transatlantic slave trade) were enforced by the late of the 15th/early 16th century. African enslavement then became the dominant presence in Haiti/Dominican Republic with over 30,000 Black people (Davis & Goodwin, 1990; Higman, 2011; Mustapha, 2013). By 1508 the Indigenous population in Haiti/Dominican Republic was approximately 60,000 and continued to decrease every year – 30,000 in 1514 and 11,000 by 1518 (Higman, 2011). Large number of declines were also seen in Cuba and Puerto Rico where many Caribbean Natives were dying and could have led to the elimination of the Amerindian race in the Caribbean (Mustapha, 2013).

With African and Native people being enslaved and finding community with one another, many indigenous people married or procreated with Africans. Spanish men raped or had sexual encounters with African women and had children who were called, mulattoes, brown, or coloureds (Higman, 2011; Mustapha, 2013). Many Spanish men married Indigenous women to make claims to the Caribbean land, that their union demanded Spanish take over. Children of these interracial marriages were labeled the “mestizo” population (Higman, 2011). These classifications were important to the Spaniards because they used colorism as a means of social stratification – white Europeans being the top of the hierarchy, Indigenous and Africans being least powerful, and mixed races in between (Higman, 2011; Reid & Gilmore, 2014). With the Caribbean accumulating many multiracial and interethnic individuals, different dialects of languages were being introduced. This history impacts the variety of languages, cultures, and races seen today in the Caribbean.

Columbus had two more voyages to the Caribbean in 1498 and 1502. With the Indigenous population declining, wars between Europeans against Indigenous and African people, and Natives and Africans being trafficked to Spain, the Caribbean was seen as testing
grounds for “tropical colonization” (Higman, 2011, p. 69) - a motive to gain power and control in building the Spanish empire (Higman, 2011; Klein, 1986; Sued-Badillo, 1992). In 1506 Christopher Columbus dies in Spain. Already taking hold of Haiti/Dominican Republic and invading Puerto Rico, Bahamas, Jamaica, and Cuba, after his death the colonization of the Caribbean did not stop. Spain colonized parts of present-day Florida, Mexico, Cartagena, Panama, and Peru (Higman, 2011). With the fate of the Taíno people being similar to those in Haiti/Dominican Republic (i.e., war, diseases, removal of agriculture, and escaping from slavery), the population in Cuba and Jamaica drastically decreased. More African people were being forced into slavery and brought over to the Caribbean. Black people were again the largest population within these areas and many times half or more of the population. Raids continued down the Caribbean as far as Trinidad and parts of Central and South America (Higman, 2011).

**Colonization in the Lesser Antilles**

As Spain continued to monopolize the Caribbean and surrounding areas, Spain’s rivals (France, Netherlands, and England) all wanted trading rights and Caribbean territory as maritime power was growing in Europe (Higman, 2011). Multiple wars and attacks including the Armada Wars in 1588 and 1589, Nine Year’s War, Seven Year’s War, European rival piracy of the Caribbean, and religious disputes against Protestant and Roman Catholic Christians started to disrupt dominance that Spain held on its territories and power as a country (Higman, 2011; Klein, 1986; Roper, 2018). Unwilling to surrender the Caribbean as collateral, Spanish rivals began to see the islands as a means of investment and sites for new colonization for their own countries. Instead of going into the Greater Antilles where Columbus started colonizing, rivals began to go into outer and smaller islands within the Lesser Antilles (e.g., Antigua and Barbados) where the Spanish had not settled. With the continuation of wars, treaties such as
Treaty of Ryswick (1697) were signed giving Caribbean land to Spanish rivals (i.e., France) (Higman, 2011; Taylor, 2012).

In the early 17th century parts of the Greater Antilles were a “blank canvas” (Higman, 2011, p. 97). Many Indigenous people and African slaves again were decreasing and died on the islands. The agricultural sources were rapidly declining as the Taíno massacre and enslavement escape removed the people native to the vegetation of the Caribbean land. As the French, Dutch, and English entered the Caribbean in the 1600s, they invaded the Lesser Antilles where many Amerindian people (some Taíno fleeing from brutality brought by the Spaniards) and mainly Kalinago people who lived on the islands (Beckles, 2008; Davis & Goodwin, 1990; Higman, 2011; Roper, 2018; Taylor, 2012). Not anticipating the new of invasion of more Europeans, many the Kalinago people were overwhelmed by the force applied to colonize the Lesser Antilles. Historized as a culture of war-like dominate society, the Kalinago provided the trespassers with a different welcome than that of the Greater Antilles (Reid, 2009). The Kalinago people worked to resist European colonization and continuously fought and resisted forced labor to maintain European wealth. Regardless of their resistance, Europeans still brought religious missionaries to convert the Amerindians, promised peace but brought death, and slaughtered thousands within the Lesser Antilles of the Caribbean (Beckles, 2008; Roper, 2018; Taylor, 2012).

A symbol of Kalinago resistance was present within many battles and wars to rebel against colonial ruling of the Caribbean (Higman, 2011; Reid, 2009; Reid & Callaghan, 2014; Roper, 2018; Taylor, 2012). In 1654, while the French were in present day St. Vincent celebrating a Jesuit Catholic mass, Kalinago warriors occupied the service and killed two priests and their French helper (Taylor, 2012). A collective of Kalinago people in Grenada killed
approximately sixty to eighty French people, robbed them, burned down their houses, and escaped with some French women (Taylor, 2012). With the French having more fire power, they went on a week-long killing spree in St. Vincent killing any Kalinago men, women, and children they saw, including demolishing their homes. This battle of rejecting the Jesuit Catholic religion continued, where the French failed to convert all the Kalinago people to their faith (Taylor, 2012).

Since the Columbus colonization of the Greater Antilles, many Africans and Amerindian people began to trust one another on the islands. These alliances generated a mixed race of people who are both Native and African that also transcended within the Lesser Antilles. Europeans called mixed Kalinago and African people “Black Caribs” or now known as “Garifuna” in Central America (Beckles, 2008; Taylor, 2012). Not using “Caribs” as the Kalinago identifier to reject colonization linguistics, it is important to acknowledge this race and ethnicity because of their history of colonization resistance and how these diverse races and ethnicities are still present now in the Caribbean. Many Garifuna people populated the lesser Antilles and fought two major wars with British and France forces about occupying Kalinago land (Taylor, 2012). Formally titled “The Black Carib Wars” the wars were fought against British plans to colonize St. Vincent. The first war (1769 -1773) resulted in British victory and a treaty dividing the lines between Kalinago and British land giving both parties territories of their own. The British still wanting the whole island and beginning to extend over the treaty boundaries, the second war (1795-1797) began. After a second Garifuna/ Kalinago loss, in March 1797 St. Vincent Garifuna population reduced to approximately 2,000 men, women, and children. When Britain took control of the island, they transported many Garifuna people on ships 1,700 miles away to Spanish colonial land of Roatán off the shore of Honduras. Many
Garifuna people still live in Central America today despite this gruesome history of war and
greed (Taylor, 2012).

*Sugar Revolution and Independence*

Sugar was the most imperative reason many European nations wanted to colonize the
Caribbean in the beginning of the 17th century (Beckles, 2008; Higman, 2011; Reid & Callaghan,
2014; Taylor, 2012). As the Europeans came to the Caribbean, a trial-and-error agricultural effort
was established in trying to perfect vegetation for their nation’s economic wealth. In failing
multiple times with other European crops, sugar not only flourished but changed the agriculture
of many islands. The mass cultivation of sugar became the monoculture and changed farming
from being small scale to large scale production (Higman, 2011). To continue such an
agricultural assembly, Europeans drastically increased the amount of African people that were
enslaved in the Caribbean, calling the Caribbean the “Sugar Islands” – a place for profit and not
for European habitation (Higman, 2011, p. 130). African people began to outnumber both
Europeans and Kalinago people since seventy percent of the Caribbean was dominated by the
sugar industry. Sixty-seven percent of the total Caribbean population were enslaved people,
making slavery the main presence of the Caribbean.

This significant information about Caribbean history does not come without Caribbean
people making something out of the nothing they were left with. Left with being stripped of their
homes, identity and freedom, many Caribbean islands sought independence from their colonizer.
In 1791 the Haitian Revolution emerged, resulting in Haiti becoming the first Black country to
have its independence in January 1804 (Klein, 1986). Dominican Republic repulsed by Spanish
rule received independence in 1844 and continuing the Latin American wars against Spain. This
persistence with other nations attaining independence continued with Cuba (1902) and Jamaica.
Many nations within the Caribbean are still dependent territories (i.e., assisted by European or other North American countries), yet the beautiful culture started from the Indigenous people of this land still exist. Caribbean history begins with generations of free Indigenous people that provided rich beginnings on the islands. Both the Amerindian and African culture still flourish in music, farming, food and religion (Mustapha, 2013). Though colonization tried to cover the authenticity of the Caribbean, its true history lives within the Caribbean people today.

**Afro-Caribbean Women and Identity**

**Workforce and Marriage in the Caribbean**

This history of the Caribbean is necessary in considering the current lives of Afro-Caribbean women, such as, how Caribbean people were originally taken from their home countries, enslaved and/or sexually and physically abused, and even died (Higman, 2011; Hofman & Hoogland, 2016; Mustapha, 2013; Reid, 2009; Roper, 2018; Taylor, 2012). Though many Taino chiefs were women (Higman, 2011), historians have difficulty differentiating traditions before European colonization that were particular to women (Beckles, 1999). Since many Amerindians were nonliterate and many European narratives were biased (Reid, 2009), this may have led to the sparse specific details that pertain to women.

With the social construction of race, patriarchy, gender, and economics during colonialism, this effected how women were centered within the ethos of society (Green, 2006). Afro-Caribbean women were viewed as “prostitutes” and unworthy of needing to be loved or cared for; therefore, impaired the evolution of how women negotiated, situated, and pivoted in society (Smith et al., 1978; Green, 2006). For example, while being enslaved Afro-Caribbean women were banned from the central institutions and rights of property and marriage; however,
being forced to be concubines to European men (Green, 2006). With marriage and property being forms of economic stability pre- and post-African enslavement, the inability for Afro-Caribbean women to attain these institutions created economic disparities. Many Afro-Caribbean women subscribed to three main categorical relationship statuses such as unmarried, consensual unions, or married (Altink, 2004; Green, 2006). These statuses also predicated their social class where many women without husbands were usually in a lower and poverty class status. By the end of the 20th century between “60 and 85 percent” of Afro-Caribbean women bore children outside of legal marriages (Green, 2006, p. 6). This gave Afro-Caribbean women more expenses with less ability to attain economic wealth through western patriarchal unions. Literature has connected these economic disparities to mothers who migrate to the United States (and other countries) without a spouse in trying to create a better life for their children (Bobb-Smith, 2003; Foner, 2009; Gentles-Peart, 2014).

Afro-Caribbean women who did not conform to the western ideologies of marriage, experienced gendered consequences (i.e., economic injustices), however literature also represents this as a temporal moment of liberation for Afro-Caribbean women (Bush, 1981; Green, 2006). Scholars expressed those women were able to explore their bodies sexually and emotionally without the patriarchal positions of needing a husband (Cooper, 1995; French, 1988; Green, 2006). This furthered the ability for women to hold internal power in deciding if they would like to be married, while still maintaining societal pressures of economic wealth through marriage (French, 1988). The respectability politics in the Caribbean still had Eurocentric norms (e.g., how wealth is accumulated, western ideologies of marriage, religion—Christian, etc.), yet Afro-Caribbean women had increased inner sense of personal agency and power to choose for themselves. As women made these decisions, it led to women being socially marked as
“protected” (her labor/work belonged to her husband) and “unprotected” (her labor/work belonged to her employer) (Green, 2006, p. 16; Holt, 1992). Both these labels positioned women to not have authority over their own bodies, which started political movements in support of women labor laws in the Caribbean. Feminist and Black nationalist in the 1960s –1970s such as Amy Garvey and Clotil Walcott fought for the rights of the working women and labor inequalities. They highlighted the exploitation of labor for industrial and domestic workers as Afro-Caribbean women spend long hours working with little to no pay (Green, 2006; Reddock, 2008).

Afro-Caribbean women were exploited during the time of enslavement and was left with the remnants of this oppression. With economic growth being influenced by capitalism, patriarchy, and gender oppression, Afro-Caribbean women continued to negotiate hegemonic restraints for personal autonomy (Green, 2006). As resisting respectability politics and fighting for the labor rights of women continued, many Afro-Caribbean women moved to countries such as the United States and Canada for better economic opportunities; yet also finding similar oppressions in a new country (Bobb-Smith, 2003; Foner, 2009; Gentles-Peart, 2014; Green, 2006).

**Migration of Afro-Caribbean Women and Collective Resistance**

Caribbean history still conveys how racism, colorism, patriarchy, and gender all encompassed how you were treated then and now. Collective resistance was a key factor within colonial history of the Caribbean. With united forces of African and Amerindian people collectively confronting colonial powers, this resistance has been conceptualized as a characteristic with the identity of Caribbean people (specifically, women) (Bobb-Smith, 2003; Flynn, 2011; Mustapha, 2013). Already expressing that being Caribbean stems from cultural
(i.e., ethnic and racial) associations, the Caribbean identity also carries fragments of historical oppression. For many Afro-Caribbean women who live in North America and Great Britain, they may not see their birthplace as “home” (i.e., place of security and comfort) (Bobb-Smith, 2003). Instead, the complexities and oppressive remnants of Caribbean history fostered the need for methods of survival, combating hurdles of gender inequality, and navigating imperialist systems that still suppress and oppress Caribbean people (Bobb-Smith, 2003; Flynn, 2011; Foner, 2009; Lalla, 2019). Collective resistance cultivated the contemporary Caribbean cultural group characteristics of esteeming community, values, and traditions when the ability of being “home” is not possible (Bobb-Smith, 2003; Flynn, 2011; Gentles-Peart, 2014; Mustapha, 2013). These group characteristics (or group identity) (Erez & Earley, 1993) are fostered within many Afro-Caribbean women’s self-identity which is crucial in this research of how Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students understand themselves.

**Cultural Identity, Caribbean Identity, and the Misunderstanding for Afro-Caribbean Women**

As Afro-Caribbean people migrated from their home country to other countries around the world, these intersections of history and identity did not dissipate. For Afro-Caribbean women immigrants and migrants in North America and Europe, the systemic concepts of race, gender, ethnicity, nationality, and eurocentrism provided an “outsider” effect on these individuals while still holding the values attained from their Caribbean identity (Bobb-Smith, 2003; Gentles-Peart, 2014; Hodge, 2018; Lalla, 2019). These countries do not account for how these systemic ideologies impact realities of Afro-Caribbean women (Bobb-Smith, 2003; Gentles-Peart, 2014). Systematic oppression creates the inability for Afro-Caribbean women to
succeed in these countries, creating gaps in areas such as economic progress and educational equity.

Some values that remain from collective resistance is in music, activism, language, and religion (Bobb-Smith, 2003). These components are derived from the value of keeping Caribbean cultural independence to combat images of colonial inferiority. For example, the beating of drums was a significant sign of African heritage brought to the Caribbean. The drum was a cultural expression of African pride and the gathering of people through rhythm and beats. Though banned by Europeans for Africans to use their drums, they resisted by infusing drums into European music and creating Caribbean musical fusions still listened to today. Steel pan music, Zouk, Calypso, and Reggae are Caribbean musical genres originated from rebellion against white supremacy (Mustapha, 2013). Jamaican Reggae is historically known for its roots in protest culture and fighting against racism and advocating for social justice (Mustapha, 2013). Different creole languages in the Caribbean were also used to disrupt Europeans from comprehending what Africans and Amerindians were saying to one another. These languages have become pivotal markers of current Caribbean identity and still use creole languages in Jamaica (Patois), Haiti (Haitian Kreyol), and Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao (Papiamento) (Mustapha, 2013; Reid & Gilmore, 2014). Repelling the European crusade of Christian conversion and failing to convert all Caribbean inhabitants, the islands have been able to maintain their ancestral religions such as Voodoo and Santeria, including forming new religions such as Rastafarianism in the 1930s (Mustapha, 2013). Many Afro-Caribbean women hold onto these values and traditions in resisting marginalization and keep a firm grasp on their cultural agency and Caribbean identity. This grasp is also tightly secured when Afro-Caribbean women migrate to other countries.
Many Afro-Caribbean women in North America express how their cultural agency is misunderstood by western cultures and reared into negative stereotypes (Bobb-Smith, 2003; Foner, 2009; Hodge, 2018; Tate, 2009). For instance, Carnival (originally started in Trinidad and Tobago) is a massive festival celebrated in many countries in the Caribbean. Every year these festivals commemorates Caribbean culture, joy, and traditions sacred to Caribbean people. The symbol of Carnival is consequential because these festivals in the Caribbean started in the 18th century by French and Spanish colonizers. With African and Amerindians being enslaved, they did not participate until slavery was abolished in 1838 (Mustapha, 2013). Taking a custom that was banned for enslaved people and reclaiming it to represent Caribbean beliefs and values is transformational. Instead of seeing the beauty in such a festival, Afro-Caribbean women may be negatively viewed as “dancehall queens” (Gentles-Peart, 2014) or body shamed for the use of costumes or Afro-stylization (Tate, 2009) by western standards and viewers. Like carnival and other Caribbean values previously expressed (i.e., music, activism, language, and religion), moments of pride can be deemed as inappropriate or misunderstood (Thompson, 2011). When Afro-Caribbean women migrate to the U.S. and Canada, these traditions are taken with them and not valued by other western cultures. Many North American (specifically, Canada and the U.S.) societies seek to mold and govern immigrants and migrants’ identity process by using power to disrupt their cultural agency (Bobb-Smith, 2003; Flynn, 2011; Gentles-Peart, 2014). Media presence about Caribbean people use stereotypical images of the Caribbean countries, discrimination against Caribbean accents, and discredit the presence of using a second language/dialect as a lack of intelligence and means to enact employment bias (Gentles-Peart, 2014).
From the late 1950’s through 1980’s many Afro-Caribbean women experienced employment and housing discrimination (Bobb-Smith, 2003; Foner, 2009). Afro-Caribbean women felt a societal push to be domestic service workers and had little to no transitional support in a new foreign country (Foner, 2009). Education was difficult to afford for many women, especially if they immigrated with children (Gentles-Peart, 2014). Despite these difficulties, Afro-Caribbean women believed in the power of education as a resistance to white domination (Bobb-Smith, 2003; Gentles-Peart, 2014). The critical consciousness for Afro-Caribbean women to be well educated as a means “to compete and acquire for positions of authority” (Bobb-Smith, 2003, p. 177). That regardless of systemic pressures in North America, intellect cannot be taken away from an individual who acquires it.

Many Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students may understand this cultural notion of the importance of education that continued from many migrants who came from the Caribbean to North America – their mothers, grandmothers, or within other Afro-Caribbean communities. Afro-Caribbean women college students may not be children of these North American Afro-Caribbean migrants and immigrants, but the first person in their family to live in North America (i.e., international students). Afro-Caribbean women college students may also listen to music, eat meals, and speak languages authentic to the Caribbean. All of these Caribbean cultural identifiers, including the importance of education could also be misunderstood on college campuses. The suppression of culture is a suppression of self-identity (Ortiz & Santos, 2009). If Afro-Caribbean women are attending colleges with a lack of cultural awareness, they may feel like their self-identity is being suppressed in college classrooms and social events. Furthermore, this notion of self-identity needs to be explored for Afro-Caribbean undergraduate women college students who have a national history of colonial oppression and
enslavement, and the difficulties of culture clashes living and attending college in the United States.

**Self-Identity**

During the years of adolescent to emerging adulthood, college students tend to discover career ambitions, new social relationships, and cultivate their individuality (Bok, 2013; Renn, 2004, 2005). With the average undergraduate college student being approximately 18-25 years old, it is feasible for these factors to be influential to all students during college (Gonzales-Backen et al., 2015). In this same college environment, Afro-Caribbean women college students go through these typical developmental discoveries, but carry minoritized social locations of race, ethnicity, gender, and nationality. Afro-Caribbean women college students are confronted with the challenges of being Black women, along with a lack of ethnic (and national) representation on college campuses (Hodge, 2018; Lalla, 2019). Afro-Caribbean women college students have a different stance in cultivating and exploring self-identity considering Caribbean history, culture for Afro-Caribbean women, and the complexities of being a college student.

Self-identity in this study refers to a compilation of components that creates someone’s self-perception (Erez & Earley, 1993) (see complete definition in Chapter 1). Self-identity is quite complex because of the intercultural influences that affects an individual’s understanding of who they are. In exploring self-identity for college students, Erik Erickson (1950, 1959) and James Marica (1966) are two theorist who have been historically used to examine self-identity among adolescence and emerging adulthood (Berzonsky, 1994; Gonzales-Backen et al., 2015; Seaton, Yip, Morgan-Lopez, & Sellers, 2012; Thompson, 2011). In Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development, it conceptualizes the complexity of self-identity by using 8 stages (Trust vs. mistrust, Autonomy vs. shame and doubt, initiative vs. guilt, industry vs. inferiority,
identity vs. role confusion, intimacy vs. isolation, generativity vs. stagnation, and ego integrity vs. despair). In the fifth stage of identity vs. role confusion, this acknowledges how adolescence and emerging adults’ try to create their own identity by exploring different roles, groups, and relationships to discover who they are. For example, college freshmen may explore fraternities, clubs/organizations, and potential occupations; thus, this continuous exploration of self is on the individual to choose a path from what they have already experienced in hopes to find their self-identity. Not completing this stage, will cause the individual to continue into role confusion, and not having a stable self-identity to follow into the next stage (intimacy vs. isolation). Using this theory, at the fifth stage is how Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students will create or evolve into their self-identity.

James Marica’s (1966) identity status theory (evolved from Erik Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development) investigates identity in four statuses (i.e., foreclosure, identity achievement, identity diffusion, and moratorium). Within these four statuses it represents the student’s current stage of identity, which differs from Erikson’s linear stages of accomplishing a stage or not. The first status is identity diffusion which is when an individual has little to no commitment to making a choice towards self-identity and little to no urgency to exploring choices. Stage two is identity foreclosure, where an individual has a high commitment to wanting to choose values and projections for their self-identity but have not experienced an urgency (crisis) to do so; conforming to what other social groups (i.e., friends, advisors, parents, etc.) may choose for them. Stage three is identity moratorium which is an individual who has a low commitment to wanting to choose but is experiencing an urgency (crisis) to explore choices to be prepared when a decision needs to be made. Lastly, stage four is identity achievement where an individual has a high commitment and is committing to making a choice about their self-identity.
For example, if a college student is taking multiple classes and internships but does not feel the need to choose a major until next semester, they maybe in identity moratorium. A student who has explored many college majors and is ready to choose a major is in identity achievement. Fitting Afro-Caribbean undergraduate women college students into this theory, their sense of crisis (or urgency) and commitment are the two prominent variables that concludes to their current stage of self-identity.

Both Erik Erickson (1950, 1959) and James Marica (1966) are conceptual frameworks that introduce stages and statuses of self-identity, but many potential implications are present when exploring self-identity for Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students. Neither theory addresses issues of how self-identity evolves, the process of identity, and the outcomes of discrimination. The definition of self-identity used within this dissertation explains that self-identity is ever evolving, meaning that identity is not a linear model of development. In Erik Erickson’s (1950, 1959) theory, an incompletion of one stage leads to the distress in another – not leaving room for personal growth and adjustments throughout the stages. This theory is framed to meet the markers of each stage without the importance of how a process view of development (evaluates attributes of self-identity instead of definite steps of development) can impact each stage (Berzonsky, 1994). Identifying the how and why college students successfully or unsuccessfully pass the fifth psychological stage (identity vs role confusion) is significant to understanding the self-identity experiences of Afro-Caribbean women. Trauma, history, and oppression are three factors that may impact Afro-Caribbean women’s identity, yet this theory does not account for the development that may happen outside of the stages of Erikson’s predetermined order. Similar to Marcia (1966) a commitment model (requires stages for conceptualization) towards viewing identity, this may miss the importance of process for Afro-
Caribbean women students. Being that the motive of this theory is to acknowledge an
dividual’s current state of commitment to identity, it may miss how process aligns to each
student. Lastly, discrimination against marginalized identities (such as, gender, race, and
ethnicity) about what self-identity development should look like for different cultures. Scholarly
counseling articles may lead to using terms such as ethnic or racial identity (Bachay, 1998; Chao,
2012; Li, Marbely, Bradley & Lan, 2016; Rowell & Benshoff, 2008), as these self-identity
theories may not encompass the complexities needed for non-white, non-male, and non-
heteronormative groups. Self-identity should encompass an individual’s full perceived self,
which includes the compilation of race, ethnicity, and gender. Erik Erickson (1950, 1959) and
James Marcia (1966) are two theories that represent conceptualization of self-identity but have
potential implications for Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students.

**Racial and Ethnic Identity**

In exploring the self-identity experiences of Afro-Caribbean women, terms such as racial
and ethnic identity are interlocked underneath the umbrella of self-identity. There are multiple
identities and experiences that make an individual’s self-identity, where race and ethnicity
maybe some of them (Jones & Pritchett-Johnson, 2018). Many times, ethnicities are also
associated within a certain race; for example, being Afro-Caribbean is a demographic description
of a person being racially Black and ethnically Caribbean. Since there are close relations with
one another, ethnic identity is seen as sense of group identity or group membership that a person
subscribes to because of the values, beliefs and emotional significances associated with the
ethnic heritage (Bachay, 1998; Li et al., 2016; Malcolm & Mendoza, 2014; Ortiz & Santos,
2009; Thompson, 2011). Racial identity is quite similar as it is a sense of collectiveness or
membership within a racial group (Helms, 1995; Ponterotto & Mallinckrodt, 2007; Rose &
Firmin, 2013). Being that within a race are different ethnicities, many times people use the terms racial and ethnic identity interchangeably (Helms, 2007), but for Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students race and ethnicity can be understood differently (Malcom & Mendoza, 2014; Matthews 2012). Concepts of nationality, and the diversity within the Black race may bring nuances of how they understand not only their race and ethnicity, but self-identity as a whole (Malcom & Mendoza, 2014). Exploring racial and ethnic identity alone would miss other core concepts of self-identity, like gender, class, and sexuality that encompasses how Afro-Caribbean college students’ view themselves. When navigating the self-identity experiences of Afro-Caribbean women college students in this dissertation, receiving a full phenomenological perspective of these women is the objective to disseminate an authentic representation of the participants.

**Research on Afro-Caribbean Undergraduate College Students**

There is a dearth of research as it pertains to Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students and their self-identity experiences in the counseling field. In a search within research databases (e.g., PsychInfo, eCaribbean Collection, JSTOR-Caribbean Studies, and ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global), it yielded a few articles and dissertations focused on Afro-Caribbean college students. Many tackled the population of Afro-Caribbean college students (that include all genders) but do not tackle the phenomena (self-identity) being explored, or vice versa (Campbell, 2017; Gustave, 2016; Hodge, 2018; Katsiaficas et al., 2015; Lalla, 2019; Malcolm & Mendoza, 2014; Matthews, 2012; Thompson, 2011). This scholarship included the development of racial and ethnic identity instead of self-identity but bring forth pertinent understanding of how Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students may handle distress, isolation, and rejection during this crucial time of self-identity development.
(Gustave, 2016; Malcom & Mendoza, 2014; Matthews, 2012; Thompson, 2011). This section will provide how this scholarship relates to this dissertation’s population and research questions of Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students and self-identity experiences. This will be completed by providing individuals summaries of Malcom and Mendoza (2014), Gustave (2016), Matthews (2012), and Thompson (2011), and ending with considerations this collectively brings to this dissertation.

Focused on the ethnic identity development with Afro-Caribbean college international students, Malcom and Mendoza (2014) conducted a constructivist grounded theory qualitative study on racial homogeneous categorization and overgeneralization. Their research explored how Afro-Caribbean international college students negotiated their identities at a predominantly white institution. There were seven participants in total, with four being Afro-Caribbean women college students (juniors or seniors). Findings reported from 45-minute semi-structured interviews and photovoice submissions expressed Afro-Caribbean students felt underrepresented in programmatic efforts and campus demographics. Participants believed student affairs programs catered to strictly Asian international students and were highly aware of the institution’s position to lump all Black students within an African American identity. For some participants, they resisted being presumed as African American and held onto the ethnic identity, but also felt like they needed to conform to U.S. societal standards in the classroom. This notion of negotiating identity created a sub theme of “selective assimilation”, where participants felt that needed to assimilate into U.S. cultural standards. Participants expressed having more of an appreciation towards their Caribbean identity because of the lack of their ethnic heritage on campus. This brought information about this current dissertation’s research questions towards ethnic marginalization and is also comparative to the Afro-Caribbean women who migrate to the
U.S. and face issues of cultural separation (Flynn, 2011; Foner, 2009; Gentles-Peart, 2014; Lalla, 2019). Nevertheless, these Afro-Caribbean college students also cherished learning new perspectives and viewpoints from other students because of the diverse backgrounds on campus. This study’s limitations mentioned having diverse pedagogy and dialogue on campus through course curriculum, administrative documents, and advising would allow ethnically diverse students to feel like their perspective is being heard and valued equally. The article also mentioned that depending on the context and interactions the participants’ ethnicity identity changed; proclaiming that ethnic identity development is fluid (can transform and shift) and is a product of an individual and their environment. Conducting this dissertation study about Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students, addresses this limitation and illuminates specific environments that may affect ethnicity and self-identity.

Gustave’s (2016) quantitative dissertation investigated the relationship between ethnic identity, self-concept, social support, and college adjustment among Afro-Caribbean undergraduate college students. With participant samples coming from three private New York City institutions, data was collected from 89 participants who identified as Afro-Caribbean by birth and/or ethnic descent. With a population sample of 77 Afro-Caribbean women, Gustave completed a sequential multiple regression analyses to discern the relationship between ethnic identity, self-concept and social support, and college adjustment. The author found that emotional stability, opposite-sex peer relations, and academic self-concept are all positive predictors of college adjustment. Also, that positive self-concept was significance within multiple measure in relationship with positive predictions of social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment and goal commitment/institutional attachment. However, within a correlation analysis of all the main variables, social support from family did not have any
significance with adjusting to college— contrary to research expressing importance of home and family support for ethnically diverse students (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; Jones & Sam, 2018; Katsiaficas et al., 2015). Implications suggest the benefits of a qualitative study of self-concept, social support, and participant personal meaning of ethnicity in college. Since self-concept was found to significantly influence Afro-Caribbean college students college adjustment, a feminist phenomenological study could add an intersectional qualitative perspective towards the correlation between self-concept (i.e., self-identity) and college adjustment for Afro-Caribbean college students.

Matthews (2012) conducted a quantitative dissertation investigating the relationship among racial discrimination, racial socialization, racial and ethnic identity, psychological distress, and self-esteem. Using participants who are 18-22 years of age from across twenty states in the U.S., 243 Afro-Caribbean college students participated with 72.4% (176 participants) being women. When conducting correlational analyses for predictor variables, results showed that higher scores for ethnicity are correlated with higher self-esteem scores and lower psychological distress scores. A higher score of racial identity was significantly correlated with higher self-esteem, where less developed racial identity is associated with less self-esteem and higher levels of discrimination and psychological distress. Nevertheless, Afro-Caribbean students with higher levels of discrimination scores did not have a significantly lower score on self-esteem and higher on psychological distress. Results indicate that a higher racial identity is positive for Afro-Caribbean students but race related stress alone may not significantly affect self-esteem and psychological distress. This is imperative because it aligns with the research about race alone may not be the indicating factor in understanding Afro-Caribbean college students’ self-identity and well-being (Gustave, 2016; Gentles-Peart, 2014; Malcom & Mendoza,
2014). This dissertation study is framed to demystify what other intersectional social locations, or crucial factors that affect self-identity. This dissertation study has filled some gaps about this imperative research explaining that race alone may not be the primary indicator of Afro-Caribbean college student’s self-identity.

In Matthews (2012), ethnicity contributes to lower psychological distress with participants who have lower self-esteem; showing how ethnicity may be a key factor in Afro-Caribbean student’s well-being. Furthermore, gender was correlated with psychological distress scores and self-esteem making this demographic information crucial when reporting about Afro-Caribbean students. Limitations include the need to expand their understanding of ethnicity and race, and how it correlates to the other variables of psychological distress and self-esteem. Though data received from this study is valuable, additional considerations about how psychological distress and self-esteem effects Afro-Caribbean college students’ perception of acculturation, spirituality, and social support are additional areas for further exploration.

Thompson (2011) also conducted a quantitative study for the purpose of exploring how to validate the Multi-Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) on Afro-Caribbean college students. In doing so, Thompson (2011) conceptualizes identity development using Erik Erikson and James Marica within their literature review to reference how college students transition in their identity from adolescence to emerging adulthood. With survey data from 155 Afro-Caribbean college students who were either born or have one or two parents born in the Caribbean, results reported that self-esteem and depression scale were also positively correlated with ethnicity. These results further supplement work revealed in Matthews (2012) and Gustave (2016) with ethnicity being a notable influence with Afro-Caribbean college students well-being. Moreover, there was also no
significance difference in ethnicity scores based on gender, which again recognize that self-
identity maybe more than the compilation of one identity.

Thompson (2011) notes that Afro-Caribbean college students may have national pride
that may be negatively perceived in a highly racialized society like the U.S. These students may
be viewed as “un-patriotic” or wanting to separate themselves from other ethnically marginalized
groups by highly valuing their ethnicity. The lack of regarding ethnicity and nationality was
reported as an implication, as well as drawing parallels to African American undergraduate
college students may not have the same relationship with ethnicity compared to Afro-Caribbean
students.

Considerations of the Literature Based on Current Study

Ethnicity/Race

In all four studies reviewed, Afro-Caribbean college students acknowledge the
significance of ethnicity within their well-being and identity development. Participants in
Malcom and Mendoza (2014) expressed they had to consistently negotiate their ethnic identity
and selectively assimilate within different social groups on campus. Social groups effect
ethnicity identity, self-concept, and self-esteem (Gustave, 2016; Matthews, 2012; Thompson,
2011), which brings more emphasis towards Malcom and Mendoza (2014) results of ethnic
negotiation. Using self-concept and self-esteem as a means to comprehend self-identity for this
study, these variables illuminate that Afro-Caribbean women college students see themselves
through an ethnic lens. With this statement also supported by literature in the previous section
about Afro-Caribbean women and identity (Bobb-Smith, 2003; Foner, 2009; Gentles-Peart,
2014; Hodge, 2018; Lalla, 2019), the advantage of a strong ethnic identity may also lead to lower
levels of psychological stress (Matthews, 2012).
Since race related stress was not significant against self-esteem and psychological distress (Matthews, 2012), Malcom and Mendoza (2014) expose the importance of how others associate or misunderstand their ethnicity bring feelings of “resistance” and isolation. Already noting that ethnicity identity is negotiated because of this, in turn, this may also affect self-identity. Erickson (1950, 1959) expressed that if identity is not formed leads to role confusion, and Marica (1966) captures if the individuals doesn’t make an informed decision in moments of crisis identity will be decided by the opinions of others. Though these theories have implications towards ethnic development, the baseline theoretical process of identity shows that social experiences effect identity development. Consequently, as Malcom and Mendoza (2014) expressed concern towards racial homogeneous categorization and overgeneralization, these factors from others could cause Afro-Caribbean women college students to feel unaccepted on college campuses and affect their self-identity.

**Social Support, Self-Concept, and Self-Identity**

Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students in these studies identify that social experiences influence self-identity, and social support could positively cultivate self-identity. Social support from campus administrators, religious affiliations and other social atmospheres can affect college adjustment and identity (Gustave, 2016; Malcom & Mendoza, 2014; Matthews, 2012). Not only is social support helpful for Afro-Caribbean women college students but having a space to cultivate self-concept on college campus will help students feel supported (Gustave, 2016). As self-concept (one’s self-perception, Gustave, 2016, p. 7) is similar to self-identity in definition, counseling can also be a space where Afro-Caribbean women college students can also cultivate their self-identity. With both self-identity and counseling
experiences as research questions in this study, participants have mentioned social support as a factor that influences self-identity experiences.

Within Gustave (2016), Matthews (2012), and Thompson (2011), there is no consistent metric for assessing how ethnicity is related to the variables being compared (i.e., self-esteem, social support, self-concept, and psychological distress). This criticism represented does express the need to explore how ethnicity impacts Afro-Caribbean students’ personhood. Gustave (2016) reported the significance for participants to express their own personal meaning of ethnicity, which could have drawn more information about specifics in aiding Afro-Caribbean college students on campus. Without this understanding of how, identifying specific social support and interventions for Afro-Caribbean student is not acknowledged. In this dissertation about Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students and self-identity experiences, it explored this gap of how ethnicity is related to self-identity by exploring their narratives. This dissertation identified specific provisions and experiences that this population needs in exploring their self-identity.

**Gender**

All the literature explored in this section have a majority identified Afro-Caribbean women college students within their research sample. Though many participants were women, there were not many results related towards specifics in gender. Matthews (2012) express that gender is correlated with psychological distress and self-esteem, and Thompson (2011) reported that there was no significance between ethnicity and gender. This information suggest that gender may impact mental health and well-being, but how is still unknown. Examining Afro-Caribbean women college students exclusively could provide knowledge towards this gap of how gender is related to these variables. With gender not impacting ethnicity but is related to
self-esteem in these articles, shows that gender does impact how Afro-Caribbean women college students see themselves; therefore, the possibility of having implications towards self-identity.

To synthesize the studies analyzed in this section, the research mainly fell into two categories – racial/ethnic identity and student support. There are still gaps about areas such as, gender, intersectionality, and strategic rationalizations about how ethnicity impacting Afro-Caribbean student’s well-being. Matthews (2012) and Thompson (2011) reports that race alone is not a sufficient cultural component for understanding Afro-Caribbean college students’ self-concept, and more research needs to be explored in identifying the components of self-identity. Being that the goal of this dissertation is to explore self-identity experiences for Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students, it bridges some of the gaps from these studies about gender, intersectionality, and ethnicity. Subsequently, the four studies reviewed did bring knowledge about research questions of this dissertation (i.e., self-identity, ethnic marginalization, and counseling experiences), by recognizing core needs for Afro-Caribbean college students, such as the importance of social support and ethnicity.

**Introduction to Methodology (Feminist Phenomenology)**

The knowledge presented thus far ranges from Caribbean history, Afro-Caribbean women, multiple perceptions of identity, and relevant literature about Afro-Caribbean undergraduate college students. These topics are essential in exploring the objective of this research – understanding self-identity narratives of Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students. With these different guided pieces that help elevate the need for this study, the research methodology needs to acknowledge these factors that may appear within participant narratives. The methodology needs to be receptive of intersectional perspectives and includes the holistic narratives of every participant. Although the next chapter will introduce feminist
phenomenology as the research methodology and explain how it will be used, the following section will introduce feminist phenomenology perspectives – intersectionality, self-reflection, self-discovery, and ambiguity.

**Intersectionality**

Introduced in chapter one as a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, intersectionality was created to explain how Black women are oppressed from the overlapping (intersecting) marginalized identities that they hold at one time (e.g., gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, etc.) (Crenshaw, 1988, 1991). This term is dominant in many feminist analyses as it situates the essence of feminism in valuing the experiences of women (Fielding & Olkowski, 2017; Fisher & Embree, 2000; Hesse-Biber, 2007, 2012; Letherby, 2003; Shabot & Landry, 2018).

Intersectionality in counselor education research has brought an additional framework in understanding supervision, research, pedagogy, and clinical work (Ali & Lee, 2019; Chan et al., 2019; Shannon, 2020). It is acknowledging that the complexity of equity and social justice cannot be properly acknowledged without understanding the intersectionality of a person’s identity (Ali & Lee, 2019; Chan et al., 2019; Shannon, 2020). Challenges in using intersectionality more broadly in counselor education is the need for more additional research using different methodologies in exploring intersectionality (Chan et al., 2019), and the consideration for counselor educators to use their power to enact an intersectional pedagogical framework in the classroom (Ali & Lee, 2019; Shannon, 2020).

Exploring self-identity for Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students, issues may entail race, ethnicity, gender, self-evaluation, and history, from the contents of this chapter. These intersecting characteristics (and more) all a part of how Afro-Caribbean women college students may (or may not) understand their self-identity. Using feminist phenomenology will
bring forth these intersectional perspectives and privilege the voices and narratives of women, as well as highlight additional intersectional research in counselor education.

**Self-reflection**

Feminist research prioritizes the production of self-reflection from both the researcher and participant. Many have witnessed self-reflection in empirical studies through inaction of reflexivity in positionality statements and discussion sections. Being reflexive allows the audience of the research to comprehend the phenomena of inquiry and the development of researcher before, during, and after the study (Hays & Singh, 2012). Self-reflection for the participant is crucial because of the power the researcher holds that can monopolize participants for personal gain (Hesse-Biber, 2007, 2012). Allowing space for self-reflection elevates participant voices to not only explain the phenomenon but provide participants with a personal investment in the research (Fielding & Olkowski, 2017; Hesse-Biber, 2007, 2012; Shabot & Landry, 2018). Using self-reflection within the methodology has the potential to provide more information in counselor education about the need for self-reflective spaces in research, to enhance the existing literature about self-reflection in counseling pedagogy (Guiffrida, 2005; Sacco & Amende, 2020). For this study, space for self-reflection will be provided during semi-structure interviews for participants to acknowledge personal revelations and thoughts about themselves and the research.

**Self-discovery and Ambiguity**

As self-identity for Afro-Caribbean women college students are explored, self-reflection will be acknowledged. In doing so many participants may discovery new aspects about themselves that they have not explored before; therefore, self-discovery and ambiguity may transpire during data collection. Literature used to understand self-identity (or any aspect of
identity) and contain Afro-Caribbean women college students usually use racial or ethnic identity (Gustave, 2016; Matthews, 2012; Malcom & Mendoza, 2014; Thompson, 2011). In doing so, participants may have never explored their self-identity prior to this point. As a first encounter, participants may begin the process of self-reflection that leads to self-discovery and ambiguity. In feminist phenomenology, discovery and ambiguity are concepts that are embraced because it is the reality of women (Beauvoir, 1989; Mann, 2018). It highlights that there may not be a conscience answer for unknown realities, and the morality that women continue to evolve. As self-identity is explored, the notions of self-discovery and ambiguity will not be erased but highlighted in this feminist phenomenological study as part of the lived experiences of Afro-Caribbean women college students. In the next chapter, feminist phenomenology will be introduced as the method for exploring the self-identity experiences of Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students.

In chapter two, the history of the Caribbean (with emphasis about Indigenous and African people), Afro-Caribbean women, research about Afro-Caribbean students, and self-identity were explored. Also, a brief summary of feminist phenomenology introduced the advantages this methodology has to the counseling field, and participants in this study. In chapter three, it will provide a more in-depth acknowledgment of how this methodology will be used for this dissertation study.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This chapter begins with an overview of qualitative feminist research. It will introduce feminist phenomenology as the methodology being used within this research study. As this methodology is explained, it will reveal that an intersectional methodology (such as feminist phenomenology) is needed in exploring the self-identity narratives of Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students (Shabot & Landry, 2018); revealing that methodology is crucial in maintaining the authenticity to the participants who will be sharing their stories. To conclude, an articulated process of how feminist phenomenology (i.e., participant recruitment procedures, data collection, and data analysis) will be used will then follow.

Feminist Research

Feminist research is a post-positivistic methodological approach that challenges traditional notions of approaching gender and equity within research (Hesse-Biber, 2007, 2012). Feminist research emphasizes the representation and documentation of women (and oppressed groups) experiences, to bring social change and/or social justice by exposing hierarchical power (Doucet & Mauthner, 2007; Hesse-Biber, 2007, 2012). Emerged from feminist theory, this method exposes how sexism, racism, discrimination, xenophobia, and other means of oppression exists, while maintaining the essence of participant responses and narratives (Baird & Mitchell, 2014; Fielding & Olkowski, 2017; Harding & Norberg, 2005; Hesse-Biber, 2007; Letherby, 2003).

Power is a crucial concept when applying a qualitative feminist methodology. Power is enacted within the role of a researcher by having the ability to structure questions and interviews, the interpretation and reporting of the results, and publishing the information gathered from participants (Baird & Mitchell, 2014; Doucet & Mauthner, 2007; Harding & Norberg, 2005;
Hesse-Biber, 2007, 2012; Watts, 2006). From this position of power, researchers must consider each aspect of data collection and results, such as engaging in reflexivity and the restriction of generalizing participant narratives to combat researcher power (Hesse-Biber, 2007, 2012).

Feminist research is advantageous because of its power recognition, emphasis on keeping the authenticity of each narrative, and seeing intersectional narratives as knowledge needed to generate proper illumination of women’s experiences.

**Feminist Phenomenology**

The explanation and creation of knowledge is a key component in feminism and feminist research methods. Gender inequalities are analyzed within power dynamics as men were usually individuals who were awarded for creating specific forms of knowledge in research (Guy-Sheftall, 1995). This historical single gender domination of knowledge legitimatization is a factor to why feminism exists. Phenomenology (created by Edmund Husserl) is traditionally used to understand the lived experiences of individuals (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015; Hays & Singh, 2012; Moustakas, 1994), and feminist phenomenology takes this method and positions women’s narratives as valuable knowledge within research. In feminist phenomenology, lived experiences are not absent of gender, sex, and sociopolitical issues. These components make this methodology suitable for exploring complex narratives about women.

Feminist phenomenology is a research approach where feminist theory and phenomenology enter an integrated relationship for engaging in data analysis, collection, and reporting (Allen-Collinson, 2011; Fielding & Olkowski, 2017). The analysis of understanding lived experiences will be different from the heteronormative nature of traditional phenomenology. This is because of the feminist emphasis on power and position to not generalize participant experiences but also illuminate the individuality in participant narratives.
This may be enacted by allowing participants to engage in unstructured or semi-structured interviews, embracing intersectionality and ambiguous narratives, and creating a collaborative atmosphere for mutual interviewer/ interviewee relationship (decreasing power structures) (Hesse-Biber, 2012.) Feminist phenomenology was created to observe and examine participant narratives, hear and explore muted voices, and provide a space for self-reflection (Allen-Collinson, 2011; Beauvoir, 1989; Fielding & Olkowski, 2017; Fisher & Embree, 2000; Hesse-Biber, 2012; Shabot & Landry, 2018). Though there are a plethora of benefits in conducting a feminist phenomenological study, limitations consist of power that still remains as the researcher reports the findings, and lack of specific core process or steps when approaching data analysis within phenomenology, such as Kaam’s (1959,1966) and Stevick – Colaizzi-Keen data analysis process to phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994). Despite these limitations, this dissertation provides methods to combat said limitations in the data collection and analysis section of this chapter.

In research exploring Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college student narratives, feminist phenomenology is fitting because of the complex experiences that these women may encounter. For example, feminist phenomenological researchers use this method because it establishes that narratives are not understood through a singular social location, but through an intersectional lens (including gender, ethnicity, and race). This also discloses the significance of highlighting this population because of their intercultural perspective towards self-identity and college life. The goal of this study is to bring an authentic representation of Afro-Caribbean women college students’ narratives despite collective participant similarities and/or differences. This represents the experiences about these women at the center of the study -making feminist phenomenology a great fit for this research.
For this dissertation feminist phenomenology will be used. This methodology represents that there are automatic and unconscious power dynamics in research, but participants should not be exploited for the benefit of the researcher (Allen-Collinson, 2011; Beauvoir, 1989; Fielding & Olkowski, 2017; Fisher & Embree, 2000; Hesse-Biber, 2012; Shabot & Landry, 2018). In making sure that this is accomplished, the sampling procedures and data analysis will have interview protocols, trustworthiness checks, and coding procedures that adhere to this methodology and ethical approaches to qualitative research. This will introduce the need for counseling research to include diversity in methodology in examining narratives about women.

**Research Questions**

The research questions for this dissertation about self-identity narratives of Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students, are:

1) What are the self-identity experiences of Afro-Caribbean women college students?

2) What are the experiences of ethnic marginalization for Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students?

3) What are the experiences of Afro-Caribbean women students who attend or have experienced counseling?

**Methodology**

**Participants**

In total there were 6 participants for this study who identified as Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students who are 18 years of age or older. To be considered Afro-Caribbean, participants self-identified as Caribbean (ethnicity) and Black (race). These women also identified with being born in, or raised with at least one parent (maternal or paternal) or guardian who was born in and/or raised in any Caribbean country (Anguilla, Antigua & Barbuda,
Aruba, Bahamas, Barbados, BES Islands (Bonaire, Sint Eustatius, and Saba), British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Cuba, Curacao, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guadeloupe, Haiti, Jamaica, Martinique, Montserrat, Puerto Rico, St. Barthélemy (St. Barts), St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Martin, St. Vincent & The Grenadines, St. Maarten, Trinidad & Tobago, Turks & Caicos, and United States Virgin Islands). Also, All the participants attended institutions that were in the Northeast of the United States, yet had different demographics as it pertains to age, student classification, and specific Caribbean ethnicity. Table 1 provides further details of brief demographics about each participant within the study.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Student Classification</th>
<th>Specific Caribbean Ethnicity</th>
<th>Experienced Living on Campus</th>
<th>Attending a Predominately White Institutions (PWI)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cathy</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Dominican/Haitian</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Haitian</td>
<td>No (Online due to COVID-19)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Jamaican</td>
<td>No (Commuter)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bea</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Dominican/Haitian</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Bajan (Barbados)/Jamaican</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Haitian</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participant Recruitment Procedures

After IRB approval, recruitment for this dissertation proceeded with the researcher adding two social media posts on her personal page - one on Instagram and the other on Facebook (Appendix A). The posts had a brief description of the research topic, participant eligibility, participant requirements, a link to the electronic informed consent and researcher
email for further contact. The posts contained the same information, but nuances existed because of the display and format of the two social media platforms. For example, Facebook had the post written out verbatim, and the Instagram post had a screenshot (picture) of the message with the participant link in the comment section (please see Appendix A for screenshot/picture). The social media messages were open posts, with the potential of individuals on these social media platforms to view the post, have the capability to share the post on their social media, and/or tell others about the study.

Social media was used as the recruitment method for this study. Using the researcher’s access to social media, already knowing that she has online connections with Afro-Caribbean women on these platforms, the study therefore began with convenience sampling. Browne (2005) suggests that using social media may also elicit snowball sampling and provide the possibility for researchers to gain access to a variety of diverse populations. This access to diverse populations through social media has the potential to recruit Afro-Caribbean women college students from multiple institutions across the United States, from public and private institutions (Browne, 2005; Gelinas et al., 2017). Additionally, being that approximately 90% of young adults (which includes college students) use social media (Vannucci et al., 2017), this recruitment method is an optimal place for recruiting Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate students. Limitations to this method included the potential personal familiarity (i.e., acquaintances, former colleagues, etc.) to the participant when recruiting from researcher’s social media networks, potential participants will have the ability to see the profile picture (or more social media activities) of the researcher prior to the interview and excludes individuals without access to internet and/or social media (Browne, 2005; Gelinas et al., 2017).
The researcher received an auto-generated email from the Syracuse University Qualtrics Software Platform when a potential participant has completed the electronic informed consent and demographic survey. After receiving this notification, the researcher reviewed the documents to make sure the participant is eligible for the study. If eligible, the researcher sent an email to participants to schedule their interviews. A follow up email was also sent to confirm the interview time, date, and Zoom meeting link once scheduled (Appendix B). The researcher emailed all ineligible participants who completed the informed consent and demographic survey thanking them for filling out the documents.

Six participants were recruited for this study who met the participant criteria. Each participant had two 60-minute interviews each to fully participate in the study. In phenomenology, 2 to 25 participants have been the wide range suggested for participant sample size when conducting individual interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Guetterman, 2018; Hays & Singh, 2012; Mason, 2010; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Notwithstanding this information, the range for the sample size with multiple interviews for an individual participant varies, with no detailed reference to a specific sample size (Read, 2018; Seidman, 2006). Read (2018) suggested that using multiple interviews provides opportunities for member checking, a decrease in researcher bias when analyzing data, and provides an increased sense of safety for participants. The sample size within qualitative studies is contingent to the degree to which the goal of the research is met (Chamaz, 214; Dworkin, 2012; Guetterman, 2018; Hays & Singh, 2012; Mason, 2010). The goal of this dissertation study is to illuminate Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college student narratives despite collective participant similarities and/or differences. Having two rounds of interviews created the opportunity for a more in-depth
analysis of participant narratives, adheres to the core values of a feminist study, and illuminates the benefits of Read’s (2018) suggestions of multiple interviews.

Saturation is a qualitative research concept that identifies when there is no new additional data found within the data collection process (Guest et al., 2006; Hays & Singh, 2012; Hennink et al., 2017; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Saunders et al., 2018; Sebele-Mpofu, 2020). In attaining saturation, the optimal sample size ranges from 9-24 individual interviews (Hennink et al., 2017; Saunders et al., 2018; Sebele-Mpofu, 2020). Being that this study has 12 interviews in total, this was within the suggested range. Saturation also implies that the data collected expresses the meaning of the phenomena being explored for the sample population – this is called meaning saturation (Hennink et al., 2017; Sebele-Mpofu, 2020).

Feminist qualitative research (and other qualitative methodologies) has limited guidance about the operationalization of saturation (Guest et al., 2006; Morley et al., 2020; Sebele-Mpofu, 2020). Researchers suggest that using data codes as a preliminary point to achieve meaning saturation is crucial in supporting that there is a deep understanding of the phenomena being explored (Hennink et al., 2017; Sebele-Mpofu, 2020). Therefore, in exploring self-identity experiences for Afro-Caribbean women college students, meaning saturation is reached when codes are being reduced (horizontalization), and there are no new meaning units being created. For example, codes such as expressing feelings to Black women and strong Caribbean women were reduced to “Sisterhood” as the meaning unit. When the researcher was coding and noticed that all the codes are being reduced to meaning units already created (such as sisterhood), this shows that the meaning units reflect the data collected. This exposes that there is a deep understanding of the experiences, and the data gathered represents the phenomena with minimal outliers (Morley et al., 2020). Also, after gathering meaning units that represent the phenomena,
meaning saturation continued by the inclusion of rich and thick descriptions of the data collected (Sebele-Mpofu, 2020). This is when the researcher created composite text descriptions that entails the individual findings for each participant and will be explained further in the data collection and analysis section of this chapter. Already using the optimal population sample size, and two interviews to attain detailed data about the phenomena to achieve saturation (Sebele-Mpofu, 2020), findings report both individual narratives of the participants as well as collective themes. This exposed detailed findings about the phenomena, as well as align with feminist phenomenology in not generalizing the self-identity experiences of Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students into one collective “truth” but illuminate each participant experience.

**Feminist Phenomenological Interviews**

Feminist phenomenology as an accepted practice explains that the interview process should begin with experience. Beginning with experience means to start interview questions about the narratives of the participants instead of how others (e.g., culture, society, people etc.) perceive them (DeVault & Gross, 2012; Fisher & Embree, 2000; Hesse-Biber, 2012). This is conducted by decreasing the number of questions about how society understands the participant but emphasizes how the participant understands society through their worldview. For example, asking the participant how do you feel when your self-identity is expressed in college, instead of how do you feel people in college perceive your self-identity. This perspective kept the Afro-Caribbean women’s narrative at the center of the research, in making sure the authenticity of their narrative is not conflated with how larger cultures understand them. Feminist phenomenology was essential in how to write the interview questions, where the research questions guided what the interview questions were about. Because this study is about the
intersectional perspective of Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students, all the questions about self-identity, counseling, and ethnic marginalization were open-ended for participants to freely engage with these three suppositions. This makes the experience distinct to what the participants want to express, again positioning their voices as most salient to the research.

Interviews were conducted using Fisher and Embree (2000) and Hesse-Biber (2012) views on feminist interviewing for qualitative research. This consist of interviewers being mindful of their power in use of linguistics, welcoming dialogue but not over disclosing, personal reflexivity, and inviting difference in narratives (i.e., inviting narratives that are different between participants) (Fisher & Embree, 2000; Hesse-Biber, 2012). For example, to adhere to these notions, the researcher made sure to write a memo before each interview to express any preconceived notions and biases, be transparent with each participant about power dynamics in research by mentioning the right to exit the interview at any time (see introduction script Appendix E), and expressed that the interview is also a space for their self-reflection.

**Interviews**

Six participants were interviewed about their experiences of being an Afro-Caribbean woman undergraduate college student and their self-identity experiences. Each participant had two individual interviews. All interviews were video recorded using Zoom online video-conferencing software (Zoom Communication Inc., 2020) available through Syracuse University, which conforms to the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) compliance standards. These semi-structured interviews were approximately 60 minutes each and the researcher conducted all the interviews.
All interviews were transcribed verbatim through Rev.com (third-party transcription service) immediately after each interview. Each interview was thoroughly scrutinized to check for transcription errors by the researcher. After the interviews were transcribed and received, the researcher listened to the interview again while reading the transcript to check for accuracy and making written adjustments when needed. When scanning for errors were complete, interviews were stored on a password protected computer hard drive for participant confidentiality. For this study, participation was on a volunteer basis and with compensation given for being a part of the study. All 6 of the participants completed both interviews and received a $35.00 e-gift card from Amazon.

**Interview One**

In the beginning of the first interview, the researcher went over the informed consent, asked if they can be recorded, and shared the feminist interview methods of creating an interviewee-interviewer relationship. The researcher mentioned the need to keep participant narratives at the forefront of the study, acknowledging the interviewee-interviewer power difference in interviews, and prioritize the participant’s autonomy (i.e., talk about their experiences without judgment, and ability to start and stop that interview at any time) as a means to begin the interviewee-interviewer relationship (Allen-Collinson, 2011; Fielding & Olkowski, 2017; Harding & Norberg, 2005; Hesse-Biber, 2007, 2012; Shabot & Landry, 2018). A script is represented in Appendix E to highlight verbatim what was said to each participant. Then the participant was invited to ask questions about the researcher’s interview strategies and if they would like to continue. After the participants agreed to continue, the researcher began asking interview questions.
Within feminist phenomenology, it is vital to start with the lived experiences of the participants (Beauvoir, 1989; Burke, 2018; Fielding & Olkowski, 2017; Hoover, 2016; Shabot & Landry, 2018). The first interview focused on the lived experiences that may impact participants’ self-identity experiences (i.e., childhood experiences, ethnic marginalization, and self-perception). Literature centered around gender, Afro-Caribbean undergraduate college students, and self-identity were used to create questions that focus on the narratives of Afro-Caribbean undergraduate college students self-identity experiences. Table 2 represents the literature used to create the semi-structured interview questions and details the specific research question it correlates to. For example, the research question *What are the self-identity experiences of Afro-Caribbean women college students*, used literature from Gustave (2016), Erez and Earley (1993), Jones and Pritchett-Johnson (2018) and Lalla (2019) to identify semi-structured interview questions. This literature provided knowledge about Afro-Caribbean college students, women college students and self-identity that led to the semi-structured interview question of *How has being on a college campus helped you understand your self-identity (if any)?* Being that the interviews were semi-structured, it gave the participants the ability to freely talk about their experiences despite guiding questions previously created. The interview ended reiterating the time and date for the next interview sent to the participant in the interview email (Appendix B).

Table 2

| Semi-Structured Interview Questions – Interview One |
|----------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Research Question                            | Interview Question | Literature |
|                                              |                  |                |


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **What are the self-identity experiences of Afro-Caribbean women college students?** | Tell me about your childhood/ family dynamics living in an Afro-Caribbean household.  
Tell me about your college experience thus far?  
Given this definition of self-identity (see below), what does this term bring up for you?  
How has being on a college campus helped you understand your self-identity (if any)?  
Have you ever questioned your self-identity?  
Talk to me about your self-identity and how you think others perceive you. | Beckles, 1999; Berzonsky, 1994; Bobb-Smith, 2003; Campbell, 2017; Dixon, 2018; Erez & Earley, 1993; Gelin, 2017; Gentles-Peart, 2014; Gustave, 2016; Jones & Pritchett-Johnson, 2018; Katsiaficas et al., 2015; Lalla, 2019; Malcolm & Mendoza, 2014; Matthews, 2012; Thompson, 2011 |
| **What are the experiences of ethnic marginalization for Afro-Caribbean women college students?** | Tell me about an experience in college that made you think or reflect about your ethnicity (Afro-Caribbean).  
Given this definition of ethnic margination (see below) (i.e., being identified as African American when you identify as Afro-Caribbean, etc.) what does this term bring up for you?  
When group marinization happens (if it does), talk to me about your internal process/ reflection of the situation. | Bobb-Smith, 2003; Campbell, 2017; Gelin, 2017; Gentles-Peart, 2014; Gustave, 2016; Katsiaficas et al., 2015; Lalla, 2019; Malcolm & Mendoza, 2014; Matthews, 2012; Thompson, 2011 |

**Interview two**

In the beginning of interview two, the researcher asked for verbal consent to record the interview. After receiving verbal consent, the researcher proceeded with a member check of the
first interview. The researcher recapped the previous interview by representing the main topics presented in the previous interview (i.e., salient emotions, stories, etc., from the data collected). The participant then had the ability to introduce their perspectives towards the first interview about whether they agree, disagree, or have any comments they would like to add regarding the previous interview. After the member check, the researcher began asking interview questions. These interview questions inquire about how participants understand the phenomena of self-identity experiences with questions centered on their feelings towards counseling, self-discovery/ambiguity and intersectionality. These interview questions were created using literature about feminist conceptualization of women’s narratives, intersectionality, and counseling perspectives. Similar to Table 2, Table 3 also further details the literature that was used to create these semi-structured interview questions for the second interview.

This interview was to gather participant narratives about counseling and their own personal self-exploration about their self-identity experiences. This interview also had the potential for participants to learn more about themselves by providing space for self-reflection and ambiguity. This space was provided through questions about where they have explored their self-identity experiences, and how intersectionality may or may not impact their narratives (see Table 3). The participants had the ability to leave these interviews reflecting upon their own narratives (interview one), and how they see themselves now (interview two). The interview ended thanking the participant for their participation, expressing they will receive their $35.00 Amazon gift card via email, and will be contacted for a second member check of the topics represented in their combined interviews (and themes) via email. There were 17 semi-structured interview questions in total, 9 questions for the first interview and 8 questions for the second interview.
Table 3

Semi-Structured Interview Questions – Interview Two

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Interview Question</th>
<th>Literature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the experiences for Afro-Caribbean women students who attend or have</td>
<td>What are your feelings towards going to counseling?</td>
<td>Bachay, 1998; Cokley, McClain et al. 2013; Guiffrida, &amp; Douthit, 2010;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>experienced counseling?</td>
<td>Within your ethnic (and/or familial) culture, what is your understanding of</td>
<td>Hodge, 2018; Jones &amp; Pritchett-Johnson, 2018; McClain et al., 2016; Ratts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>counseling?</td>
<td>et al., 2016; Rowell &amp; Benshoff, 2008; Whaley &amp; Dubose, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tell me about your thoughts around counseling as an avenue to understand your</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>self-identity.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploring Feminist Framework Concepts of Self-</td>
<td>How did it feel to talk about these narratives in an intersectional format (i.e.,</td>
<td>Beauvoir, 1989; Burke, 2018; Crenshaw, 1991; Crenshaw, 1988; Fielding &amp;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discovery/ Ambiguity &amp; Intersectionality</td>
<td>being a woman who is racially black and ethnically Caribbean)?</td>
<td>Olkowski, 2017; Guy-Sheftall, 1995; hooks, 1952; Hoover, 2016; Mohammed,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Was there anything about yourself that you discovered through these interviews?</td>
<td>1998; Shabot &amp; Landry, 2018; Whaley &amp; Dubose, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection and Analysis

Simone De Beauvoir, the pioneer of feminist phenomenology, eloquently expresses that women are seen as “other” or “second” in comparison to men (Beauvoir, 1989). The gender oppression of women also continues as the value of how a woman projects their femininity is also compared or analyzed from one woman to another. Beauvoir (1989) acknowledged the weight and validity of one woman’s narrative, that self-liberation (self-consciousness) is worth exploration (Guy-Sheftall, 1995; hooks, 1952; Lorde, 1984) despite the presence of collective
agreeance. In remaining authentic to the realities of women (and feminist phenomenology), this inquiry sought to steer away from reporting findings singularly through the confinement of collective themes but report both themes and stand-alone narratives – single voices that all need to be heard.

Themes and thick descriptions of the interviews were created for each participant separately, to bring awareness to the unique essence of the experience for each participant. Consequently, each of the participants were analyzed within themselves, using the two participant interviews as a means to authentically report the lived experiences of Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students. As previously stated, phenomenology can be completed with 2 to 25 individual interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Guetterman, 2018; Hays & Singh, 2012; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Mason, 2010), therefore, using two interviews to highlight multiple single narratives resulted in rich data about participants experiences (Read, 2018). After this analysis was complete, the researcher went back and highlighted themes represented across all the data collected. This was conducted by the researcher looking at the codes, meaning units, and structural descriptions made for each participant, and identifying any similarities (themes). A synopsis of this data analysis and data collection process will be explained in the next section.

Reporting of the findings started with each participant individual narratives titled with their pseudonym given within the demographic survey. This consists of personal stories not mentioned within the themes and/or significant narratives mentioned by the participants. Participants had the ability to access their individual narrative profile (and collective themes) through Microsoft Word encrypted password lock file. The file only had the comment accessibility available for participants to add any remarks they would like to express to the researcher. The individual narrative profiles consist of their structural descriptions (expressed in
detail in the next section) which was a list of multiple themes from the data collected for one participant after data analysis. Participants had one week to respond before their individual narrative profile and themes through Microsoft Word encrypted password lock file were inaccessible. Also, if participants mentioned any differences from the themes, they were highlighted as a means to conduct a negative research analysis in reporting data opposite or different from represented themes. This trustworthiness measure is explained more in the trustworthiness section of this chapter. Including findings about individual narratives and themes also represents the core value of feminist phenomenology of not making generalizations about participants and recognizing each voice within the research (Fisher & Embree, 2000; Shabot & Landry, 2018).

Data Collection and Analysis Phases

The data collection and analysis process were conducted in three phases. It began with a review of the transcript and writing memos (phase I), analysis of individual participant narratives from two one-on-one interviews (phase II), and use of structural descriptions from each participant to create collective themes (phase III). More about each phase will be represented below along with a brief table (e.g., Table 4, 5 and 6) concisely demonstrating each stage.

Phase I

The researcher began phase I with writing a memo (descriptive summaries) before interviewing the participants, to engage in the phenomenological process of epoche/bracketing. (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015; Hays & Singh, 2012; Moustakas, 1994). The purpose of this memo is to be transparent about any beliefs or assumptions that may be present prior to hearing the narratives of Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate students within the study. After this memo was completed, the researcher conducted the first interview with the participant. Directly
following the interview, the researcher wrote another memo to continue the process of epoche/bracketing and write any general observations, researcher’s personal interview experience, and other significant thoughts related to the first interview. The first interview was then submitted to Rev.com for transcription. When the transcription was returned, the researcher mainly reviewed the transcribed interview for errors, but also reread the transcript to immerse herself in the participant’s understanding of their self-identity experiences. When the review of the transcript was complete, the transcript was uploaded to ATLAS.ti software which is a qualitative data management tool (Atlas.ti, 2021; Hays & Singh, 2012).

For the second participant interview, each step for interview one mentioned above was completed again. For instance, after interview one was uploaded to ATLAS.ti, the researcher wrote a memo, conducted the second interview, wrote another memo, transcribed the interview (third-party transcription service), reviewed the transcript, and uploaded the second transcript to ATLAS.ti. Phase I resulted in having at least 4 memos for each participant, 2 written transcriptions (one for each interview), and two interviews being uploaded onto ATLAS.ti. After both transcripts for a participant have been uploaded, phase I was complete and phase II began.

Table 4

Phase I of Data Collection and Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase I</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Write a memo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Conduct an interview with a participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Write another memo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Complete Transcription</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Review Transcription</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Upload on ATLAS.ti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>These steps are completed after each interview</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Phase II
Within Simone de Beauvoir’s construction of analyzing women’s lived experiences (feminist phenomenology), self-reflection, ambiguity, and self-discovery were core concepts (Beauvoir, 1989; Shabot & Landry, 2018.) Intersectionality is also crucial if using feminist phenomenology when interviewing participants with multiple marginalized identities (Shabot & Landry, 2018; Whaley & Dubose, 2018). Being that the participants are Afro-Caribbean women, both intersectionality and core concepts of Simone De Beauvoir’s methodology need to be explored within the study; therefore, phase II began with the creation of feminist potential codes for this research. These a priori potential feminist codes can be seen in Appendix F including the literature used to create them. These codes were created to be used as a guide to centralize the coding in phase II. This step (creating codes) is needed and was created because it is vital to maintain the feminist framework throughout the study and not just within the results. Having these code centralizes the study within the feminist framework before analysis begins. Though these a priori potential codes exist, they are just a guide. More codes were illuminated as each participant expressed their narratives. Examples of other codes represented within this research were “Being a Black Woman”, “Lessons from Mother”, and “Feeling Safe with Other Black Women. Additionally, how coding was conducted will be explained in the next paragraph. After codes were created the researcher adhered to the steps below to continue phase II. These steps were completed for each participant’s individual set of interviews (i.e., coding interview one and interview two (step 1), completing horizontalization for all the codes (step 2), and creating structural descriptions (step 3).

**Step 1) Coding by phrase to identify list of meaning units (invariant horizons):** When coding transcripts, each statement was considered on the basis of the experience/research question (coding by phrase). For example, a participant within this study mentioned “I’m tired,
the heat is killing me... I got so offended, but I just bit my tongue. I never played it again.” The first statement “I’m tired, the heat is killing me” was not coded because the participant did not mention this in regards the self-identity experiences of an Afro-Caribbean woman, but just wanting more rest and feeling hot from the heat of summer. The second statement “I got so offended, but I just bit my tongue. I never played it again” was coded muted voices (a priori code), silenced, and ethnic marginalization in romantic relationships. The decision in choosing these codes were made as the focus of coding was to represent the response of the participants in understanding the phenomena; therefore, capturing the essence of participant statements (Hays & Singh, 2012; Moustakas, 1994). These codes portrayed how this participant was feeling in an inter-ethnic romantic relationship with a previous partner.

Creation of codes continued and led to generating a list of meaning units to be condensed into themes (Hays & Singh, 2012). A meaning unit is the text in the transcriptions that hold significance to the phenomena being observed. For example, codes such as expressing feelings to Black women and strong Caribbean women represented the participant narratives of Afro-Caribbean women feeling safe with other Black women. In representing both codes, “Sisterhood” is the meaning unit. This meaning unit embodied the community of other Black women being safe people for these participants. Though these are two codes that led to a meaning unit, within each meaning unit there are multiple codes that signify the richness of the experience presented. For example, codes such as, thriving Black women communities and safety with Black women were also used in creating “Sisterhood” as a meaning unit.

**Step 2) Horizontalization and reduction of meaning units/invariant horizons:**

Horizontalization describes the process when the meaning units and codes are being identified and the reduction of meaning units begins (Hays & Singh, 2012). As previously represented,
multiple phrases were coded *muted voices*, then these codes were grouped together (reduction process) with participant narratives associated with the same code. For example, participant transcript data that were grouped together and coded *muted voices* were, *we have to bite our tongues or keep from saying certain things and I got so offended, but I just bit my tongue. I never played it again.* As codes were grouped together, this began the process of horizontalization.

Data is also being horizontalized when non-repetitive and non-overlapping statements are found during the reduction process (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015; Hays & Singh, 2012). As the data was being reduced, these nonrepetitive statements were illuminated, as well as grouped codes came together to bring forth multiple meanings of the participant’s experiences. This process reached saturation when there were no new meaning units presented after the last participant. If more meaning units were continuing to be found, more participants would have needed to be interviewed for the study.

Also, during horizontalization, this is a major moment when the researcher went back to her own personal textural descriptions (i.e., memos) and looked for any bias – seeing how personal feelings may have interfered with the data analysis. This is where the researcher consulted with the research auditor to identify presence of bias or any research observations that need to be discussed about the data gathered. An audit trail of the data collection (mean units and codes) was given to the auditor for review (Hays & Singh, 2012). This consisted of giving the auditor 5 random meaning units and codes to check for consistency and provide any assistance within the data analysis process.

**Step 3) Creation of structural descriptions:** Structural descriptions were then created after horizontalization and reduction. Structural descriptions are text written composites that describe the reduction and list of meaning units that were created (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015). This consists of
text that describes the meanings being presented as multiple codes were collapsed under muted voices. An example of a structural descriptions for muted voices was, “When women feel like their voices are going unheard or dismissed. Usually by men or people with more privilege than their own.” This is where the researcher listed out multiple meanings from the data gathered for each participant which included familial conversations or people significant to the participant narratives. Having already synthesized the invariant horizons, the researcher referenced each meaning with a participant narrative to again preference participant voices. For instance, this means pairing the participant transcript data with structural descriptions like the example used for muted voices, in identifying the meanings derived from each narrative. The researcher was also transparent within the findings in expressing any conflicting meanings and tensions illuminated within the data. A peer debriefer was used here to consult someone outside of the research team who may reflect observations and alternative suggestions from the structural descriptions created.

To remain consistent with conducting a feminist phenomenological study, it is important to express findings that are not generalizing the participant narratives, therefore steps 1-3 in phase II allowed for each participant data sets to be analyzed individually instead of collectively against the other participants. Doing so, it kept the essence of the phenomena for each individual participant, with the ability to express nuances and differences present in the research, which is crucial to feminist research. When step 3 was complete, it resulted in a representation of the self-identity experiences for each individual Afro-Caribbean woman undergraduate student that engaged in the research.

Table 5

*Phase II of Data Collection and Analysis*
Phase II

*Begin with reviewing created Feminist Codes*
Step 1) Coding by phrase
Step 2) Horizontalization and reduction
  - Researcher reviewed memos to combat bias
  - Researcher provided auditor with audit trail
Step 3) Creation of structural descriptions
  - Researcher consults peer debriefer about final structural descriptions

Phase III

For phase III, participant centered structural descriptions created in phase II step 3 were reviewed. The review entailed rereading all the structural descriptions for each of the participants and seeing if there are any similarities across all the participant structural descriptions to create themes. In finding similarities, the researcher was cognizant of how each participant makes meaning of their experiences. This involved themes being centered about their feelings, significant individuals, or even childhood experiences that represent how they understand their self-identity experiences.

Once the themes were created, a member check was engaged via email to see if the results are an authentic report of their experience (Hays & Singh, 2012). Participants got the results for their own individual narrative profile and collective themes to complete the final member check for the study. During the final member check, 3 participants responded agreeing to their individual profiles and themes, and 3 participants did not respond. These themes represented key descriptive data collected from the participants of the study, reflecting the participants’ phenomenological essence of an Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college student’s self-identity experience.

After the member check was complete, composite text descriptions were created for the phenomenon. This is where the researcher wrote the results of the themes created and composed
a representation of the data received during the study in the findings section (chapter 4). This was completed with the research integrity of keeping the essence of each of the participants’ experiences.

As previously stated, this data collection and analysis process were conducted in 3 phases – review of the transcript and writing memos (phase I), analysis of individual participant narratives (phase II), and creation of themes (phase III). These phases were to make sure that each participant account is being compared to its own narrative and not committing to overgeneralization. Each step was addressed with trustworthiness and credibility that will be described more in the next section.

Table 6

*Phase III of Data Collection and Analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase III</th>
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<tr>
<td>1) Review structural descriptions in Phase II</td>
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<td>2) Member Check</td>
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<tr>
<td>3) Create composite text descriptions (write findings section)</td>
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**Trustworthiness**

**Member Checks**

This study has multiple avenues of trustworthiness in elevating the credibility and dependability that this research represents the phenomena being studied (self-identity experiences of Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate students). The trustworthiness factors in this study were the use of memos/descriptive summaries, simultaneous data collection, negative research analysis, an auditor, and a peer debriefer (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Hays & Singh, 2012; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Seidman, 2006). Within this study there is a completion of two member checks – one at the beginning of the second interview and another via
email after the second interview is completed. During the first member check, all the participants reported agreeing to the represented main topics from their initial interview. Participant topics in the first interviews varied, but also exemplified their narratives about family, being an Afro-Caribbean woman, self-identity, and college life. During the second member check, participants were emailed their individual profiles and collective themes. Participants were given a week to respond about whether they agreed or disagreed with the data, and/or would like to add their perspective on any part of the interview process. Three participants mentioned via email that they agree to their individual profile and collective themes and 3 did not respond. Providing member checks, provided power to the participants involved, allowing them to represent the authenticity of their narrative, and positioned them as core tenants of the research (Hays & Singh, 2012; Hesse-Biber, 2012). Throughout the interviews, they were allowed to contact the researcher via email and make sure their participant narrative was correctly articulated.

**Memos/ Descriptive Summaries**

Researcher reflexivity is a critical component to feminist qualitative research (Doucet & Mauthner, 2007; Fielding & Olkowski, 2017; Hesse-Biber, 2007, 2012). The applications of memos were used throughout the research process – adding a level of reflexivity in keeping a record of the development and formation of the study (Fielding & Olkowski, 2017; Hays & Singh, 2012; Hesse-Biber, 2007, 2012). For each participant, memoing occurred before the first interview, after the first interview, before the second interview, and after the second interview. Additional memos were recorded each time the researcher worked on the data analysis process, as well as any moment the researcher had any thoughts, questions, connections, patterns, and literature connected to the research (Hays & Singh, 2012; Hesse-Biber, 2007, 2012). Memoing was highly significant during the process of (1) creating codes, (2) making decisions about the
data analysis, (3) writing personal researcher contentions about the research, (4) and exploring directions in making sure the narratives of Afro-Caribbean women were highlighted. For example, this dissertation is rooted in highlighting the narratives of Afro-Caribbean women, therefore, remaining true to Simone de Beauvoir’s (1989) framework in amplifying women’s narratives was a consistent theme within the memos. In doing so, memos were written about why and how decisions were made to stay true to this perspective. For example, when creating codes, feminist codes (Appendix F) were reviewed first, and any hesitation about coding a specific narrative was memoed. Before creating structural descriptions, the memos were viewed first to aid in reducing the process of bias in the results.

**Auditor and Peer Debriefers**

An auditor is essential in qualitative inquiry as they assist with providing feedback, combat researcher bias, and promote consistency within research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Given, 2012; Hays & Singh, 2012). An auditor is commonly used in phenomenological studies when viewing the research data analysis process in ensuring the evidence used to explain the phenomena is conclusive to the data collected (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Hays & Singh, 2012). In this dissertation, an auditor was used during the horizontalization and reduction phase to make sure the codes and meaning units were representative of the research data. The researcher gave the auditor and audit trail of five meaning units picked at random from different participants to check for consistency and provide assistance with the data analysis process. The audit trail also consisted of the original interview transcript data, codes, and meaning units. For example, the interview data was “But on my mom's side, I just think about femininity and just being a strong, capable woman.” This was coded femininity (from feminist codes created – Appendix F), and the meaning unit was conceptualization of womanhood. The auditor went
through this trail together with the researcher and discussed reasoning for choosing codes, counterbalanced the literature related to the data, and aided with making sure the narratives are properly coded.

A peer debriefer was also used when the structural descriptions were created. A peer debriefer was a person outside of the research team who had extensive experience with mentoring, advising, and conducting campus administration for Afro-Caribbean women in a higher education setting. Peer debriefers are imperative as a person who can ask questions, make alternative suggestions, and reflect on the structural descriptions created or overall data in qualitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Given, 2012; Hays & Singh, 2012). The peer debriefer was shown all the structural descriptions (and an audit trail of how they were created) including the collective themes. The peer debriefer and researcher engaged in conversations centered around what is currently happening in higher education for Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students outside of this research and if there are any patterns, contentions around Afro-Caribbean individual profiles and their own identities, and their thoughts about the research data. This added confirmation that the data was representative of the participants’ narratives, and Afro-Caribbean women they encountered in their place of employment.

**Simultaneous Data Collection and Negative Research Analysis**

Simultaneous data collection refers to collecting and analyzing data at the same time (Hays & Singh, 2012; Yu et al., 2014). Within this research process, participant interviews were analyzed while other interviews were being conducted. This trustworthiness method is not frequently used in qualitative research (Yu et al., 2014), yet is important for this feminist study as it is a continuous reminder to not generalize the narratives of Afro-Caribbean women. Collecting data and analyzing data of two different narratives was a constant reminder to the
researcher to highlight the authenticity of each narrative. Seeing differences and similarities at once provided a full perspective to also illuminate the differences seen within their stories when writing individual profiles (in Chapter 4). These profiles now have rich descriptions because of this trustworthiness measure.

Also, in continuing to illuminate the authentic narratives of the participants, negative research analysis was used to expose data that is opposite and/or outside of the current structural descriptions or findings. By using negative research analysis, it also decreases researcher bias and provides more strength to the research study (Hays & Singh, 2012; Maxwell, 2012). Searching for more than commonalities and similarities within the two interviews provides richness and a more realistic position of the findings. This again positions the individual profiles to represent nuances for each participant. Also, since there are not many counseling articles about Afro-Caribbean women, writing thick descriptions of the findings within this research exposed a more genuine account of the participant narratives.

With these measures of trustworthiness such as, the use of memos/ descriptive summaries, simultaneous data collection, negative research analysis, an auditor, and a peer debriefer (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Hays & Singh, 2012; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Seidman, 2006), there are still limitations. Researcher power and population size are limitations of this research and will continue to be explored in Chapter 5. This chapter explains the data collection and analysis process along with feminist phenomenology as the methodology. Being that this is a feminist phenomenological dissertation, it is important to position this research with a feminist framework. Using Simone de Beauvoir’s (1989) stance toward feminist phenomenology she acknowledged women who were in the process of self-discovery/ rediscovery. This chapter represents not only how the research was conducted but the
essence of why feminist phenomenology was chosen to explore this population. The next chapter reports the research findings of the interviews with Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students and exposes the details received from the measures used in this chapter.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS

So I feel like, as I said before, I never really thought about identity until this interview. And I never thought about my family or my culture in that way. Because I felt I never really had this space to do that. (Bea, Participant)

This chapter begins with a summary of the research findings and continues with the specifics related to the framework (i.e., Simone de Beauvoir’s self-discovery/rediscovery framework towards feminist phenomenology) and results. The findings of this dissertation include individual profiles that were created for each participant that exposes their narrative around being an Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college student. These individual profiles yielded findings such as, participants expressing their mental health journey, ethnic pride, self-identity exploration, academic stress, and cross-cultural mentorship. After individual profiles are expressed for each participant, there is a summary of the profiles in explaining the similarities across participants. Lastly, this chapter will end with collective themes noted from the research findings (i.e., (a) “prayer is all I need”: religion and mental health, (b) the conceptualization of womanhood (femininity) (c) the beauty of intersectionality: gender, ethnicity, and race).

Findings in this chapter are reported according to Simone de Beauvoir’s self-discovery/rediscovery stance towards feminist phenomenology. This research framework acknowledges the importance of self-liberation (self-consciousness) through the illumination of individual narratives of women (Beauvoir, 1989). This self-discovery/rediscovery framework was chosen to represent the findings to amplify the individual participant narratives within this dissertation study, while acknowledging the differences that maybe revealed as the participants expressed their lived experiences. In doing so, the findings will include areas in the research where participants learned something about themselves within the interviews, rediscovered any
personal aspects about themselves they have not explored recently, and/or how they felt talking about their narrative in an intersectional format (i.e., being Black, Afro-Caribbean, and a woman). As previously explained in Chapter 3, an intersectional methodology (i.e., feminist phenomenological) is crucial in reporting the self-identity narratives of Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students in exposing the authenticity of each participant. In doing so, each participant will have their own individual narrative profile to recognize each voice within this study. This chapter will end with collective themes that represent the research phenomena that occurred as these participants talked about their self-identity experiences.

This dissertation study interviewed 6 Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students (two interviews for each participant) that will be introduced within their individual narrative profile for the purpose of understanding their self-identity experiences. Profiles will contain the individual themes for each participant and demographic data to provide a comprehensive context of the participant narratives. In reporting the findings within the individual narratives, they will represent the research phenomena of self-identity experiences which includes ethnic marginalization, and/or participants who have experience with using and/or trying to attain counseling services. Each individual profile will be expressed in a narrative format, which entails the reporting of the findings of each individual participant without generalizations, or conclusions to recognize the importance of each participant's personal story. Within the individual profiles, self-identity experiences were used to express the participants understanding of how they conceptualize who they are, ethnic marginalization in reporting findings where participants felt ethnically dismissed, and counseling services to reveal the impact of counseling on Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students.
After the individual narrative profiles, themes drawn from all participant interviews will present commonalities within all the Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students in this study. This section is formatted to start with a brief overview of the research phenomena represented in the individual profiles (i.e., self-identity experiences – including ethnic marginalization, and/or participants who have experience with using and/or trying to attain counseling services). This is to summarize all the individual profiles and represent collective narratives from what already been expressed. Therefore, this summarization it just to provide a synopsis of the phenomena represented in the individual profiles.

After this summarization, additional themes will be reported that were illuminated during the data analysis process. Across all six of the participants there were topics that were frequently represented in the data when exploring all twelve of the interviews. These items did not have deep descriptive quotes, but always infused when talking about self-identity experiences. The addition of religious practices, how they understand womanhood, and intersectionality were sprinkled throughout their narratives when talking about the research phenomena. Therefore, to maintain this feminist phenomenological approach in making sure the fullness of the participants narratives was reported, three additional themes will be represented.

Also, in remaining congruent to feminist research, I have used the first-person perspective in reporting the individual profile summaries and collective themes (Hesse-Biber, 2007, 2012). This acknowledges that the researcher is never completely absent from the study and recognizes the inevitable power dynamics that still exist within qualitative research (Fielding & Olkowski, 2017; Hesse-Biber, 2007, 2012). Positioning the researcher in the study shifts the readers lens to connect to the research findings and continues the humanization of the women within this study – instead of confining them to mere research participants. This chapter will
express the narratives of six different perspectives of being an Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students and their commonalities through collective themes.

**Individual Profiles**

**Cathy**

Cathy is a 19-year-old Afro-Caribbean woman who identifies ethnically as Haitian and Dominican and born in the U.S. She attends a small public university in the Northeast of the U.S. and just completed her freshman year of college in-person. Growing up, she (and her older brother) was raised by a Haitian single mother who came to the U.S. as a teenager. She expressed that her mother is a strong Haitian woman with traditional Haitian values as it pertains to parenting. She explains that her relationship with her mother impacts multiple areas of her life, including her mental health and self-identity. As a Christian woman, throughout her narrative she mentions the importance of her relationship with God and received some of these religious values from her mother. Cathy’s story reveals her self-identity experiences, ethnic marginalization, and counseling experiences as an Afro-Caribbean woman undergraduate college student. The main themes in her individual profile are (a) relationship with mother, (b) romantic relationships, (c) personal mental health journey, (d) and in conclusion, moments of self-discovery/re-discovery.

**Relationship With Mother**

**Self-Identity Experiences.** When Cathy spoke about her self-identity experiences, she mentioned that she identifies as being Haitian, an Afro-Caribbean woman, a Baptist-Christian, and a lower middle socioeconomic status. She referred to her Haitian ethnicity as the primary identity that influences her conceptualization of life and the main lens used to understand her self-identity. She then followed up by saying her family celebrates Caribbean holidays such as
Haitian Flag Day, and speak Haitian Creole at home because of her upbringing with a Haitian mother. As she relayed the salience of being Haitian, she proceeded to explain that much of her self-identity comes from mimicking her mother at a young age – “Because I see how people treat her, because of the way that she carries herself. So, I try to mimic that.” Cathy used her mother as a barometer for who she is, who she wants to become, and continued to compare herself to her mother. She mentioned, “I am my mother's daughter because we are very much twins. I consider myself very strong-willed, and very wise for my age, just because I'm literally my mother's daughter.” Cathy’s relationship with her mother is so imperative that it is a primary source to her self-identity, that through her mother she cultivated who she wanted to be.

"I Just Want A Relationship With You": Mother-Daughter Relationship. Even though Cathy may see her mother as a source (or person) that helps her understand her self-identity, there are aspect about her mother (and their relationship) that she wished were different. She explains that her mother is not emotionally supportive and lacks communication within the household. From this, Cathy tried to do more to please her mother in hopes to build a stronger bond.

The main reason I took AP and honors class is to show my mom I'm working hard in school. And church, I'm doing all these activities. I'm active in church. You want me to be active, I'm active in church. I would get, "That's good," that's about it from her. And I'm just like, I'm doing all these things to get some validation, to show you maybe this can be one step closer to building a relationship because I'm doing things that make you happy... I would love to have that close mother and daughter relationship.

Despite Cathy doing these activities, she continued feeling dismissed by her mother.
I just want a relationship with you, but it just feels like anytime I try to talk to you there's a barrier or (pause) There's so many times I gone into her room, sat there, was like, "Can I talk to you?" She would finish doing her night routine, turn off the light, pray, go to sleep, and I'm just sitting there in dark. I'm like, maybe she's still praying. I'm going to give her some time. And I would wait five to 10 minutes, nothing, and I just leave the room.

Cathy deeply expressed wanting to be closer to her mother and having a “mother-daughter relationship”, but her strict parenting style caused her to feel restricted with what she can wear, who she could be friends with, and always felt “like there was certain things I couldn't do even if I wanted to.” Her mother’s restriction continued to take a toll on Cathy and as she began to feel like she could not live her life the way she wanted to, and still did not have the communication she wanted with her mother. Cathy mentioned, “I see that almost everything I do is to please this woman” but still lacked the closeness she genuinely desired.

**Romantic Relationships**

When Cathy spoke about the significance of her relationship with her mother, she also mentioned her mother keeping strict rules around romantic relationships. Cathy was not allowed to date, but without her mother’s permission she had her first boyfriend when she was 14 years old. Months later, Cathy’s mother found out about her first romantic relationship from a church member before Cathy was able to tell her mother. Cathy reported getting in trouble for lying to her mother, and she began to start having conversations with Cathy about dating, having self-respect, and her mother’s values on sex before marriage. Her mother thought that she was lying about having sex, after Cathy repeated that she was not. Talking with her mother Cathy
continued to feel penalized for wanting to live her life more freely without her mother’s restrictions.

During her freshman year of college, Cathy reconnected with a friend from middle school and began an interracial romantic relationship with a White male. This time, Cathy’s mother knew about the relationship, but did not want her to stay with him for long periods of time in fear of sexual intimacy. While Cathy’s mother was worried about her daughter having sex, Cathy was experiencing severe complications and neglect in her relationship. Cathy mentioned that she felt ethnically marginalized, insecure, unsure about her self-identity and sometimes physically unsafe. As she tried to share aspects of her Haitian culture with him, he dismissed her and made Cathy feel ethnically marginalized within their relationship.

Try to teach him a little bit of my culture (Haitian) and stuff like that. He said, "What is this music? Why does it sound like that? All the music sounds the same." I got so offended, but I just bit my tongue. I never played it again.

His actions kept her from wanting to be openly communicate her feelings to him and felt as if he did not compromise on any aspect during their relationship. Cathy expressed that this relationship was unhealthy for her, and it highly affected her mental health and self-identity.

But as far as being in a relationship, you just make me feel insecure and you make me not like who I am, and that's just not okay, because up until now, I was perfectly fine with who I am. It's you that's caused me to feel this way, and I shouldn't be allowing it. I shouldn't settle.

Cathy admitted that the relationship was negatively impacting her self-identity and continued to feel as if her values were not important to him.
And then with the religious thing. I don't know what he considered himself, but I just saw him as an Atheist. And whenever it came to speaking about God, and things like that, he would just be very disrespectful. Like, "He's not real."

With religion (faith in God) being an important social location within her self-identity and already feeling unheard and dismissed within the relationship, this began to impact her life as a college student.

Like I said, I went into freshman year dating him. I would just stay in my room. I would cry myself to sleep at night. I just didn't have the motivation to do classwork or attend classes. That's why I got so held back. He would always ask me to sleep over. I'm like, "Okay, whatever. Just come get me. That's fine." I just, I don't know. I was not me at all come freshman year.

Cathy’s relationship with him caused her academics to decrease and continued to act in ways that she believed was not congruent to her self-identity. Already being ethnically marginalized for her Haitian culture, feeling insecure, and the suppression of her true self-identity, Cathy felt like she did not have a voice in their relationship. “So, that's why most of the time, I would bite my tongue, and just keep it to myself. And that obviously really affected my mental.” As previously stated, Cathy had a lack of motivation for her college academics and stayed in her room because of the impact of this relationship. As Cathy continued, she mentioned that her mental health concerns became a lot more severe.

**Personal Mental Health Journey**

“**How am I Still Breathing?**”: Suicide Attempt. Having already explained her complicated relationship with her mother and boyfriend, Cathy expressed that these relationships were increasing her anxiety and depression. She reported that her symptoms grew stronger and
came to the decision that she wanted to commit suicide. The process of these thoughts manifested from Cathy sleeping over at her boyfriend’s house without telling her mother. Cathy expressed that she spent “a night and a day” with her boyfriend and did not tell her mother or anyone in her family. “My phone actually died. Back then I had an Android. He had an iPhone, so I didn't have a charger. I didn't contact anyone.” Unsure of where Cathy was, her mother called the police and reported Cathy missing. When Cathy came home:

I walked in the front door of the house and then I saw my brother standing in the kitchen. He looked frustrated. My mom was actually at the dining room table that was (pause) Once you walk in the house, there's a dining room table there. She was sitting there, her head down, tears on her face. There's papers everywhere and I'm like, "I'm so sorry." Because I didn't even know what was going on, but I already knew it had something to do with me. And then she told my brother...She was like, "You can call the police. Tell them that she came back home." I was like, whoa, what did I just do? What just happened here? She didn't talk to me, obviously, that night, she just went to her room.

Cathy continued and recalled her emotions from that night.

That night, I went to my room, I just broke down and started crying, because I'm like, I always feel like I'm causing trouble and stress in the house, tension. I always feel like it's always me...Because there's just certain things I can't really talk to my mom about. I would love to have that close mother and daughter relationship...The different mindsets, different ways of making and operating. That night, I was like (pause) I told myself the following morning I'm going to commit suicide because I just feel like I'm such a stressor in the house to everyone.
Cathy felt like she was the cause of stress in her household, and suicide would be best to relieve stress in her family. She mentioned that her mother:

She's always on me, like, "Don't make me go crazy," anytime I ask her something or ask for help. Those kind of things stick with me. And then there's my brother, in our old house, he would say depression is for the weak, so I feel like I could not talk to him.

Not receiving the support that she wanted from her boyfriend, brother, and mother, Cathy’s choice of suicide grew stronger. The next morning:

I pushed the couch, blocked the door, locked my door... And then I had this green extension cord in my room that I used, and then I had a ceiling fan. I just tied that and I just tied it around my neck. I texted my brother this... I forget the verse I sent to him from the bible. It was psalm something, I don't remember. But it had something to do with going to rest, dying, whatever. And then I actually opened his message and he responded because he was at work, but he didn't work too far from the house... He was like, "As a Christian you're not supposed to do this. Suicide is not the way."... I texted a couple other people that I was close to, said, "I love you." I didn't tell them what was going on, just said, "I love you." My brother's the only person that insinuated it to. Texted everyone, listened to the song, tied the thing around my neck. It hung for about five minutes. I was like, how am I still breathing right now? But it eventually just broke off. The fan broke and the cord broke. The cord snapped and I just laid on the ground. It was still tight around my neck so I couldn't breathe, but I eventually just found the strength to pull it off.

As Cathy was on the ground:
I remember my door just breaking and it was my brother. He's a pretty big guy. He wrestled and played football, always in the gym, so he had the strength to do that. He broke the door. Remember, the couch was in front of it, so he broke the door. He thought I was dead just because I wasn't moving and I guess he couldn't really tell I was breathing. I remember him putting his hand on his head and he was cursing, whatever. And then he did the same to my mom's door because she usually locks her door. I don't know why. He broke my mom's door...And she was like, "What happened?" Because she was still on the phone. And she ran into the room, sat next to me, started breaking down crying. And whoever she was on the phone with, they were like, "What's going on? What's going on?"...She said in Creole, but she's like, "Cathy put a thing around her neck to kill herself." And then she kept repeating that, repeating that.

Cathy’s brother called the police, and she was sent to the hospital for physical examinations as they asked her what happened that night. After her examination, the hospital highly requested a psychological facility for clinical assessments after she attempted suicide. Cathy explained that in the psychological facility she felt trapped and alone. Despite the uncomfortable atmosphere of the facility, Cathy reminded herself to remain positive and was discharged two days later.

**Counseling Experience.** Throughout Cathy’s story she experienced a tremendous amount of emotional neglect and lack of support and communication. Since her suicide attempt, she broke up with her boyfriend and went to three counseling sessions. Cathy mentioned that she enjoyed counseling and it helped her grow a closer relationship with her mother. During the last two counseling sessions, the counselor decided to have Cathy’s mother involved for family counseling. As the counselor talked to Cathy’s mother, the counselor advocated for Cathy’s emotions related to wanting emotional validation and striving to live a life that pleases her
mother. Cathy’s mother said, "I grew up in Haiti, the culture is very different," and stuff like that. "Growing up, children didn't really express themselves, didn't really show emotion, things like that." In the session, both mother and daughter were able to understand one another for the first time, have a conversation about cultural values, express the need for more open communication, and began to build a closer mother-daughter relationship. “After that, my mom would actually call me in her room to talk, see how I'm actually doing. Have in depth conversation that we haven't had in 18 years. I really appreciated that counselor.”

Cathy’s time in counseling was short lived because of the cost to receive services. “We did only go to two to three meetings, because again, the bills were (pause) Each session was like $300. Again, single mother.” The cost made it inaccessible for Cathy to continue with sessions though the service wer greatly effective with helping her relationship with her mother. Cathy explained that her mental health has gotten better since receiving services because she can talk to her mother when she feels depressed or anxious. Cathy wished that she could have more one-on-one sessions with the counselor,

...that maybe could help me realize some things that I can't see. Because I still have my episodes here and there with the depression and stuff like that, so that's why I said I wouldn't be opposed to going back.

Although Cathy is not receiving counseling services, she reported having more familial support for her mental health and wanting to use her narrative to help other young adults who are struggling with their mental health.

**Moments of Self-Discovery/Rediscovery**

Cathy revealed different moments of self-identity experiences where she compared herself to her mother, times where she felt ethnically marginalization by her ex-boyfriend and
experienced the positive impacts of counseling. With talking about these experiences within two interviews, she expressed that this was the first time talking about all these experiences at once, and the first time talking about them within the perspective of being a Haitian-Black Woman (i.e., gender, race, and ethnicity). While she pondered about telling her narrative within an intersectional lens, Cathy mentioned that looking at her mental health through the lens of her ethnicity made her feel weak or unable to control her mental health symptoms. “Sometimes it makes me feel a little weak, just because, like I said, the mental health and depression thing is not something that's really spoken about in the Caribbean culture.” When she conceptualized her narrative using the position of being a woman then mentioned, “But as a woman, we're more open with that. In general, as a woman, we're emotional people so things happen. We take it to heart more. At the same time, when I think about that, I'm like, all right, it doesn't make me feel as weak.” Cathy mentioned self-discovering how two different social locations can affect how she feels about her own mental health journey. She explained that she thinks of both these different social location perspectives when contemplating about her mental health. No matter how these social location perspectives unfold, Cathy expressed that nothing will keep her from sharing her story and advocating for others people with similar narratives.

As Cathy talked about this essential perspective about intersectionality, she mentioned, For me to have to sit here and think about it and see it through those different lenses, it's like wild. It's like you're living multiple lives. It's crazy. Not really. I just feel like it's a conversation that needs to be had.

Cathy revealed this notion of intersectionality within mental health did affect her and feels as if she did not always make these intersectional connections on her own. She mentioned that conversations expressed in the interviews need to be had more wildly talked about in the Afro-
Caribbean community for others to understand the self-identity intersections when conceptualizing personal mental health. Cathy also re-discovered that she no longer wants to be ashamed of her story. Whether it was being perceived as too emotional as a woman, or being weak because of her Haitian ethnicity, it would not stop her from getting the support that she needs or being a support for others. Through Cathy’s narrative it is more than self-identity experiences, ethnic marginalization, and counseling experiences, but how these concepts impact her life today, effect who she is, and who she wants to become.

**Chris**

Chris is a 19-year-old Afro-Caribbean woman of Haitian ethnic descent who was born in the U.S. She attends a large university in the Northeast of the U.S. and just completed her freshman year at a predominately white institution online due to the impact of COVID-19 pandemic. Chris was raised by her mother who was born in the U.S. of Haitian descent, and a father who was born and raised in Haiti and migrated to the U.S. during his adulthood. Chris also mentioned the significances of her maternal grandmother as another pivotal person involved in raising her. As the older sibling to a younger teenaged brother, she expressed having more of the Haitian culture impressed on her because of the pressures of being an older sibling. She mentions that being Haitian is the primary social location that highly impacts her self-identity. With two generations (parents and grandmother), influencing the strength of her Haitian identity, the main themes in her narrative represents this crucial cultural factor; therefore, the themes are: (a) self-identity experiences, (b) ethnicity going unnoticed, and (c) moments of self-discovery/re-discovery.

*“Everything Comes Hand in Hand With My Ethnicity”: Self-Identity Experiences*
With Chris’ Haitian cultural association being an imperative part of her life, this is also represented when she expressed her self-identity experiences. When asked about her self-identity, Chris mentioned:

And that's why I say that, I would definitely say my culture (Haitian) is, I feel like for many people, is a big part of who you are because it creates you, everything you (pause) the way you think about things the way you see things it's just all stemmed from that.

As Chris mentioned that “everything” stems from her Haitian ethnicity she continued by expressing how other social locations also intersect with her ethnicity.

So I feel like because everything comes hand in hand with my ethnicity, like I was saying earlier religion and some may say politics and things like that. I feel a lot of the way I think about so many different things, all stems off of me being Haitian. So the religion I practice, politically where I feel fall, my morals, I feel a lot of that stems from my culture (Haitian).

Chris explained that her opinion towards religion and politics is molded from her ethnic background and is how she understands her self-identity. She emphasized that there is one main source of her self-identity (ethnicity) and everything else is funneled through it (i.e., religion and politics).

With Chris’ clear understanding of ethnicity and self-identity, she mentioned how she came to this conclusion when thinking about her self-identity experiences.

Just looking at the other women in my family and seeing how strong they are, how sure of themselves as they are and how passionate about the work that they do. My grandmother with her ministry, my mom with her career. She's just been moving up the
ladder. My aunt following in my mom's footsteps and her sisters. So I guess being surrounded by very strong Haitian women, for me who made me this way.

Here Chris recalled that the reason for her strong emphasis on her Haitian ethnicity comes from the women in her family. This continued as she talked about her grandmother’s influence on her life.

Because I would say I'm very strong and my self-identity like I was talking about, with seeing strong (pause) Because my grandmother, she's very like that. She's like that. She's going to do what she wants and she doesn't care. She's very (pause) Okay, I don't want to talk about my grandmother the entire time, but my grandma is literally my role model. Because one, to get to where she is, she had to climb very, very, very hard, because she's a female Haitian pastor.

Again, Chris shows her admiration and respect for her the Haitian women in here family who helped her solidify her strong self-identity, especially her grandmother – her role model. For Chris it is evident that her self-identity is anchored within her ethnicity and the Haitian women who cultivated who she is today.

**Ethnicity Going Unnoticed**

With Chris highlighting the importance of ethnicity, she mentioned that there are many times that her ethnicity goes unnoticed on social media and in college academic courses. She expressed that ethnic marginalization impacted her college experience and increased her reflexivity in becoming more aware of the lack of ethnic representation and monolithic perspectives within the Black race. With experiencing ethnic marginalization, she saw that her Haitian ethnicity has some differences compared to other Black ethnicities.
Chris mentioned that she does not want her ethnicity to continue to be silenced or go unnoticed when people see her. She firmly stated:

People don't look at me and see my culture unless I bring it up, which is why I've started to bring up the fact that I am Haitian in conversation with many people. Just because I feel like, like I was saying, I feel like that's such a big part of me. And as I get older, I realized how much it bothers me when people aren't noticing that about me, or trying to like, I guess, move past it, or ignore it, or downplay, or whatever the case may be. I guess it differs on how strongly other people feel about culture.

Chris mentioned that she wants to be seen as Haitian, but ethnicity is not significant or goes unnoticed by many people. Chris continued this notion of the absence of ethnicity by talking about the terms Black or African American being normalized for all Black people – furthering the narrative of the Black race being a monolith.

I realized, I hear the word African American all the time, all the time. Or people say Black people, it's always either African American, or Black. It's so interesting. Well, now it's so interesting to me because I realized more and more how Black and White everybody makes it. It's either, oh you're Black. It doesn't matter if you're Haitian, or Jamaica, or whatever else. You're just either White, or you're Black and that's all we talk about.

When she explained that race (either Black or White) is what people see as most salient, she continued to express within group differences in the Black race.

...while we all face the same issues racially as Black people, we definitely still have major difference culturally. And so, I feel people need to understand more, understand that, or to just be more aware and look out for their culture...And I think a lot of people
kind of conflate them a lot and kind of say like, well, if you said Black, it takes care of everyone.

Again, the conflation of Black ethnicities made Chris feel as if her culture was lost, and the nuances of her ethnicity (Haitian) was being ignored. She continued this concept of ethnicity going unnoticed when talking about Haiti and social media.

**Haiti and Social Media.** On social media, Chris believed that Haiti and/or Haitian people are not supported. She expressed talking to other Haitian friends about this who also agree with the lack of social media support for Haitians.

We were talking about how a lot of people, when it came to posting about Black Lives Matter, everybody was active. It was everybody was active. Everybody was actively posting about it, raising awareness on it, Black, White, whatever the case may be. Everybody was doing it. And when it came to everything that was going down with Haiti, it was like you saw very, very, very, very few people Re-posting Free Haiti hashtags, or anything like that. And me and my friend were just talking about how it's so crazy.

Chris mentioned that whenever Haiti needs attention other Black people (non-Haitians) do not support them. She passionately expressed not having support from other non-Haitian Black people as Haiti goes through political and economic unrest is a “really good example of understanding that race is not the same thing as ethnicity.” She believed that many non-Haitian Black people show up for Black racial injustice but not ethnic specific (i.e., Haitian) concerns. She expressed that the lack of support from other Black people makes her feel like her race is dismissing a huge part of her self-identity (i.e., ethnicity).

**Ethnic Marginalization.** Chris was having a conversation with her boyfriend’s aunt about Chris’ new job at a center for Black research. As she talked to her about the new position,
her boyfriend’s aunt asked if they included Haitian research “being that they are also Black as well.” As Chris answered no, she continued to reflect on this fact that her ethnicity was not present in the center for Black research.

And ever since she asked me that question, I've always constantly thought about that on how (pause) even when I'm picking my classes and school, you can pick from a number of different African American classes, or Asian classes, or different things like that. But I realized that there's no class that teaches on Haitian history, or anything like that. It's like a lot of the research has focused on African American history, but there's just nothing about Haitian history. And I guess that's kind of when I started thinking more about my culture in school and the space between it.

Chris mention that as she continued to become aware and reflect on this lack of Black ethnic specific attention in college. She reported that this made her feel ethnically marginalized as a Haitian student looking for ethnic diversity throughout campus. Her place of work and academic courses did not represent core pieces of her self-identity which is significantly crucial to Chris. Though Chris did not find the ethnic representation she wished for in college, she mentioned that regardless she is “very proud to be Haitian” and highly values her cultural background.

**Self-Discovery/Rediscovery (Counseling)**

As Chris began to express her personal knowledge about mental health and counseling, she revealed being self-diagnosed with anxiety and having multiple anxiety attacks during high stressed moments in her life. Despite these mental health concerns, Chris mentioned not going to counseling or seeking treatment for her anxiety. She explained that she “never cared to look into it because I never thought that I had any problems that basically somebody would want to see me
for.” She did not think that her mental health concerns merited professional attention and the participant interviews was her first time talking about counseling.

I really don't remember what it was from last time, but I kind of knew what my thoughts on counseling were, but I guess saying out loud made me really realize how my thoughts were because I never talked about it before...I guess hearing myself talk about it, I would say that I might look into counseling more, especially next semester, because I anticipate stress.

Chris did not notice her thoughts about counseling because she hesitated with the idea of talking to other about her personal mental health (anxiety). Chris self-discovered that she believed in the benefits of counseling for other people, but she did not apply it to herself. After discovering this, she realized that counseling would be beneficial to her when she goes back to college in the fall semester. Chris also quickly acknowledge that she did not think about counseling because no one ever asked her.

I've never actually really thought about it. I've never really actually talked about it with someone. I think nobody ever really asked, so being able to talk about something that you actually think about was (pause) it felt a little freeing to actually say it out loud. This is a problem. This is what I face, and to really look at it for yourself and be like, "Damn."

Chris never deeply contemplated that counseling could assistance with lessening her anxiety prior to the interview. Chris was not only able to share her narrative about her self-identity experiences as an Afro-Caribbean women college student but felt freedom from releasing her thoughts about her personal mental health and counseling. Chris was able to use learned aspects about herself related to counseling and mental health, and reenforced her passion and salience for her Haitian ethnicity.
Andrea

Andrea is a 29-year-old Afro-Caribbean woman born and raised in Jamaica and came to the U.S. approximately at the age of 21. She currently attends a predominately white university in the Northeast of the U.S., where she just recently transferred for the Spring 2021 semester. Previously attending a community college in the Northeast, Andrea explains she went through several complications being an Afro-Caribbean student in the United States. Andrea has always been a full-time commuter student (in her junior year by college credits) and works full-time. Andrea’s experience as a college student reflected differences in age, gender, nationality, and race compared to other students. Being an “island girl” experiencing U.S. culture, made her feel as if there were aspects that she could not relate to. Whether it was dating culture, living in an individualistic society (i.e., U.S.), or a limited prior knowledge of United States history, Andrea at times felt like her ethnicity (and nationality) made her feel different. Despite these differences, Andrea kept her strong Jamaican roots in how she understood her self-identity. Within her narrative the main themes represented are: (a) being Afro-Caribbean in the United States, (b) self-identity experiences, (c) being an Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college student, and (d) self-discovery and rediscovery.

**Being Afro-Caribbean in the United States**

**Childhood.** Before coming to the United States, Andrea expressed that “I grew up with my mom and my stepdad, a full family house; two siblings, brother and a sister.” She mentioned that she has a close-knit family and was not allowed to have much of a social life as a child in Jamaica. She continued by saying “It was more like church and school, and that's it.” Andrea expressed that she had a strict childhood where failure was not an option, she needed to always
get the best grades, and make sure to do what she is told by her parents. As she reminisced about her childhood, she expressed the differences that she learned from being in the U.S.:

I learned most of these things when I came here...and I noticed the whole process of growing up and how American culture is way different. This is why the kids are the way they are here. They're grown people. They have emotions. They know how to express it, how to feel it, how to give it back. They don't get shut down when they're supposed to verbalize anything, no matter how old they are or how young they are. They're human. They get treated like human beings...They're not treated like, "I'm a grown person. You're a child. You have no say. You don't know what you like. You don't know what you want," because that's what they'll tell us back home. "I'm the parent. I know what you need," instead of listening to what the child needs.

Andrea believed that she grew up not being able to have a voice as a child, yet children in U.S. are able to have more freedom about what they feel and how to express it. She mentioned being raised where parents made the decisions for the child, without consulting the child about what they need. She expressed that this affected her in negative and positive ways. For example, her authoritarian upbringing influenced her to be an independent person, fostered the inability to ask for help, and caused some of her incapability to express her feelings because of her lack of emotional expression as a child.

**Friendship.** As Andrea talked about her childhood, she also mentioned not having any friends. She expressed that her friends were her family members in Jamaica, and the difficulties of having friends now because of it. As an adult, Andrea mentioned trying to make friends with Americans, but they did not understand her ambition to succeed. Coming from Jamaica with a
strict upbringing, she insisted that only Caribbean people understood her and felt unappreciated and misjudged by everyone else.

My friends are always Caribbean. I don't last too long with Afro-Americans and it's just based on the mindset. They can't see it. They can't see why you're pushing yourself. Why you're doing this, why are you doing that, why are you so strict? Why are you so disciplined? They can't see it. So being in a system (US Culture) where, okay, we all look alike, but obviously we're not alike.

Andrea talked about not being able to remain friends with other non-Caribbean Black people in the U.S. (specifically African American) because of her Caribbean mindset. With Andrea being raised with a “failure is not an option” mentality, she believed that other African American people did not understand her. She ends the quote above with “we all look alike, but obviously we're not alike”, mentioning mentality being a difference between African American and Afro-Caribbean Black ethnicities.

With her perspective on being friends with African American individuals, she also expressed the automatic collective unity when meeting other Caribbean people.

Oh, you Caribbean. Immediately we have a relationship, right? I don't need to know your name, your family or anything because automatically we have familiarity. I already know your mom. I already know your aunt. I get you. I understand. You don't need to explain yourself anymore. You're seen.

Andrea expressed that there is an instant connection and mutual life understanding when you meet another Caribbean person – an acceptance that she does not feel with African American people. Consequently, when she reflected on her friends and being around Caribbean people, she
mentioned her life feels less stressful because they understand who she is as a Jamaican woman – she is seen.

**Self-Identity Experiences**

When Andrea talked about her self-identity experience, she mentioned:

Yes...I always remember the whole concept of a proud Jamaican. So, it's like even when I'm here and things get hard, and stuff like that, it's like "No, I can't fail." And it's like, "I'm Andrea, I'm Jamaican, I'm strong, I'm this." That's always the thing; it's like, I think, everything, we always make ourselves seem like we're number one or something, but it's like, everything that Jamaica stand for (pause) I feel like if I do anything less than that, I may have defeated myself and my country at the same time.

Andrea explained that her self-identity is first planted within her ethnicity (along with nationality), and the pride situated within being a Jamaican woman. She reported that her ethnicity is first when talking about self-identity, but has other qualities of herself that she also finds valuable.

"Andrea is a stubborn person, very determined, I could be very annoying as well. I'm very loving, really emotional, but at the same time, I'm very reserved, very protective, guarded, I'm helpful, I'm reliable, I love to overthink, cautious, but at the same time, I'll take risks on certain things. I could be very impulsive, depending. I'm very ambitious, I like peace, I'm spiritual, I do love security, and that security in all areas; within myself, life overall, comfort, everything is important to me. Yeah. I think that's all of it. There's probably more, but I've probably go on a whole list."
After talking about the importance of her ethnicity, Andera mentioned these self-attributes above are important to her self-identity. She expressed that all these attributes also make her who she is today.

**Mother and Daughter.** Lastly, Andrea stated that her mother is a significant figure when talking about her self-identity experiences. She reported that:

I would say my mother, in a sense, I see myself as a strong person, a strong woman. When I look at how she is so determined, she goes through everything, and she still stands strong, and I look at myself, and I mirror the same qualities.

She expressed that she mirrored her mother’s qualities at a young age because “our environments effects self-identity.” With her mother being the pivotal part of her upbringing, Andrea believed that her mother’s personal qualities impacted her the most because she raised her. Andrea mentioned that she is also a very kind person because that is who she saw her mother to be throughout her life.

**“I'm Not From Here”: Being An Afro-Caribbean Woman Undergraduate College Student**

With Andrea being a full-time Afro-Caribbean commuter student, she experienced multiple challenges trying to complete her academic courses. She expressed that she is always the oldest one in her classes, feels that she is at a disadvantage for not having a previous education (i.e., grade school) in the United States, and does not feel comfortable to ask questions in her classes. Andrea mentioned that these apprehensions interfere with her academics and her ability to participate in her college courses. During the first class at the university she recently transferred to, Andrea said:

...the first class was women and gender study, and I felt awkward because the way the professor was teaching, it's like I was supposed to have prior knowledge of certain things
that happened in the United States, which I didn't know. I was lost to it. So, I would just sit in the class. And I remember at one point, she asked, "What was going on in the 1900s or something?" And she literally asked for us to write the list of things that were happening in that time. And I didn't write anything on the paper. I just sat there because I'm like, "I am not from here. I don't know."

Andrea continued talking about this course and expressed:

I didn't feel comfortable because I feel like she didn't make it comfortable. When you come in a classroom and you just ask a question and give a paper, and say, "Write this down," you're automatically shutting down anybody that has opposition to that. So, that's how I (pause) I didn't feel comfortable anymore. And I swear to you, for that semester, I barely spoke in her class. Because I just felt like, "Why am I here? I know nothing about the history of America." It's not that I don't want to learn, but then my knowledge or prior knowledge is important for my grade. This is what it is at this point. Because even when it came to writing papers, she wanted me to do certain things. And I'm like, "This is just unfair. I'm defeated at this point.

As an Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college student, Andrea expressed that she constantly felt awkward in her classes for feeling like the only student who did not have previous academic information. She mentioned that the structure of the course did not make room for her to have an opposing perspective or even questions about class assignments. Andrea mentioned that lost and defeated were feelings that she consistently felt in college courses. She expressed that she wished more professors created a class environment for her to ask questions, and comfortable for her to say that she did not know or understand something in class. Andrea emphasized this about the classes:
Makes me feel like a failure. Yes, it does make me feel like a failure. There's like a few things, and it always happened. I feel stupid, I feel dumb; that's how I would perceive myself in that moment. I feel dumb, I feel weak, I feel useless, I feel dumb. And I know vulnerable and weak is basically the same thing, but when I say vulnerable, it's just like I'm helpless. I could go around every obstacle, and it's like I'm still here. I don't know what to do, I don't know how to solve this problem because this problem requires this.

And for me to get (pause), So, say that it requires me to Google and do all of that, and at the same time, I don't have enough time because I have work, I have other classes that I'm trying to balance, so then I'm just there like, "Let me go sleep it off, tomorrow's another day." That's after I already beat up myself. So, that's how I deal with stuff like that, which I'm trying to get better at.

Andrea passionately expressed that when she does not know something in class it makes her feel inadequate and unable to understand her course content. Andrea briefly mentioned that she never had the resources to succeed in college and felt like the White students had all the information. As a college student working full-time, Andrea stated that college is much harder but attaining a college degree with “All of these odds were against me” and “Nothing was put on the table before me”, is worth it.

**Black Professors in College.** Andrea mentioned even though college had consistent challenges, one thing that helped her was finding classes with Black professors. She mentions that Black professors “communicate better” and make her feel more comfortable in class. She followed up with talking about an example with an Afro-Caribbean woman professor. She mentioned to the professor that she just started a new job, was paying for school on her own, and
she needed some adjustments to the schedule because she would not be able to make it to each class every day.

And when I expressed to her what was going on, she's like, “you come first, don't work”. And this is a very educated and successful woman. Right? She's like, ‘you come first do what you got to do for you. School will always be here, but get what you need to get.” Right? And I respected her for that. I looked at her like, okay, I don't want you to have to explain anything more. And she's like, “I'm going to work around your schedule. I'm going to make sure everything's good for you”. And I saw where even finals, it's a day class, and she set aside time in the night for me just to do my finals. In the end of the semester, I found out she was a Trinidadian. And she's like, “yeah, I know about the hustles.” I know how as she brought her accent out. I was like, okay, now I know why you were so understanding and made all that effort.

Andrea stated that she believed because of her professor’s ethnicity in understanding the hardship that Caribbean people go through, she understood Andrea’s college struggles. Andrea expressed that the professor could have failed her but instead allowed her to be one step closer to completing her college degree. Andrea explained that Black professors continued to make her feel welcomed in academic courses and continues to choose Black professors as much as she can.

*Ethnic Marginalization.* Andrea expressed a story from a Black male college student (she assumed to be African American) where she felt ethnically marginalized. He mentioned that Caribbean people only come to the United States to steal their jobs and Andrea felt judged because of her ethnicity.
When he made the statement about us coming over here and stealing their jobs and I'm like, we're taking jobs that you would never even do. How are we stealing? At the end of the day a lot of times we get robbed. Because some people don't have papers. They don't have these things and they have to settle for this work. We're honest working people. We don't come and depend on anybody. We try to get stuff done and we're balancing life. Nobody supports needing us. So that was a way of where I felt like I was being judged just for being outside of this country.

Andrea stated that this marginalizing and discriminatory comment continued to remind her that “I’m not from here” and consistently feels judged for being Jamaican.

**Moments of Self-Discovery/ Rediscovery**

Throughout the interviews Andrea expressed, multiple aspects of her life from childhood to adulthood. During this time Andrea mentioned, being kicked out of her mother’s home, experienced abuse, and felt as if she was taking advantage of as a child and adolescent in Jamaica. As she talked about living in Jamaica and experiencing trauma, Andrea expressed that these interviews helped her self-discover how her past affects her life currently. She mentioned when people give her advice, she needs a “tear down” where,

You know you have those friends, and they'll sling you in a wall, not literally, but they'll fling you in a wall and call you stupid and, "Are you dumb?" You need that little breakdown in self-esteem a little bit, maybe that beat up.

Immediately after this statement Andrea expressed “This sounds so toxic.” And connected this behavior to her childhood.

Maybe as a child I'm just so used to that aggression to get me started, so in my opinion I think that's really toxic. I already know it's toxic in the sense of maybe how I process
stuff, how I deal with my issues. In my opinion, I don't think it's healthy, but really looking at it, I don't think I should have to go through all those breakdowns to come to one positive outcome. I shouldn't have to do all of that. I shouldn't have to do the whole crying, and I hate life, and literally go in this dark zone just to go out to the light. I survived it, but I wonder where I got that from. That's something I learned.

Andrea self-discovered that her trauma history could be affecting the pathway to how she receives advice and observed its toxicity. She mentioned that she did not know the route to this behavior but wanted to explore more.

Andrea mentioned that these questions about self-identity, ethnic marginalization, counseling, and using an intersectional standpoint is something,

I've never actually really thought about it. I've never really actually talked about it with someone. I think nobody ever really asked, so being able to talk about something that you actually think about was... It felt a little freeing to actually say it out loud. This is a problem. This is what I face, and to really look at it for yourself and be like, "Damn."

You go through a lot being in the system (being in the U.S.).

As she mentioned the “freeing” feeling of talking about her narrative for the first time, it caused her to continue to reflect on when other Caribbean people say,

"There's no place like home." And, that's why most of us, we still always think about home because you can never be at home here because you're never fully accepted, you're never fully seen, you're never fully catered to. It doesn't feel like there's room being made at the table. You got to force yourself in-between it.

Talking about her story, helped her to personally self-discover that the United States is not her home, and does not feel fully received by being in America. It helped her to reflect on parts of
her life that she usually disregards or hides from herself, which includes the struggles of living in a culture that is different from being in Jamaica.

Overall, Andrea mentioned that participating in this study allowed her to go through a personal process of self-awareness.

It has helped me in the sense of seeing myself a little bit different. I actually told you stuff that I've probably never said to other people. I basically said stuff to you I've only thought of to myself in the sense of okay, how toxic was my life as a child? I think there was something else I said to you that I've never said to anyone else either. In that sense, it's really putting it out there. So, I saw that different in the sense of talking about it with someone, a perfect stranger actually.

Now seeing herself differently Andrea expressed, that her emotional well-being impacts everyone around her. Andrea reported wanting to be more emotionally healthy for her future self, and if she were to ever have her own children. Talking to the researcher about her narrative brought self-discovery towards her feelings of being Jamaican in the United States, experiencing a “freeing” feeling from talking about her story, and a new sense of self-awareness by being a part of this research study.

**Bea**

Bea is a 21-year-old Afro-Caribbean woman of Haitian and Dominican descent. Bea’s mother was born in the Dominican Republic and moved to Haiti with her mother (Bea’s grandmother who is Haitian), and Bea’s father was born and raised in Haiti. Her parents migrated to the United States in their adulthood, and Bea was born in the Southeast of the U.S. Throughout her life Bea mentioned that her Haitian ethnicity was a significant part of her upbringing. As a high school student, Bea mentioned that those years were pivotal to how she
understood societal beauty standards and grappled with mental health symptoms. Bea recently completed her junior year of college in-person at a Northeast university in the United States, and she is still exploring life goals and self-identity as an Afro-Caribbean woman. With Bea’s life experience from high school to college, the main themes within her narrative are: (a) evolving self-identity, (b) being a plus size woman and societal beauty standards, (c) personal mental health and (d) self-discovery/rediscovery.

**Evolving Self-Identity**

Within Bea’s narrative, she expressed having conflicting understandings of her self-identity. Throughout the participant interviews and even between the two interviews, Bea went through her own personal reflexivity in noticing she is still exploring her self-identity and who she wants to become. In interview one, she explained,

So that was just a huge part of growing up and being connected to my Caribbean identity as a woman... I think the first part is being a woman, being a cis-het woman is the first thing because its just something about identifying in that way, it gives me not any privileges but its very important in the way that my family views me being a woman.

As the topic of self-identity continued, she added:

I feel like now it’s just dark-skinned black woman. Well dark skinned Caribbean black woman. I definitely think my ethnicity and my race, and my skin tone are the three most important things...That is included my monochord. Creative, Caribbean, dark skinned black woman, that is my thing. I've embraced it.

Bea expressed that her self-identity was mostly engrossed with being a dark-skinned, Afro-Caribbean, cis gender, heterosexual, and being a creative women. Quickly after she mentioned these aspects of her self-identity, she explained that,
I'm learning! I feel like that sentence, those things are very important to me right now, but I don't know I feel like I don't have a definition for my identity just yet. I feel like what I just listed off is so general, and people have such specifics about who they are. I don't think I'm done exploring who I really am.

Bea realized that she was listing off attributes and cultures that impact her self-identity, but still unsure about what specifies who she is. Bea was honest with her feelings and expressed “I’m learning” and “exploring” instead of continuing general statements that may or may not be who she really is.

Within the second interview, Bea mentioned that she was thinking about her self-identity the night before and explained, “I don't want people to know exactly who I am and what I'm going through. I would just rather them see a character than see the actual me.” As she explained her thoughts from the previous night, she mentioned feeling that she wears a shield and becomes a character, so people will not, and do not know who she is. With still exploring her self-identity, she explains that her shield is because of her insecurities: “It stems from all the insecurities I have. It's like, boom, plus size, boom, dark skin. Boom.” Her insecurities about her appearance created this shield/ character the Bea described as what she wants others to see. Bea expressed that she wants others to see that she is a humorous and a likable person instead of the insecurities she is trying to hide. She continued by saying,

I think a lot of my identity has to be, and unfortunately it's hard saying this, but how other people see me is what I would say is my identity. And so it just helps shield all of those things. You know, it makes me not really think about who I truly am.

In this interview Bea expressed having an unevolved self-identity, and how others view her is the core of her self-identity. Bea reported that because of her self-identity is in how others view her,
her appearance is highly important. Bea expressed that her appearance is already an insecurity for her, and it makes exploring her self-identity harder. Bea ended the conversation believing she will continue to explore her self-identity and will start by using her first counseling session in the upcoming weeks.

**Being A Plus Sized Woman and Societal Beauty Standards**

As Bea expressed her self-identity being connected to her appearance, she talked about how she remembers feeling unattractive at a predominantly White high school. Bea mentioned, “I just felt black women were always looked down upon” and students did not see black women as beautiful. Feeling unattractive and worried about her weight in high school was part of the reason Bea created the shield/character that she expresses her self-identity through currently.

I've kind of learned to not care about my appearance anymore, but at the same time I do. This is a very huge part of who I am, I care about my appearance a lot specifically my weight is just something that I've always beaten myself up about and I feel like every woman can say that but its just something that always been on my mind. Every single day I don't think about my weight so that's also very huge.

Bea mentioned that her weight is something that causes her to internally condemn herself but not thinking of her weight as often is her sign of personal growth. She mentioned that her and her mother are the only plus sized women at home (she has one brother and one sister), and never felt any shame or offense because of her weight. She expressed living in a societal culture where people glorify social media causes some of her negative perceptions about her weight. She mentioned that,

It was just always hard because people didn't see plus sized black women as beautiful or worthy, and we see it with Lizzo now the way the media not even the media but people’s
opinions are always hating her...There's always this pressure to lose weight because if you think about it there's this hierarchy in which skinny women are on top but its more white skinny women. It goes down to the bottom of the list its plus sized black women are at the bottom, and that's just society's perception and I'm really thankful for Lizzo to try and change that view.

Bea also mentioned TikTok and Instagram created a negative outlook about her weight, but is thankful that celebrities like Lizzo for supporting body positivity.

Bea recounted that the pressure to lose weight usually came from social media to where it felt like “I couldn't believe people could like me romantically, because I'm this loudmouth plus size Caribbean woman and I'm black too.” The intersection of being Black, Caribbean, and plus sized created a narrative that Bea believed that she did not deserve to be in a romantic relationship. Bea is still processing and exploring her weight, societal pressures, and beauty standards for herself. Bea mentioned that she is optimistic to see her appearance through her own eyes and not the lens of others.

**Personal Mental Health**

As Bea mentioned being unsure about her self-identity and societal beauty standards, she expressed that she used to cope with these stressors in middle school and high school by committing self-harm.

I would self-harm, that was just one of the things. So just cutting up my arms with scissors was a huge thing, but I was never diagnosed with depression or anxiety. It was just self-harming...And so as a result, I just felt I was very alone and then I would cut myself and I still have some of the scars to this day that I Facetune (picture editing software).
Bea mentioned the pressures of social media (as previously expressed), not being “considered one of the popular kids”, and not having many friends triggered a decline in her mental health. She expressed this is when “I was just always cracking jokes and I was just trying to be funny so people would like me, because I didn't fit the beauty standard.” Bea expressed that she stopped cutting herself during her sophomore year of high school when she finally found a close friend. She expressed that through this friendship she felt like someone truly cared about her and it positively affected her mental health.

**Moments of Self-Discovery/ Rediscovery**

Bea mentioned these interviews being the first time talking about her self-identity and needing to explore more about who she is.

I think I discovered that talking, I never really had an ear to listen to, or somebody to ask me these types of questions about how I would define myself. So I feel like, as I said before, I never really thought about identity until this interview.

Having never thought about her self-identity before the interviews, she self-discovered that talking about self-identity may help start the exploration process.

And it's just gotten me thinking about identity so much, even though as I said before, I never thought my identity was special in any way, but now I'm learning that it is, and that you doing this is showing that somebody does care about it. And so yeah, that's all I have to say really. So thank you.

Bea also explained that having the researcher who cared and talked to her about her self-identity caused her to see the importance of this topic. Bea mentioned that these interviews was the first time that she realized that “I have this persona that I carry to shield, I keep on using the word
shield a lot, but that shields who I truly am.” With still exploring her self-identity, Bea explained that she self-discovered the urge to get to know herself more without hiding behind a shield.

**Ashley**

Ashley is a 21-year-old Afro-Caribbean women of Bajan and Jamaican descent who was born in the United States. Ashley’s mother is from Barbados and came to Northeast of the U.S. during her adulthood. Growing up with a single Bajan mother in an urban area in Northeast, Ashley takes pride in her ethnic culture and continued to express the importance of being a Caribbean woman because of her Bajan upbringing. Living in an urban area where many Caribbean ethnicities reside, Ashley expressed that her ethnicity was always well received at church, school, and even neighborhood gatherings.

Ashely recently completed her senior year of college at a predominately white institution in a rural area in the Northeast of the United States. At this university was the first time she experienced most teachers, staff members, and students who were racially and ethnically different from her. She expressed that in her courses she needed to acknowledge her own self-identity and the cultures of others who were not represented in the classroom. Whether it was about speaking against the cultural stereotypes of Black people or demystifying the narratives of individuals in urban areas, Ashley explained that she felt passionate about educating students about diversity. With Ashley’s upbringing and experiences as a college student were major components of her narrative, therefore the main themes within her individual profile are (a) representing Afro-Caribbean intersectional narratives in college classrooms, (b) cross-racial mentorship, and (c) self-discovery/rediscovery.

“I Wasn’t Whitewashing Nothing”: Representing Afro-Caribbean Intersectional Narratives in College
Self-Identity and Being an Afro-Caribbean Women in Academic Courses.

Ashely expressed that her self-identity is imperative to how she represented herself in academic courses in college. When she mentioned her self-identity she expressed,

Christian, because I love Jesus. Christian, Afro-Caribbean woman from (location removed). Christian because just being a Christian is the predominant thing that should be just (pause) When I walk and talk, people should see God through me. Caribbean because big ups. So my two countries. Woman being, that's just my gender identity. From (location removed) because of the cultural significance of my neighborhood. The fact that my neighborhood was seen as one of the roughest.

Being Christian, Afro-Caribbean, a woman, and connections with her neighborhood were the components that represented Ashley’s self-identity. When Ashley expressed talking about her self-identity within her courses, she mentioned “being in this predominantly White space, I absolutely refuse to whitewash myself.” Ashley continued and expressed that she did not want to hold back on how she shows up in classes.

Like I said, I'm Caribbean, I'm from (location removed). It is what you see is what you get. I don't even know how to really whitewash myself like that. I absolutely refuse just because I can say something, like I said, I can say something that is so Caribbean, just so commonplace for me and forget that wherever I am, it's just because it's so second nature, I forget like, "Oh, maybe I shouldn't say this things. Like, "No, I'm going to say it," and if I have to explain it, that's perfectly fine.

Ashley then continued to express that she talks about her ethnic culture in class and is unapologetic about it. She mentioned that explaining her ethnic culture and her experiences allows other students on campus to understand “what I'm doing, how I'm treating you, how I'm
talking to you, how I carry myself.” Ashley expressed that she wants other people to understand her culture and other marginalized perspectives other than the viewpoints of White privileged students.

Ashley expressed that the consequence of educating others through her self-identity are students in class who want to invalidate her intersectional experiences, or being the spokesperson for all Caribbean and Black people. She mentioned that in class, “I am actively telling you my lived experience and you are trying to invalidate that." She fervently reported that she constantly is being undermined because of her experiences as an Afro-Caribbean woman, but still wants to push through and explain why talking about diverse perspectives is important in class. She mentioned that she is passionate about,

...the Caribbean component of just that Black mental health. But at any point in time, I was ready. I was ready and armed to give a lesson. Not that I wanted to be the spokesperson, but like I said, I knew how I was going to show up. I knew I wasn't whitewashing nothing and I'm going to educate everybody. I have no problem doing that. Ashely was always ready and prepared to talk, teach, and defend her Blackness and Caribbean ethnicity. With wanting others to engage with marginalized perspectives, she saw that it is imperative that course lessons continued to engage the complexity of different human experiences. She expressed that talking about her experience, brought into class the missing narratives needed in a predominately white classroom. Even though she knew people had bias perspectives in class, she wanted to still dialogue with students in understanding that White narratives are not the only relevant experiences in academic courses.

**Questioning Her Space in the Classroom.** Ashley continued to use her self-identity as a means for conceptualization to explain concepts in class, she reported thinking to herself, “Like,
Damn, am I doing too much?" She thought that the amount of space that she took up to talk about Caribbean and Black narratives in class made her overbearing in her courses. During a moment of personal self-reflection in college, she recalled herself saying "Girl, no, you're not doing too much. If anything, you need to all gas, no brakes." Again, Ashley then reflected on when she questioned the space she took up in class a second time.

When you identify as something, and everything is so everyday to you, and you're explaining it to somebody that has absolutely no idea, there are times where it's just like, you low-key would question, but it's also like, no, this is a very lived experience. This is very commonplace.

Ashley explained going through push back, and invalidation for talking about her experiences (and the experiences of other marginalized groups) in class. Through it all, Ashley explained that she will continue to speak up in class and combat the singular White narratives represented in her courses.

**College Counseling Experience – Cross-Racial Counseling.** As Ashley continued to talk about her college experience, she mentioned going to counseling for the first time during her first semester in college. She expressed going through a traumatic situation with her father and was encouraged by her resident advisor and housing director to see the college counselor. She mentioned that there is only one counselor (a White women) who worked on campus and was grateful for her helpfulness. Ashley expressed that her counseling experience was:

Interesting because she's a White lady. And I was like, "I don't really know how much this White lady (pause)" From the difference between my first between my first experience with talking to her on that first day versus what everybody else was saying. I didn't really think that outside of whatever happened to me on that first day she would
really be able to be a person for me to reach out to for whatever. I didn't. Not because I didn't think she was credible but it was just like, I don't know, I was just fresh out of (location removed). I didn't think that this White lady would be able to really be a backbone for me or a glue for me.

Ashley mentioned she did not think a White woman could help her in counseling but ended up finding her as a pivotal person that helped maintain her emotional well-being in college. She also stated this college counselor went above and beyond for students. For example, Ashley expressed that this counselor would offer nighttime after-hours grief session if a student passed away on campus, an extensive amount of counseling resources, and even had an evening counseling session with Ashley after a worrisome Facebook status.

Ashley mentioned during her last semester of college, a friend from elementary school was killed by her husband. Through a Facebook status Ashley expressed her thoughts and feelings about this tragic death and mentioned not handling her grief well. Forgetting that she had some college administrators as friends on Facebook, Ashley received and email from the college counselor that same night.

But it's like 9:00 PM and (counselor name removed) emails me, she's like, "I'm on campus, pull up." I'm like, "Girl, it's 9:00 PM, why are you on campus?" And she left her house and came all the way to campus just to talk to me about the situation. And I really appreciated that because it was like it's 9:00 PM, (counselor name removed) has kids, she has a husband, she didn't live next door to campus, she didn't live on campus, she lived wherever. She literally came to campus.
Ashley explained feeling like the counselor cared for her and wanting to see her emotionally healthy. She mentioned that the counselor did a great job on campus, and she made it look effortless.

**Lack of Diversity in College Counseling Services.** Ashley enjoyed her experience with the college counselor and even suggested other students to go to counseling because of it. Despite this great experience, Ashley expressed some crucial feedback related to her counseling on campus.

As much as I loved (counselor name removed) and as much as she made me feel comfortable talking to her about certain things, at the end of the day being a psych major and being very cognizant of my identity as a black woman, it was like I don't know if I, I didn't give her everything, I maybe gave her about 85% and I wish I would have been able to give her 100% because those years at (college name removed) were not easy. There was a lot of things that occurred that I don't know, I just feel like a black woman would have understood it right there and then.

Ashley continued by saying she wished there was a Black woman counselor that she could have seen during her time in college. She felt like “(counselor name removed) was a validator” and did not fully understand her intersectional cultural experiences (race and ethnicity). Overall, she believe that,

(Counselor name removed) did the best that she could for me as a White woman but if we would have had a black woman to help her or somebody just who wasn't White to help her, it would definitely make a difference.

Ashley reported feeling as if she could not be her full self in sessions because the counselor could not connect with her experiences. Ashley believed that a major issue with her college
counselor services was not having a Black woman (or a person of color) who could connect to her intersectional narrative as an Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate student.

**Cross-Racial Mentorship**

Going to a predominantly White institution, Ashley mentioned her experience with going to counseling with a White women counselor and appreciating the treatment she received. As Ashley continued with her narrative, she also began talking about another cross-racial connection that impacted her time in college – her relationship with her mentors. Ashley met her first mentor prior to her first semester in college during an orientation event. During the event, students were being randomly assigned to professors to help them pick courses for their first semester. Unknowing of what the future would hold, she was assigned to her mentor – a White male professor in the psychology department. He saw that Ashley was coming from a high school where she was allowed to take college credits, but these credits were not represented on her transcripts.

He told me he was going to actively help me get out of (college name removed) as soon as possible, and he did. Because he has such a high position, he sent my transcripts to main campus. He took four years of work and made it two years. So I spent two years at (college name removed). He made sure that every credit from (high school name removed) fit perfectly into my transcript and was like, "All right, now that you're basically a junior, we need to have conversations about what you want to do next. Ashley expressed that from this first meeting her mentor started to make sure that she received whatever she needed to succeed in college. She expressed that her mentor was so helpful that,
He didn't have to tell me anything twice because now we have this relationship where if he tell me something, it's gospel. Don't ask him why, just do it because you're going to see how in the end, it pays.

Her mentor even helped her get an undergraduate research opportunity where she met another faculty member who is also now her mentor – a White woman professor in the psychology department. She mentioned,

They were preparing me to be one of the only in rooms that I was going to see myself in later on the higher that I got up in the field. I couldn't afford to be passive because I had these two people who were very strong, dynamic people, actively working to make sure that I was successful. I couldn't fold.

Ashley expressed that her mentors understood that she would be one of the only Black people in her classes if she continued with graduate education, and they wanted to prepare her for the future. Ashley credits her mentors as primary reasons for succeeding in college.

Even now that Ashley has recently graduated, she expressed, “Now, those are my rocks. When I needed recommendations for a job, there, no problem, boom, here, done. Recommendations for grad school boom, done. Because I had them and because they really had my best interest.” Having these mentors Ashley explained that she feels like she is prepared to go to graduate school and sees the importance and necessity of mentorship. She reflected on praying for a mentor before going to college, and now she is thankful for two mentors who helped her despite their racial (and cultural) differences.

**Moments of Self-discovery/ Rediscovery**

Ashley expressed having moments of rediscovery and self-discovery during the interview process. Ashley recalled a moment on the train talking to a Black man who asked her, "Would
you want to see the Black Panther party revamped?” After saying yes and explaining her thoughts, the Black male disagreed with wanting to accept Caribbean people into the party. Ashley mentioned feeling ethnically marginalized and rediscovering (being reminded of) the ethnic discrimination within the Black race. She even expressed that the Black male train passenger also said that Caribbean people only come to the U.S. to steal American jobs. Ashley mentioned that this statement made her feel like her Blackness was not seen as valuable because of her Caribbean ethnicity. Ashley stated rediscovering the need to have more conversations about within group differences in the Black race. She explained that though this train passenger wanted to only uplift the African American community, she wanted to fight for the advancement of all Black people.

Ashley reported that this was her first time having a one-on-one conversation but “not my first time really getting into my culture and my identity and everything like that.” Though already having experiences talking about self-identity, counseling, ethnic marginalization, and intersectionality, she expressed that she “learned that I’m an empath and as gangster as I am, I really, I cry.” Ashley mentioned she self-discovered being an empath after talking about her experiences. She expressed having a tough exterior, but on the inside, she feels emotional pain deeply for herself and others. She directly correlated her emotional pain to waiting to be healed from her past and needing to go back to counseling.

So, I try not to think of same things that I went through just because it's like oh damn I am not healed from that. Well, everybody heals, I don't know. So having to talk about it in this space was very purging and it reminds me girl you need to get a therapist because you still have things that you need to work on that's going to help me with just being able
to function in my day-to-day and how that's going to affect how I show up and my self-awareness.”

Ashley expressed that participating in this research study “felt like a purge in a sense because I think there are some things that I try to suppress.” Being able to release her narrative allowed Ashley to reflect on her experiences and need to succeed to help Afro-Caribbean communities and other marginalized groups.

**Charlotte**

Charlotte is a 21-year-old Afro-Caribbean undergraduate woman college student who completed her junior year at a predominantly white university in the Northeast of the United States. Charlotte is of Haitian descent and was born in the U.S. Her father migrated from Haiti to the United States when he was about eight or nine, and her mother migrated from Haiti in her 20s. With both her parents being Haitian, she mentioned that they taught her about being Black in the U.S., but constantly emphasized that she is a “Haitian American Girl.” She expressed that growing up there was a tremendous emphasis on being Haitian through the expression of language (Haitian Kreyòl/Creole), food, music, and holiday traditions (i.e., celebrating Haitian Independence Day). Charlotte mentioned that she has “always been proud of being Haitian” and the importance of her ethnic culture in her household.

As a college student, Charlotte expressed feelings of knowing how to navigate academia but had difficulties creating a social circle for herself. She mentioned because education is a top priority in her Haitian household, making friends was always hard for her. Navigating her college social life is still something that she is trying to grasp even after completing her junior year. During her years in college on campus, she also experienced complications with feeling ethnically marginalized, attaining counseling services, and unsure about what she wants in life
other than a successful career. As Charlotte expressed her narrative, the main themes of (a) self-identity, (b) college social life, (c) difficulties attaining counseling services, and (d) self-discovery/rediscovery were highlighted to express her story as a Haitian American undergraduate college student.

“A Daughter of Love”: Self-Identity Experiences

Charlotte stated that her self-identity is influenced by different factors such as, her ethnicity, experiences of her Haitian ancestors, race, and being a college student. With all these attributes being important to her, ultimately, she mentioned that showing love is the most important aspect of her self-identity.

I think this is weird or maybe it's not weird, but it's unusual. I think that if I were to explain myself and I'd say that I'm a daughter of love. That's what when I think of God, I think of the people that came before me and us. Ultimately, I think that is love, I think God is love, and I just think that I am a daughter of that. And my job is just to be a vessel of that love or just to be a door or an alley to that love, so. I'm a student, I'm Haitian. All those stuff matter, but at the same time, they don't really matter to me. I just say that this being that's here. And ultimately, all I need to do is to show that love. And I will say that's who Charlotte is.

Charlotte stated that being “a daughter of love” and a vessel of love is who she is. The love Charlotte expressed comes from her religious identity of being Catholic Christian and the root of how (and why) she spreads love. Charlotte believes that love is what people really need in this world.

Additionally, to being a daughter of love, she also mentioned “almost in similar ways I feel connected to my Haitian ancestry.” She stated that being Haitian will always be highly
significant to her self-identity because of her upbringing, but she feels a responsibility to her ancestors to succeed. She stated that she comes

...from such a strong heritage, and it's our turn to carry that in. Right? What is it called or like that domino effect. And so that the people that come after us that they have the tools to be, who they need to be. So, I think with that understanding, that's how it influences myself identity.

She professed that it is her responsibility to continue the cycle of paving the way for other Haitian people who come after her. She mentioned that this responsibility is a part of who she is, therefore embedded within her self-identity.

**Exploring Sexuality.** Charlotte stated that college was difficult for her to discover her personal passions outside of education. She expressed being unsure about dating relationships in college and does not know how that currently fits into her life. Charlotte stated that she wants to explore her sexuality because she questioned

...whether I'm straight, whether I'm bi. And I allow myself to be open to that. I currently identify as straight. But, I do think that sexuality is fluid, too. So, there are times that I question I think in my head, but I leave it at that and I might not pursue it any further. And I guess, I don't know how I'm okay with that. That's still something I'm trying to navigate.

With wanting to explore her sexuality she expressed encouragement from her father about this decision.

Even my Dad, he's like, "I don't care if you marry a woman." And I'm like, and I'm thankful for that because a lot of Afro-Caribbean people is not like that. So, I don't know
what my mom would say. I think she would still be loving, but they do open that up for me.

Charlotte mentioned still being in the beginning stage of thinking about exploring her sexuality and appreciates the value of having an Afro-Caribbean family that supports her decision.

**College Social Life**

As Charlotte talked about her social life in college, she began by saying:

I think that through my background, I know how to be a student and that's been my first priority. That's always my first priority, given that being a student is my job right now. That's what it is and that's what I've been taught and that's fine, but I think that in terms of when I think about college, it's hard in the sense that I really tried to navigate my social life trying to make friends.

Charlotte expressed that she believed her family taught her how to achieve academically, but not socially. She mentioned that she was “taught to be a student for so long and I don't know if there was much importance on, "Okay, Charlotte, are you strengthening your friendships?" or are you... like, "How's your love life? How's your emotional life?" Charlotte felt like she missed out on this growing up, and now has to figure out what she wants her social life to look like as a college student. She mentioned that she asks herself questions such as "Okay, what do you want outside of that (academic success)? Do you want to start dating? Okay, if you want that, how can you go about that?" She stated not having an answer for these questions but is beginning to figure out what she wants in life.

Lastly, Charlotte mentioned that she credits connecting to a Haitian student organization on campus that allowed her to make social connections on campus. After being introduced to the group, she remained active and is now on the executive board (E-board) of the organization. She
explained that this club helped her build friendships on campus and is continuously thankful for the members comradery. Charlotte mentions that she still wants to expand her horizons and find more friends on campus but is still working on how to balance her personal social wants (more friendships) and academic life.

**Ethnic Marginalization**

Charlotte explained that she enjoys being on the E-board of this Haitian organization, but at times feels hesitant when connecting with other ethnic organizations. For example, Charlotte mentioned feeling ethnically marginalized by the Latinx/Hispanic organizations because of the lack of Haitian representation when discussing topics with Black organizations on campus. Charlotte explained that the Latinx/Hispanic organizations wanted to have a conversation about bridging the gaps between the Latinx and Black culture, but their organization was not invited to the conversation. She expressed that

Somebody in the E-board brought it up, in the sense like, we're a black Caribbean country, why weren't we invited to this conversation? So, it's been stuff like that where it's like Haiti is always, we're always left out or I remember, there was an event. They're yelling all the Caribbean countries. Haiti is not said. And me and my friend are like, it's stuff like that, that because people don't look at Haiti at the same they do as Trinidad, Tobago, or Jamaica, so. And stuff like that that I'm aware of when I say that I am Haitian.

Charlotte continued by saying she connects with her Haitian ancestors when lack of Haitian involvement happens on campus. “I have to fall back on my heritage and my ancestry, because I know that they had to experience something like this in the sense that they felt left out.” She mentioned that connecting with her ancestry on being left out, and this connection gives her strength to push through marginalization from their historical resilience. Charlotte mentioned
feeling like her race (Black) does not uplift the diversity of Black ethnicities which makes her continue to feel ethnically marginalized on campus.

**Difficulties Attaining Counseling Services**

**College Counseling Services.** As Charlotte continued to express her issues as an Afro-Caribbean (Haitian) college student, she mentioned having difficulties attaining counseling. She expressed “I have a little bit of anxiety and ever since I was young” she wanted to seek assistance from a counselor. Never attaining counseling before, Charlotte decided to try group therapy at her college counseling center and never received the service.

Everything was around 1:00 PM, but no one would show up, no one other students would show up and it would be canceled. I don't know if the therapists were there. I would just remember going to the (counseling center name removed) and the receptionist or whoever was there at the front desk said, "It's not happening today." So here I am preparing for this therapy thing after class. I'm excited to go and it doesn't even happen. I never had one session.

She expressed that she was frustrated that she was not able to have her group therapy sessions, because she felt like she needed it to navigate the stress of being an Afro-Caribbean college student. Charlotte explained that she tried going to her college counseling center again for individual therapy, had one session and her counselor left the university. Charlotte again mentioned that it was frustrating to continue to try to attain counseling at her university, and not having any success.

**Counseling and COVID-19.** Though Charlotte had difficulties with counseling services at her university, completing academic courses on-line due to COVID-19 gave her the motivation to try counseling again. She mentioned that she thinks counseling is
...a necessary thing. It's just for me personally getting access to it can be challenging. I know for me, I tried to get help during the pandemic during the wintertime, and a bunch of agencies were just closed or I was put on the waiting list (pause) Oh my gosh, here's another experience of me trying to get help, and it didn't work. My doctor recommended this woman. I called her. I couldn't get a response.

Again, Charlotte explained trying to attain services, and was unsuccessful. She mentioned that even though she has negative experiences trying to attain counseling she genuinely wants to find a counselor and will continue to seek one.

**Moments of Self-Discovery/Rediscovery**

As Charlotte expressed her narrative as an Afro-Caribbean undergraduate college student, she revealed struggles of college social life and attaining counseling. During the interview Charlotte mentioned that she self-discovered that she is still in the process of exploring who she is (self-identity), and who she wants to become.

I think I'm still trying to figure out who Charlotte is, and what makes Charlotte feel like herself. So, and the things that matter to me. So, I think that's the great part. I'm talking about myself, but at the same time, I'm still trying to figure out who I am. So, I think I know how my experiences have affected me and what it means to me, but I don't know that might change.

She also mentioned she enjoyed talking about her narrative in an intersectional format.

I loved it. I think that it addressed who I am really because I am black, but my parents are born in Haiti, and my Haitian culture is directly intertwined into who I am. And I think through my experiences, I recognize that like it's a dual type of thing. So for me to talk about who I am, and not leaving one out, but really addressing my Haitian culture that I
love so much, it feels really good. And I honestly felt empowered. I think I felt
empowered, really. I told my mom. I told her what this was, and I'm just happy. I was
happy after the interview, honestly. So, thank you.

She even continued by saying:

I also think it's been healing in the sense that I've got to talk to you. Someone who comes
from the same culture as me and a Black woman in this space. And just to share my story
a little bit. There's something really healing, and just, I guess, not holding it in, and letting
it out into someone I don't really know. That feels good. So, I think that's my last remark.

Charlotte expressed that she was able to self-discover that she is still exploring parts of her self-
identity and felt healed and empowered after participating. Charlotte hopes to discover what she
wants in life other than being a college student and is looking forward to where this exploration
takes her.

**Summary of Individual Profiles**

As each individual profile was written, my motive was to make sure the voice of the
participants was more prominent than my voice as the researcher; therefore, there are large
participant quotes and no generalizations across their individual profiles. Collectively the
participant profiles reflect varied and unique identity and cultural development experiences of a
diverse group of Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students. Using Simone de
Beauvoir’s stance toward feminist phenomenology allowed for the participants talk about these
varied perspectives of being a woman, Black, and ethnically Caribbean. The humanization of the
participants through using this framework allows the research not to just be about gaining
information from participants, but what participants can gain for themselves during a qualitative
research study.
Summarizing Self-Identity Experiences, Ethnic Marginalization, and Counseling Experiences Across Participants

Within this dissertation research study, research findings represented the research phenomena of self-identity experiences which includes ethnic marginalization, and/or participants who have experience with using and/or trying to attain counseling services. In doing so, the individual profiles have provided findings relevant to these topics. This section is to provide a summary of the findings mentioned within the individual profiles and participant narratives. This section is to provide context of similarities within all the individual profiles.

Self-Identity Experiences

Within all the interviews, ethnicity and religion were the two highest collective social locations that participants mentioned were priorities within their self-identity. Even with participants who expressed still exploring their self-identity, growing up with a strong Haitian, Bajan, and/or Jamaica ethnicity highly impacts how they understand themselves. Most of the women mentioned having an Afro-Caribbean mother and/or women role models who represented strength that they too wanted to emulate. This upbringing with strong Caribbean women is seen as a source of their connection to their ethnicity. All the participants did not have active fathers in their life now and as a child, therefore, mothers instilled the importance of their ethnicity which currently impacts their self-identity.

Religion is another social location that was represented within the individual profiles, and all the women mentioned they were Christian (Catholic or Baptist). All the participants mentioned that religion was intertwined with their morals and values within their Afro-Caribbean upbringing. All the Haitian participants (n=4) mentioned a Kreyòl/Creole saying expressed as “l’église, lakay, l’ecole”, which in English means “church, home, school.” These women
expressed that church, home, and school were the primary values in their household, therefore the basis and root of making religion a high priority within their self-identity. All the participants mentioned going to church on Sundays growing up, and still practicing faith-based values (i.e., prayer, attending bible study and youth groups) in their personal life. All the participants mentioned religion still being important to them and a part of their self-identity as college students even without parental probing to be involved in their faith.

**Ethnic Marginalization**

Ethnic marginalization was another research question that was prominently mentioned within the individual profiles. Collectively, participants felt marginalized by their own race (Black) and believed this United States society is centered around the African American narratives; consequently, marginalizing the Afro-Caribbean narrative in which these participants self-identify. Whether it was African American individuals believing that Afro-Caribbean people “steal jobs”, or not having Afro-Caribbean history taught within academic courses in college, these participants have felt ethnically marginalized. Others have felt ethnically marginalized in interracial relationships where a White male did not value Cathy’s ethnicity or other Caribbean ethnicities not valuing Charlotte’s Haitian culture. All the participants felt the backlash of being Afro-Caribbean and has felt othered because of it.

**Counseling Experiences**

Out of the six participants three have been to counseling, but only one received more than three sessions. Ashley is the only participant who actively attended counseling in college, while Cathy and Charlotte both had barriers related to the counseling accessibility that stunted them from receiving treatment. For example, Cathy talked about barriers to accessibility as it pertains to cost of counseling services. Cathy wanted to go to individual counseling and continue family
counseling with her mother but could not afford it. Charlotte had issues with the high turnover rate for counselors at her college counseling center, her group therapy sessions being cancelled, and inability to find a counselor due to COVID-19. With all of these counseling concerns, Ashely and Cathy expressed having rewarding counseling experiences, yet both had barriers to counseling because of the inability to continue services. In Ashley’s individual profile she mentioned enjoying her cross-racial counseling experience yet was not able to bring her full self in the counseling sessions because of the counselor’s inability to connect to issues related to being Afro-Caribbean. By the end of all the interviews, every participant mentioned wanting to explore counseling and how they could benefit from it. So much so, that Bea mentioned making her first counseling appointment after the first research interview. Even though everyone did not receive counseling, having all the participants acknowledge the need and the importance of counseling could lead to more exploration of self-discovery in the future.

**Collective Themes**

As I continued with the data analysis process, I noticed that there were more themes presented within the data additional aspects of the phenomena mentioned in the individual profiles. For example, there were nuances that may have not been expressed in great detail, but they were repeated as a part of their narrative. These collective themes were intergraded whenever participants spoke about self-identity experiences, ethnic marginalization, and counseling services, but may not have been something participants spoke about in great length. In remaining true to the authenticity of the participant narratives, these additional findings need to be mentioned. Therefore, the final themes within this dissertation research study are: (a) “prayer is all I need”: religion and mental health, (b) the conceptualization of womanhood (femininity), and (c) the beauty of intersectionality: gender, ethnicity, and race.
"Prayer is All I Need": Religion and Counseling/Mental Health Services

Each participant shared that their faith was a crucial component of their self-identity, as it continues to help them understand morality, integrity, and decision making. When it came to making decisions about their own personal mental health most of the participants expressed using religion and/or religious practices (i.e., prayer) to tackle their mental health needs. They shared growing up hearing that God provides for all their needs, and continued to express advice from parents, church members, and even personal beliefs that spirituality will heal their mental health. This theme will show how religion/spirituality, faith leaders, and faith members, have made the participants feel reluctant to seek counseling/mental health services.

As participants spoke to me about their connections with religion and mental health, they mentioned being hesitant to seek counseling because they were taught to “look to God” or prayer will fix their mental health concerns. Chris shared that her family told her that mental health symptoms are “the devil.” She mentioned if anything negative was wrong with a person “It's the devil's doing. So if you were having anxiety or any mental something, it would be like, there's a demon in you.” Chris described that she never sought counseling because of these religious beliefs in her family. With her grandmother being a Christian pastor, the belief is that “counseling can't fix it, only God can fix it, so you're not going to go to a therapist to fix something that you could just go home and pray.” This highly impacted the reason why Chris never told anyone in her family about her anxiety attacks and felt as if it was “better off just keeping it to myself than telling them.” From her family’s highly religious views, Chris still has not sought counseling for her anxiety and expressed her anxiety worsened as academic college courses got harder.
This same notion of praying away the need for counseling made Ashley feel as if she did not have enough faith to receive healing for her mental health symptoms. Church members told her, "Oh you need to pray more. If your relationship with God was stronger, then that wouldn't be the issue." Ashley mentioned feeling offended by their responses about her depressive symptoms and imposter syndrome, and she reported feeling ashamed because of their assumption about her relationship with God. Cathy mentioned that a church member told her a similar story to Ashley’s, and that she needed to be closer to God to help her depressive symptoms and suicidal thoughts. Cathy mentioned that she told her testimony (a public confession) in church about her depression and committing suicide but was met with severe backlash. She was told by her mother and other church members that she is “not supposed to tell people about that. You're not supposed to go up in the church and tell people that.” Cathy thought she would have been met with support after her testimony but was met with many people gossiping about her mental health instead. Cathy mentioned after this moment “I had shared at my church, that was another aspect that made me really want to commit suicide.” Not only did this not help Cathy feel closer to God or supported in her church, but Cathy had more feelings of wanting to commit suicide.

With many of the participants religion/religious affiliated individuals have negatively impacted their willingness to seek counseling/mental health services. Ashley, Charlotte, and Cathy, have all been to at least one counseling session, but only happened after going away for college, or a more severe measure of needing to be hospitalized (suicidal attempt). This shows that leaving home, may allow for more freedom to take care of their mental health needs in college. Chris explained that she is now thinking about going to college counseling when she goes back to campus, so she does not need to tell her religious family members. Religion and/or
faith practices has been the hesitation before seeking counseling for the participants, therefore, once religious pressures have been subsided it is easier for Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students to receive the counseling services that they need.

**The Conceptualization of Womanhood**

As the phenomena of self-identity was expressed, each participant briefly mentioned an integration of what it meant and how they understood womanhood. This developed as participants did not just talk about womanhood but the distinction of being an Afro-Caribbean woman. The foundation of womanhood was internally raised as participants articulated their understanding, experiences, feelings, and conceptualizations of womanhood. Most of the participants talked about learned behaviors from their mothers, cultural perspectives of what Afro-Caribbean women “should do” and academic spaces that allowed them to understand their womanhood. This theme will represent these experiences and people that helped them to understand their womanhood – how they should live, what they should do, and how they should act as a woman.

Without giving a definition or specific questioning centered on womanhood, all the participants expressed how they grow up getting messaging of what being a woman looks like. Andrea expressed,

So, that whole aspect of womanhood, I saw my mother do, and that's what I grew up in, and that's the mentality I have too; I saw my mother cook, clean, wash, handle the household, went to work still. She was a wife, a lady, and a mother. So, she did all aspects of that.

Andrea understood what it meant to be a woman by looking at her mother and chose to have that same “mentality” as well. When she saw other women cooking and cleaning, she believed this is
what women should be doing and “if you can't cook and clean and stuff like that, it's like you're worthless.” She mentioned being from Jamaica her ethnic perspective of womanhood is only centered around taking care of the household or catering to a man (spouse). Chris and Cathy also expressed these same values in their Haitian households. Chris mentioned that the “first thing my boyfriend said to me was that, the whole cooking, he bought the whole cooking thing. And it's like, why? What the heck?” As an Afro-Caribbean woman, womanhood is seen as the domesticated duties, or what Chris called “wifey duties.” These attributes of cooking and cleaning was what they were taught to do or how they should act to be considered a “good woman.”

This notion represents that womanhood can be taught/learned behaviors, less about them but what they can provide, and centered around men and children. In these examples, the value of a woman comes from the assessment of others demand on women’s bodies – to cook and clean. This showcases that the foundation of womanhood for Afro-Caribbean women is not about women’s conceptualization of themselves or what she wants to do, but whether her “wifey duties” are evaluated as successful or not. Bea mentioned never being a woman who followed this conceptualization of womanhood, and always felt less “feminine” and unattractive because of it. This understanding of being and Afro-Caribbean women has brought the impression that Bea is not acceptable as a romantic partner and thinking she needs to change herself to be accepted. Womanhood for most of these participants have been fostered into task and actions, instead of personal characteristics or ambitions for these women.

**Women Empowerment**

Also, another aspect of how womanhood is affected by what is taught/learned is shown through women to women empowerment. Charlotte expressed at a young age she was taught
about the value of women outside of “wifey duties”; therefore, raised to have a rich understanding on how women powerfully impact the world. Charlotte stated, “I think because I am a woman and we live in a society where women really are the change makers.” Charlotte expressed that the empowerment of women that she received throughout her life allowed her to know that woman can do anything they set their mind to. This allowed Charlotte to have a vast understanding that womanhood is not steady but ever changing.

Similar to Charlotte, Chris saw her grandmother who defied these cultural notions of what womanhood is for Afro-Caribbean women. Though Chris was taught that womanhood was centered around cooking and cleaning, her grandmother “absolutely hates cooking. She always has.” She also expressed that her grandmother “normally has people from her church cook for her” so she does not have to. Seeing her grandmother who did not like domestic duties, and is a pastor which is predominantly a male role, empowered Chris to question why Afro-Caribbean women (specifically Haitian) were seen as strictly domesticated women. This challenging of the status quo empowered Chris that she could be whoever she wants to be, and that be the foundation of her understanding of womanhood.

Seeing how the understanding of womanhood can stem from ethnic cultural influences and what is taught/learned, this section shows that the conceptualization of womanhood looks different for each woman. Andrea has a different perspective of what women should do compared to Charlotte, showing that womanhood is not stable, but fluid. Expressing that there is no one way of viewing who an Afro-Caribbean woman should be, because culture and temporality affects how a woman may see herself and others. This theme also shows that at a young age what womanhood looked like was always presented through the women around them,
showing that the women who influenced them as children will impact their womanhood as adults.

**Intersectionality: The Compilation of Gender, Ethnicity and Race**

As participants explained their self-identity, not one person used one single social location to explain who they are. They talked about a compilation of attributes such as, religion and body shape/type. Knowing that these Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students saw themselves through a myriad of qualities, it was interesting to see how they talked about the intersections of race, gender, and ethnicity. I noticed that when speaking about their Blackness, they did not separate their ethnicity, and when they talked about their gender there was also an integration of their ethnicity. Through their individual composites, it concludes that most of the participants use their ethnicity as the main aspect of their self-identity and filter the understanding of other parts of their self-identity (i.e., race and gender) through ethnicity. Furthermore, it reveals that they understand their intersectionality with a main foundation of ethnicity and funnels everything else through it. For example, already mentioned in Chris’ individual profile, she said that “everything comes hand in hand with my ethnicity”, that she is a Haitian Black person (Ethnicity with race) and a Haitian woman (ethnicity with gender). Chris (and other participants), understand their Blackness through their Caribbean ethnicity, and same for being a woman. This represents that a personal understanding of intersectionality is not seen as each attribute of self-identity being equal to another, but it flows through the root of ethnicity.

Additionally, Ashley also explains this same notion of having ethnicity as the root of her self-identity when she said, “my identity as a Caribbean woman from (location removed), which crosses between being black, being in America.” Ashley was speaking about how she personally sees the intersection of her self-identity as an Afro-Caribbean women in America and expressed
the importance of her ethnicity first that influences her Blackness. Also, in Andrea’s individual profile it mentioned that being from Jamaica and coming to the United States, her ethnicity is most important to her because that is how she was “grown” to understand life values.

In exploring how Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students represent their intersectionality, it is present that ethnicity influences every piece of their self-identity. The other intersections, such as gender, and race are also important to them but are just influenced by their ethnic culture. In Charlotte’s individual profile, she expressed that her family made sure she remembered she is a “Haitian American Girl” throughout her childhood and adolescence. This strong ethnic upbringing with all of the participants influenced how they understand the intersections of their own self-identity. It is evident that these participants see their ethnic culture as a guide to how they understand their self-identity as a whole.

**Chapter Summary**

In conclusion, this chapter represented the findings centered on experiences of self-identity, counseling, and ethnic marginalization of Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students. As a result, individual profiles were created to maintain and uplift the voices of each of the participant, as well as collective themes to showcase the similarities across all the narratives. As self-identity, counseling, and ethnic marginalization were explained within each individual profile, additional collective themes of “Prayer is All I Need”: Religion and Mental Health, The Conceptualization of Womanhood, The Beauty of Intersectionality: Gender, Ethnicity, and Race were also explored. This chapter expressed the findings of the research through the narratives of six different perspectives of being an Afro-Caribbean woman undergraduate college students and their commonalities through collective themes. In the next
chapter, the results of this dissertation study will be explored to expand on the research questions, discuss the limitations of this study, and expose recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

This chapter will use literature to discuss the findings to expand upon the research questions centered around the research phenomena of self-identity experiences (including counseling experiences and ethnic marginalization). In doing so, each individual profile and collective theme will be discussed in answering and expanding on the research questions. I will also include the limitations of this feminist phenomenological study, future implications centered around multiculturalism in the counseling field, and future research. This chapter will conclude with a researcher reflection about my personal journey and self-discovery as the researcher of this dissertation study.

**Collectively Discussing Individual Profiles**

The purpose of this study was to illuminate the voices of Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate students and their self-identity experiences. Within these profiles, the findings were represented as the participants explored their experiences centered around self-identity, ethnic marginalization, and counseling experiences. These profiles show how Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students understand and navigate their self-identity experiences. Although each individual participant explained their self-identity, ethnic marginalization, and counseling experiences, they all have differences in how they understand their narratives. The individual profiles will be collectively discussed in exploring the research questions to expose the differences and similarities of how the participants conceptualize their self-identity, ethnic marginalization, and counseling experiences. This discussion explores these differences and similarities and synthesizes literature to expose where this dissertation supports, challenges, and questions current scholarship.

**Self-Identity Experiences**
In this dissertation study, self-identity was defined as an accumulation of components that generates someone’s self-perception (Erez & Earley, 1993). Self-identity is quite complex because there are many different interpersonal and intrapersonal experiences that can affect someone’s self-perception. As participants explained their self-identity experiences, they expressed stories like growing up in an Afro-Caribbean household as the oldest sibling, an internal responsibility to succeed in college for their family, and being raised Afro-Caribbean in an urban area. This compilation of different experiences was present as participants took different approaches to explaining how they come to understand who they are.

Erik Erickson (1950, 1959) and James Marica (1966) explain self-identity for college aged individuals in stages, yet these participants saw their self-identity through people, culture, and who they wanted to become. This raises a question if Afro-Caribbean women experience their identity in stages. Perhaps not in the static culturally sanitized ways of Erikson (1950, 1959) and Marcia (1966), but in more complex intersectional perspectives. Individuals of different ethnic backgrounds use an intersection of multiple identity domains such as ethnicity and social experiences for identity development (Gonzales-Backen et al., 2015). The general understanding of self-identity models used in counseling such as Erik Erickson (1950, 1959) and James Marica (1966) do not consult how these cultural influences and social integrations affect self-identity for Afro-Caribbean students. Literature centered around Afro-Caribbean students exposes that culture (i.e., ethnicity) is how they understand their self-identity (Gustave, 2016; Malcom & Mendoza, 2014; Matthews, 2012; Thompson, 2011). With literature emphasizing that individuals of varied ethnic backgrounds need an intersection of identity domains and culture to understand their self-identity (Gonzales-Backen et al., 2015; Gustave, 2016; Malcom & Mendoza, 2014; Matthews, 2012; Thompson, 2011), this may be a component to why Afro-Caribbean women
gravitate towards ethnicity, culture, and social interrelations when referring to their self-identity experiences.

Participants expressed wanting to be as strong as their mothers and other Afro-Caribbean women; therefore, putting these women at the forefront of their self-identity experiences. Bobb-Smith (2003) mentioned that Caribbean women have an identity of collective resistance from being solely seen as immigrant women who migrated to North America. This is relevant for the participants as many of them explained their mothers’ stories of migrating to North America. As these women became guardians who raised these participants, historical discrimination impacted how their children (Afro-Caribbean women) are raised, along with affecting their self-identity experiences. Their self-identity experiences were impacted by the collective ethnic experience of resistance and strength that they too wanted to emulate. Also, from this resistance created a strong connection to ethnic identity, while western norms tried to push them towards assimilating to American culture (Bobb-Smith, 2003; John, 2016). This amplified the legacy of generations of Afro-Caribbean women who magnify their ethnicity within their self-identity, and is seen within the participant findings.

For each participant, ethnicity was the primary social location that navigated their self-identity experiences. This is additive because it challenges earlier research that expressed the homogenization of Black people, and it demystifies that race is not the only salient identity for all Black individuals (Agyemang et al., 2005; Campbell, 2017; Gustave, 2016; Matthews, 2012; McClain et al., 2016; Thompson, 2011). Most of the participants mentioned that they understand other parts of their self-identity (i.e., gender and race) through their ethnicity. Participants mentioned that women in their families helped them understand who they are and who they wanted to become. Self-identity experiences for these participants were complex and
intersectional, but all filtered through the lens of ethnicity. With Afro-Caribbean women keeping their strong ethnic roots when migrating to North America (Bobb-Smith, 2003), this may correlate to why Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate students in this research highly regard their ethnicity.

Other than ethnicity, additional self-identity nuances such as experiences with exploring self-identity were also present in the findings. Malcom & Mendoza (2014) explained that identity changes and shifts “at any moment and is created and recreated through discourse” (p. 596). Through interviews with participants, I noticed that everyone had an answer for explaining their self-identity until questions were asked about how they understood these experiences. This is when participants began to explain that they do not consistently think about their self-identity experiences, making the interviews the first time they really thought about the experiences and components that make them who they are. This exploration of self-identity from the participants is congruent to literature explaining that identity shifts and changes through discourse (Malcom & Mendoza, 2014) and that college students may not fully grasp their self-identity within their young adulthood (Berzonsky, 1994). Again, through discourse in the interviews, this process of identity fluidity was captured with as the participants realized that they have not fully explored who they are. Participants expressed feeling a sense of collective and self-identity in being Afro-Caribbean, but they needed continued personal exploration about social locations such as sexual orientation or beauty perceptions such as body size/type. Intersectional social locations (i.e., ethnicity and sexual orientation) are how Afro-Caribbean people understand their self-identity (Asante et al., 2016; Gonzales-Backen et al., 2015) so when one aspect is underexplored it may cause a shift in self-identity as a whole. With discourse happening within the interviews, every participant had a moment of clarity through conversation or needing more exploration of their
self-identity. This process is important because it shows that Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students need to actively speak about their self-identity experiences, because identity consistently changes as their life experiences evolve. Afro-Caribbean women need spaces in college to fully be themselves and not have this interview be the last time they get to explore their self-identity.

Thus far, the discussion about self-identity explains the need for intersectional perspective in understanding their self-identity, ethnicity being highly regarded within participant self-identify experiences, and the fluidity of identity; yet questions still linger regarding self-identity experiences specifically connected to other social locations (e.g., gender). It is already mentioned that ethnicity highly impacts other social locations for Afro-Caribbean students (Asante et al., 2016; Gonzales-Backen et al., 2015; Malcom & Mendoza, 2014), yet do Afro-Caribbean men or gender fluid folx also feel this connection toward ethnicity? Is there a difference in the cognitive self-identity formation in understanding gender (González-Torres & Fernandez-Rivas, 2019)? Although this dissertation does not explain perspectives of others who did not identify as Afro-Caribbean women, this discussion of gender and self-identity may provide more details to why ethnicity is important to Afro-Caribbean women college students. Current research about Afro-Caribbean students do not show differences in gender (Thompson, 2011), but given the contrast in social connections, experiences, and biology there could be identified discrepancies (González-Torres & Fernandez-Rivas, 2019). Matthews (2012) and Thompson (2011) explains that race only does not sufficiently encompass the understand of Afro-Caribbean students self-concept, which is why this dissertation is important in illuminating ethnicity; however, with women being the primary gender in Afro-Caribbean research the question remains if gender is this reason for this connection to ethnicity.
Ethnic Marginalization

Most participants reported feeling mistreatment from being ethnically different (ethnic marginalization) from someone within their own race. Whether it was hearing that Afro-Caribbean individuals steal jobs in the U.S., or not teaching Caribbean history when talking about Black history in college, they felt as if their ethnicity was not valued. Ethnic exclusion fosters a negative connotation that Afro-Caribbean women do not belong within their own race (Park, 2017). Black college students already feel marginalization because of their race in college (Charles et al., 2015; McClain et al., 2016; Rose & Firmin, 2013). Participants in this study share those feelings and an additional layer of ethnic marginalization.

The findings in this dissertation extends the literature around Afro-Caribbean college students and reflects on the duality of race and ethnic marginalization at the same time. Current literature supports this claim and emphasizes when ethnicity is not introduced on college campuses Afro-Caribbean students feel dismissed and unseen (Malcom & Mendoza, 2014). The current challenge is recognizing ethnic notions separately or in tangent with race discourse. Counseling research (and other disciplines) may conflate race and ethnicity (McClain et al., 2016), therefore continuing ethnic marginalization. This dissertation extends what has been previously published in the counseling field in recognizing the multiple jeopardy (Guy-Sheftall, 1995; King, 1988) for Afro-Caribbean women in expressing the oppression and suppression of Black women with multiple marginalized identities (i.e., gender, race, and ethnicity).

Understanding the history of the Afro-Caribbean individuals coming to the U.S., Americans may feel as if their born nationality makes them superior to Caribbean people (Gentles-Peart, 2014). This assumed superiority was felt by Afro-Caribbean women in this study which fueled their continued representation of their ethnicity. The product of being ethnically
marginalized for these participants ignited a sense of pride for their ethnicity. Talking about their ethnicity with friends on campus, strangers on the train, and using their personal narratives in the classroom was their response to being ethnically marginalized. Etienne (2016) expressed that Afro-Caribbean women continue to bridge social capital by engaging with others about their culture. The way in which Afro-Caribbean women create space for their narratives is by talking about them (Gentles-Peart, 2014) to dismantle the stereotypes made about the Afro-Caribbean community and resisting colonial narratives. Like the Afro-Caribbean women in the U.S. who came before them (participants), this same notion of collective resistance arose in all the participants who felt ethnically dismissed. This shows that the deep ethnic roots of collective resistance exist in the participants as they fought back by not assimilating to societal American standards but continue to acknowledge their ethnicity. These findings also illuminate narratives that race is not always the most salient social location for Black students (Campbell, 2017; Malcom & Mendoza, 2014; Matthews, 2012; Thompson, 2011).

**Counseling Experiences**

With self-identity and ethnic marginalization, most of the participants mentioned having experiences related to these topics. When talking about counseling, three participants mentioned going to counseling, but only one participant experienced more than three sessions; therefore, only one participant had an in-depth experience with counseling. Reasons for the other two participants to not have a longer experience in counseling was because of the inaccessibility in attaining counseling - financial concerns, retention of counselors in college settings, and the COVID-19 pandemic. In this instance it was not that these participants did not want services, it was that services were not attainable to them. Black people and individuals from marginalized backgrounds are more likely to have difficulties in accessing counseling services/ mental health
treatment (Memon et al., 2016) than White people for reasons such as the ones mentioned above in this study. The cost of counseling outside of being on campus was too much for Afro-Caribbean single parent households which half of these participants subscribe to. Even with insurance there are still financial barriers that keep marginalized individuals from going to counseling (Kim et al, 2021) and led participants in this research to discontinue counseling. Without financial access to services Afro-Caribbean women will continue to have issues with attaining counseling.

College counselors have a high impact on student retention in higher education (Sharkin, 2004). This impact allows students to feel supported for their mental health and adjustment needs when attending college. This study shows that when Afro-Caribbean women students report concerns about the number of counseling sessions and availability of counselors it may minimize the support felt on campus as a student. Being that Black students go through more academic difficulties in higher education than White students (Beasley & McClain, 2021), stable college treatment is crucial for Black students. This fluctuation in college counselors was experienced in the participant narratives and impacted how she interacted socially and managed her academics. Additionally, with the COVID-19 pandemic, increasing the number of people across the U.S. who are seeking counseling (Bell et al., 2020), virtually there was still an inaccessibility to counseling in this study. More literature is needed centered around mental health services and COVID-19 pandemic effects for Afro-Caribbean women (or similar population) in navigating the reasoning towards this research finding. Regardless, this study shows college counseling retention and COVID-19 pandemic affected participants’ ability to attain counseling.

For participants who did not receive counseling, it was evident that participants understood the severity of mental health assistance and could even name symptoms that they
experienced themselves. Even with experiencing mental health symptoms, they did not believe it was severe enough to go to counseling. A barrier to counseling for Afro-Caribbean individuals is lack of mental health knowledge, and acceptance that treatment is needed (Forbes & Hutchison, 2020; Mantovani, et al., 2017) which is present in this dissertation. Within Afro-Caribbean culture it can be frowned upon “and may be perceived as betrayal to the family” for expressing personal matters to strangers (Greenidge & Daire, 2010, p. 192). Because of this, the findings bring more enlightenment towards Afro-Caribbean women college students in this study who were less likely to express emotional openness towards counselors or going to counseling (Greenidge & Daire, 2010). Therefore, when participants experienced symptoms of depression and anxiety, they were hesitant to express their emotions in fear their family would find out, or they believed that they did not need immediate mental health assistance. Afro-Caribbean individuals need to feel a sense of safety to attend counseling, and psychoeducation to demystify the stigmas attached to counseling (Forbes & Hutchison, 2020; Greenidge & Daire, 2010; Mantovani, et al., 2017). In this study and in literature, Afro-Caribbean populations still use other means of coping such as religion or religious practices instead of attaining counseling services (will be discussed in the next section) (Dixon & Arthur, 2019). Having these interviews with participants about counseling as an Afro-Caribbean woman I believe unintentionally began the process of demystifying counseling stigmas. After the interviews, one participant made an appointment to see a counselor, and another mentioned wanting to go to counseling on their college campus. This shows that speaking to Afro-Caribbean women about counseling from a within group perspective (i.e. also Afro-Caribbean) can aid with accessing counseling to marginalized groups and de-stigmatize counseling services.

**Discussing the Collective Themes**
"Prayer is All I Need": Religion and Counseling/Mental Health Services

Within counseling and mental health research, there is a correlation between gender and religiosity where women tend to be more religious than men (Dixon & Arthur, 2019; Penny et al., 2015). The participants expressed feeling as if they could not attend counseling, or that they were hesitant about counseling/mental health services because of the strong religious narrative that God will heal them of any issue. Faith is a crucial role in the cultural identity of Afro-Caribbean women, therefore religious barriers and/or broaching techniques are needed to be explored in counseling (Dixon & Arthur, 2019). Broaching is needed in providing familial and ethnic “permission” for Afro-Caribbean women to access counseling. All the women within this study expressed knowing and understanding the importance of counseling, but some hesitated to go to counseling for their own mental health. Religion played a role in the comprehension that counseling is for everyone else who does not worship God, meaning counseling is not for them.

Consistent with the literature centered around counseling, Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college student participants who attended counseling expressed positive outcomes. They expressed having a parent or friends who consulted them about the positives of mental health treatment. Afro-Caribbean (and other Black women undergraduate) students have lower levels of anxiety and stress when attending counseling (Jones and Pritchett-Johnson, 2018). With evidence associated with the positive effects of counseling related to this dissertation, findings show that other participants who did not attend counseling but had anxiety (and other mental health symptoms) could have had similar positive outcomes. Again, with religious stereotypes about counseling verse the healing of God is one of the barriers for not seeking counseling services.
Bridging the gap between counseling and religion is necessary after reporting that these participants hesitate to seek counseling services. Some participants expressed that having these participant interviews sparked their attention about how much they need counseling. This brings attention to whether Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students see the coexistence of counseling and religion within their social stratosphere. Jones and Pritchett-Johnson (2018) expressed that Black women who are exposed the “Strong Black Women” schema are more resistant to counseling, and continue to see other Black women who overcome mental health barriers without using counseling. This may lead to the continual perspective that other forms of mental health treatment or management (i.e., religion) may be the best way to treat mental health symptoms, and not counseling. The lack of exposure of people who actively practice their religious faith and attend counseling is crucial for Afro-Caribbean women. This may be a pivotal marker to bridging the gap between counseling and religion.

Through participant narratives, this dissertation, and literature shows the importance of both faith and mental health (Dixon & Arthur, 2019; Jones & Pritchett-Johnson, 2018; Penny et al., 2015). Importantly, evidence still shows that the belief in God and/or faith is a high contributor to overall well-being (Dixon & Arthur, 2019; Penny et al., 2015; Rose et al., 2012). Therefore, the remaining challenge still exist that if faith practices are helping, why do Afro-Caribbean individuals need counseling? Religion scholars have reported faith practices (i.e., attending church, services, bible study, youth groups, etc.) itself are not a contributor to positive well-being while others may have contrary beliefs. Instead, these practices may foster coping mechanisms (Milot & Ludden, 2009; Rose et al., 2012), which may be helpful for some but not enough clinical support for all Afro-Caribbean individuals who may need mental health services. This then explains that Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students may find faith
sufficient in sustaining their mental health but not aiding in deeper emotional healing. Some people may need both faith and mental health services in aiding in their overall well-being (Dixon & Arthur, 2019).

**Girlhood: Discussing the Conceptualization of Womanhood**

Most of the participants talked about moments from childhood to adulthood that gave them the idea of how they conceptualized womanhood. They expressed watching mothers, aunts, and grandmothers, at a young age who they admired and formed an understanding of what womanhood should look like. Whether it was watching “wifey duties” as a child or being reminded of woman empowerment, the conceptualization of womanhood started at girlhood for these women.

“Black girlhood as a spatial intervention is useful for making our daily lives better and therefore changing the world as we currently know it” (Brown, 2013, p. 1). Brown (2013) explains girlhood to be a place of liberation; a place when Black girls should have the ability to release their desires without worry and consequences. With the combination of girlhood being influenced by space and freedom, when these positions are interrupted it may impact current perceptions of womanhood. The impact of what happens to Black women as children (girls) will impact how she understands her womanhood. For example, participants mentioned feeling as if they needed to participate in domestic chores and witnessed the women that they admired doing the same. During girlhood, these women understood that womanhood entailed cooking, having children, and other domestic responsibilities. The “space” and “liberation” that Brown (2013) expresses is the ability for Black girls to explore, dream, and live in a society where young girls are not being violently abused and dismissed for who they are or want to be. This is not to dismiss the significance of domestic responsibilities, but the need for Black girls to have the
space to create a self-identity free from gender restraints. Bea (a participant) expressed never having a space to explore her self-identity until her participant interview in this study, and Afro-Caribbean women need more spaces to do so.

Literature around Black girlhood amplifies the essence that Black girls do not have the ability to maintain their childhood (girlhood) compared to White girls (Brown 2013; Gilbert, 2020; Wright, 2016). Literature further exemplifies that there is an adultification of Black girls within the U.S. highly racialized society, and an explanation for Black girls not having the space to explore their girlhood (Brown 2013; Gilbert, 2020; Wright, 2016). As the conceptualization of womanhood for these participants was explained through their modeling of Afro-Caribbean women in their girlhood, is what was used as an avenue to explain how Afro-Caribbean women should present themselves today. The connections between girlhood and womanhood exposes the need for self-identity development for Black girls at a young age. This is because who they saw, what they could do, and the lack of agency in girlhood, affected their womanhood (Brown 2013; Wright, 2016).

**Intersectionality is Self-identity: Discussing Intersectionality (Gender, Ethnicity & Race)**

Intersectionality is a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw that represents the combination of marginalized identities (i.e., race, gender, class, etc.) that affects the “negative frameworks in which social power works to exclude or marginalize those who are different” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1; Crenshaw, 1988). With the uptake of intersectionality in counseling research (and related fields), there is a concern that using this conceptualization or framework is an appropriation and white-washing that exploits the essence of intersectionality (Cole, 2009; Collins, 2014; Grzanka, 2020; Grzanka & Cole, 2022, in press). This problematic application includes the removal of intersectionality from being about power and marginalization to mere social locations that
intersect and form a person’s identity (Grzanka, 2020). In exploring research that engages in intersectionality, Cole (2009) mentions that research needs to answer three questions, 1) who is included in the category, 2) what role does inequality play, and 3) where are the similarities. Within the interpretation of this dissertation findings, this means findings are not meant to be generalized, differences are acceptable, and nuances always remain in the midst of similarities. Consistent to the feminist research methods used in this dissertation, to engage in an intersectionality discussion about the findings these questions will be answered.

**Who Is Included In The Category?**

Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students are the ones who are being included within this notion of intersectionality. The history of the Caribbean that involves enslavement, racism, abuse, sexism, colorism, and patriarchy that highly impacts Afro-Caribbean people. As scholars learn about Afro-Caribbean individuals (specifically, women), it exposes that Caribbean narratives include the importance of acknowledging an intersectional experience (Blouet, 2007; Bobb-Smith, 2003; Davis & Goodwin, 1990; Flynn, 2011; Gentles-Peart, 2014; Gustave, 2016; Higman, 2011; Hofman & Hoogland, 2016; Hood, 2019; Mustapha, 2013; Reid, 2009; Reid & Gilmore, 2014; Rouse, 1992; Taylor, 2012), where a combination of marginalized identities affect these women’s everyday lives. This history of marginalization and oppression in the Caribbean still impacts Afro-Caribbean women in many ways – including the ethnic marginalization already expressed within the findings. Acknowledging the past and present brings about how Afro-Caribbean culture was formulated through a place of collective resistance – fighting for their culture, and people. This fight created a strong sense of ethnic pride that many Afro-Caribbean women hold when expressing their self-identity.

**What Role Does Inequality Play?**
In exploring the research findings, ethnic marginalization placed a key role towards collective resistance historically and personally for these participants. As already expressed, literature shows the oppression toward Afro-Caribbean women historically, but the response to this inequity was collectivity. Participants expressed when challenged with the representation of ethnic marginalization, their response was connecting with their ancestors, experiences of inequality, speaking up in classes about their ethnicity, and continued pride in their ethnicity. In discussing these responses, collective resistance can be seen as the rejection of western views towards ethnic values, and the uniting of individuals in interrupting culturally oppressive forces (Bobb-Smith, 2003). This supports the claims made in this dissertation that Afro-Caribbean women use social capital to engage others about their culture (Etienne, 2016); which draws meaning to why participants reacted as such when met with inequity and inequality.

With ethnicity already represented as a highly significant social location in this research, I think it also important to acknowledge how dismissing this pivotal cultural factor made participants feel. Participants expressed feeling dismissed from the own race, feeling othered for being Afro-Caribbean, and feeling ethnically denied on their college campuses. Grzanka (2020) explains that the impact of intersectionality is not just the celebration of diversity but the acknowledgement of these realities of having multiple marginalized identities. These findings support published literature that intersectionality also addresses the power against marginalized individuals (such as, Afro-Caribbean women college students) and illuminating how this power dynamic impacts their lives (Cole, 2009; Collins, 2014; Crenshaw, 1991; Crenshaw, 1988; Grzanka, 2020; Grzanka & Cole, 2022, in press; Shabot & Landry, 2018).

It is also important to discuss other roles that inequality plays within the lives of Afro-Caribbean students that were not widely acknowledged in the findings of this dissertation.
Participants talked about their experiences with ethnicity in a collective nature, yet Black women are widely diverse (Jones & Pritchett-Johnson, 2018). For example, Caribbean people who have an accent or speak a different language are discriminated against and viewed as having a lack of intelligence. Because of this, inequities such as employment bias and dismissal within housing markets continue to oppress and suppress Afro-Caribbean women (Gentles-Poart, 2014). Also, engaging in cultural public spaces such as Caribbean parades are seen as provocative and women are body shamed for the use of costumes influenced by Afro-stylization (Gentles-Poart, 2014; Tate, 2009). These points also need to be amplified as more work is needed in exploring this population and the challenges that were not widely represented within the findings.

Where Are the Similarities?

When gathering societal aspects about social location, society usually uses certain locations to totalize individuals, removing and rejecting intersectional perspectives (Cohen, 1997; Cole, 2009). I realized through the data analysis process that race and gender are usually the main social locations that other people viewed them through yet was not the initial social location that they view themselves. This incongruence of Afro-Caribbean women self-identity versus societal categorization connects to how the U.S. societal standards may not prioritize ethnicity as they do race (or gender). Being that ethnicity is still connected to a race (in this case Black), ethnic pride can be viewed as dismissive towards the Black race in a highly racialized society like the U.S. This also brings more illumination to why participants may have never mentioned being in a space where they can fully bring each part of their self-identity because their ethnicity was excluded.

Having expressed the importance of ethnicity within self-identity, both gender and race were still important to the participants. They also spoke about marginalized social class/
socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation as other social locations that are importance to them within their self-identity. The totality of all these social locations together not only show how marginalization impacts the intersectionality of these participants but their self-identity. With this information, a similarity in this dissertation study is that ethnicity is not only a part of their self-identity experiences, but the main source of their self-identity. Though research expresses that intersectionality should not merely be about the celebration of diversity (Cole, 2009; Grzanka, 2020; Grzanka & Cole, 2022, in press), but what if the people who the term was created for (Black women) see intersectionality as a means of empowerment in the mist of adversity, or strength despite daily challenges. Historically, Afro-Caribbean women have a sense of resilience as they pulled through oppression, this fighting spirit is also seen as commendable, honorable, and valued within Caribbean cultures (Bobb-Smith, 2003; Flynn, 2011; Foner, 2009; Gentles-Peart, 2014). Intersectionality could be conceptualized as form of collective resistance, that with societal power and marginalized social locations against them, they still prevail. In this fashion intersectionality can not only be seen as a conceptualization concept of inequity, but an identity marker of people (e.g., Black women) – intersectionality as a sense of being (who you are).

With using this theoretical projection to view intersectionality, in this study, participants intersectionality could also translate into self-identity. As stated earlier in this chapter, Afro-Caribbean people use intersectional social locations to express who they are; therefore, providing more evidence and similarities towards their intersectionality being their self-identity. In a previous chapter, I write that self-identity are the “intercultural influences that affects an individual’s understanding of who they are.” For these participants, that included their race, gender, and ethnicity which are all are a part of the intersectionality of these Afro-Caribbean women. To conceive Afro-Caribbean women within an intersectional lens is crucial in
understanding their self-identity, but in this instance these intersectional sections are not just a combination of identities that effect how others view them, but even how they view themselves. The notion of viewing intersectionality as a being instead of a conceptual framework could foster more positive expressions of how Afro-Caribbean women understand themselves as a whole – illuminating that despite oppression their presence is intersectional and celebrated.

**Limitations of the Study**

This feminist phenomenological dissertation was to illuminate the self-identity experiences of Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students. In doing so, this study brought awareness to social locations and people who affect Afro-Caribbean women’s self-identity, the feelings about being ethnically marginalized, and the need for de-stigmatization of counseling services. Though this study exposes so much about the individual and collective experiences of Afro-Caribbean women, there are still some limitations to this study that needs to be explored.

This study had six participants in total with four being of Haitian descent, five participants attending predominately white institutions, and all went to schools in the Northeast of the U.S. This is a limitation because there could be additional viewpoints if participants attended colleges in the South of the U.S. or attended an historically black college/university (HBCU). Sample size is usually chosen in qualitative research studies by how many participants are needed to answer a research question(s) (Hays &Singh, 2012). Six participants attained rich data; yet more data could have been gathered with a larger sample size. Having 4 participants from Haitian descent could also be a limitation in providing more cultural variety in understanding Afro-Caribbean narratives. The Caribbean is also not a monolith, and each country has its own distinct history (Mustapha, 2013; Reid, 2009; Reid & Gilmore, 2014);
therefore, more Caribbean ethnicities could have benefitted this study. Also, this dissertation only consisted of undergraduate students. Having varied perspectives from students who already completed their undergraduate degree could have brought some insight about how they navigated self-identity, and whether it has been consistent or shifted as an undergraduate and graduate student. The primary focus of this study was to explore experiences of Afro-Caribbean women, yet because there is limited counseling research on Afro-Caribbean people, it is important to assess all genders including non-binary students when exploring self-identity.

Other limitations such as COVID pandemic and researcher-insider status are also limitations. Being that the COVID pandemic did not allow for people to gather, there were no face-to-face interviews. In-person feminist qualitative interviews build a positive interviewee-interviewer relationship (Hesse-Biber, 2007, 2012). Online interviews can provide a similar authenticity level to in-person interviews because of the possibility to hear and see participants (Janghorban et al., 2014); therefore, addressing the ability to make positive interviewee-interviewer relationships in these interviews. Despite the positives of online interviews, with technology there are always limitations such as computer freezing, or low internet connection that could have affected the closeness and trust within the interviewee-interviewer relationships. Additionally, being that I am a researcher who identifies with being Afro-Caribbean, that gave me researcher-insider status. This status can be seen as an advantage in having a more well-rounded representation of the population but can also be a limitation of unseen bias within the research (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Even with engaging in a feminist qualitative research study that acknowledges power as the researcher, it is still not possible to remove this power the researcher holds. Even with participant individual profiles and trustworthiness methods there is still no guarantee that the
researcher’s power played a role in miscomprehending the findings. Trustworthiness methods used were memos to add reflexivity in keeping record of the formation of the study, an auditor and peer reviewer to check for bias and misrepresentation of the findings, and simultaneous data collection and negative research analysis to express the authentic narratives of the participants (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Hays & Singh, 2012; Hesse-Biber, 2007, 2012). I engaged in consistent dialogue with these individuals throughout the study to illuminate the narratives of Afro-Caribbean women. The findings are also being filtered by the memories of participants and research shows that memories can change (Brown et al., 2020) which affects the accuracy of the research data.

Another limitation is the use of feminist phenomenology (Allen-Collinson, 2011; Beauvoir, 1989; Fielding & Olkowski, 2017; Fisher & Embree, 2000; Hesse-Biber, 2012; Shabot & Landry, 2018) with Simone de Beauvoir’s (1989) framework on self-discovery/re-discovery. In previous chapters the importance of using this methodology was explained as strategic in illuminating the voices of women, yet this methodology does not account for how the researcher approached or traversed possible tensions within the research. A critique toward using postmodern theoretical qualitative research perspectives (e.g., feminist research) is the lack of knowing all the choices and decisions made when reporting research findings (Hesse-Biber, 2012). Also, using feminist phenomenology does not call for researchers to express specific data analysis decisions in such fashion; therefore, choosing this methodology has limitations that impacted the research. Feminist phenomenology is not explored within a linear or concrete manner within the data analysis process, hence seeing different ways in approaching this methodology in research (Allen-Collinson, 2011; Baird & Mitchell, 2014; Doucet & Mauthner, 2007; Fielding & Olkowski, 2017; Fisher & Embree, 2000). Having multiple application
processes for a methodology has effects on how the knowledge is understood within research. Though having implications, this notion was viewed as an asset to this research as it allowed flexibility in illuminating the narratives of marginalized voices. Having the ability to explore self-discovery and rediscovery within the data collection, analysis, and reporting stems from using feminist phenomenology principle of providing space for self-reflection. Despite these limitations, this dissertation study illuminates Afro-Caribbean women narratives and has the potential to be a catalyst for dynamic future counseling research.

**Implications**

This dissertation focuses on Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college student self-identity experiences. Implications for this study centers around multicultural and intersectional training of college counselors and counselor educators – along with implications for Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students. Counselors need to be able to advocate and integrate intersectionality more effectively for this population; therefore, influencing how counselors provide treatment to Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students. With a dearth of counseling research on this population, exploring this group will continue to expand the multicultural research in the field; especially, expanding on the narratives of Black individuals within such research.

The counseling and multicultural and social justice competencies (MSJCC) were revised in 2015, making this document a pillar that iterates the significance of how intersectionality affects mental health outcomes (Ratts et al., 2016). Many counseling training resources previously spoke about social locations separately when educating counselors-in-training (Pebdani, 2019), without acknowledging the importance of intersectionality. The findings of this dissertation study add more complexity within the Black identity; specifically, adding to more
intersectional research to the counseling field. More insight about how race, gender, and ethnicity, can encourage counselors to identify more intersectional interventions in discussing treatment with clients, and with other counselors or counselors-in training (specifically those who are and will be college counselors). Research about Afro-Caribbean women college students and self-identity can also provide more references for college counselors in understanding how societal and ecological systems may affect an individual’s identity development. Within a western society, the cultural mindset is mainly individualistic; yet these women are influenced by a Caribbean collectivistic culture (Bobb-Smith, 2003; Gentles-Peart, 2014; Katsiaficas, et al., 2015; Mendoza & Malcolm, 2014; Muruthi, et al., 2015). These cultural differences are usually not explored as it pertains to cultural and social clashes within short-term treatment in colleges. College counselors feel more pressure to use more short-term treatment models that support positive outcome measurements instead of insight-oriented approaches to counseling (Newhart et al., 2021). With college counselors being less likely to use insight-oriented (i.e., cultural) approaches, this may affect Afro-Caribbean students who need to explore their culture in counseling. Also, narratives of Afro-Caribbean women self-identity experiences illuminates self-identity issues and areas of development that counselors can assist students with while in college. Seeing self-identity differences and similarities within cultural groups (race, ethnicity, and gender) will provide more information in developing multiculturally competent college counselors who provide culturally sensitive treatment.

**Implications for College Counselor Practice**

All of the participants expressed the topics centered around Afro-Caribbean collective identity, cultural differences, and self-identity experiences as an Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students; therefore, these concepts need to be explored when counseling
these students. All the participants talked about Caribbean collectivistic culture as it pertains to growing up in an Afro-Caribbean home. Black students who attend colleges at predominantly white institutions feel more comfortable working with White college counselors who acknowledge their family cultural complexities (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). The participant (Ashley) who attained college counseling in this study expressed feeling as if their White counselor was helpful, but did not explore her the collectivistic culture of being an Afro-Caribbean student. Ashley expressed that her counselor did not engage in exploring her ethnicity which is crucial to the collective mindset she uses to make decisions as a college student.

College counselors at predominately white institutions need to engage in a student-centered approach when counseling Afro-Caribbean students and provide space for students to engage in their ethnic background in counseling (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). The findings for this study show that those who did not get to explore their collective culture did not feel they could be completely transparent in counseling. Therefore, college counselors should consider exploring their own biases, consulting with peer counseling or mentorship programs that Afro-Caribbean students may join, and having psychoeducation events outside of the counseling center to build trust (Greenidge & Daire, 2010). These strategies may allow Afro-Caribbean students to feel more comfortable in counseling to talk about their collective culture which may also be connected to reasons for coming to college and academic success (Brown et al., 2020).

When collective identity is explored for Afro-Caribbean students, college counselors could properly provide on-campus networks and support needed as they transition into college life. This notion of proper support is needed for Black students who attend predominantly white institutions like the participants in this study. College counselors do not just counsel students, but they have the means to provide college assistance and resources for students on campus.
Connected to collective identity, students have cultural (i.e., ethnic) differences from other Black students, and college counselors need to know campus resources for proper referral. For example, college counselors need to know about ethnic college clubs and organizations, faculty and staff with diverse ethnic backgrounds, and international campus services for Afro-Caribbean students who need assistance. Providing these resources could instill a sense of belongingness on campus which aids in Afro-Caribbean students overall well-being in college (Greenidge & Daire, 2010).

All the participants in this study expressed learning something about themselves through exploring their self-identity experiences. They reflected about not having the space or people in their lives that allowed them to process their self-identity. With college being a place where students explore their self-identity and independence (Bok, 2013), college counseling should also be a place for students to reflect on these self-identity experiences. College counseling could be a place for Afro-Caribbean students to explore their narratives instead of just going for prevention or interventions for mental health concerns. In doing so college counseling services should remind students of color (specifically Afro-Caribbean students) about the multifaceted benefits of counseling along with mental health advantages (i.e., social support, increased confidence, exploring personal change, etc.). College counselors already attend campus gatherings to promote counseling services; therefore, counselors need to advocate for attending tabling events and ethnic studies programs where Afro-Caribbean students are present for them to understand the benefits of counseling services, including self-identity exploration.

Implications for Counselor Educators

Singh et al. (2020) reports that decolonization practices and structures that critically examine White and western ideologies need to be upheld to commit to the standards of
counseling and multicultural and social justice competencies. This is important as the counseling curriculum is still reflective of these bias ideologies. From this dissertation, counselor educators need to refrain from using Black stereotypes when teaching and educating counselors-in-training. This dissertation exposes the importance of ethnicity in understanding the narratives of Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate students, and pedagogy about Black people is usually monolithic. The emphasis on ethnic marginalization expressed that there are differences within the Black race and needs to be reflected in counseling curriculum. In doing so, when counselor educators are talking about social locations such as race, they should reflect on the power they hold as the counselor educators in influencing the minds of counselors-in-training. This entails reconsidering reading materials, in-class activities, and class lectures that may minimize the Afro-Caribbean women experience and continue to dismiss the importance of their ethnicity. Adding more articles and examples about intersectionality will allow counselors-in-training to see the multiple narratives and perspectives about Black people (specifically Afro-Caribbean).

Also, in continuing this call to commit to the MSJCC standards in aiding the counseling profession, counselor educators need to also use interventions that align with a non-bias perspective. For example, using theories and decolonization paradigms that implement the MSJCC such as, intersectionality in addressing power in counseling and relational cultural theory for students to learn through the importance of authentic relationships. Traditional counseling methods were not created “with the goal of dismantling systems of oppression” (Singh et al., 2020, p. 261), therefore this research emphasizes the need to bring awareness to different counseling structures that recognize intersectional aspects of Afro-Caribbean identities, and critique how white supremacy dictates work in the counseling field. Also, from demographic data of The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs
(CACREP) counseling programs in 2017, 71% of the faculty are white (CACREP, 2017). With findings in this dissertation explaining that Afro-Caribbean women gravitate towards Black faculty, this may be because faculty of color in counseling programs use relational and culturally based pedagogical approaches (Dorn-Medeiros et al., 2020). Using these approaches align with the MSJCC standards in using methods with cultural components that enlighten intersectional aspects such as, Afro-Caribbean identities.

Other avenues to implement the need for dismantling oppression in the counseling field is through advocacy, education, and research. The MSJCC and The American Counseling Association (ACA) talk about counseling and advocacy interventions, yet this commitment is not widely seen for the Afro-Caribbean population. This dissertation exposes that the lack of exposure to the Caribbean received in media, and in college impacts their self-identity experiences. The Caribbean (specifically Haiti) has gone through a tremendous amount of hardship within 2021 and yet advocacy is not visible. Counselor educators can assist with advocating within their roles as advisors (i.e., Chi Sigma Iota, Counselors for Social Justice, etc.). Articles centered around Caribbean populations express the importance of advocacy in cultivating trust in mental health providers (Phelps et al., 2001; Shafiq et al., 2021). This advocacy could provide counselor educators with the knowledge needed such as interventions and additional adjacent mental health supports (i.e., case management) for Afro-Caribbean individuals.

Applying this advocacy information about Afro-Caribbean population within the counselor education courses is also needed. Expressing how Caribbean people have one of the highest rates of mental illness within Black communities, the increase of substance related disorders, and the need for counseling in Caribbean communities (Forbes & Hutchison, 2020;
Gibbs et al., 2013; Mantovani, 2017) is important to represent. Applying these statistics and Afro-Caribbean real-world experiences in class would highlight the experiences of Afro-Caribbean people along with expressing a variety of Black narratives. Additionally, research about Afro-Caribbean individuals continue to be integrated with research about Black people, and not illuminating ethnic differences (Chapman-Hilliard & Beasley, 2018; Guiffrida & Douthit 2010; Jones & Pritchett-Johnson, 2018; Stewart, 2009). As multicultural and intersectional practices proceed in this counseling field, this dissertation can provide insight for college counselors and counselors educators in aiding Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students and illuminating Afro-Caribbean narratives. The counseling field is still limited on the amount of research centered Afro-Caribbean individuals and still need illumination within advocacy, education, and research.

**Afro-Caribbean Women Undergraduate College Students**

Within this dissertation there are challenges that these participants faced being an undergraduate student, therefore; there are implications for Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students. This study shows that Afro-Caribbean women highly regard their ethnicity and students can feel dismissed when their ethnicity is not represented (Campbell, 2017, Greenidge &. Daire, 2010; Malcolm & Mendoza, 2014). Hence, it is important to find communities in college that embrace Afro-Caribbean ethnicities – whether it be social clubs, faculty/staff who are Afro-Caribbean, or mentorship. This challenge of finding community was represented within all the participant narratives and a sense of belonging is needed for Black students who attend predominantly white institutions (McClain et al., 2016).

Another challenge for Afro-Caribbean students in this study was the lack of self-identity exploration. College is the atmosphere where students can cultivate the independence and invest
in themselves (Bok, 2013); yet Black students go through high levels of psychological stress in college (Charles et al., 2015; McClain et al., 2016; Rose & Firmin, 2013) that keep them from exploring these benefits compared to White students. With Afro-Caribbean students dealing with additional ethnic marginalization expressed in this study, there is more of a hindrance towards self-identity exploration. From this study exploring self-identity may mean going to counseling and talking about the people and experiences that allow Afro-Caribbean students to understand who they are, or actively talking to dependable friends about the importance of their ethnic culture. All the participants mentioned exploring something new about themselves by giving them the space to talk about their self-identity.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This is the first feminist phenomenological research study that focused on Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students with implications towards the counseling field. With this study, there are still areas that need continued exploration and recommendations for future research. Additional studies should be conducted using larger more diverse samples of Afro-Caribbean women. Particular attention should be given to the inclusion of diverse Caribbean descents. Moreover, researchers should consider using varied qualitative methodologies such as a grounded theory study centered around the phenomena of self-identity of Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students. This may provide more explicit theoretical underpinnings of the origins of self-identity development within these participants. For example, a grounded theory research question centered around “What are the factors that influence self-identity development for Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students?” could yield an empirical model that demonstrates specific factors that influence self-identity development. In qualitative research, sample sizes are strategic to the phenomena or
topic being explored Chamaz, 214; Dworkin, 2012; Guetterman, 2018; Hays & Singh, 2012; Mason, 2010), and grounded theory studies may have up to 25 participant interviews (Dworkin, 2012). Having a larger sample size could strengthen the ability to see more similarities across participants and aid in creating a representative model of self-identity development. This followed by trustworthiness measures such as the ones seen in this dissertation (e.g., peer debriefer, auditor, and memos), could present significant results as it pertains to the Afro-Caribbean population. Also, an additional qualitative study such as transcendental phenomenological study that focused on self-identity development could also show the lived experiences of how their self-identity developed across time. Using focused groups within these qualitative studies could also be helpful in exploring narratives for Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students.

Furthermore, though there is a need to understand self-identity within qualitative research, it is also important to explore this subject quantitatively. With quantitative studies there is more accessibility for larger sample sizes and varied representation of participants around the U.S. With more people being able to participate this could bring additional information about self-identity experiences and development at a larger scale. Also, exploring similar concepts to self-identity such as self-concept, self-esteem, and ethnic identity development is also useful exploring within a quantitative fashion. Using quantitative research may also help correlation and comparison data about self-identity and Afro-Caribbean individuals as it pertains to age, gender, socioeconomic status, and other social locations.

As it pertains to the findings of this study, there are many directions for future research from the data collected. Being that the participants expressed that they enjoyed talking about their intersectionality and self-identity, more race and ethnic research in the counseling field
should have an intersectional component to understanding the ways in which participants understand their race and ethnicity. This is helpful in not pathologizing Black narratives but expressing similarities and differences within race. Additionally, more research is needed in understanding the individual perspectives of Afro-Caribbean women and the deep connection with ethnicity. This research exposes that ethnicity is a deep contributor in self-identity experiences but having research strictly on ethnicity and self-identity could bring needed perspective for this population. Components of self-identity experiences within the research findings include the exploration of sexual orientation. Exploring sexual orientation for Afro-Caribbean women would also bring more intersectional and queer research into the counseling field about a population that is not widely visible. Queer women of color (specifically, Afro-Caribbean) as a research population that is not widely explored and is recommended from the findings of this study.

Additional nuances when exploring self-identity experiences such as womanhood, religion, ethnic marginalization, and counseling are also areas that need further research for Afro-Caribbean women. How factors such as family support and social environments specifically impact the areas previously represented. Also, the additional use of individual profiles is another research recommendation. Counseling dissertations (Perez, 2017) have used individual profiles before, and bringing more exposure to such research could impact how the counseling field understands underrepresented diverse narratives.

Reflections from the Researcher

As I reflect on the countless memos, dissertation feedback, and participant narratives, I am honored for such an amazing opportunity to illuminate the voices of Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students. This section is to uphold the feminist production of this research
in acknowledging researcher power and the impact it had on me as an Afro-Caribbean woman doing research about Afro-Caribbean women. With having similar social locations as my participants (i.e., Black, Caribbean, a woman, and Christian), this research also triggered my own self-identity experiences that are similar and different from the participants. It reminded me of the reasons why I wanted to explore the phenomena of self-identity, and how it was not explored in my household. As I continued to discover self-identity experiences for Afro-Caribbean women through this research, I noticed the impact I played when interviewing participants, challenges about the study, and understood more about myself (self-discovery/rediscovery) within the process.

As all the interviews progressed, there was an interviewee-interviewer relationship that was built during the process (Allen-Collinson, 2011; Fielding & Olkowski, 2017; Harding & Norberg, 2005; Hesse-Biber, 2007, 2012; Shabot & Landry, 2018). Participants spoke about in-depth parts of their narrative, and they expressed moments of laughter, joy, grief, and despair within the interviews. As I reflect on these rich conversations, I thought about the reasoning behind the immediate connections I had with each of these women in their interviews. I expressed being an Afro-Caribbean woman and a Counseling and Counselor Education doctoral candidate when reading the informed consent. I believe that these notions may have contributed to the trust and emotional openness throughout the research process. There were multiple moments where participants spoke about being an Afro-Caribbean woman and said “we”, “us”, or other forms of collective identity in inviting me into their narrative (Bobb-Smith, 2003; Foner, 2009). As they spoke about their narratives it felt like I knew them – not because I have met them before but because of the familiarity to their stories compared to mine and other Afro-Caribbean women I have encountered. Andrea (participant) mentioned when you meet another
Afro-Caribbean person “they just understand” and this perspective manifested during the interviews (Malcom & Mendoza, 2014). There was a sisterhood that was created within this research study that has impacted how I see my own life (Guy-Sheftall, 1995; hooks, 1952).

With this fruitful interview process, there were challenges that unfolded when trying to represent the data. The first challenge throughout data analysis was making sure participant narratives were authentically illuminated and avoided bias as much as possible. In doing so, I continued to memo and created individual profiles that highlighted the narratives of each participant (Fielding & Olkowski, 2017; Hesse-Biber, 2007, 2012). Even with representations of trustworthiness, I felt a personal responsibility to uphold these narratives in making sure each profile had rich information about the participants. This data was sacred to me, I was meticulous in how I wrote the findings and wanted to make sure my voice as the researcher was minimized. Being an Afro-Caribbean woman who did not have the space to explore her self-identity, I felt like I needed to finally take up space that Afro-Caribbean women are not given in counseling research. Another challenge was writing collective responses for the participants. I wanted to stick to Simone De Beauvoir’s (1989) notion of women’s narrative being able to stand alone to explore research. In doing so, I created collective themes that would be further analyzed while maintaining the power of each individual profile. Making this decision was difficult after reading other feminist research that allowed women’s individual narratives to stand alone (Beauvoir, 1989) with no need for collective themes. I had an internal researcher battle about writing these collective themes afraid it would overlook the power of the individual narratives. Going back into my memos helped me realize that bringing these narratives together provides more data about Afro-Caribbean women that is needed in assisting with understanding the individual profiles.
As the researcher, I noticed that I was going through my own process of self-discovery and rediscovery throughout this dissertation process. I noticed personal stories that I have not explored in years or remembered people that impacted my self-identity. For example, in a memo I write,

“As a child, growing up in a Haitian household it was always reinforced that I was Haitian, but I didn't fully comprehend my connection to Blackness other than my skin complexion. It wasn't until other Black students talked about soul food, and other things that they did at home that I recognized that I did not engage in those traditions in my house. When people would ask did you have these meals growing up and I said “No”, then other kids would say “Aren't you black?” My response was always, “I'm Haitian”. Even as a child I knew my ethnicity was the most salient part of my self-identity, but then I wasn't sure about how I understood my Blackness.”

This quote was one of my earliest self-identity experiences that I could remember. Interviewing the participants reminded me of this moment where I first felt ethnically marginalized, but also empowered to say I was Haitian. From my experiences growing up my ethnicity was usually the driving force before race. This made me ponder about conversations I have had with my parents about race. Living in a country where being Black is the dominant race, they understood race differently than in the U.S. They did not see race as the reason for their trials and tribulations, but socioeconomic status and colorism. Though both these concepts are influenced by the historical oppression, racism, and White supremacy in Haiti (and other countries within the Caribbean) (Higman, 2011; Mustapha, 2013; Reid, 2009; Reid & Gilmore, 2014; Rouse, 1992), pride in their ethnicity came first because race was influenced by their ethnicity (which is also seen within this
research findings). Trying to teach me this connection in the U.S. was difficult as experiences that I went through about race were ones my parents never experienced growing up in Haiti.

Being able to witness the storytelling process of these tremendous Afro-Caribbean women was invaluable. The research process was not easy, but highly rewarding to provide space for Afro-Caribbean women narratives and a place for them to learn about themselves. Along the way I was able to explore my own connections to this work and rediscovered the reason why I became a counselor and pursued a PhD in the first place. My reason for higher education was always to uplift Afro-Caribbean narratives and these participants reminded me of my purpose in this field. As a researcher, I had the privilege to foster brief moments of sisterhood in meeting each participant, but also the pleasure of being impacted by each woman’s story that I got to interview.

**Conclusion/ Summary**

This feminist phenomenological dissertation exposes the self-identity experiences of six Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students. The findings also expressed participant experiences with ethnic marginalization and counseling experiences. This research exposed information that is consistent to literature about self-identity and exposes gaps and new findings as it pertains to narratives about Afro-Caribbean women. Using Simone De Beauvoir’s feminist framework of self-discovery/rediscovery brought an additional perspective to seeing what participants learned about themselves during the interview process. This highlighted that Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students do not have a space to process their self-identity, therefore, making this research the first time they have ever explored who they are. Findings expressed that ethnicity was the primary social location used when navigating their self-identity experiences, and every experience is filtered through their ethnicity. Implications for
this study include ways college counselors can be mindful of Afro-Caribbean women experiences, and how counselor educators can be proactive when teaching about race and ethnicity. Future research recommendations also include more research about Afro-Caribbean individuals and self-identity development through additional qualitative research (i.e., grounded theory), and the use of quantitative methods. As I expressed my researcher’s reflections, this was necessary in maintaining reflexivity in this feminist dissertation process. I have learned so much about myself from this experience and I thank each participant for sharing their self-identity experiences in this dissertation.
Appendix A: Social Media Post for Recruitment

Facebook:

Research Study: Afro-Caribbean Women Undergraduate College Students and Self-Identity Experiences

Participants Needed:
- Afro-Caribbean (i.e., identify racially as Black and Caribbean by ethnicity- Black and Jamaican, Black and Bahamian, etc.)
- Self-identify as a woman
- Undergraduate college student (Part-time or full-time)
- 18 years old or older

Participation in this study involves completing a demographic questionnaire which will take approximately 10 minutes. This study also involves 2 semi-structured interviews that will be recorded and approximately take 60 minutes each (120 minutes in total).

Click here if you are interested in participating in this study. A separate link will also be provided below for accessibility.

Participation Link:

Please contact me via email at sigelin@syr.edu if you have any questions about the study. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Syracuse University’s Office of Research Integrity and Protections at (315) 443-3013.

Instagram:

Social Media Post for Recruitment

**Research Study:** Afro-Caribbean Women Undergraduate College Students and Self-Identity Experiences

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Please click the link in the comment section if you are interested in participating in this study. A separate link will also be provided below for accessibility.

**Participation Link:**

Please contact me via email at sigelin@syr.edu if you have any questions about the study. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Syracuse University’s Office of Research Integrity and Protections at (315) 443-3013.
Appendix B: Interview Email

Thank you so much for wanting to participate in this dissertation research titled *An Exploration of Self-identity Experiences Within the Lives of Afro-Caribbean Women Undergraduate College Students*. Below is the information for your Zoom participant interview. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at sigelin@syr.edu.

Topic: AC Women Interview  
Time:  
Zoom Meeting Link:  
Meeting ID:  
Passcode:

Thank you again and I look forward to the interview!

Take Care,  
Shana
Appendix C: Electronic Informed Consent

An Exploration of Self-identity Experiences Within the Lives of Afro-Caribbean Women Undergraduate College Students: A Feminist Phenomenological Study

My name is Shana Gelin and I am a Doctoral Candidate in the Counseling and Counselor Education program at Syracuse University. As the Co-Investigator, I invite you to participate in a research study on a volunteer basis. The purpose of this study is to explore the self-identify experiences of Afro-Caribbean women undergraduate college students. This informed consent will explain the research objectives, and please feel free to ask any questions or concerns. I can be contacted via email at sjgelin@syr.edu or via telephone at (856) 495-1813. Derek Seward who is the Faculty Mentor/Co-Investigator of this study can be contacted via email at xseward@syr.edu and 315-443-9623 via telephone.

To participate within this study, you must identify as:

- Afro-Caribbean (i.e. identify racially as Black with a Caribbean ethnicity- Black and Jamaican, Black and Bahamian, etc.)
- A woman
- Undergraduate college student (Part-time or full-time)
- 18 years old or older

You will be asked to participate in an online interview via Zoom for approximately an hour and a half to two hours and complete a demographic survey (approximately 7-10 minutes) prior to the interview. Participants will have the opportunity to review information with a member check to provide the co-investigator with any comments about the transcript and/or interview via email.

Efforts will be made to make sure your privacy is protected by saving all information on a password protected computer hard drive. During dissemination of this research and data analysis, your names or any other information in revealing your identity will not be used. You will be asked to provide a pseudonym for data collection.

The possible risk of participating within this study are emotional or psychological discomfort when talking about self-identity experiences of being an Afro-Caribbean woman student on a college campus. If you experience any emotional or psychological discomfort, you can visit the National Board of Certified Counselors website (https://www.nbcc.org/search/counselorfind) to locate a counselor in your area. Also, feel free to access the 24-hour mental health hotlines for emotional distress provided by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (https://www.mentalhealth.gov/get-help/immediate-help). Also, when working with email or the internet there is always the risk of compromising privacy, confidentiality, and/or anonymity. Your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology being used. It is important for you to understand that no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet via third parties. Additionally, all interviews will be transcribed by a three-party transcription service. Again, all names will not be revealed, and all research items will be stored on a password protected computer hard drive.
Possible benefits within this study will be the ability for participants to learn more about themselves through exploring their self-identity narratives. It will also provide counselors and counselor educators with the resources and literature needed in aiding Afro-Caribbean women college students. Also, it will provide information to higher education professionals to better serve college students of diverse ethnic backgrounds; therefore, your insight and experiences are valuable to this research.

As a research participant, you have the following rights:

- Your participation is voluntary.
- You may skip and/or refuse to answer any question for any reason.
- You are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Syracuse University’s Office of Research Integrity and Protections at (315) 443-3013.

I am 18 years of age or older and I understand what my participation in this study involves, I have printed a copy of this form for my personal records.

By continuing I agree to participate in this research study.
Appendix D: Electronic Demographic Survey

1) What pseudonym would you like for this study?

2) How did you learn about this study?
   a. Facebook
   b. Instagram
   c. Other
      i. If you chose "Other" for how you learned about this study, please describe below (i.e., sent to you via text from a friend, email from a co-worker, etc.)

3) What is your nationality?

4) What is your ethnicity? Please choose the country or countries that best describes your ethnicity. Please write all the countries that apply if multiple (e.g., Jamaican and Bahamian – select Jamaica and Bahamas below)
   a. Anguilla,
   b. Antigua & Barbuda
   c. Aruba,
   d. Bahamas
   e. Barbados
   f. British Virgin Islands
   g. Cayman Islands
   h. Cuba, Curacao
   i. Dominica
   j. Dominican Republic
   k. Grenada
   l. Guadeloupe
   m. Haiti
   n. Jamaica
   o. Martinique
   p. Montserrat
   q. Puerto Rico
   r. St. Barthélemy (St. Barts)
   s. St. Kitts & Nevis
   t. St. Lucia
   u. St. Martin
   v. St. Vincent & The Grenadines
   w. St. Maarten
   x. Trinidad & Tobago
   y. Turks & Caicos
   z. United States Virgin Islands

5) Do you identify as a person with disability or a disabled person? (yes/no/I do not wish to answer)
   a. Will you be need accommodations for a semi-structured interview on zoom? (yes/no)
   b. If you need any accommodations, please let the researchers investigators know below.
Student Status Demographics

6) Do you attend a public or private institution?
   a. Public
   b. Private

7) Which region within the United States best describes the location of your institution?
   a. West
   b. Southwest
   c. Midwest
   d. Southeast
   e. Northeast

8) Do you attend a predominantly white institution? (yes/no)

9) Which title best describes your Undergraduate Student Classification (i.e., Freshmen, Sophomore, etc.)
   a. Freshman
   b. Sophomore
   c. Junior
   d. Senior

10) Please write your age in the text box below.

11) Are you an International Student? (yes/no)
   a. If you are an international student, from where? (Please provide the name of the country below)

12) What is your Major (Mathematics, Biology, History etc.)

13) Are you a part-time or full-time student?
   a. Part-time
   b. Full-time

14) Are you a transfer student? (yes/no)
   a. If so, how long have you been at your current institution?

15) Are you actively involved in Afro-Caribbean or cultural extracurricular activities at your university/college (i.e., Caribbean Student Association, Dominican Student Association, Haitian Student Association, Black Artist Association, etc.)? (yes/no)
   a. If so, how many?
      i. 1
      ii. 2
      iii. 3
      iv. More than 3
   b. Are you on the e-board of any these clubs/organizations? (yes/no)

16) What is your first language?
   a. Do you speak multiple languages and/or dialects/creole languages (i.e. Spanish, Patois, etc.)? (yes/no)
      i. If so, which ones (i.e., American English and Jamaican Patois, American English and Haitian Creole etc.)?

17) If you had to quantify the number of friends you have in total, are your friends mostly Afro-Caribbean? (all, some, couple, none)

Familial Information
1) Who were the guardians that raised you (i.e. mother, father, paternal grandparents, maternal aunt)? *Please write all that apply, even if it is more than 2 parental figures*
   a. Biological Mother
   b. Biological Father
   c. Biological Paternal Grandmother
   d. Biological Paternal Grandfather
   e. Biological Maternal Grandmother
   f. Biological Paternal Grandfather
   g. Foster/Adopted Mother
   h. Foster/Adopted Father
   i. Family Friend/ Neighbors
   j. Paternal Aunt
   k. Paternal Uncle
   l. Maternal Aunt
   m. Maternal Uncle
   n. Other/Not Mentioned Above
      i. If you have selected "other" for the guardians who raised you, please describe your relationship with that person or people below (i.e., a church member, childhood babysitter, etc.). *Please feel free to mention multiple people if they are considered a pivotal part of your upbringing*

2) Were there grandparents (or generations prior) living in the household as a child and/or adolescent? (yes/no)
   a. If so, who? (No specific names- just role/relation to you (e.g. grandmother, great-grandfather, etc.))

These next questions are about your BIOLOGICAL MOTHER

3) Mother:
   a. Mother’s Country of Birth?
   b. Mother’s ethnicity?
   c. Mother’s race?
   d. If your mother was not born in the U.S., how long has she been in the U.S.?
      i. Less than 1 year
      ii. 1-5 years
      iii. 6-10 years
      iv. 11-15 years
      v. 16-20 years
      vi. Over 20 years
      vii. Mother was born in the US
   e. Mother’s highest level of education?
      i. Less than high school
      ii. Some High school
      iii. High school diploma/ GED
      iv. Trade/ Professional School
      v. Some Bachelors’ Degree
      vi. Bachelors’ Degree
      vii. Some graduate school
viii. Competition of graduate (i.e., Master’s or Doctorate Degree)

These next questions are about your BIOLOGICAL FATHER

4) Father
   a. Father’s Country of Birth?
   b. Father’s ethnicity?
   c. Father’s race?
   d. If your father was not born in the U.S., how long has he been in the U.S.?
      i. Less than 1 year
      ii. 1-5 years
      iii. 6-10 years
      iv. 11-15 years
      v. 16-20 years
      vi. Over 20 years
      vii. Father was born in the US
   e. Father’s highest level of education?
      i. Less than high school
      ii. Some High school
      iii. High school diploma/ GED
      iv. Trade/ Professional School
      v. Some Bachelors’ Degree
      vi. Bachelors’ Degree
      vii. Some graduate school
      viii. Competition of graduate (i.e. Master’s or Doctorate Degree)

5) What is your household SES (social economic status)?
   a. Below – 19,999
   b. 20,000 – 39,999
   c. 40,000 – 59,999
   d. 60,000 – 79,999
   e. 80,000 – 99,999
   f. 100,000 – Above
Appendix E: Example Semi-Structured Interview Guide

The purpose of this interview is to explore the self-identity narratives of Afro-Caribbean undergraduate college women. In doing so, below are the main research questions, including the probes, prompts, and subset questions to ascertain these experiences.

**Introduction Script** (At the beginning of the interview):

This is a feminist phenomenology study, therefore there are some pivotal guidelines that feminist researchers uphold to make sure the participant narratives and stories are at the forefront of the study. For example, we acknowledge that there are power differentials as it pertains to the researcher and the participant, so we make sure to prioritize participant autonomy. The way that is executed is by allowing the participant to opt out of any questions, have the ability to stop the interview at any time, and express their experiences without judgment or modification. This is to cultivate an interviewee-interviewer relationship and provide an atmosphere that is conductive to the participant.

Do you have any questions about these researcher interview strategies before we start the interview?

**Question 1:** What are the self-identity experiences of Afro-Caribbean women college students?

- Tell me about your childhood/family dynamics living in an Afro-Caribbean household (e.g., cultural/familial norms, traditions, favorite cultural activities to engage in, etc.)
  - How do these experiences with _____ (e.g., mother, father, brother, etc.) impact you today?
- Talk about your college experience thus far?
  - How was managing these experiences being an Afro-Caribbean woman?
- Given this definition of self-identity (see below), what does this term bring up for you?
  - Has your ethnicity affected your understanding of self-identity?
- How has being on a college campus helped you understand your self-identity (if any)?
- Have you ever questioned your self-identity?
- Talk to me about your self-identity and how do you think others perceive you?

**Question 2:** What are the experiences of ethnic marginalization for Afro-Caribbean women college students?

- Tell me about an experience in college that made you think or reflect about your ethnicity (Afro-Caribbean)?
- Given this definition of ethnic marginalization (see below) (e.g., being identified as African American when you identify as Afro-Caribbean, etc.) what does this term bring up for you.
  - Has this ever affected your self-identity?
  - How does being a woman impact these experiences?
  - What are your experiences of ethnic validation?
- When group marinization happens (if it does), talk to me about your internal process/reflection of the situation?
Question 3: What are the experiences for Afro-Caribbean women students who attend or have experienced counseling?

- What are your feelings towards going to counseling?
  - If you attended counseling, what was the outcome in attending counseling?
- Within your ethnic (and/or familial) culture, what is your understanding of counseling?
- Tell me about your thoughts around counseling as an avenue to understand your self-identity.
  - If you have been to counseling, talk to me about how helpful counseling was to process your self-identity.
  - Overall, how was counseling helpful to you?

Additional Questions in exploring Feminist Framework (Self-Discovery/Ambiguity & Intersectionality):

- Was there anything about yourself that you discovered through these interviews?
  - Please explain your response, whether yes or no
- How did it feel to talk about these narratives in an intersectional format (i.e. being a woman who is racially black and ethnically Caribbean)
  - Was this the first time you expressed your emotions and/or experiences about being an Afro-Caribbean women, self-identity, and marginalization?

Verbatim Definitions for Each Participant:

**Self-Identity:** Self-identity is defined as all cultural factors within a student’s life that has consistent impact on a student’s perception of themselves. This includes but is not limited to ethnicity, interpersonal relationships, race, religion, social economic status, gender, and an intersection of multiple elements of different cultures. Malcolm 2014; Sue, 2001; therefore, continuously evolving over a person’s lifetime.

**Ethnic Marginalization:** Ethnic marginalization is the mistreatment felt from being a different ethnicity from someone in another ethnic or racial group (Ashely, 2013; Diver-Stamnes & Lomascolo, 2001; Milo, 2013; Park, 2017). Complexity within such a term progresses as ethnic marginalization can be experienced within race and with other races. For example, an Afro-Caribbean woman can feel judged for listening to a Caribbean podcast from another Black person and someone who identifies as East Asian.
Appendix F: Sample of Potential A Priori Feminist Codes

These are potential codes that will be used within the data analysis portion of this proposed dissertation. Having a priori codes are to make sure that the feminist framework is consistent throughout data analysis and not solely within the findings of the study. Codes below are framed by: Beauvoir, 1989; Burke, 2018; Crenshaw, 1988; Doucet & Mauthner, 2007; Eddles-Hirsch, 2015; Fielding & Olkowski, 2017; Guy-Sheftall, 1995; Hays & Singh, 2012; Hesse-Biber, 2007, 2012; hooks, 1952; King, 1988; Lorde, 1984; Mann, 2018; Moustakas, 1994; Reddock, 2007; Shabot & Landry, 2018; Watts, 2006. These references are phenomenology, feminist research, and feminist phenomenology sources to best represent the research analysis process. When data analysis continues, this document can be used to add participant quotes as examples to the codes presented. Multiple codes maybe linked to the same example when participants speak to several ideas at once. Lastly, a note section is available to add any observations, perspectives and other details to enhance these codes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Descriptions</th>
<th>Examples (i.e., Participant Quotes)</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Muted voices</td>
<td>When women feel like their voices are going unheard or dismissed. Usually by men or people with more privilege than their own.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploring Self-Identity</td>
<td>When participants are still exploring the core concepts of who they are. Also, challenging the stereotypes, and other introjections of what others believe that they should be.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wondering</td>
<td>The ability to maintain curiosity and inquisitiveness about notions of self-and/or other people, systems, and philosophies.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacrifice</td>
<td>When something is taken away because of their marginalized identities (e.g., race, sex, ethnicity, etc.) This can be seen as both negative and positive. For example, getting a new job where someone works more hours with less pay than all the other employees. In this</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
example getting a job is positive but came with sacrifices unseen before beginning the position.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Intersectionality</strong> (Crenshaw, 1988; Shabot &amp; Landry, 2018)</th>
<th>Coined by Crenshaw (1991) this term will used to understand the consciousness (or lack thereof) about how their identities intersect and impact who they are.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Multiple Jeopardy</strong> (Guy-Sheftall, 1995; King, 1988)</td>
<td>Similar to intersectionality, multiply jeopardy coined by King (1988) will be used to identify the oppression and suppression that happens to Black women because of their multiple marginalized identities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Awareness to Reflexivity</strong> (Hesse-Biber, 2007, 2012)</td>
<td>Being aware of how people react to you and how you engage and reflect with yourself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unaware</strong> (Beauvoir, 1989)</td>
<td>Not being aware of how people react to you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Insider-outsider</strong> (Lorde, 1984; Watts, 2006)</td>
<td>The juxtaposition of feeling within a group and outside of it. For example, Lorde (1984) talks about being Black and brings critiques to the culture from personal experience of being a Black woman (insider-outsider).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exhausted/ Tired</strong> (Guy-Sheftall, 1995; King, 1988; hooks, 1952; Lorde, 1984)</td>
<td>The feeling related to being fatigued about situations related to marginalization (e.g., going to school where white people repeatedly say your name incorrectly, or continued police brutality towards Black individuals).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Unequal/ Inequality** (Guy-Sheftall, 1995; Doucet & Mauthner, 2007; King, 1988) | Experiences of feeling unequal or under minded because of a marginalized identity (e.g., always being
hooks, 1952; Lorde, 1984) called upon last in a majority white classroom.

**Being Afro-Caribbean in the Classroom** (Guy-Sheftall, 1995; Reddock, 2007)
Experiences in the classroom that participants explain are linked to their race and/or ethnicity (e.g., students asking a Bahamian international student about her schooling in Jamaica, after explaining that she went to school in the Bahamas).

**Identity-in-difference** (Fielding & Olkowski, 2017)
This concept is understood when an individual sees personal individuality within their race. This is the value of understanding racial “difference and sameness” (p. 313) simultaneously. For instance, this may be explored when participants conceptualize their personal ethnicity within the Black race. A participant may find solace knowing their differences in ethnicity, as well as knowing that they are still a part of a larger community of Black people.

**Femininity** (Fielding & Olkowski, 2017)
This code will be ascribed when participants talk about their own understanding, experiences, feelings, and conceptualizations of womanhood.

**Using Space and Taking Space** (Guy-Sheftall, 1995; hooks, 1952)
How they move (e.g., talk, express themselves, etc.) in difference spaces (e.g., school, home, with friends, etc.). Also, can be linked to cultural traditions of how they were raised to use/take up space (e.g., the patriarchal position that
| **Community** (Guy-Sheftall, 1995; hooks, 1952; Lorde, 1984) | **Sisterhood** (Guy-Sheftall, 1995; hooks, 1952) | **Defending Character/Personhood** (Guy-Sheftall, 1995; Lorde, 1984) | **Defending Community** (Crenshaw, 1988; Guy-Sheftall, 1995; hooks, 1952; Lorde, 1984) | **Women in Temporality** (Burke, 2018) | **Power Dynamics in Research** (Doucet & Mauthner, 2007; Eddles-Hirsch, 2015; Fielding & Olkowski, | |
|---------|---------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|
| women need to be meek, gentle, etc.). | People that allow participants to feel comfort and maintain comradery. May include mentors, friends, relatives, etc. | Specifically, other women that allow participants to feel comfort and maintain comradery. May include mentors, friends, relatives, etc. | Moments where participants had to defend their actions because of stereotypes or other forms of prejudice and discrimination (e.g., a black woman exemplifying that she is not being aggressive when confrontation happens). | Moments where participants feel like they need to defend their community because of stereotypes or other forms of prejudice and discrimination (e.g., when people express false narratives/stereotypes such as, “all Black people are lazy.”) | This code is specific to researcher and participant dynamics about how power is presented within the research. For example, |
| | | | | | | |
| **Community** (Guy-Sheftall, 1995; hooks, 1952; Lorde, 1984) | **Sisterhood** (Guy-Sheftall, 1995; hooks, 1952) | **Defending Character/Personhood** (Guy-Sheftall, 1995; Lorde, 1984) | **Defending Community** (Crenshaw, 1988; Guy-Sheftall, 1995; hooks, 1952; Lorde, 1984) | **Women in Temporality** (Burke, 2018) | **Power Dynamics in Research** (Doucet & Mauthner, 2007; Eddles-Hirsch, 2015; Fielding & Olkowski, | |
| | | | | | | |
| 2017; Hesse-Biber, 2007, 2012; Shabot & Landry, 2018) | whether the participants ask for permission to speak, or requesting information after the study. |   |
References


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EDUCATION

Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York
Ph.D. in Counseling and Counselor Education (CACREP-Accredited), Doctoral Candidate

Certificate in Advanced Study (CAS) in Women and Gender Studies, Degree Issued: May 2019

Rider University, Lawrenceville, New Jersey
Master of Arts in Clinical Mental Health Counseling (CACREP-Accredited), December 2015
Bachelor of Science: May 2013
Major: Behavioral Neuroscience  Minor: Psychology

PUBLICATIONS

Refereed Journal


Book Contributions


Selected Non-Refereed Publications


Manuscripts in Progress/ Under Review


GRANTS AND FELLOWSHIPS

Syracuse University – Counseling and Human Services
Hackney/ Bernard Professional Development Fund
- Awarded $400 to attend a professional conference that enhances student professional development.

Syracuse University- School of Education
School of Education Graduate Student Council Travel Grant
- Awarded $150 to attend a professional conference that enhances student professional development.

National Board of Certified Counselors (NBCC)
NBCC Doctoral Minority Fellowship 2018
- Awarded $20,000 to fellows committed to providing mental health and/or substance abuse and addictions counseling services to underserved minority populations through direct practice or the training of direct practitioners.

Syracuse University- School of Education
Himan Brown Trust Fellowship
- Awarded $5,300 to enhance academic knowledge and global experiences through studying abroad in Paris, France.

PROFESSIONAL AND INVITED PRESENTATIONS


Gelin, S., Jackson, T., & Buchanan, Y. (November, 2020). Panel Discussion about multiculturalism and creative arts -Rewriting history (Art Exhibition by Fabiola Jean-Louis) (Invited Panel Discussion), Point of Contact Art Gallery – Syracuse University (Online Event).


Gelin, S. & Quayson, A (September, 2020). Using hip-hop feminism in supervising master’s counseling students [Not able to attend]. Education Session at Association for Creativity in Counseling (ACC), Virtual Conference.
Gelin, S. (October, 2019). Feminist pedagogy: Exploring the lack of feminist thought in counselor education. Education Session at Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES), Seattle, WA.

Gelin, S. (May, 2019). Black, african-american, what’s the difference?: An exploration about self-identity and afro-caribbean college students. Poster Session at NBCC Foundation Bridging the Gap Symposium: Eliminating Mental Health Disparities, Atlanta, GA.

Gelin, S. (March, 2019). Narratives of afro-caribbean college students and self-identity development. Education Session at the American Counseling Association (ACA), New Orleans, LA.


Gelin, S. (February, 2018). Uncovering narratives from minority students in group counseling courses. Roundtable at Association for Specialist in Group Work Conference (ASGW), Savannah, GE.

Gelin, S., Buser, J., Buser, T., Goodrich, K., & Luke, M. (February, 2018). Ethical considerations for mindfulness practice in group work. Poster Session at Association for Specialist in Group Work Conference (ASGW), Savannah, GA.


Gelin, S. (June, 2017). Black, african-american, what’s the difference?: An exploration about self-identity and afro-caribbean college students. Education Session at Association for Humanistic Counseling (AHC), Syracuse, NY.


COUNSELING LEADERSHIP
Counselors for Social Justice (Syracuse University)- Vice President & Founding Chapter Member (2017 – 2018)
Emerging Leader Fellowship Program 2017 (Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) Fall 2017
Chi Sigma Iota (Rider University) – Treasurer 4/2014 – 4/2016

PROFESSIONAL SERVICE / DEVELOPMENT
Syracuse University– Creating Change LGBTQ Conference Committee Reader (2019)
Syracuse University– Surviving the Silence: Forum on Sexual Assault and Relationship Violence Committee (2019)
Syracuse University– School of Education Steering Committee (2017– 2019)
Syracuse University– School of Education Graduate Student Representative (2016 – 2017)
Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) Research Grant Award Committee (2017)
Syracuse University– Office of Multicultural Affairs – Cultural Centers Welcome Committee (2017)