Black College Students' Hardship in Post-Secondary Education

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ABSTRACT

This study is designed to pinpoint the hardships Black students endure and why these students are treated differently. Some of the barriers related to college access and college environmental settings (which I label "internal issues") that have affected Black college students include the cost of higher education, which that can lead to them dropping out due to being unable to afford their education, a lack of spaces of belonging, and difficulty finding helpful mentors for guidance. These internal issues are compounded by challenged Black students often face outside college contexts (labeled "external issues"), including raising dependents, a lack of community or family resources, and experiences of racism. Taken together, internal and external issues interact to impact Black college students' experiences and outcomes in post-secondary education.

INTRODUCTION

Black students in the United States must deal with several unnecessary barriers created by policies and ideologies that systematically exclude them from post-secondary educational success. When Black individuals encounter a system that historically has not accounted for them or treat them as equal, it can create hardships that affect their journeys in post-secondary education. Some of the misfortune Black college students encounter include racism, biases from instructors, and negative stigma attached to them due to their skin color. It can also be challenging for Black college students to feel connected to a particular institution. One of the points mentioned by Broom (2018) is academic and social isolation. Broom (2018) delineates that when Black college students do not feel connected to the college, they will isolate themselves. This can cause them not to

be engaged and even affect their coursework. Such barriers have been longstanding over time in the U.S. across various types of public and private institutions, regardless of what policies universities have tried to change to adapt to Black students. Unfortunately, Black students continue to be judged for the color of their skin in ways that negatively impact their educational experiences and outcomes. It is vital that educational college institutions acknowledge and work to address barriers that can affect these students, so they are in a better position to be successful.

Segregation continues to be a widespread de facto reality for Black people in the U.S., especially in education. According to Hakkola (2019), there remains a lack of recruitment efforts for students from segregated Black communities by post-secondary educational institutions. The recruitment process is used by colleges to select who is given opportunities to attend their institutions. Yet, past and present practices demonstrate that Black people continue to be systematically rejected by dominant white colleges through a dearth of recruitment. Beasley (2021) further proposes that social engagement can help Black college students flourish in college. Black college students' interactions with staff, faculty, and other students can positively impact their education and experience at their institutions. However, a lack of Black representation in university settings, combined with ongoing discriminatory behavior persists today. Black students often report that they treated as if they are dangerous to society and should be feared, or as if they are less capable or less worthy than non-Black students (Beasley 2021). This creates unnecessary barriers for Black students to access, belong, and be successful in post-secondary education.

One of the solutions to emerge from longstanding Black marginalization in higher education was the creation of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). HBCUs were created so Black students could have a safe environment to learn and obtain an education without the barriers they would face attending a dominant white institution. The first HBCU created was the Cheyney University of Pennsylvania, established in 1837. Following this great school, a chain of HBCUs emerged to provide a space for Black students to learn in an environment that tailored

to their needs and best interest. Unfortunately, most Black students cannot afford to travel and pay the tuition necessary to gain the HBCU experience, leaving most Black students to navigate the public and private colleges most financially and geographically accessible to them.

Unfortunately, not much has changed for Black students' experiences in post-secondary education. Though Black students may be accepted at higher rates than the past, their skin color and unique experiences living in the U.S. can make it harder for them to feel part of the school compared to non-Black counterparts. A pervasive marginalization and associated of subjective belonging have long term consequences for Black students throughout their journeys in college and after graduation. Previous researchers have found similar themes that Black students still encounter at their institutions. The college educational system still has a long way to go to become diverse and be a place for Black students to feel accepted and trusted.

The purpose of this research is to document the hardships that Black students in the United States face when navigating higher education. To accomplish this, I conducted 20 semi-structured qualitative electronic interviews with former and current college students from different generational cohorts and states who self-identify as Black or African American. My findings suggest that, while their experiences can and do vary, Black students generally continue to face a set of hardships that systematically marginalize them from a positive educational experience in colleges and universities in the U.S. These negative experiences span time and space in ways that threaten to continue to affect Black educational outcomes at the individual and intergenerational levels.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Poverty/Class/Income

One of the many challenges Black college students' often face is growing up in impoverished communities with limited educational resources. These communities can cause significant stress to the student due to income availability and how they are perceived. In these communities' parents must work two jobs to support their families and hustle to have enough funds to put food

on the table, which can limit their availability to assist young students with educational needs. Economic issues also distract Black students from their academics and affect their ability to apply and attend universities if they must work to support or assist their families. Heimans and Singh (2019) argue that individuals who need food security, health security like access to clean water and food, and or electricity might face decreased chances of success.

K-12 schools in poverty-stricken communities typically do not have the resources to prepare Black students properly for college (Simon and Steele 2020). These schools are mostly in impoverished communities where there is often violence, minimal resources for families, and instructors who may feel underpaid and treat these students differently. There are usually metal detectors to ensure students are not bringing in weapons, with Black students being the prime suspects (Bell 2015). Black students can also be victims of bullying owing to skin color or if they cannot afford the most popular clothing and wearing off brands. If any Black college students have had these negative experiences described above, how are they supposed to feel they belong at a UC or Cal State institution?

Family structure was demonstrated by Simon and Steele (2020) as a factor in financial hardship, especially if they come from a single-family outcome. Mammen and Woodford (2010) describe low-income mothers' experience striving to be successful in post-secondary education. In many cases, these families are single parents and mothers who are left to fend for themselves due to the father being in the criminal justice system, often because they were compelled to break society's norms to make a living for his family. How can a Black mother who is a college student with children attend school and be successful when she has external responsibilities? There is a lack of acknowledgement and support for these types of students, and they can struggle in college as a result.

Poverty can also bring about problems in the household for Black college students. In their study, Brown et al. (2015) demonstrated that family issues can cause tremendous psychological and physical effects on the children involved. One of the issues mentioned by Brown et al. (2015) shows that when a

family is not financially stable, it can cause several issues, including domestic violence. How is a Black college student supposed to succeed in post-secondary education when they are exposed to hostile environments, often due to economic pressures, at home? These actions can harm the students regardless of whether they witness the hostile environment directly or indirectly. When Black college students are trying to escape such a hostile environment, the last thing they need is to enter a college that treats them like they don't belong or create another set of barriers they must endure.

The community Black students are raised in affects their financial status, resource access, and choices. Bourke et al. (2019) focus on situational, institutional, and dispositional barriers that affect low-income individuals pursuing their education. The *situational barrier* is defined as an individual's circumstances. *The institutional barrier* is defined as how to apply for school and funding. Finally, the dispositional barrier is the psychological factor in the equation. The *dispositional barriers* Black students' experiences that can affect their mindset in continuing their educational journey. According to Bourke et al. (2019) it is essential to factor in those three variants together when dissecting the access and success rates of Black people from poverty-stricken communities.

In addition to the negative situational and institutional barriers Black students from poor communities' face, they often hear the message that they cannot be successful. Black college students often report that they are seen as a threat as to society, as a stereotype persists that Black people – especially those who live in poverty-- are thugs or criminals They may also be seen as a welfare case, or that they are not as bright as the other kids. Sometimes Black students are the object of pity. Rather than providing solidarity and meaningful support, people feel sorry for these poor Black college students. These kinds of experiences can affect Black students' mindset and even lead them to stop pursuing their education and instead focus on the external responsibility of providing for their families.

Detachment/Marginalization/Mental Health

Feelings of detachment start forming when society rejects an individual due to its rules and standards. Heimans and Singh (2019) mention that Black college students can feel detached from society as they are marginalized in the institutions around them. This experience of marginalization and detachment can cause students not to seek post-secondary education. When Black students make it into college, they continue to face difficulties due to the stigma attached to their communities. They often realize that their culture is not welcome or accepted, which reinforces feelings of marginalization and promotes severe detachment from the college. When individuals begin feeling this way, one of two things can occur. They might transform and try to be the person society wants them to be. In this case, they might try to abandon all their cultural beliefs and practices to no longer be outsiders. Conversely, they may stay to themselves and disappear in the background. Both outcomes are harmful.

Black students often experience racism and discrimination in post-secondary educational institutions even though it can and often does can start sooner. Black students are reportedly more likely to be investigated and punished than any other category of students on campus due to negative stereotypes if they are suspected of any violation on campus (Scott and Allen 2020). In their study, Allen et al. (2018) describe that some individuals do not have the proper relationship with the staff to gain information necessary to help them navigate higher education due to bias and stereotyped treatment. Allen and Jacques (2020) imply that these interactions harm Black students' educational achievement. Black college students may encounter rough interactions from the first day they enter their institutions. They feel they must walk on eggshells most of the time because they do not want to be perceived in a negative way.

If we analyze the college environment, Harris and Linder (2018) describe what a typical person of color would experience in educational institutions. One of the examples uses in their study come from Amy, a Black female student. Harris and Linder (2018:149) quoted Amy saying, "the classroom is a constant struggle. Sometimes you really wish that you could just put down your arms and not fight as much, but it does not always go that

way. And then also like I am marginalized in so many areas that it is hard sometimes to keep fighting." When Black college students must endure this kind of treatment of always having to fight to fit in and accept that can cause detachment and fatigue among Black college students. Harris and Linder (2018:150) delineate that, "David perceived that white student, who did not have to go through life "seeing" or "getting" race, invalidated his views in the classroom simply because they were not their own views or experiences." When Black college students try to educate them on their cultures and backgrounds, it is shrugged off or deemed invalid.

   Black students deal with stigmatizing biases in higher education that derive from stereotypical representations prevalent in the media that link Blackness with threat. This can have a severe impact on their mental health, impacting educational success. Barr and Neville (2014) explore mental health and racial ideology in post-secondary education, finding that the educational system can generate mental health problems for Black students if the environment is hostile or the student has encountered racism or discrimination. This can prohibit Black college students from being engaged if the environment is causing them not to focus and lead to feelings of marginalization. When Black students feel isolated, as described by Harris and Linder (2018), they are also more likely to leave the educational system. They may also carry trauma due to the experiences that were rendered while in college, which can follow them outside of college institutions. Bringing in old stereotypes and dehumanizing Black college students by treating them harshly or making them feel detached thus only causes unnecessary problems for both the student and the college.

   This research on Black student belonging suggests that college campuses should be an environment in which Black college students can confidently enter and connect. Space is a significant aspect of this environment and is key to Black college students' success. Chapman-Hillman, Collette, and Beasley (2017) describe that when Black students can have a space they identify with, it can give them a sense of belonging and attachment. It allows them to see and connect to other Black students and can provide a support group during their time at the institution. It also gives them confidence that they can be a

success. Giving space does not mean providing Black college students with an area with little to no resources, but rather it means that their unique needs should be satisfied. Black college student space means having faculty and staff supporting them in designated spaces and throughout institutions of higher education. These spaces are too often unavailable on college campuses, to the detriment of Black student belonging and success.

According to Beasley (2021:241), "Black students attending historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) report higher levels of engagement compared to their same-race peers at PWIs." Black students are given more support at HBCUs, which encourages attachment to the institutions, peers, and academics. In non-HBCU colleges, Chapman-Hillman, Collette, and Beasley (2017) find that having BSC (Black Studies Courses) assists Black students with developing their identity and attachment to the institutions as they receive their education. Pan-African Studies is an excellent example of BSC because it offers courses to help Black college students identify their roots. Pan-African Studies explains diverse Black experiences, views Black history beyond slavery, differentiates between African and Black American History, and shows why Black people are essential in society. Black students are more able to recognize racial barriers and can use them as motivation to succeed rather than reasons to disengage (Chapman-Hillman, Collette, and Beasley's 2017). Every campus should have Black Studies and Pan African Studies courses available for Black and non-Black students to learn more about Black cultures. Black students deserve to feel welcome and be able to compete and be successful at their colleges.

METHODS

Qualitative and semi-structured interviews were conducted with twenty participants using the Zoom platform. I used two sampling strategies to attain the data I listed above. First, I utilized the purposive sampling method because I was looking for participants who fit the criteria, I have former and current Black college students. Using the purposive sampling granted me access to the participants needed to gain the data needed to provide a reasonable and formal study. The second sampling strategy method I implemented was convenience sampling. I located the

individuals using my personal and professional networks. Convenience sampling allowed me to select participants who are close to me, which allowed for rich, conversational interviews.

The participants of this study chose the date and time the discussions took place. The earliest was around 10 am, and the latest was around 5 pm. The length of the interviews ranged from 17 minutes to an hour and five minutes, with an average of 40 minutes each. The topics discussed their experiences as Black students attending either a community college or a university. I protected their rights by having them sign a consent form stating the rationale of the interviews and their rights as a participant in this study. I also have their transcript and audio data secured in a OneDrive account with a password that is needed to access the data. Only my Chair and I have access to the participant's information. I used pseudonyms in my reporting to protect the identities of my participants throughout the report.

I analyzed the data by using thematic coding in the Qualitative Data Analysis web-based program, Dedoose. I uploaded the transcripts and inductively coded on themes related to Black students' experiences as they navigated college. This included environmental factors outside the educational institution and factors within higher educational systems. I drew from language used by the participants when developing my thematic codes to stay as true to their perspectives as possible.

My position on the data is personal since I have experienced racism and discrimination in post-secondary education. I understand and can relate to the participants' experience. Because I can relate to them, it makes the interviews richer and more profound since the participants feel they are talking to someone who knows the struggle of what they have experienced. It also allowed them to be more comfortable and open in the interviews. The rationale behind this study was based on my experience as a current Black college student at a post-secondary institution college; the obstacle we must take is unique.

The limitation of this study is that I am not using quantitative methods, so my data is strictly based only on the participant experiences. My sample was a convenience sampling strategy based on 20 participants and thus cannot be generalized to the general population. Time constrictions inhibited the

collection of a bigger, more generalizable sample that includes statistics that confidently reflect the broader population of Black colleges across time in the U.S. Nonetheless, the findings are broadly consistent with previous research on Black students' experiences and outcomes in the U.S. indicating a high level of external reliability.

I chose participants I know who fit the criteria to be part of the project. I conducted phone banking to inform them about the project I am analyzing. I let them know what the interview is about and how they will contribute to the study. I read to them their rights as a participant in the study so they will have the proper knowledge going forward with the interview. I also notified them of the importance of the interview and how it affects Black college students today. My relationship with these individuals made it an easier transition to convince them to participate since I am not a stranger but a friend, former classmate, or co-worker.

FINDINGS

The study findings stated several factors. I will break down these findings by themes and use the twenty participants' narratives as evidence. Some of the findings that will be discussed are financial issues, racisms, and bias. Every participant had experienced racism and bias in their institutions. Also, students with dependents have had extra barriers versus those who have no children. Homelessness had been experienced by a few participants in their educational journey. Overall, the study findings describe Black college students' hardships by analyzing them as internal to the institutional landscape of higher education or external to it (i.e., community, family, societal factors).

Internal Hardships

Internal hardships are experiences of hardships that Black college students have within their colleges. Some of the findings that were discovered in this area were financial barriers due to not having enough income, which can affect their education. The lack of space for Black college students to identify with or make a connection within their institutions was also discussed by interviewees. While mentorships were identified as a hardship due to Black college students' difficulties in developing meaningful

and beneficial relationships at their educational institution, they were a beneficial factor when mentorship was accessible, attentive, and respectful.

Financial Barriers

Financial barriers were one of the questions asked and many Black college students identify them as a hardship. Since most of my participants come from the lower class, a few from the middle class, and none from the upper class; affording college is expensive, depending on the school you attend. Since many Black college students come from lower class communities, they can run into financial issues. Jerry stated, He had to work two jobs to pay his tuition, and it affected his schoolwork, so he had to quit one to raise his grades. Some Black college students can't find a job on campus, so they must go off campus, which makes it more challenging since work-study is based on your school schedule. An off-the-campus job typically does not consider school schedules and is based on the company needs and not the students. Mark stated, "But when I transferred, I was working off campus and working more hours; however, my coursework was not up to par." Finding work to pay for books and tuition is challenging; financial aid issues have also come up. Susan stated her financial aid would be delayed, and there was no accountability in the office. She would be rushed off, and it cost her an extra semester to graduate because she had to drop a class, she was supposed to take due to insufficient funds. Jae and Jack both had to drop out of school for a semester to get the funds to take courses through focusing on work. Resources need to be shared with every student, and when Black college students do not have access to or lack knowledge of these resources, further assistance should be provided so they will have the proper support in their educational journeys.

Mentorship

When Black students enter a college, traditionally they are to be welcomed, and supposed to feel accepted by their peers, administrations, staff, and faculty. Unfortunately, that does not happen frequently, and most of the Black college students I interviewed stated that mentors were their most prominent

supporters in post-secondary education due to a lack of relationships developed due to negative biases and stereotypes. Mentorships heavily impacted Sarah, and they helped her graduate from her institutions. One of the quotes she stated was, "I had a mentor who was a counselor who was not assigned to me; however, she would go out of her way to assist me in my goals and keep me encouraged when I wanted to leave college." Her second and most important comment about her mentor was, "She made me feel like I belong at the college and guided me to resources that help me succeed and never judge me or look at me differently because I was Black." Showing interest in Black college students' educations can positively impact their educational journey. Mentors are significant to Black students in post-secondary education because they need that prep talk and an extra push to make it through their prospective programs.

These mentors also help them deal with encounters or issues they may face as Black college students. James stated, "I still remember [name of camp counselor] and other counselors that I forgot to name, but I'll never forget their faces, but they were like our mentors, our coaches, our supporters, and they love us." His statements describe what every Black college student needs to feel when they enter any institution, regardless of whether it is an HBCU. Every Black college student needs that community and love from their institutions. The few Black college students who did not experience this kind of mentorship in their institutions had to go outside the college to find someone to help them succeed, like Justin, who had his parents to lean on for that mentorship and guidance, or other Black college students who had friends external to college to lean on to deal with some of the issues they would face in college.

Lack of Space

All the participants felt that there was a lack of space with which they could identify. They had to find an area or room to get a sense of belonging. Stacy, Jack, and Fred were all part of a Black Student Union club where they found unity and a support group to lean on during their post-secondary education. Jack stated, "Without BSU, I wouldn't have graduated because I needed that support from my people." When I asked my follow-up question

about whether he felt supported by other peers and faculty that did not look like him, he said no. His support strictly came from the advisor of the club and BSU.

Stacy liked the group because it gave her space. She stated, "I would get stares like I do not belong here." However, BSU made her feel welcome. Space is important to Black college students who need that to feel welcome. The other 17 participants who were not in the BSU had difficulty identifying a space and had encounters with staff and faculty that made them uncomfortable. Mariah stated, "I had a hard time finding resources, and when I would ask someone, they would just brush me off or have an attitude." George stated, "Black staff was more helpful than non-Black staff and friendlier." Campuses with a space for Black college students allow them to see themselves as more belonging and able to receive assistance to avoid interactions that can lead to detachment. If Black college students do not have an area they can identify with, their likelihood of dealing with hardship increases. All seventeen participants without the BSU had issues connecting to their college due to a lack of space.

External Hardships

External hardship deals with anything outside of college. Several issues can affect Black college students' educational journey. Some of the findings are external issues such as Black students who have children or dependents they must care for, because not all students come straight from high school. Family structure and culture was identified as a hardship because many of the participants experienced single parent household. Housing was an issue for a few participants, and it highlighted that Black college students also go through housing hardship. Internal and external racism and bias are also described below in the findings because all participants experience this inside and outside of the college.

Black College Students with Dependents

There have been times when a few of my participants had to leave college to care for family members. Five of the female participants I interviewed have children. Jasmine's story was very compelling. She stated, "Once I became a mom, I had to neglect

my education in preference for my daughter. So, it wasn't that I did not want to be in school; I had to be home to be a mom." There was no support for dependent students at her college, so she dropped out. The childcare services at her college were too expensive. Henry stated he had to drop out to take off his daughters; however, in his case, he was able to return shortly afterward. These are just a few examples of participants who had external responsibility, and their college needed tools and access to resources to assist them in their situation. Which role these parents adopt plays a critical part in their education because they may have to choose which one is more important; being a full-time parent or a full-time student. Institutions need more resources for parents because Black college students are no longer just 17 or 18 years old. The age demographic is changing from younger to more senior, and the older students and even the younger students have children, and that needs to be considered when serving Black college students.

Housing

Housing was identified as a hardship among my interviewees. If students do not have stable housing, that will affect their grades, basic needs, and other issues caused by homelessness. I had five participants who experienced homelessness during their time in college. Joe stated, "I had to move out of a family member's house because they thought I had money since I was attending college. When I told them no, I do not have all this funding, I was kicked out and stayed in my car for six months while going to school." Housing is critical for Black college students to be able to focus. When I asked these participants did the institution help them in their situations, they said they were just given a piece of paper and rushed out of the office. That is why Meeka stated, "Not just having stability, but just personally to feeling like you're going, you're going through this process by yourself." Housing is an issue for Black college students, especially those with dependents, and there should be resources for these students and support so they can complete their degrees and meet their basic needs requirements.

Family Structure and Culture

Black college students' background is crucial to their success because most low-impoverished communities do not promote post-secondary education college-going. Most of these communities define success as completing high school and obtaining some employment to take care of yourself and your loved ones. I asked participants if post-secondary education was promoted in their households. Below are some of the responses and findings.

Eight out of twenty participants had a two-parent household. Five out of the eight participants experienced being in a single parent household due to divorce or separation. Out of twenty participants, only four had parents or siblings who achieved post-secondary success, including an associate or bachelor's degree. Helen had two members in her family with post-secondary degrees. Helen stated, "Having parents who had a master's degrees encourage me to seek my education and show me I can be successful at that level." This statistic is very alarming because most of my participants needed someone to look to when it came to navigating colleges. Most participants had to witness their parents work two jobs and even work themselves to support their parents.

For the four participants who had a relative who had post-secondary education success, it encouraged them to be successful in college. It enables them and many others to attend college and overcome barriers and the other participants. One of the participants, Marquise, stated it was a positive experience for him to see family members being successful, "We hold secondary degrees, and my brother and sister both have master's degrees." Kenneth stated his mother used to tell him he had to go to college. Participants who had previously successful parents typically attended college and finished their degrees.

For those I interviewed who did not have any siblings or parents who achieved a degree in post-secondary education, I am excited to report their parents encouraged them. Some of these participants are the first generation in their families because they took that first step in pursuing their education. Shirley's mom was a single parent who told her to attend college and get a formal education. Jackie said her mom told her to "be the first to graduate

in the family and set the standard." Because of those encouraging words, Jackie is no longer the only family graduate with a bachelor's degree. Her brother also has one, and they are grooming their nephews and cousin to follow suites. Vicky stated that she wanted to attend college to experience a different community.

Overall, family culture does impact Black college students' success in post-secondary due to the influence inside the home and how education is viewed. It can affect what barrier these Black college students will face and how they will respond. Family culture also dictates how they will see the world and others.

Many Black communities are not faring well since most of the participant's family members have not finished their degrees or have not attempted post-secondary education. The sixteen participants who graduated from college and had no one with previous experience were motivated by the lack of success and were determined to break that barrier. It demonstrates that the educational systems need to get Black people more involved in post-secondary education starting at an early age because not everyone is as fortunate as these participants who encourage education in their household.

External And Internal Hardships Related to Bias and Racism

Unfortunately, racism and bias exist in the educational system. For Black college students this experience is not new. Eighteen out of twenty participants in this study reported experiencing racism or prejudices from staff, faculty, and peers. Brianna shared a story with me that she was going by a sorority table and asked how she joined. The non-Black group told her they were full. When she was walking away, she heard them say, "why Black girls wanted to join us. They need to stay in their lane." There was another incident where a white athlete assaulted her, and because of his status, she did not report it because she felt no one would believe her. When I asked why she did not want to tell anyone, she just stated, "I don't trust the system here because a friend of hers who is white experienced the same thing and was denied justice. I am Black, so what chances do I have?" Because

of this terrible experience after she graduated, she refuses to step foot on the campus and wishes she had just attended an HBCU.

Leslie shared that on her campus, she was called a "Nigga," and she did not belong there. Raymond shared that when he heard about his universities, he encountered the KKK. He stated that they call him a Nigga and threaten his life. When he told the administration, they did not act upon it immediately until he had it printed in the school newspaper. There are many incidents that occurred on college campuses that are not reported due to Black college students' distrust within the college system. They do not believe either the perpetrator or the college will take their complaint seriously.

The last two examples delineate heavy biases when Black college students deal with staff or faculty, starting with Johnny. Johnny's experiences with instructors could have been better in his institutions. He stated a teacher was grading bias because he was Black. When I asked a follow-up about why, he just said the teacher would never talk to him like he does the other students. When Johnny comes by during office hours, he would never be there or says he is busy. His tone with Johnny was like he was afraid of him. He had to retake the course because he felt he would not pass with how the teacher was acting toward him. Finally, my last example is with Angela, who detailed how she walked into the financial aid office and stated she had an issue with her financial aid status. The elderly white lady told her, "You people always have these issues" smartly. Angela asked what she meant by "you people," so she pointed to the room that was dominated by Black. A Black employee stood there looking shocked, so he helps instead.

Overall, Black college students report dealing with these issues daily from entering college until leaving. Biases and racism can be untaught by having mandatory diversity training and having employees who understand the demographic they are working with, especially instructors. Those three Black students' stories describe an insight into what they must endure in the UC and CSU system.

DISCUSSION

Overall, Black college students have experienced internal and external hardships affecting their educational journey. The findings display that financial hardship was a significant problem for Black college students. Heimans and Sing (2019) found basic needs were an issue and this study also confirms this as a factor as most of the participants experienced some basic need insecurity as an external factor. Ten of the participants had to gain employment to support their families. The primary rationale behind this is that fifteen participants had experienced the single parent family structure, with only one being a single father.

The income in these families has created external barriers for Black college students because they must work and depend on a scholarship or financial aid. When these students have external issues, it can lead to internal economic problems. A few participants had to drop out because they needed help to keep up with their tuition. There are cases where if a Black college student must depend on financial aid and employment, they will not be a hundred percent focused on their academics if they must work and do schoolwork. Some participants found that quite challenging to do and had a challenging time handling both. One of the concerns from these interviews is that colleges need to figure out how to support Black college students who have financial issues coming into their colleges. Are there enough resources or scholarships offered for them to participate in? Do the scholarships, if any are offered, help them in their educational journey? These concerns and issues can and will affect Black college students attending or intending to attend any UC or CSU institutions.

Black students with dependents face an additional layer to external hardship. The barriers that single mothers face is twice as problematic compared to someone who does not have children. Their external responsibility will affect their educational responsibility if they do not have a support system. Mammen and Woodford (2010) describe single mothers with children. The most challenging road to success is dealing with role conflict. Will they be full-time students and focus on their studies or be full mothers and put all their energy into raising their children? Being a mother or father is a job that does not turn off because you have an assignment due. Also, they are Black college students, who are

often labeled and treated as irresponsible and looked down upon. There is a lack of support for Black college students with dependents due to the culture colleges are used to. When these types of students are entering college, then additional resources are needed to assist them. When a Black college student with a dependent cannot get the proper help due to the college not having the necessary resources for them to be successful, that creates an additional barrier for that student. It will become an internal issue due to a lack of support from their institutions.

College culture should always try to avoid racism, and bias; however, it still occurs and heavily impacts Black college students' educational journeys. The old ideology still exist that Black individuals are to be feared, which triggers certain behaviors from non-Black peers like clutching their purse and becoming suspicious when they see a lot of Black students around, assuming Black students are uneducated due to the community they come from and the class they are associated with. Allen et al. (2018) describes that due to racism and bias, they cannot form the relationships needed.

Furthermore, this can cause serious mental health issues if Black college students endure constant discriminatory treatment constantly. Barr and Neville (2014) delineate that when Black college students encounter hostile situations, frequently, it can cause them to perceive other non-Black individuals as unapproachable due to these experiences. It may cause them to react positively or negatively depending on the situation. There is a folktale saying, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me" – however, words hurt, especially if they are racially or biased motivated. It can cause Black college students to be mentally broken down and unable to focus academically.

Colleges need to implement mandatory diversity training to prepare their staff better when dealing with Black college students and to be aware of triggers that can cause mental issues. The training should be limited to staff and students. They come from various parts of the world, and for most students, it is their first time dealing with another ethnicity in this environment. Training is critical for everyone, especially in today's critical state where Black people's image is painted as violent when they are

just trying to find a path to have the same opportunities for success as anyone else.

Black college students want to feel they belong to their institutions. They want to think that they are on a non-judgmental campus where they can be themselves and be accepted for who they are. Unfortunately, that is not happening, and it goes deeper than having money, what class students are in, or even how they are approached by staff, faculty, teacher, and their peers. The primary problem at colleges resides internal to institutions of higher education themselves. When colleges decide to prioritize Black college students, the detachment they are faced with constantly will change. This will in turn improve mental health, which is likely to positively affect students' educational experiences and outcomes.

This research suggests several steps that colleges can takes to better integrate Black students into a sense of communal belonging. They should have a dedicated space for Black college students and not just give them an empty room. A more vigorous effort in placing resources in their area would be a significant improvement and having someone there to answer questions and address their concerns. Hillman and Beasley's (2017) research states that having a space for Black college students can increase their chances. The colleges must make a more substantial effort to connect them to the community. Training is critical for everyone, especially in today's critical state where Black people's image is painted as violent when they are just trying to find a path to have the same opportunities for success as anyone else. Also, I recommend that universities dedicate mentors to guide Black students, especially in a heavily Hispanic or white college, since the percentage of Black students at any college that is not an HBCU is generally remarkably low.

Many of my participants have been in classes where they are the only Black student. The ratio of seeing another Black student decreases when a Black college student attends a non-HBCU institutions, so any non-Black traditional colleges need to make a better effort in making Black college students connected to their colleges, since there is only a small percentage of them in attendance at these colleges. The recruiting strategy needs to be reviewed due to the percentage of Black people in post-secondary

education. inferior quality educations, and the resource for college is rarely promoted to our Black generations. These Black college students want a chance to improve their lives, and these stereotypes and biases must stop starting from administration to their peers.

CONCLUSION

Overall, Black College students are a unique population and need specific resources to succeed in post-secondary education. The study suggests that more funding opportunities for them are necessary, so they do not have to leave school because of financial rationale. Also, connecting them to mentors right away will assist Black college students to not feel detachment from the school. They will have someone who can relate to them and guide them. Having resources for Black college students who have children is crucial. We have grown-ups and older people who are attending college now. The culture of having all resources dedicated to younger college students must change significantly for those with dependents so they can continue their education without having to deal with role conflicts.

Increasing diversity training and adding students to that training would be extremely helpful, so all students know how to deal with diverse cultures. White colleges especially need to focus on staff, who must remember that thousands of students come to institutions from diverse backgrounds and perspectives. Cultures will clash, and conflict will arrive shortly after, unless students know how to deal with various kinds of people, especially Black college students. Knowledge of another culture should not be based on just the media and social outlets.

Colleges should offer more Black Studies Courses for students and staff to take so they can learn more about Black student cultures and where they come from. I would recommend that all college institutions make it mandatory for all students to take a Pan-African Study class. It will help non-Black students learn something more about Black college student history than just slavery. For Black college students, it would show them where they come from, as ancestors of kings and queens. They will be able to relate to their Blackness more in-depth and feel more comfortable in their institutions. This will help interactions with

Black students overall and hopefully provide more positive than negative interactions.

Black college students should be offered a space by their institutions that is worthy of their rich history and accomplishment. Black college students need to see an area that looks like them and is created just for them, not just an empty room with chairs and tables. Have a special welcome for them, especially if you have a small percentage of Black people at the college. As stated previously, most of my participants have been the only Black student in a class, so the chances of them seeing another Black person in class is very unlikely. It can be extremely uncomfortable going into a heavily Hispanic or white department. Diversity is needed across the board at the college level for students to feel comfortable, especially Black students. Having Black college students comfortable in college is not complicated. The formula is simple: treat them with the proper respect and assist them in their educational journey so they can succeed.

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