Black Faculty Perceptions of Classroom Interactions With Students at a Predominantly White Institution

Robyn Clarke Ngwabi
Marquette University

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BLACK FACULTY PERCEPTIONS OF CLASSROOM INTERACTIONS WITH STUDENTS AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION

by

Robyn D. Clarke Ngwabi, M.A.

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Marquette University,
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ABSTRACT
BLACK FACULTY PERCEPTIONS OF CLASSROOM INTERACTIONS WITH STUDENTS AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION

Robyn D. Clarke Ngwabi, M.A.

Marquette University 2012

Current research generally reveals the classroom experiences of black professors at predominantly white institutions (PWI) as largely negative, whether or not issues of race are featured prominently in course content. The literature on this overall topic is, however, sparse and no published research study exists involving the use of originally conducted fieldwork observations and interviews. Consequently, this exploratory case study uses an interpretive (qualitative), ethnographic fieldwork research approach to examine a black professor’s perceptions of her interactions with her students during instruction at a PWI. This study yielded eight overarching themes pointing to a generally negative perception of classroom interactions with students. Several key findings aligned with existing literature included white student resistance and problematic responses from department/university administration to these troubling interactions.

Other major findings, such as frustration with black student performance, were unexpected and not discussed in the literature. Additionally, there were several nuances in this informant’s reported experience during instruction that are also essentially absent from the often aggregately reported experiences of black faculty. These included not always being sure how much race (as opposed to other characteristics such as student generational tendencies) actually played a role in her current perceptions, and wondering if she sometimes projected her past racialized experiences onto her present classroom reality. Further, analysis of emergent findings, such as the informant’s perceptions of black students, extends the conversation about the experiences of black professors at PWIs. The dissertation ends with a set of recommendations for black faculty, university administrators, black and white students, and future research.
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Robyn D. Clarke, M.A.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my loving and all-supportive parents, Melvin and Rosemary Clarke. Their individual experiences, joint life story and pattern of how to use education to assert and express one’s humanity, as well as to develop one’s spiritual and intellectual facets, have served as an inspiration to me and my brother, Matthew. Further, their immigration from their native, respective countries of Barbados and Guyana to pursue higher education, has served as a powerful and personal source of determination and stick-to-itiveness for me in my lifelong love of learning—inside and outside the classroom. Truly, my parents were my first teachers, and through them, I developed an early and deep appreciation for the acquisition and application of knowledge as a vehicle to better myself, understand the world and its workings, grow closer to God and serve as one His vessels to help others.

Dad, I have viewed us as a kind of “relay team” with regard to this, my latest round of graduate work. I will proudly wear the title “Dr.” in honor of the example you set for me in your own doctoral study at Columbia University that was unexpectedly cut short due to your health battle with inclusion body myocitis. You set the pace, and I finished the race—for both of us. This degree is as much yours as it is mine.
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Chapter One

An Introduction:

“I Won’t Learn From You Either”

Darrell Cleveland holds a Ph.D. from University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, a master’s degree from St. Joseph’s University, and a bachelor’s degree from Temple University. He is currently an assistant professor at The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey, located 20 minutes from this dissertator’s hometown. He recalled his first day of class in his first faculty position at a small, Catholic liberal arts college in the Northeast:

When I introduced myself as the professor of the class, I could see the various expressions of shock, amazement, disgust, surprise and discomfort. Without planning to, I began to speak about my training, trying to convince the students and myself that I was qualified to be there. After the initial shock wore off, students then began to challenge me about my syllabus. “I don’t see how we can possibly do all this work.” “Can we drop one of the assignments?” “I don’t know where I am going to get the time.” Much to their dismay, the syllabus stayed the same. I later learned that students complained that I gave too much work (Cleveland, 2004, p. xv).

In an article that later appeared in his book I Won’t Learn From You, activist educator and author Herbert Kohl spoke on the role of student assent in learning and interaction with a teacher who represents or teaches a culture the student refuses to accept. “Not-learning tends to take place when someone has to deal with unavoidable challenges to her or his personal and family loyalties… and identity…” (Kohl, 1992, p. 15). Drawing on experiences from his multi-decade career teaching poor black and Latino students in the inner city, he praised this “not learning” in the case of pupils “who refuse to be molded by a hostile society” (p. 15), wherein their language/culture of origin is replaced with that of the dominant group.
Kohl and others (Freire, 2000; Valenzuela, 1999; Delpit, 2006) have written extensively about the educational imposition of dominant culture onto certain racial/ethnic groups. These chronicles have focused on classroom interactions between white public school teachers and their students in urban settings, from the teacher’s vantage point. But what happens when the teacher is a black, Ph.D. holding, university tenure-track professor and the classroom is in a predominantly white institution (PWI)? What are those classroom interactions like from the professor’s perspective?

Theoretical Framework

While considering the notion of perspective for my dissertation, I selected Critical Race Theory (CRT) as the theoretical lens through which to understand my study context (Chapters One and Two), the reason behind my chosen methodology (Chapter Three), the research data itself (Chapter Four), its discussion (Chapter Five) and its implications (Chapter Six). I chose it specifically because my research directly focuses on race and power issues (among other things) between black tenure-track faculty and students at PWIs. I provide more background on CRT at the conclusion of this chapter. However, I decided to introduce its basic principles very early, so all that follows this opening makes sense in a unified, suppositional fashion.

To begin, this study focuses on black faculty at PWIs. These institutions are where the majority of American students as a group pursue higher education, and in many cases, have a black professor for the first time. As student bodies are growing increasingly diverse, a faculty reflecting this racial/ethnic variety is needed (discussed subsequently in this chapter). Blacks have taught at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) since the 1800s, but in the 21st century, continue to hold
proportionately small numbers of faculty positions at PWIs. This remains true despite access to full time faculty positions in these institutions since the 1940s (discussed in Chapter Two). Presently, most PWI American colleges and universities express some level of interest in diversifying both their faculties and student bodies—evidenced by their published commitments to institutional diversity, social justice or some combination of the two. Thus, inquiry into the work lives of black faculty who work in them can yield useful data to improve PWI recruitment and retention efforts around these scholars.

Still, existing literature on the aggregate experiences of black professors at PWIs paints a relatively bleak picture streaked with subtle and overt shades of racism. This fits with the main premises of CRT. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) asserted six central tenets: 1) racism is difficult to address or cure in the United States because it is “ordinary, not aberrational…the usual way society does business, the common, everyday experience of most people of color in this country” (p. 7); 2) the current racial hierarchy confers benefits material (to elite whites) and psychological (to middle and working class whites), providing them little collective incentive to eliminate racism; 3) race—having no biological basis and no intrinsic ties to intelligence or morality—is a product of social inventions, constructions and relations; society often ignores these scientific facts, and endows races with pseudo-permanent characteristics to keep certain populations oppressed; races are manipulated or retired when convenient; 4) the dominant group has historically racialized subordinate groups in different ways at different times for different purposes, but always to maintain top social status; 5) the tendency to classify and relate to subordinate racial groups as monolithic units, rather than as a compilation of individuals with intersecting, conflicting and overlapping identities; and 6) the need for voices of
color in the academic narrative on the experiences of people of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

These elements are noted and explored throughout this dissertation. I also review these points—as they apply directly to my study—in Chapter Five. There, I discuss just how seamlessly all that came before it seems to hang together from this theoretical viewpoint. But first, I lay out my argument here.

Background of the Problem

Teaching is, perhaps, the most concrete and clearly understood component of a faculty member’s work responsibilities in higher education (Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006). Further, it is the role through which instructors have the most interaction with students, as well as sway over their learning. Students attending any institution of higher education are primarily focused on the instruction portion of what their professors do, and expect to be taught well and engaged in the classroom (Osler, 2004). However, nuanced, interactive dynamics between professor and student can influence what instruction and actual learning takes place.

*Relationship Between Teaching and Professor-Student Interaction in the Classroom*

Some schools, depending on the type, rank teaching lower in importance than research. However, Nuhfer (2003) maintained the centrality of teaching in higher education—as evidenced by the use of student evaluations of instructors, and teaching observations and classroom evaluations of tenure-track junior faculty by senior faculty—cannot be denied:

Why mandate a traumatic seven years of “probation” before making a tenure decision that includes “teaching criteria” if successful teaching can’t be
recognized? Why should salaries rise with experience, if teaching experience cannot be demonstrably linked with better performance? (Nuhfer, 2003)

Indeed, student satisfaction largely hinges on whether real learning is taking place as a result of class time instruction and rapport with an enthusiastic instructor (Nuhfer, 2003).

The ability to “click” with others is an important but elusive element of the instructor-student relationship. Whether a student chooses to learn or not-learn (Kohl, 1992) is influenced by connection (Osler, 2004). Granitz, Koernig and Harich (2009) asserted that master teachers know how to foster rapport with their students. Previously, Nuhfer (2003) indicated this trait is perceived as more important in social science disciplines (r = .70) than in physical/life sciences (r = .59) or in the humanities (r = .43). He said, however, that the substance of rapport is hard to measure and evaluate because of variances in statistically significant areas including instructor expressiveness, student motivation, instruction methods and personality differences.

Nonetheless, whether or not a student perceives that (s)he has a “good” relationship with a professor (that is, “likes” the instructor, including the way s(he) approaches course content) does impact that student’s willingness to learn and use the professor as a resource. For instance, the results of a qualitative study on professors’ perceptions of antecedents of rapport by Granitz et al. (2009) revealed 72.5 percent of respondents reported that connection further motivates students to come to class more often, be attentive, learn more, actively engage in discussions, and be more open with their professors (p. 57-59)—which then symbiotically impacts how faculty respond to and interact with their students (Osler, 2004).
Though little research has been conducted on higher education instructor perception of rapport with students (Granitz et al., 2009) and its resulting influence on teaching, a professor’s view of this relationship with his/her students—collectively and separately—is important. This may been seen, for example, in the level of leniency (s)he is willing to grant to a class or a particular student with regard to turning in a late assignment or missing a class session. Nuhfer (2003) highlighted that only approximately 10 percent of students in many classes ever go to the professor's office for help; inferring that rapport is most likely to be developed primarily in the classroom, (as opposed to, say, during office hours when a bond formed in the classroom can be strengthened further; or where a bit more personal connection can be established and nurtured, as in the case of very large lecture courses) simply because that is where most students spend the vast majority of time with their professors.

While not always the case, this affinity may also hinge on the demographics of the instructor and his/her students. Specifically, Granitz et al. (2009) contended that rapport can be fostered by *status homophily*, where individuals tend to gravitate to and bond with individuals similar to themselves based on ascribed status traits such as age, education, occupation, etc. Thus, it could be argued that a single, childless, 30-year old professor is closer in age and marital status to a traditional undergraduate student, who may in turn perceive that (s)he relates better to that instructor than to a married, parent, 50-year old professor, and vice versa. This perception can help further foster rapport, resulting in increased comfort and better relationships with professors of shared status, and by extension, increase student learning.
In the same way, race, an ascribed status, may also play a role in instructor-student classroom interaction. The degree to which it does depends on broader considerations of the individual experiences of both professor and students, the institutional and classroom climate in which they interact, and the degree to which diversity exists in a given school/academic field/classroom—issues explored by Jackson and Crawley (2003). They wrote, for example, in a qualitative study on white students’ perceptions of a black male professor in an intercultural communication course at a PWI:

In the case of the professor of intercultural communications who taught the white students in this study, he recognized that what they saw walking into the classroom on the first day of class was a 6’4”, dark-skinned, bald, black, young, male professor. Most white students were nervous and some even afraid, as suggested by their journal entries. They did not even try to hide it; it was in their eyes... Initially, it was surprising that so many students admitted they had never had a black teacher in elementary, junior, or high school. Interestingly, most of them were not even conscious of it. It was not until the moment that they saw this black male professor in front of the class that they realized their level of deprivation and ignorance (Jackson & Crawley, 2003).

We can infer that such nervousness and fear on the part of some of these students negatively impacted the initial rapport they had with the faculty member, especially considering that black males comprise only a fraction of one percent of U.S. postsecondary educators (Sanderson, Dugoni, Hoffer & Myers, 2000).

Some find the paucity of black men in academics is disturbing (Rowley, 2000). Black men represent less than one percent of all American faculty despite currently comprising nearly 47 percent of the approximately 38.6 million blacks in the U.S.—about 12.7 percent of the national population (U.S. Census 2010). Data from the 2010 U.S. Census on educational attainment showed that of its nearly 2.8 million reported doctoral holders, whites hold almost 2.3 million or just over 82 percent of those degrees. By contrast, blacks hold 123,000 or about 4.4 percent of doctorates. For a more specific
illustration, figures taken from the National Science Foundation’s 2010 *Survey of Earned Doctorates* indicated just over 31,500 doctorates were earned that year. Whites earned 74.5 percent of these, while blacks earned just 6.3 percent—disproportionately above and below national population levels, respectively. It should be noted that, according to either set of figures, less than one percent of all Americans hold a doctoral degree.

In contrast to these low numbers of Ph.D. holders overall, there are greater numbers of students from diverse backgrounds with access to higher education now than ever before. For example, between 1993 and 2003 alone, total college/university enrollment by students of color increased by over 50 percent (Cook & Cordova, 2006). However, in 1997, whites still made up 84 percent of all full-time faculty positions, while people of color made up about 13.4 percent. A breakdown of this figure showed Asian Americans made up approximately 5.5 percent, African Americans 4.9 percent, Hispanics 2.6 percent and Native Americans .4 percent (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000.) Ten years later, in 2007, 17 percent of U.S. higher education full-time faculty members (including those at historically black colleges and universities) were people of color (Gasman & Kim, 2011, p. 10).

Quezada and Louque (2004) stated that students of color assume that if an academic department or program has faculty of color, it is demonstrating some level of commitment to equity and diversity issues. Indeed, the presence of faculty of color and the recruitment of students of color are highly correlated and intricately woven (Alger, 1998). Thus, it can be argued that an increasingly diverse student body needs a more diverse professoriate.
A Diverse Population Needs a Diverse Higher Education Faculty

It is no longer news that the world community is drawing closer together. Likewise, it has long been evident that the color of America is swiftly changing (Seidman, 2005). Murdock & Hoque (1999) projected that 47.2 percent of the total U.S. population will be people of color by 2050. As previously stated, this has translated into an increasingly diverse student body in higher education. Some have argued that, given the demographic “browning” of America, the U.S can only remain economically competitive in the global economy if its growing workforce of color is better educated and more highly skilled (Simpson, 2003; Murdock & Hoque, 1999; Stamps & Tribble, 1995).

Specifically, Jayakumar, Howard, Allen and Han (2009) outlined several ways in which this applies to the industry of higher education; I will highlight three of those. Faculty of color provide several benefits to the academy. First, their very presence at PWIs may help to attract a more diverse student application pool; and when these matriculate, scholars of color provide valuable mentoring, role modeling and connection to a school. Second, they take on more teaching, service and committee/administrative responsibilities compared to their white colleagues (Allen, Epps, Guillory, Suh & Bonous-Hammarth, 2000). Third, they are more likely to use (inter)active pedagogical techniques that enhance student learning, and encourage their students to engage with peers different from themselves (Knowles & Harleston, 1997). For these reasons, they argue, a diverse professoriate is needed now more than ever in higher education.

It had long been forecasted that this diversity would in part be facilitated by the natural cycle of job openings in the academy. For example, Ford (1996) predicted that
about half of American faculty across disciplines would retire by the year 2000. That prophecy has, however, been less than fulfilled as of this writing. This is surely due to significant downturns in the economy, most recently the institutional and personal financial crises during the first decade of the 21st century; and a changing landscape in higher education regarding faculty roles, responsibilities and extended career opportunities (Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006). Nonetheless, the push for more racially/ethnically diverse representation in the professorship (Stamps & Tribble, 1995) theoretically still presents a ripe career opportunity for doctoral students of color who aspire to faculty positions after earning their degrees.

Considering “the potential that faculty of color bring toward institutional and societal transformation” (Jayakumar et al. 2009, p. 539), the need for faculty from multicultural backgrounds in American higher education, and especially in predominantly white institutions (PWIs)—where the majority of American college and graduate students are educated—is clear. Unfortunately, the demand outweighs the supply. Currently, faculty of color collectively comprise roughly 17 percent of all American college/university faculty (Turner, Gonzalez & Woods, 2008; Jayakumar et al. 2009). With the exception of Asians/Asian Americans, their absence is especially noticeable in disciplines such as science, math and engineering (Ford, 1996). In particular, blacks—the focus of my dissertation (to be elaborated in the next section)—make up an estimated 7 percent of all college and university faculty, historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) included (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). Though faculty roles and responsibilities are said to be changing, the doctorate has remained necessary to secure most tenure-track faculty positions:
…attainment of academic… leadership is almost exclusively a result of graduate education and professional training in colleges and universities. Therefore, participation rates for blacks in such training are an extremely sensitive barometer of either progress or retrogression in the production of black leaders (Wilson, 1988, p. 163).

As such, getting black doctoral students through their programs and across the graduation stage is critical in expanding their presence as instructional leaders in higher education (Simpson, 2003; Nettles, 1990; Bowen & Bok, 1998; Olson, 1988; Stamps & Tribble, 1995; Vaughn, 1985).

Rationale for Concentration on Black Faculty

Given the under-representation of all populations of color in the academy, why does this study focus solely on black faculty? Ogbu (1978) argued that blacks occupy a unique space in American society. The United States maintains an asymmetrical, dual social stratification system based on class or “social achieved criteria” and racial caste or “birth-ascribed criteria” (p. 103). The former allows for some social mobility as a function of changeable behavior and attitudes, while the latter does not due to basis in immutable, physical characteristics (i.e. skin color, hair type, etc.). He argued African Americans are a low status, caste minority group in America, and “membership is determined permanently at birth” (Ogbu, 1978, p. 101) because of their phenotype.

Harley (2008) asserted, “individuals of African descent represent a unique group who hold a specifically differentiated place in history throughout the world, and particularly in the United States because of slavery and its subsequent effects” (p. 19). That is, no other population of color in America was brought against their will to this country specifically and exclusively for the purpose of slave labor; pathologically dehumanized and kept in forced subordination for centuries; legally kept in second-class
citizenship for another century after emancipation; and systematically denied social, legal, political, residential, educational and career equity as American citizens. Some of these discriminatory practices, such as name profiling on employment applications (Levitt & Dubner, 2005), continue de facto today. The cumulative, intertwining effects of this multigenerational treatment (Moynihan, 1965; Ogbu, 1978) have contributed to the dearth of black representation in PWIs today. But despite this, evidence supports that blacks have always valued education (Anderson, 1986; Perry, Steele & Hilliard, 2003; Walker, 1996). This two-sided legacy, examined more thoroughly in Chapter Two, also serves as the foundation for some of the issues black faculty who choose to teach at mainstream institutions may face.

Potential Challenges for Black Faculty at PWIs

The professional world at PWIs awaiting aspiring black faculty members-to-be is likely to present some unique challenges (Turner et al. 2008; Jayakumar et al. 2009). These are not just occupational, but also psychological in nature (Smith & Witt, 1993; Harley, 2008). Thompson & Dey (1998), for example, examined the stress of black faculty working at PWIs, “where the cultures … are both white-normed and white-dominated.” They found that black professors were more likely to experience significant stress in “challenging that the experiences of faculty from underrepresented groups [are] qualitatively different and disconnected from those of the dominant culture” (p. 325).

Stress, as defined in the counseling psychology field, is:

A state of tension in a person accompanied by physiological arousal and strain. Stress interferes with coping and functioning; if it does not abate after a period of time, distress may set in, causing a person mental or physical incapacitation (Gladding, 2001, p. 116).
On the surface, it seems reasonable to expect that those black faculty who have already been immersed in PWIs as students for many years have mastered the cultural terrain therein—unless part or all of their higher education was attained at an HBCU. It may also seem logical that they have developed sufficient coping skills to deal with the pressures of academia by the time they become faculty members. But the problems they may have faced as students and may again encounter as faculty are deeper than simply learning the school song and surviving cafeteria food, or knowing how to effectively develop and teach from a syllabus. The research suggests that the added psychological wear and tear of “working while black” (Johnson, 2004) compounds the routine rigors experienced by most tenure-track faculty during their careers. For instance, “those doctorates of color who do enter the professoriate often face structural barriers when it comes to promotion and tenure” (Jayakumar et al. 2009, p. 541).

To illustrate one of those obstructions, it is informative to explore research and its traditional role in obtaining faculty tenure. The following two and a half-page discussion may seem tangential because this treatise centers on teaching. However, it is relevant and important because the tenure process at some four-year colleges, and certainly at doctoral and research universities, is heavily predicated on research in addition to instruction. Further, it is often considered the hierarchical head in the triumvirate of traditional faculty responsibilities: research, teaching and service (Burgan, 2006; Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006).

Like the tenure process, publication is highly competitive as early-career scholars seek to have large quantities of their work appear in the most prestigious journals and university presses (O’Meara & Rice, 2005; Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006) within a tiered
publishing system. This is a subtle obstacle in and of itself (and beyond the scope of this treatise to detail), as the contest for the limited pages available in a journal is fierce and the process is protracted. A common misconception is that faculty of color do not generate as much research as their white counterparts (O’Meara & Rice, 2005). Data comparing the publication records of white faculty and faculty of color, however, indicate no significant differences in research production rates (Blackburn, Wenzel & Bieber, 1994).

As in the academy proper, white men largely control scholarship entry into the highest-ranked journals and university presses, thereby determining what research will be considered valid by virtue of what they select for publication (Stanley, 2007). There are no available statistics on research interests of faculty by discipline and race. And given the blind review process, it is not easily possible to determine the racial/ethnic background of those who submit research with content on and/or of direct interest to black populations. However, it is reasonable to hypothesize that, proportionately, black scholars would be more likely to publish such work than white scholars, particularly in the social sciences and humanities, where black faculty work in proportionately higher numbers.

Expressing the notion of the research process as a structural barrier, some (Schiele, 1991; Thompson & Dey, 1998; Gregory, 2001; Delgado & Villalpando, 2002; Perna, 2002; Brown, 2003; Essien, 2003; Fenelon, 2003; Turner, 2003; Burden, Harrison & Hodge, 2005) have questioned whether the study agendas pursued by many faculty of color—on topics such as affirmative action, diversity and student outcomes, race and institutional climate, culture and ethnicity and other subjects directly benefiting
communities of color—are rewarded in the academy. Stanley (2006) highlighted three lenses commonly used to scrutinize scholarship produced by faculty of color who are interested in studying concerns “outside” of the mainstream: 1) “neutrality;” 2) methodology; and 3) location. Briefly detailed below, she asserted these lenses are applied to the work of racially underrepresented faculty at PWIs utterly absent of a broader acknowledgement and consideration of hegemonic processes that reward mainstream research and grant tenure to those that conduct it; and punish other areas of study and those that perform it for the express benefit of communities of color. This is in keeping with CRT tenet no. 2.

First, some mainstream academics do not believe scholars of color can be unbiased when investigating their own communities, and thus regard such research as lacking in rigor (Stanley, 2006). However, this standard is never applied to white researchers when their studies are conducted on white populations. Second, faculty of color, particularly in the social sciences and humanities, often utilize qualitative research methods (Stanley, 2007; Turner et al. 2008) rather than the quantitative methods that dominate scientific inquiry, and are most valued by the majority culture (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Donmoyer, 1990; Stanley, 2007). And third, researchers of color may in fact be publishing their work in scholarly journals of color (i.e. *The Journal of Black Studies, The African American Review, The Journal of African American History, The Journal of Negro Education, The Journal of Black Psychology*, etc.) that are indeed relevant and appropriate for their scholarship, but deemed lower status within the tiered publication system by the most elite of the academy’s dominant culture (Coleman, 2005).
When considered from these perspectives, research on people of color by faculty of color may place said scholars at a disadvantage in the tenure and promotion process at PWIs, where mainstream research is most highly valued (Stanley, 2006). At best, this places those junior faculty members in a career-defining position of contemplating whether to alter or abandon their desired research platform in order to better their chances of earning tenure. At worst, scholars suggest it could, ultimately, further reduce the trickle of an already petite candidate pool of educators of color into tenured faculty ranks at PWIs (Reyes & Halcon, 1988; Johnsrud & Sadao, 1998; Tillman, 2001; Trower & Chait, 2002; Jackson, 2004). As mentioned at the outset, this is the type of concern faculty of color will much more likely need to contemplate and navigate to succeed at a PWI.

Now connect this back to instruction. Of course, the relative importance of research to a professor’s success at achieving tenure varies depending on the institution of employ (i.e. a research university, a teaching university, a community college, a for-profit university, etc.). Likewise, the emphasis placed on teaching will also vary depending on the school. However, as stated toward the beginning of this chapter, all students attending any higher education institution are indeed focused on instruction and expect to be taught well by their professors, whether they teach two or three courses every semester or one every other year. Though many early-career faculty members usually carry lower teaching loads than their more senior colleagues in order to develop their research platforms, instruction (and good evaluations from it) also remains essential to attaining tenure. Jayakumar et al. (2009) note that, “indeed, successful promotion and tenure has been one of the most contentious issues facing faculty of color and is also a
major factor involved in retention” (p. 541). And if some black faculty members’ research platforms are not as well received, they could achieve an extra boost in the tenure process from a strong teaching program. Therefore, this dissertation will focus on the teaching domain of black faculty members’ work lives.

Attention to (Some Missing) Details

Certain issues are infrequently researched or discussed in the literature on black faculty at PWIs. For example, seemingly missing—both in the academy and in general society at large—is the acknowledgement, ownership and understanding of how the historical legacy of the education of black Americans has resulted in the dearth of tenured black faculty generally, and at PWIs specifically. These discussions typically “suffer from theoretical parochialism; they are short-sighted in that they do not critique American society as a whole. Rather, the majority of these theories continue to blame blacks… for not performing up to par with whites (i.e. ‘blaming the victim’)” (Torres, 2006, p. 18). Thus, while we openly discuss most of the “what” of the problem, and to a lesser extent the “how,” we rarely address the “why.” As stated by Perry, Steele and Hilliard (2003), who concurred with Ogbu (1978) on the role of blackness in why blacks have been treated the way they have in the American education system:

We share a general view that African American[s]…face challenges unique to them by virtue of their identity as African Americans and of the way that identity can be a source of devaluation in contemporary American society. We believe, as we all argue, that the contemporary conversation about African American achievement ignores these social facts in ways that seriously distort the debate” (Perry et al. 2003, p. vii).

It is fascinating that solutions offered to help remedy the shortage of PWI black faculty do not directly and explicitly recognize and speak of those facts — that are the direct
result of CRT tenet no. 1—which appear to be a sizable cause of the problem. Indeed, the silence on the legacy of African American education seems deafening.

This complex and sometimes unsightly history, its earliest components documented thoroughly by Anderson (1988), has certainly contributed to many of the unpleasant educational consequences—for example, achievement gaps by race regardless of socioeconomic status, low performing schools in inner cities and a corresponding higher incidence of unemployment in those areas, etc.—we now face; and which ultimately affect the rates of black doctorate and faculty production. Many opponents of affirmative action (generally, and specifically in higher education), such as D’Souza (1996), Sowell (1994) and Thernstrom & Thernstrom (1997), and those pushing for the privatization of public schools in communities of color appear to believe that to admit to, explore and comprehend these origins is to dwell needlessly on the past and excuse away any personal responsibility descendants of formerly enslaved persons in the U.S. have in their educational and professional fates now. Torres (2006) asserted that the achievement conversation instead devolves into one in which blacks are homogeneously perceived as simply being culturally deprived and genetically inferior to whites, “the standard by which all things are judged” (p. 18). Perry of Perry et al. (2003) argued:

We have to face the fact that if we are going to have this public conversation about African-American [academic] achievement, it will inevitably become a conversation that blames black parents, black students, and the black community. The danger is that it will become another location for the recycling of African-American moral, cultural, and intellectual deficiency (p. 9).

Indeed, black Americans have, at times, been complicit in their own educational fates—particularly in the South (Walker, 1996; Anderson, 1988). For example, they submitted themselves to unfair practices such as “double taxation” in order to build some
semblance of a learning system for themselves when the public authorities refused to do so.

Further, Torres (2006) highlighted that though there is frequent reference to a “black community” (i.e. native born blacks of multigenerational American nationality) in the literature and social discourse, there is considerable diversity—in line with CRT tenet no. 5—that researchers have ignored until very recently (p. 19). For instance, blacks of direct/recent Caribbean and African origin or descent comprise other communities (Ogbu, 1978). Domestically, there has been, since the days of slavery, at least two distinct black societies: one of lighter skinned blacks descended from enslaved, biracial Africans who worked in the houses of their white slave master fathers; and one of darker skinned blacks descended from those enslaved Africans who worked in the fields.

The former group, which also included free blacks, became fashioned into “the black aristocracy…typically those who were able to gain an education and various professional skills” (Graham, 1999, p. 9). Because of their earlier academic preparation, members of the black upper class (most of the pioneers highlighted in Chapter Two) made inroads into academia at PWIs and other professional industries before their poorer, darker-skinned brethren. Yet, Graham (1999), himself a progeny of the black elite, indicated the black elite manifests “a pride in black accomplishment that is inexorably tied to a lingering resentment about our past as poor, enslaved blacks and our past and current treatment by whites” (p. 18). That is, though they may be the “black elite,” they are still black and must contend with what that means in America.

Critics of “looking back in order to move ahead” ignore these kinds of distinctions, lumping all blacks together (Moynihan, 1965). And while protesting
affirmative action policies for blacks who are professionally prepared but would have had no opportunities otherwise, these same critics also selectively ignore preferential treatment programs such as legacy admissions at top institutions of higher learning that disproportionately benefit whites, some of whom are not as academically primed as their peers. For instance, Megalli (1995) highlighted a two-year investigation by the U.S. Department of Education that revealed Harvard legacies were admitted with lower GPAs, class rank and board scores 35 points below the mean score of its non-legacy students. In sum, what those who choose to disregard the past fail to realize is that you cannot change what you do not acknowledge. Chapter Two’s literature review explores this history to help foster a deeper understanding of how black faculty generally have arrived at their present state in American higher education generally, and at PWIs particularly.

As touched upon earlier, teaching plays an influential role in whether or not a scholar is granted tenure—and continues a career as a university-based scholar. Nationally, blacks—in aggregate with Hispanics and Native Americans—comprise only 5.3 percent of full professors in the United States. Of these, 10 percent of black faculty report intentions to leave the academy altogether (Jayakumar et al. 2009).

Statement of the Problem

Examination of the in-vivo classroom experiences of black faculty and their perceptions of their interactions with their students—the interest of this dissertation—is non-existent. Indeed, inquiry into the comprehensive work lives of faculty of color in PWIs is rare (Stanley, 2006). As stated earlier, few would dispute the real and expressed need for more professors of color at American PWIs. Likewise, few would dispute the relative importance of teaching to a professor’s chances of being granted tenure.
While the literature does address the role and responsibility of teaching in faculty roles (O’Meara & Rice, 2005; Burgan, 2006; Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006), there is a scarcity of studies on the actual teaching experiences of faculty of color at PWIs from their perspective. Further, the literature on what has been addressed is primarily theoretical in nature. There are some articles that include a discussion of the teaching experiences of faculty of color, as part of a broader examination of faculty of color at PWIs (Braddock, 1978; Sutherland, 1990; Hamilton, 2002; Stanley, 2006); some articles on teaching challenges faculty of color face (Kauper, 1991; Johnsrud & Sadao, 1998; Aguirre, 2000; Brayboy, 2003; Bradley, 2005; Smith & Anderson, 2005; Hassouneh, 2006; Sampaio, 2006; Stanley, 2006; Hendrix, 2007; Marbley, 2007; Saavedra & Saavedra, 2007; Skachkova, 2007); a few studies on student perceptions of instructors of color (Jackson & Crawley, 2003; Hendrix, 2004; Anderson & Smith, 2005; Ho, Thomsen & Sidanius, 2009); and a couple of qualitative studies on classroom experiences of faculty of color: one on maintaining credibility and authority while teaching a diversity education course (Perry, Moore, Edwards, Acosta & Frey, 2009) and one on managing emotions in undergraduate classrooms (Harlow, 2003). In none of these, however, is there any direct observation or ethnographic inquiry focusing on the in-vivo classroom experiences of black faculty.

As highlighted previously, black faculty potentially face unique stress as a result of racial and/or cultural factors—perceived and real—in the academy (Thompson & Dey, 1998). This additional strain beyond the normal pressures of a tenure-track faculty position may be due to: 1) their very presence as professionals and educational authorities in academic environments that have not historically incorporated the socio-cultural needs
and perspectives of people of color into their campus or departmental cultures (Sámano, 2007, p. 3); 2) their research agendas (Stanley, 2006); and/or 3) their experiences with students in the classroom (Jackson & Crawley, 2003). Why the latter? It might be because the phenomenon of blacks formally teaching whites in any level of the American educational system remains relatively strange and novel. The literature review in Chapter Two critically elaborates this fact in more detail. Considering the importance of teaching to the tenure attainment process, my case study will explore a black, female, tenure-track faculty member’s perception of her classroom interactions during instruction with her PWI students. In addition, I investigated whether she identified any psychological and psychosocial stressors that emanated from those classroom dynamics, and what coping strategies, if any, she used to alleviate that strain.

Research Questions

Given this focus, my primary questions are:

1. How does my informant perceive classroom interactions with her students?
2. How do those interactions affect this professor’s perceptions of her students, and how do they affect her teaching in the classroom?
3. To what extent does she believe her perceptions and interactions are racial in nature?
4. What, if any, classroom-related psychological and psychosocial stressors does she identify, and, if any, how does she cope with them?
5. What personal and professional experiences contribute to/explain the professor’s perceptions of these classroom interactions? That is, why does she perceive these interactions the way she does?
6. Finally, given the challenges facing black faculty at PWIs as reported almost always negatively in the literature, why did my informant decide to teach at one?

Study Purpose and Significance

Some have argued that, as scholars of color, black faculty potentially bring about “institutional and societal transformation” as “agents of social change in predominantly white universities” (Jayakumar et al. 2009, p. 539). Simultaneously, they encounter a different set of experiences than their white counterparts in the academy that “often…translate into disadvantages” (Jayakumar et al. 2009, p. 540). Nonetheless, to the extent that they contribute to the advancement of research and the enrichment of student learning, black faculty are needed in the academy as scholars and instructors respected for their intellectual contributions to and professional presence in higher education—not as tokens used to create the impression of diversity in institutions where such is lacking (Sámano, 2007; Alexander & Moore, 2008; Wood, 2008).

My study attempts to help readers better understand the in-vivo classroom experiences of a tenure-track black faculty member—in her own words—with their students at PWIs. Further, this study will be the first to go beyond interviews to conduct direct observation while teaching is actually occurring. It will help add more details to the ongoing developing portrait of the work lives of black faculty at PWIs. This study and the questions I sought to answer were driven by three primary concerns.

The first included my personal interests as I finish my doctoral education and make decisions about my own professional future, which currently includes contemplation about potential opportunities as a tenure-track faculty position at a PWI. Over the course of my doctoral education, I listened to black tenure track faculty working
at various PWIs around the country as they presented papers and hosted discussions on this topic. I read scholarly reports about experiences of faculty of color. I worked for four years as a graduate assistant and taught two summer courses as an adjunct instructor at a PWI, partially to assess if I had the skills necessary to pursue this career path. The last investigation I felt I could undertake in this discovery process would be to conduct my own research study to contribute to our understanding of these issues.

The second involved getting at the personal experiences of individual black faculty at PWIs, rather than automatically taking the literature as the unerring “gospel” for all of them—in line with CRT tenet no. 6. As I have mentioned, the literature has presented these professionals in aggregate—either as “black faculty” or “faculty of color”—eliminating any nuances or stories that do not fit with the reported group experience. Thus, I would frequently be left with a nagging question while reading narrative after narrative that painted the professoriate landscape as particularly bleak and unsatisfactory: if things are so bad for all black faculty at PWIs, why would they—or I—choose to work at one? I wanted to explore firsthand the experience of a tenure-track black faculty member in the classroom, and see what the particulars of her experience at a specific PWI were like. My study surfaces the fine distinctions of her story, as well as highlights what may seem to fit the published scholarly discussion. In sum, I wanted to get more information before making up my mind, as the researchers in the literature have seemed to do.

Finally, the third entails a desire to contribute something new and interesting to this line of research and knowledge in the American academy. In particular, I wanted to get a more up close and personal view of the interactions between black faculty and their
students in the classroom through direct observation. Little has been said about this topic, and ethnographic methodology has not been used before to investigate it.

Study Delimitations and Limitations

Indeed, the findings emerging from the literature on this topic describe the aggregate or global experiences of black faculty at PWIs. Thus, I intentionally chose a methodology, detailed in Chapter Three, which allowed for examination of individual experiences and encouraged in-depth discovery of what was happening in a particular setting with a specific informant. Consider, for example, the following anonymous, web-posted comment from a promotion and tenure chair (presumably, at an American university) in response to an online review (Jaschik, 2008) of the book *The Black Academic’s Guide to Winning Tenure—Without Losing Your Soul* by Rockquemore and Lazlofsky (2008):

I’m the chair of the P&T committee at my institution, and I think I can save people the cost of the book by divulging, for free, the secrets of how black faculty get tenure: 1) Demonstrate excellence as a classroom teacher; 2) Demonstrate a commitment to productive scholarship of teaching, discovery, integration, and application; 3) Demonstrate a willingness for and a track record of committed service to the institution. 4) There is no #4.

I can guarantee all tenure-track faculty that if you do these things (at least at my institution) and keep good records of your accomplishments in a portfolio that you submit for tenure, you will get tenure, and it won’t matter what your skin color is. And if you do these things at some other institution and still don’t get tenure, it’s likely that nobody in your position would have gotten tenure no matter what their skin color might have been.

I might even suggest that black faculty will be much better able to accomplish steps 1-3 above if they don’t begin their careers by assuming that all their colleagues are racists, as Lazlofsky and Rockquemore suggest they do. The authors are doing black faculty, and academia as a whole, a great disservice by encouraging black faculty to start with the assumption that racism is as rampant as they say, an assertion backed up only by “stories.” For every one of the authors' “stories” I can come up with 3-4 stories of my own where black and other
minority faculty have entered academia and succeeded admirably with the full support of their colleagues (Jaschick, 2008).

The author did not indicate his/her racial/ethnic background. Still, given the topic (and title) of the book, I found it interesting. I wondered, hypothetically, if it was a black faculty member at a PWI who made this statement and if it was based on his/her personal experience. Why have such comments (and experiences of scholars) not made it into the published scholarly conversation? Would not such a perspective be equally as valid as the other findings thus far in the literature?

Important Definitions

Psychological Terms

This study, like the field of education itself, is multidisciplinary. Specifically, as touched on earlier in this chapter, I explored the presence (or absence) of a certain phenomenon (i.e. stress, as identified by my informant) typically associated with the field of psychology. As a result, I have included a brief glossary of terms that will appear in the manuscript for readers who may be unfamiliar with that terminology.

• **Coping strategies:** The skills and behaviors people use to adjust to their environments and avoid stress (Gladding, 2001, p. 31); behavioral tools used to offset or overcome adversity, disadvantage, or disability without correcting or eliminating the underlying cause of these conditions.

• **Psychosocial:** Events or behaviors that relate to social aspects of life (Gladding, 2001, p. 98); of or relating to processes or factors that are both social (external) and psychological (internal) in nature.

• **Racial microaggression:** Subtle, brief and commonplace verbal, behavioral, and/or environmental indignities—whether deliberate or unintentional—that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward
people of color. (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal & Esquilin, 2007).

- **Stressor**: An event, experience, condition or other stimulus that causes stress (Gladding, 2001, p. 119).

*Critical Race Theory*

To reiterate, CRT is my chosen theoretical framework to analyze both the context for my study, as well as many of the findings of my research. CRT is the study and transformation of the relationships among race, racism and power from a broad perspective incorporating, among other elements, historical and social context (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, pp. 2-3)—generally appropriate for this dissertation. For example, CRT’s concern with historical and social context is central to understanding my contextual literature review synopsis and its proposed implications in Chapter Two.

CRT began as a movement within the legal profession in the 1970s. It has since been used across disciplines, and features prominent proponents for its application in analyzing and changing the education system (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2002). As applied to education, Ladson-Billings and Tate maintain: 1) race is a primary factor in determining inequity in the United States; 2) American society is based on property rights—not human or civil rights; and 3) the intersection of race and property rights is an analytic tool for understanding social and educational inequity (p. 48). The authors went on to effectively dissect examples of inequity in the American education system. However, their analysis concerned only students, and only at the elementary and secondary levels with the exception of one sentence: “…black students often come to the university in the role of intruders—who have been granted special permission to be there” (p. 60).
As a quick point of critique of CRT, I find its fifth tenet (the tendency of dominant society to classify and relate to subordinate racial groups as monolithic units, rather than as a compilation of individuals with intersecting, conflicting and overlapping identities) interesting and ironic. Due to the way discussions around race are usually framed in the U.S. (even by proponents of CRT who are overwhelmingly members of racial subordinate groups), use of terms like “the dominant group,” “dominant society” and “white” in tenet no. 5 seems to do the same thing as the sentiment it rails against. This is, of course, without the social clout to institutionalize that language. Nonetheless, the following chapter does center on the systemic power used against black scholars as a group that has helped create the academic landscape we have today. While I am utilizing the broader concept of CRT for my treatise, I would, based on my study data and extant readings, slightly modify the sentiment proffered by Ladson-Billings and Tate (2002): black tenure-track professors as a group often come to the PWI in the role of intruders who have been granted special permission to be there—but who are not accorded the full measure of respect and reception their educations and professional status “ought” to afford them.

I selected CRT for one obvious reason: this study examines an aspect of the relationship(s) between a black faculty member and PWI students in the classroom during instruction. From the outset, I expected race and power dynamics to feature prominently in this inquiry, as they are inherent elements of the topic of investigation. Though I did not—indeed, could not—know in advance what would happen in my informant’s classroom, I suspected the professor’s perceptions would reveal at least some challenges in interactions with white students. I also had a hunch that these perceptions would
possibly differ qualitatively from those about interactions with black students, if any were enrolled in the classes I observed. Additionally, I cautiously anticipated the revelation of potential race and power issues outside of the classroom in other aspects of the professor’s academic role (i.e. relationships with colleagues and superiors, pertaining to the tenure process, etc.), stemming from our conversations about why my informant chose to teach at this PWI and what her overall instructional experiences at PWIs have been like.
Chapter Two

A Review of the Contextual Literature:

“The Miseducation of the Black Professor”

To fully understand the nature of the kinds of classroom interactions black professors at PWIs may face, it is necessary to situate their current state in historical context. In 1933, Dr. Carter G. Woodson published the seminal black studies text *The Miseducation of the Negro*, detailing what he deemed “mistakes in the education of the Negro” (Woodson, 1933/1998, p. ix). He contended:

> How we have arrived at the present state of affairs can be understood only by studying the forces effective in the development of the Negro education since it was systematically undertaken immediately after Emancipation. To point out merely the defects as they appear today will be of little benefit to the present and future generations. These things must be viewed in their historic setting. The conditions of today have been determined by what has taken place in the past, and in a careful study of this history we may see more clearly the great theatre of events in which the Negro has played a part. (Woodson, 1933/1998, p. 9).

This chapter outlines a simplified version of this “theatre” in a review of the literature that highlights the general background of my study topic—rather than prophesy about specifics of data I “hoped” to collect, as traditionally happens with quantitative research. The qualitative methodology I chose for this dissertation is elaborated in Chapter Three. The critical literature review that does specifically speak to my data—and whose citations are driven by what my study revealed—is woven into my findings in Chapter Five, and in my discussion of the implications of my findings in Chapter Six.

Here, I simply argue that the published, aggregate perceptions of black professors at PWIs about their interactive experiences with students in the classroom are not disconnected anecdotes: they have long precedent grounded in the historical legacy of the education of black Americans. As suggested in Chapter One, this heritage is partially
responsible for the dearth of tenured black faculty generally, and at PWIs specifically—which colors the collective interactions they may have with their students. Again, in order to fully grasp the scope and depth of these potential challenges and their impact on in-class interactions with students at PWIs, it is crucial to know the history of black American education and career opportunities generally, and at PWIs specifically. “We simply cannot prepare realistically for our future without assessing honestly our past” (Bell, 1992, p. 11).

I attempt to briefly chronicle this complex, winding history in the first of this chapter’s two major sections. I seek to set the contextual stage for a later discussion on the collective experience around classroom interactions of black faculty with their students at PWIs by retracing the progression of black American education as a whole. I attempt to do this in a linear emphasis, although a few dates in the storyline unavoidably diverge/overlap as details unfold. Overall, I argue that the present collective experience of black faculty with their students in the classroom, as reported in the literature, is directly traceable back to the mainstream philosophy that guided the design and implementation of early black American education. This section highlights post-slavery education and general black college opportunities at PWIs, and then focuses on black doctoral study and black faculty opportunities at PWIs. It should be noted that a complete history is beyond the scope of this paper; and I do not pretend to include such. Also, I keep my commentary to a minimum here, saving my analysis for the chapter’s next segment.

In that second section, using historical facts and anecdotal examples, I weave my critique of the intellectual, social and cultural explanations identified in the literature
regarding black educational place and performance—which directly influence the interactions PWI black faculty as a group may have with their students today. In total, these two sections provide a useful scaffold to comprehend the psychological and psychosocial difficulties that black faculty at PWIs as a group may endure as they fulfill their classroom duties as instructors, thought leaders and advisers to their students generally. This background will properly situate both my study and analysis in Chapter Five.

Section One: A Historical Overview of Black American Education

This section briefly details, in chronological order, black access to general education, then moves to doctoral training and teaching prospects at PWIs in the U.S. It touches upon ideological tools used to discriminate against early scholars. Finally, I elaborate the wider social forces that later aimed to alter the relationship between the academy and black faculty—but which maintained the homeostasis that remains in place.

*Early Black Access to Education*

There exist discrete examples of enslaved blacks receiving language elements of the educative process (i.e. spelling, reading and writing), though legally they were prohibited from learning how to read and write, or attend school in much of the American antebellum South and some parts of the North (Franklin & Moss, 1994). The Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 set the wheels in motion to free enslaved Africans-turned-Americans, but left them with no property, recognized rights or resources—“blackboards, pencils, books, chairs, desks and even land and the buildings” (Franklin & Savage, 2004, p. xii)—for a basic education by which to begin this next chapter in their existence in the United States. Post-slavery, black Reconstruction politicians championed
“universal education” (Tyack & Lowe, 1986), the schooling system foundation upon which Southern black communities would build to serve themselves when the public authorities would not. The legalized, *de jure* segregation system of Jim Crow in the South replaced slavery after the Reconstruction of 1865-1877 as a means of keeping blacks and whites separate in all public (e.g. hotels, restaurants, schools, interstate transportation, etc.) and semi-private (e.g. marriage) spheres of life. Blacks were also involuntarily subjected to *de facto* segregation, which was more subtle and prevalent throughout the North (Sitkoff, 1978), likewise affecting schooling.

The basis for segregation of the races in education and all other domains stemmed from a belief in the inherent inferiority of blacks (DuBois, 1903; West, 1993; Guthrie, 2003). The Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of “separate but equal” segregation in the landmark case *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896). The Court ruled:

> [W]e think the enforced separation of the races, as applied to the internal commerce of the State, neither abridges the privileges and immunities of the colored man, deprives him of his property without due process of the law, nor denies him the equal protection of the laws, within the meaning of the Fourteenth Amendment (Cohen & Danelski, 1994, p. 900).

While *Plessy* specifically addressed railroad accommodations, the ruling had longstanding and far-reaching implications in the solidification of legal segregation in education and other areas of American life; and in justifying the racist attitudes fostered and defended by segregation (Bell, 1992).

Some scholars, such as Tyack (1974) and Anderson (1988), agree that the public education system manifested some of the most insidious racism. Learning to read was generally punishable by death during slavery in several parts of the South, and efforts to prevent emancipated blacks and their early 20th century descendants from acquiring a full
education were widespread. The schooling system that did develop for blacks in the American South (and North) embodied both class and racial caste oppression.

Ogbu (1978) argued that the United States maintains an asymmetrical, dual social stratification system based on class or “social achieved criteria” and racial caste or “birth-ascribed criteria” (p. 103). The former allows for some social mobility as a function of changeable behavior and attitudes, while the latter does not due to basis in immutable, phenotype characteristics (i.e. skin color). Both class and racial caste played a role in the development of American education generally, but the latter was specifically the driving force behind black education, both urban (Tyack, 1974) and Southern (Anderson, 1988). Anderson’s main contention was that de jure, “the structure, ideology, and content of black education [w]as part and parcel of the larger political subordination of blacks” (Anderson, 1988, p. 2).

For instance, Samuel Armstrong, founder and first principal of the all-black Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute (now HBCU Hampton University), co-opted the political economy, practical morals and civil government courses taught at the Virginia school in 1882 (Anderson, 1988). The political economy course

…was developed to promote proper relations between capitalists and laborers, and the courses in practical morals and civil government were aimed at correcting the students’ ‘wrong notions’ regarding ‘the rights of persons and property, the origins of these rights and how they may be violated’ (Anderson, 1988, p. 50).

So while courses prima facie on ideas central to democracy were offered, Southern educational system engineers and capitalist magnates sabotaged their content to suit their racially motivated, autocratic purposes. Meanwhile, public education in the North was characterized by de facto “structural separateness” of both black students and teachers from their white counterparts (Tyack 1974, p. 229). In both parts of the country, the
notion that “to have been born black was normally to have been labeled a failure” (Tyack, 1974, p. 217) fueled mainstream societal attitudes about black intellectual development.

Roebuck and Murty (1993) asserted, and Franklin and Moss (1994) and Perry et al. (2003) concurred, that the justification for poor quality black education rested on two contradictory ideas: 1) the intellectual inferiority of blacks, and 2) that educated blacks will “forget their place” and become economic, political and sexual competition for whites. This gave rise to the “Hampton Idea” of industrial education (Washington, 1901) for first and second generations of emancipated African Americans in the South, which

…essentially called for the effective removal of black voters and politicians from southern political life, the relegation of black workers to the lowest forms of labor in the southern economy, and the establishment of a general southern racial hierarchy... the work of adjusting blacks to this social arrangement… (Anderson, 1988, p. 36).

White Northern capitalist philanthropists such as Carnegie, Rockefeller and Eastman, funded the Hampton Idea while white Southern educational reformers politically supported it (Anderson, 1988).

They ideologically battled the dominant, upper class, white Southern planters who opposed universal education for all who labored under them generally, and who specifically believed literacy would spoil blacks by awakening their political and economic aspirations; thereby making them less yielding to coercion, more competitive with laboring whites (Southern and Northern), and disruptive to the prevailing political system—the backbone of the oppressive, Southern social order (Anderson, 1988, p. 81).

The hegemonic education model of industrial education legally prevailed for a time though, ironically, most blacks resisted its influence and ultimately rejected it (Anderson, 1988; Roebuck & Murty, 1993). Still, legal school segregation in the South was strictly
enforced—in partnership with economic and other forces—resulting in the non-existent or substandard education of millions of African Americans through the 1960s and 1970s. Multigenerational effects of this, such as poverty (Payne, 1996), continue to have impact today.

Fast forward to the mid-1930s, when the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund began seeking legal redress of educational opportunity for blacks in the face of _Plessy_’s “separate but equal” holding. It brought five cases before the Supreme Court (Roebuck & Murty, 1993; Franklin & Moss, 1994): 1) _University of Maryland v. Murray_ (1935), which attacked charging black students out-of-state tuition at colleges in their home state; 2) _Missouri ex rel. Gains v. Canada_ (1938), which ruled that only shared use of the same public facilities would be acceptable to blacks; 3) _Sipuel v. Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma_ (1948), which ruled that the state of Oklahoma had to provide instruction for blacks equal to that of whites, requiring the admission of qualified black students to previously all-white state law schools; 4) _Sweatt v. Painter_ (1950), which ruled that the crude facilities of all-black Texas Southern University were separate and unequal; and 5) _McLaurin v. Oklahoma Regents_ (1950), which held that a public institution of higher learning treating a student differently solely because of race violated equal protection rights under the 14th Amendment. While none directly addressed the foundation of the _Plessy_ ruling, all of these cases set the stage for the landmark decision of _Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka_ (1954).

_Brown_ (1954), led by then NAACP chief counsel Thurgood Marshall, declared that the establishment of separate public schools for blacks and whites was inherently unequal. The Supreme Court ruled:
We conclude that in the field of public education, the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. Therefore, we hold that the plaintiffs and others similarly situated for whom the actions have been brought are, by reason of the segregation complained of, deprived of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment (Cohen and Danelski, 1994, p. 911).

While Brown overturned Plessy in principle, it would take several years for the ruling to become enacted fact. A year later in 1955, the Supreme Court mandated in its ruling of Brown v. Board of Education II that school desegregation be implemented in “a prompt and reasonable start toward full compliance” (Franklin & Moss, 1994, p. 413) “with all deliberate speed” (Cohen & Danelski, 1994, p. 917). The ambiguous language and the hostility with which the decision was met throughout the South resulted in considerable stalling of execution and enforcement of school desegregation (Street, 2005).

Meanwhile, blacks in other parts of the world were beginning to assert their presence on the global scene—bringing political attention to the plight of Africans throughout the Diaspora (Moynihan, 1965). For example, the African nation of Ghana joined the United Nations in 1957 just months before the U.S. Congress would begin debating newly introduced legislation that would become the Civil Rights Act of 1957. This increased international spotlight, combined with the recent legal backing of Brown helped increase pressure by civil rights activists. The snail’s pace with which school desegregation took place, in light of these other events, set the stage for the integration events of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas by The Little Rock Nine in 1957; and of the University of Mississippi in Oxford, Mississippi by James Meredith in 1962.

The presence of black college students at PWIs in the American South or North was miniscule before and immediately after Meredith’s integration of “Ole Miss.” It was not until the late 1960s that a critical mass of black students was enrolled at PWIs:
“Before the 1960s, most black students attended predominantly black colleges… [which] were criticized at the time for their low entrance standards and limited curricula… they were not comparable in quality to predominantly white institutions” (Rojas, 2007, p. 25).

It wasn’t until after Meredith graduated in 1963 that, “for the first time, there were now enough black students at predominantly white colleges to organize protests” to change the hostile conditions that met them (Rojas, 2007, p. 24). Likewise, it was not until the early 1970s that a critical mass of black faculty taught at PWIs (Hooks & West, 1991)—primarily due to the establishment of black studies departments (Rojas, 2007) and affirmative action policies providing employment opportunities for black Ph.D.s and other professionals (Bell, 1992). Taken together, from post-Emancipation public schooling to black undergraduate access to PWIs in significant numbers at the close of the 1960s, the educational “experiment with democracy, as it is applied to African Americans,” is only about forty years old (Perry et al. 2003, p. 6).

Production of Black Ph.D.s and Faculty at PWIs

Against this backdrop, then, it is not surprising that black faculty have been few in number at PWIs from the time they were first permitted careers in the academy. Ards, Brintnall and Woodard (1997) maintained that “the production of African American Ph.D.s must be viewed from a historical perspective, for only within the past century have African Americans made strides in obtaining the Ph.D. degree” (p. 159). In 1876, just 13 years after the Emancipation Proclamation was decreed, Edward A. Bouchet became the first black American to earn a Ph.D. in the United States (Mickens, 2002). Despite earning the doctorate in physics from Yale University and being only the sixth American overall to earn a doctorate of philosophy, Bouchet was not permitted to teach at white colleges and universities. Instead, he spent the next 26 years of his career
teaching chemistry and physics at the Institute for Colored Youth, which would later become Cheyney State College (Mickens, 2002), now HBCU Cheyney University of Pennsylvania.

After Bouchet’s achievement, it would be nearly another half-century before a black woman would earn the Ph.D. Three did, in 1921: Georgiana Simpson, in German from the University of Chicago; Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander, in economics from the University of Pennsylvania; and Eva Beatrice Dykes, in English philology from Radcliffe College (Evans, 2007). Still, no black doctorate holders were hired as full-time faculty in tenure track professorships (as opposed to adjunct or temporary instructors) at any American PWI until William Alison Davis, a Harvard Ph.D. in anthropology, was hired as professor of education at the University of Chicago in the 1940s. The accounts of Anderson (2002) and Guthrie (2004) stated that Davis was installed as an assistant professor in 1941; the Journal of Blacks in Higher Education (2003) cited his tenure as full professor began in 1947.

In his book, Graham (1999) named most of these trailblazers as members of the black elite, discussed briefly in Chapter One. Though a privileged few acquired the highest of educational credentials and training, they were still not equally afforded the professional status and respect of their white counterparts. Cose (1993) described this impediment facing the black professional class as “the problem of the broken covenant, that if you work hard, get a good education, and play by the rules, you will be allowed to advance and achieve to the limits of your ability” (p. 1). It echoes challenges collectively voiced in the literature by contemporary black faculty at PWIs. But “most of the country does not see it” (p. 1) because they find it “impossible to believe that serious
discrimination still exists (p. 3). Why? Because, in keeping with CRT tenet no. 1, this bias has been rendered practically invisible by the American ethos of “meritocracy,” which, in practice, does not actually exist (Mosley, Diawara, Taylor & Austin, 1999, p. 8).

**Interplay of Race, “Meritocracy” and Institutionalized Discrimination**

As described earlier, until the 1960s, PWIs in the South openly prohibited any black students or faculty on their campuses (Meredith, 1966; Cohodas, 1997; Doyle, 2001) by using the overtly racist rhetoric and Jim Crow laws that governed all other aspects of Southern life. But in the North, except for a scattering of appointments of singular black scholars after Davis’ pioneering appointment (“First Black Faculty at Flagship State Universities,” 2003, p. 118), PWI presidents used vague language involving the “interrelationship of race, meritocracy and institutionalized discrimination” (Anderson, 2002, p. 5) to excuse away their miniscule numbers of black students (Guthrie, 2004), and to justify hiring few blacks for full-time faculty positions “no matter how qualified, no matter how many degrees he or she had earned, or how many excellent articles and books he or she had published” (Anderson, 2002, p. 4). For example, said President Herbert G. Espy of the State Teachers College in Genesco, New York in 1945: “I do not know whether they [department heads] will feel that the educational needs of our students now warrant our making any special effort to employ Negro teachers or to discriminate against white applicants” (Anderson, 2002, p. 13).

Explanations offered by some PWIs in more contemporary times in response to their lack of scholars of color—including, for instance, color-blind, meritocratic rhetoric without real institutional change and the drive necessary to acquire larger numbers of
qualified potential academics (Bell, 1992)—were commonplace then. Despite polite claims to the contrary, Northern PWI presidents “obeyed, until the middle of the twentieth century, a binding social convention that Negroes need not apply for faculty positions” (“First Black Faculty at Flagship State Universities,” 2003, p. 118).

In the early to mid 20th century, black graduate level training at PWIs “was largely a matter of good fortune and the ability to negotiate often lonely campuses with confrontational environments” (Guthrie, 2004, p. 135). As federal and state monetary aid was nonexistent, early 20th century financial assistance was provided to black scholars through private philanthropic foundations, including the John T. Slater Fund and the Julius Rosenwald Fund. Guthrie (2004) indicated the latter paid Davis’ salary at the University of Chicago. A few other recipients of Rosenwald Fund monies during graduate study did eventually go on to full faculty status at PWIs after earning their Ph.D.s, including renowned scholars African American historian John Hope Franklin (University of Chicago; Duke University) and psychologist Kenneth Clark (City College of New York).

Subsequent Societal Changes

Davis’ singular installation preceded the civil rights movement and the major legal pronouncements affecting black education as a whole. To reiterate, though many heralded Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas (1954) as a pivotal victory for black American educational progress, it did not result in widespread desegregation of the public school system or automatic access to higher education. This was because the purposefully ambiguous language of the decisions of Brown I (1954) and II (1955) “failed to say precisely how or when…schools were to be concretely desegregated” and
refused “to provide either a timetable or an actual plan to fix the problem of separate and unequal schools” (Street, 2005, p. 24). However, they did lead to additional legal cases that later provided opportunities for pursuit of four-year, master’s, professional and doctoral degrees in unprecedented numbers from that point forward (Ellis, 2001).

Also, diversity in the United States was not more fully acknowledged until well after Davis’ appointment. In a 1965 televised address to a special convening of Congress, President Lyndon Johnson called the civil rights cause of black Americans “our cause too”: the cause of all Americans. In that speech, he vocalized a growing realization that failure to boost fuller black participation in American life, including higher education, would negatively impact the very “values and the purposes and the meaning of our beloved Nation” (Johnson, 1966).

For example, some forty years later, Anelauskas (2003) described one outcome of President Johnson’s forecast: the bleak conditions that continue to envelop many black inner city students. He stated, citing a 1998 comprehensive urban school assessment “Quality Counts ’98: The Urban Challenge” in Education Week:

Most of them attend schools which are predominantly, often completely, minority populated and in which more than half the students are poor. Most of these giant schools resemble vast warehouses where students float anonymously through what passes for an education. Where they can skip school and no one will notice. Where the first sight to greet them when they walk through the door each morning is a metal detector or a police officer checking for weapons (Anelauskas, 2003, p. 173).

Contrast this with the findings of Bowen and Bok (1998) in the same year, and their longitudinal, quantitative analysis examining two cohorts of academically prepared black students (from 1976 and 1989) who were able to take advantage of affirmative action admissions policies in higher education. It revealed, and Simpson (2003) agreed, that
black students who attended the most selective colleges and had “certain kinds of experiences” (Simpson, 2003, p. 4) went on to finish graduate and professional school in higher numbers—greater even than their white counterparts at top universities; gross more earnings than their peers at less-selective schools; and take part in community service activities in greater numbers. In short, a quality education meant the difference between realizing President Johnson’s conception of The American Dream and living The American Nightmare (Mosley et al. 1999).

The affirmative action policies of the 1970s and the development of doctoral degree preparation programs, such as the Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program (Esler, 1998) established in 1986 and the Ph.D. Project (Mangan, 2006) begun in 1994, have contributed to the current numbers of blacks and other people of color pursuing doctorates. For instance, results of a 2004 survey of two McNair Program cohort groups (1989-1993 and 1994-1998) indicated that 14.4 percent of the earlier cohort of 1,807 former participants reported earning doctorates, and 3.9 percent of the later cohort of 7,122 former participants reported earning doctorates (“The Educational and Employment Outcomes of The Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program Alumni,” 2004). Meanwhile, the Ph.D. Project has more than tripled the number of doctorate-holding minority business school professors from 294 to over 1,000 since 1994 (Ph.D. Project Annual Report, 2009).

Perhaps these kinds of numbers are encouraging to some, even inspiring, considering the fact that black educational access in America has only been most widely available within the last 40 or so years. To others, however, that these figures are even true despite a black presence in the United States since the 1600s (Franklin & Moss,
1994) is troubling. Despite a few political friends in high places and hard-won legislation described in this section, the next elaborates how the black struggle for equal educational preparedness and related employment opportunities has been littered with pervasive obstacles.

Section Two: Factors Impacting Black Educational Place and Performance at PWIs

This section, while drawing on historical facts, mainly presents a philosophical discussion of the challenges blacks collectively have faced in obtaining quality education that could lead to faculty roles at PWIs. This is relevant because without a professional presence in the academy, there could be no discussion of classroom experiences of black faculty with their students. I start by picking up where the last section ended and examining black doctoral degree attainment numbers and the resulting impact on PWI faculty rates. From there, I detail a central, mainstream philosophy that has helped to prevent greater acquisition of these high levels of academic preparation and resulting tenure-track scholarly careers: the idea of black intellectual inferiority. Finally, I conclude this chapter with a discussion of how all of this can impact the interactions between black faculty and their students in the PWI classroom.

Black Doctoral Degree Attainment and Impact on PWI Faculty Rates

Against the backdrop of the previous segment, it’s not surprising that black doctoral student retention is in crisis. Contextually, enrollment by students of color generally at the graduate level has increased somewhat over the years, but the quantity actually completing these advanced degrees remains relatively small. For example, in 1986, students of color represented a combined 11.6 percent of all graduate school enrollments (Esler, 1998). A little less than 20 years later, the number had increased to
about 18 percent (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2001). Simpson (2003) reported fluctuating trend data on doctoral recipients, showing students of color earned an estimated 6.3 percent of doctorates awarded in 1975, 9.1 percent in 1985 (Olson, 1988) but fewer than 8 percent of those awarded in 1999 (Farrell, 2001). Eleven years later, data from the National Science Foundation’s 2010 *Survey of Earned Doctorates* revealed the number had dropped again to around 6.3 percent.

Statistics on black doctoral students specifically tell a similar story (Poock, 2000). Prior to 1970, the number of blacks who pursued and completed doctoral study was sparse (Ellis, 2001). Ards, Brintnall and Woodard (1997) reported that between 1876 and 1930, 63 African Americans received Ph.D.s, followed by 316 between 1930 and 1942. By the mid 1940s, there were more than 550 blacks holding Ph.D.s (Anderson, 2002). Even more specifically, Evans and Evans (1982) stated that 45 blacks had earned doctorates in the first three decades of the 20th century, compared to nearly two hundred in the 1950s. These numbers increased until the late 1970s, with 1,056 doctorate degrees awarded in 1979. During the following decade, the numbers declined through 1987, when only 767 degrees were awarded—a nearly one-third decrease in one decade. Since then, data revealed an upswing that reached a then all-time high in 1995, when 1,287 African Americans received Ph.D.s, the most at that point since 1975. Most recent figures on black doctorate attainment reports 1,985 earned degrees in 2010. Percentage wise, blacks represented less than one percent of all doctorate holders between 1950 and 1969 (Blackwell, 1987; Shears et al. 2004). By 1985, that figure rose to 3.2 percent (Nettles, 1990) and by 1995, blacks represented five percent of all doctoral recipients (Patterson-Stewart et al. 1997). The figure dropped again to around 3.1 percent in the 1990s.
(National Center for Education Statistics, 1999; Taylor & Antony, 2000), but “bounced back” to 6.3 percent in 2006 (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2009). In only four years, as of 2010 U.S. Census data, black composition of all doctoral degree holders dipped to 4.4 percent.

Taken together, these figures are important. They show that despite some movement both upward and downward in the overall numbers of black doctorate holders over more than a century, blacks have always represented a proportionately low percentage of all Ph.D. holders—and thus by extension, tenure-track faculty memberships in American higher education. Why? Is it because, as some have suggested, that blacks as a group are just inherently incapable of making the grade as instructor-scholars at PWIs? The historical evidence clearly answers: no.

For example, a two-year study begun in 1945, undertaken by Fred G. Wale, director of education at The Julius Rosenwald Fund, made use of a list of 150 distinguished black scholars:

More than one third of the scholars on Wale’s list had received their Ph.D.s from the University of Chicago (20), Harvard University (15), Columbia University (10), the University of Michigan (6), and the University of Pennsylvania (5). Other institutions that had more than two Ph.D.s on the list were Yale University, Cornell University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Radcliffe College, Brown University, Western Reserve University, and the University of Wisconsin. Wale had taken care to stock his list with African American Ph.D.s from the nation’s most distinguished graduate schools (Anderson, 2002, p. 8).

The survey was a central feature of “Wale’s campaign to desegregate northern white faculties” (Anderson, 2002, p. 5). By the study’s start, there were approximately 550 black Ph.D.s in the nation. Again, Graham (1999) confirmed several of those named by Anderson (2002) as members of the black elite. The academic credentials of these men and women could not be questioned: “As a class, they were well published even by
today’s standards, and were far ahead of the standards of their own time,” (Anderson, 2002, p. 11). Wale contacted the presidents of 600 northern PWIs to make them aware these scholars existed, and to inquire as to why these schools had no black full-time faculty members.

Only 160 presidents, a 27 percent response rate, responded to Wale, and of these, half indicated they would “put the list in their files for future reference” (Guthrie, 2004, p. 138). “Virtually none of the respondents viewed the complete absence of African American scholars from their staffs as even suggestive of racially discriminatory hiring practices” (Anderson, 2002, p. 7). To be clear, “some predominantly white colleges did employ blacks on their faculties”—including Roosevelt College (now University) in Chicago—“but their numbers were few” (Evans & Evans, 1982, p. 254).

Anderson (2002) indicated that the rest of the contacted PWI presidents, some even acknowledging the sterling credentials of the scholars in Wale’s directory, cited a variety of specious arguments as to why they had not and would not hire black faculty at that time: no knowledge of “qualified” black scholars; a lack of black applicants; a lack of black students who would need a black professor; a kind of pre-affirmative action, reverse racism that would discriminate against white applicants, “reflecting a concept that all such jobs should be held by white professors” only (Guthrie, 2004, p. 139); fear of negative community backlash; regional locales and populations that “naturally” made it unnecessary, undesirable or that would lead to the “unhappiness” of black scholars were they to be hired; small school size; and/or espoused artificial meritocratic language that did three things:
First, affirm one’s commitment to a color-blind hiring policy; second, ignore the request to hire African American scholars; and third, focus on what was being done for African Americans in nonacademic areas (Anderson, 2002, p. 14).

Examples of the latter included the hiring of black waitstaff, assistant athletic coaches and temporary lecturers. Anderson (2002) concluded that, “apparently, the geographical, population, and other circumstances that allegedly worked against hiring African Americans as professors did not preclude their employment as library assistants and service managers in tea rooms” (p. 14).

In short, black scholars highly certified to hold faculty positions in the most outstanding American colleges and universities had been systematically denied the opportunities to be such. Anderson (2002) noted, “the evidence proves conclusively that… [t]he [PWI] presidents in general simply did not want to appoint African American scholars to their faculties, even at a time when there was a great shortage of qualified scholars” (p. 14). It would take federal legislation in the form of affirmative action decades later to forcibly open the doors for a relative few black Ph.D.s such as these to occupy faculty seats at PWIs. Still, Anderson (2002) maintained that the peculiar relationship between race and meritocracy in the academy…remains a problem in our contemporary institutions of higher learning… Even in today’s environment, the question of hiring African American scholars at traditionally white universities is invariably followed by the question of ‘qualification’ or ‘merit’ (p. 16).

Indeed, the under-representation of black faculty at PWIs has been attributed to many factors over the course of American history. But many scholars agree that the insinuation of intrinsic black ineptitude has essentially undergirded—and superseded—them all.
Ideology of Black Intellectual and Cultural Inferiority

To elaborate, socioeconomic disadvantages (Blackwell, 1988); inadequate pre-baccalaureate educational opportunities (White & Parham, 1990); hostile campus environments and negative interactions with faculty at PWIs (Nettles, 1990; Patterson-Stewart, Ritchie & Sanders, 1997; Lewis, Ginsberg, Davies & Smith, 2004); and psychosocial factors such as “stereotype threat” (Steele, 1997; Taylor & Antony, 2000) have all been frequently cited as reasons for the lack of black participation in higher education (Ellis, 2001). Perry of Perry et al. (2003) confirmed many of these, but maintained that the persistent, societal ideology of black intellectual inferiority has been one of the biggest barriers to American black educational attainment and, by extension, academic careers at PWIs.

From the days of slavery through the present, the belief that blacks are innately less intelligent and moral than whites has been imbedded into the collective American consciousness (Perry et al. 2003). In 1799, English physician Charles White contended that science “proved” blacks were “just above the ape in the hierarchy of animal/human development, having a small brain” (White & Parham, 1990, p. 7). Whole subfields of anthropology and psychology were dedicated early in their existences to the study of supposed differences in innate intelligence and character of blacks (Guthrie, 2004). Influential though theoretically and methodologically flawed hereditarian work “proving” the scientific bases of black racial and intellectual inferiority (Jensen, 1969) appeared frequently in respected scholarly journals such as The Harvard Review (Crane, 1994). Thus, these were not beliefs advocated by fringe members of society. Rather, these notions of black inferiority were centerpieces in mainstream academic thought, and
helped cement them in the collective consciousness of the nation. Evans and Evans (1982) argued that the mindset about black incompetence is “what forced most black educators to teach in segregated black schools” (p. 254).

In other words, “because the prevailing attitude held by whites was that blacks were inferior to them,” Evans & Evans 1982, p. 254), blacks as a group were systematically denied opportunities to teach whites in formal education settings (e.g. PWIs).

The number of black professors teaching at predominantly white institutions remains less than five percent nationally. Hence, though blacks have gained popularity and credibility in sports and entertainment, they are still questioned regarding their academic capabilities. Society perpetuates the notion that blacks are biologically inferior to whites’ intellectual level by publishing reports such as The Bell Curve and consistently offering information on black students’ poor performance on standardized tests (Barbee, 2000, p. 3).

This not only effectively precluded blacks from holding authoritative roles as thought leaders and instructors over whites, it also prevented whites from interacting with blacks in this capacity in formal intellectual settings. (As an aside, there is little research yielding actual comprehensive numbers, but I would hypothesize that the same could be said of black teachers and principals in predominantly white public school districts as well.)

It seems plausible that more widespread occurrence of both of these actions could help to, over time, ameliorate misguided notions of black inferiority fueled by racial prejudice or sheer ignorance (i.e. no personal knowledge of black intellectuals). But Barbee (2000) expressed little confidence in this logic. Allport (1954) maintained, “[prejudice] is actively resistant to all evidence that would unseat it” (p. 9). Barbee
examined Allport’s contact hypothesis and black professor-white student interaction and reported that

Nonetheless, Allport contends that interracial contact may lessen prejudice: (1) when those in contact are of equal status; (2) when those in contact perceive themselves to be in pursuit of common goals; (3) when the contact is sanctioned by institutional support, i.e., by the larger community or by law; and (4) when the contact is positive in nature. (Barbee, 2000, p. 1)

She correctly maintained that while “not all of these conditions apply, however, to white student-black professor contact” (for instance, the professor-student relationship generally is not one of equals, nor necessarily common goals), white “students’ exposure to black professors teaching at predominantly white institutions is unlikely to diminish their stereotypical views of blacks in general” (Barbee, 2000, p. 2).

Indeed, Perry of Perry et al. (2003) suggested that the ideology of black intellectual inferiority is more entrenched today than it ever was: “[it] is expressed… vividly and constantly and with considerable force in the media, which inserts itself into all aspects of our lives” (p. 96). For example, consider widely publicized comments by current U.S. Vice President Joe Biden and U.S. Senator Harry Reid (D-Nevada) about President Barack Obama. Both men, at different times before and during Obama’s 2008 presidential campaign, verbalized racial microaggressions (Sue et al. 2007) about Obama’s “exceptional” deportment as a black man. Biden praised his “cleanliness,” “bright” intellect and “articulate speech,” while Reid noted his “light skin” and “lack of Negro dialect unless he wanted to have one.” The two men’s remarks on how Obama speaks—a mundane detail considering Obama’s upbringing, socioeconomic status and educational background—inadvertently spoke to prevailing stereotypical beliefs about black people as a group.
And ponder the example of a 17-year old student who had been part of a city-to-suburb busing program since she was five years old:

My teachers always tell me I am so smart, that I am not like the other black students. They think this is a compliment, that it will make me feel good. They don’t know that it would only make me feel good if I didn’t identify with my community, with black people. Instead it lets me know that they think black people as a whole are dumb (Perry et al. 2003, p. 96).

Sue et al. (2007) described this particular form of microaggression as a “microinsult,” communication that, often unconsciously, “conveys rudeness, insensitivity, and demean[s] the target’s racial heritage or identity…” These are subtle snubs, frequently unknown to the perpetrator, but clearly convey a hidden insulting message to the recipient of color” (p. 274). More specifically, these comments by Biden, Reid and the girl’s teachers were “ascriptions of intelligence,” where assessment of a person’s intellect is evaluated on the basis of their race (p. 276).

History offers plenty of examples of black cerebral excellence: from Phyllis Wheatley, an enslaved African who became the first black published poet in 1773; to Julius Percy, who, in 1936 at Glidden, became the first black chemist to direct a chemical research laboratory; to Maurice Ashley, who, in 1999, became the first international chess grandmaster. When afforded the environment, resources and opportunity to excel intellectually—and sometimes, even in the absence of all of these elements—blacks are no less likely to naturally do so than any other group (Banks, 1998). And, despite collective notions and media reports to the contrary, most black Americans have always valued education (Anderson, 1988). “There is simply no evidence to support the claim that African Americans historically developed a deep distrust of school and school people” (Perry et al. 2003, p. 62).
However, Taylor and Antony (2000) argued that functioning in academic settings under these kinds of assumptions is stressful to black students and professionals, particularly those whose high scholastic performance is part of their identity—such as black professors. Steele (1997) coined the idea of “stereotype threat” as membership in a group whose intellectual skills are generally held suspect because of negative stereotyping. This threat may be more pronounced among blacks of higher socioeconomic status, “the academic vanguard of their group” (Taylor & Antony, 2000, p. 187). Steele contended that these might be more confident in their intellectual abilities and thus more sensitive to being negatively stereotyped by a particular occurrence (say, mispronouncing words) in a given academic situation (during a class presentation in front of white peers or students). And while some black faculty at PWIs may be busy managing this threat (even if it is more imagined than actual), their students may be dealing with reactions all their own.

Black “Docs” and Student Shock

This feeling may be felt most acutely in scholastic environments where black faculty members are typically fewer in number—at PWIs, for instance. “Regrettably there is a widespread view held by large numbers of American academics that blacks as a race simply lack the ability and qualifications to hold important positions in academia, particularly positions where they are entrusted with the teaching of white students” (“The Snail-Like Progress of Blacks Into Faculty Ranks of Higher Education,” 2007). Hendrix (2004) did agree that black professors at PWIs had to work harder to establish credibility with their students—except when they taught “ethnic courses,” or “spoke about blacks or subjects typically associated with blacks, (e.g. crime)” (p. 243). Said one student in
Hendrix’ study on the role of race in student perceptions of faculty credibility: “the more removed from cultural identity, the more you have to figure out the fit… [like fitting] a square peg in a round hole” (p. 243).

This expressed ‘odd fit’ can play out between black faculty and their students in several ways. Osler (2004) identified seven student-led factors confirmed by the extant literature on classroom experiences of black faculty at PWIs: 1) disbelief; 2) a lack of respect; 3) the question of age; 4) cultural tension and shock; 5) the need to constantly challenge; 6) misperceptions of rigor; and 7) a lack of faith (pp. 144-146). First, PWI students are often surprised to encounter a black professor. “Many of these professors felt that their classes contained at least some students who questioned their right to hold the status of professor” (Harlow, 2003, p. 352). Second, students are more likely to directly and indirectly disrespect black professors in ways they would not white faculty members. Thompson & Louque (2005) recount an interaction on the first night of class at a PWI:

One of us was passing out the course syllabus and other relevant materials, when a group of white students asked us, “Aren’t you intimidated by us?” When the author replied, “No. Why should I be?” they resumed their conversation with each other and appeared not to think twice about the inappropriateness of their questions. At the time the author wondered if these students would have asked a white professor the same question (p. 41).

Third, some black professors are mistaken for students. This could be a function of their chronological age, or the idea that a black student is more cognitively congruous than a black professor to students at PWIs. Cleveland (2004), while a professor at a small, Catholic, liberal arts PWI, shared:

“when I entered the classroom and met my students for the first time… [i]mmediately most assumed I was a student — a surprise for them in itself because most of them...had never taken classes with black students or any minority for that matter” (p. xiv).
Fourth, some PWI students refuse to engage around racial/ethnic issues, even when such are part of the course content. Said one professor participant in a qualitative study on diversity education professors at PWIs: “there are times when I cannot get someone to consider a different perspective. Those are the most stressful things, to leave a classroom and someone just refuses to consider a different perspective” (Perry et al. 2009, p. 92).

Fifth, some black PWI professors experience challenges from students on their competence and knowledge of subject matter. A black full professor in electrical engineering described that

The male students sometimes would try to show that I did not know my material. For example, after I had explained a point in class, a male student would attempt to explain the point again in a manner that suggested my explanation was incorrect. From the tone of the student and the timing of the comment, I felt he was trying to demonstrate that I, this black woman professor, was not knowledgeable” (Stanley, 2006, p. 709).

Sixth, some students mistakenly think that a course taught by a black professor will be easier to pass. Hamilton (2002) highlighted one black faculty member who was “incensed” that some of his white students, after failing the midterm examination of his African American literature course, came to his office hours to “ask to be allowed to take the class pass-fail,” even after he “bent over backward to help them out” by re-curving the grades, handing out written notes to supplement his lectures and starting class earlier to allow more time for student questions. “I still can’t believe the arrogance, the sense of entitlement, of white people thinking our stuff is easy and when it’s not, they don’t have to change their attitudes, come to it with a sense of seriousness — they just get to check out” (p. 33). Seventh and finally, some students are not willing to give black faculty the benefit of the doubt that they can teach them what they need to know in a given course. Burden, Harrison and Hodge (2005) interviewed a black woman faculty member at a
PWI who had a student in her class who stated, “I cannot believe I paid money to be taught by a black person…” (p. 231).

Unfortunately, the published descriptions of black faculty classroom experiences seem more negative than encouraging. This, too, is the result of historical precedent. In the closing conversation that follows, I cull four prominent themes from the previous sections of this chapter that ultimately affect, directly and indirectly, the kinds of interactions some black faculty have had with their students at PWIs.

Concluding Discussion

To recap, it should be underscored that while the American schooling system certainly has been used, and even intended to hegemonically prepare blacks for their place in the broader economic and social structure, “it has hardly been a finely tuned instrument of manipulation in the hands of socially dominant groups” (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p. 12). For instance, most blacks in the post-bellum South collectively resisted the kind of industrial education offered them in preference of liberal arts education, which taught the democratic principles that helped them continue—and eventually win—their long fight for full legal citizenship. Nonetheless, we presently grapple with the overarching outcomes of this far-reaching history whenever we survey the relative lack of black scholarly presence at PWIs in the 21st century and the implications that can have on their classroom interactions with their students.

Again, blacks are not blameless for some of the conditions that have resulted in their present state in American educational affairs, including the place of black faculty at PWIs today. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote about two elements of black complicity in the struggle for civil rights from a jail cell in Alabama in 1963:
I began thinking about the fact that I stand in the middle of two opposing forces in the Negro community. One is a force of complacency, made up in part of Negroes who, as a result of long years of oppression, are so drained of self respect and a sense of “somebodiness” that they have adjusted to segregation; and in part of a few middle-class Negroes who, because of a degree of academic and economic security and because in some ways they profit by segregation, have become insensitive to the problems of the masses (King, 1963, p. 6).

However, these ingredients, figuratively speaking, have to be understood from analysis of the entire recipe, which occurs far too little (Torres, 2006). From this chapter, we can extract four major factors—I call them the “Four As”—that are frequently muted in the debate, but which contribute directly to black faculty shortage and thereby impact the kinds of interactions black PWI faculty have in the classroom with their students.

_Ambition_

First, the scarcity of black professors is not for lack of _ambition_. Many blacks have historically sacrificed and placed hope in what Willis (1977) claimed to be “the common educational fallacy that opportunities can be made by education” (p. 127). Rather, it is for multi-generational absence of the option to pursue the levels and quality of education necessary for an academic career. “Systemic change takes many decades” (McIntosh, 1990, p. 36). Though overt discrimination may be a thing of the not-so-distant past,

> African American parents, as the first generation of African Americans to experience racism and its impact on achievement in an allegedly ‘open and integrated society,’ might possibly not have figured out how to develop institutional formations and pass on psychological coping strategies to their children that respond to this new context (Perry et al. 2003, p. 100).

Contemporary discussion of this issue rarely vocalizes the fact that solid black American education as a whole unit from grade school to grad school—and the concurrent opportunity to be a professor at a PWI—has really only existed in earnest for one
generation, the last 40 years or so (Perry et al. 2003). That is, slightly longer than this
dissertator’s lifetime: at this writing, I am 36.

For most black children in the South, Anderson (1988) noted that from 1860-1935, “not even public elementary schools were available. High schools were virtually non-existent, and the general unavailability of secondary education precluded even the opportunity to prepare for college” (p. 285). However, by 1940, this reality began to change. Still, from 1935 to the early 1970s, most blacks didn’t go to college, either for lack of prospects or solid academic preparation due to the blatant, systematic “long and persistent denial and limiting of educational opportunity for African Americans” (Perry et al. 2003, p. 6). Thus, graduate study was out of the question except for a tiny minority. If the Ph.D. is necessary to secure a tenured faculty post, it is easy to understand this reason why there are proportionately so few black tenure-track professors at PWIs.

Ability

Second, neither is the shortage of black professors at PWIs for lack of ability. Rather, it has been for insufficiency of professional opportunities, often cloaked in either blatantly bigoted or milder meritocratic language promoting the innate inferiority of African descended people. Despite “a substantial body of evidence, from numerous different sources using a variety of methods, that supports an environmental explanation of the race gap” (Crane, 1994, p. 189), the national ideology of black intellectual inferiority persists. It did for those black scholars on Wale’s 1945 list fortunate enough to earn undergraduate and graduate degrees early on, and it still does for those who engage in extensive education attainment today. To reiterate, blacks as a group have only been permitted to be academic fixtures at PWIs for about 40 or so years. During the 1970s and
1980s, most of these relatively sizeable numbers were located in black studies departments (Rojas, 2007).

The notion of black intellectual inferiority has been well elaborated in this chapter’s thesis—and its legacy in how black people as a group are generally perceived academically cannot be emphasized enough. For as long as people of African descent have resided in America, “being black [has not] been comparable with being smart” (Perry et al. 2003, p. 36). The dehumanization of blacks through centuries of slavery and institutionalized racial inequality necessarily fueled the notion of innate black intellectual inferiority.

For no American group has there been such a persistent, well-articulated, and unabated ideology about their mental incompetence. Thus both African Americans’ caste like status and the larger society’s ideology about their intellectual competence create a distinctive set of dilemmas for African American youth and even adults. African Americans have to develop social psychological and political competencies to deal with these dilemmas if they are to commit themselves to doing work that involves the life of the mind (Perry et al., 2003, p. 105).

Compounded by generations of deliberately restricted educational opportunity, and rigid de jure and de facto racial segregation, there was little occasion for blacks to hold formal positions as knowledge transmitters to or academic facilitators for white students. This may help explain why it remains conceptually foreign and novel for whites as a group to see blacks as a group as capable of being their intellectual equals or leaders.

For example, in a qualitative study on student perceptions of professor credibility, Hendrix (2004) found that “black [professors] had to work harder to establish their credibility” with their white students than white professors did; and that their students of color “were very aware that the qualifications of black professors were challenged by their white classmates” (p. 243). Further, the students of color interviewed in the study
“spoke of overheard comments and conversations in class as well as open challenges to the authority of black professors during class lectures” (p. 243).

Attempt

Third, the shortage of black professors is not for want of attempt. Rather, it is due to lasting systemic obstructions. A synopsis of an experience of a fellow academic and friend of my informant may serve as an apt illustration. “Dr. White,” who is black, interviewed, upon invitation, at this study’s PWI of Inquiry during an earlier year of my informant’s employment. Dr. White’s area of interest and research concerned black youth culture and music. Her application (which would include her research) was reviewed and she was invited to interview. But, according to my informant, once she arrived, members of the college and university (not the actual hiring department) with whom she met treated her very poorly. At the core, they questioned her choice of research platform subject matter. “The picture that you paint of African American life and culture is very negative,” reported my informant. “And now that Barack Obama is president, we think you should do something more positive.” Needless to say, she was not hired at this PWI.

This example reflects the discussion of research by scholars of color in Chapter One. Specifically, it exemplifies the reality that certain unspoken expectations are imposed upon the work of racially underrepresented faculty at PWIs, and that these demands can destroy an aspiring scholar’s attempts to enter—or desire to remain—in the academy. That these members of the review committee had the institutional authority (as well as the impudence) to instruct and expect a trained scholar who had earned the necessary credentials (as they did) and was “free” to select any research platform she
chose (as they were) to abandon it because it did not fit their conceptions of what should be covered about black people is fascinating—and disquieting.

Who should get to determine what should be covered about black people? That the historical details highlighted in this chapter frequently go missing from mainstream public and academic discussion of the paucity of black faculty at PWIs is an example of the “selective tradition”:

…that which within an effective dominant culture is always passed off as ‘the tradition,’ the significant past. But always the selectivity is the point; the way in which from a whole possible areas of past and present, certain meanings and practices are neglected and excluded. Even more crucially, some of these meanings are reinterpreted, diluted or put into forms which support or at least do not contradict other elements within the effective dominant culture (Apple, 2004, p. 5).

This selectivity is a function of invisible white privilege (McIntosh, 1990). It provides those of the dominant culture an “invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks” (McIntosh, 1990, p. 31). These utensils—including the assumed right to dictate another (peer) scholar’s research platform—have methodically been denied to blacks as a group, who continue to occupy a low caste-like position in society (Ogbu, 1978). Despite modern popular rhetoric to the contrary (often attributed in part, ironically, to the Obama presidency), we are far from being a “post-racial” society though “the visible, in-your-face manifestations of oppression have been mostly eliminated” (Perry et al. 2003, p. 97). We now contend with more subtle yet no less damaging strains of societal inequities based on both race and class. Since blatant symbols of racism are all but gone, blacks are now expected to perform “on par”—without the knapsack of privilege—on the same competitive plane as if they had the same starting line and share the same playing field. It’s difficult to
imagine a white applicant being invited to interview as Dr. White was, and that scenario
playing out as it did, even if (s)he was not offered the position.

Availability

Finally, the present scarceness of black faculty at PWIs is not for lack of
availability. Though he did not distinguish faculty from administrative careers, Marable
(2008) stated that 68 percent of all African-American Ph.D. recipients plan to obtain jobs
in higher education. While the number of black Ph.D.s is small, it is a pool of talent
nonetheless. There are scholarly articles focused mainly on increasing the number of
black Ph.D.s as a solution to the shortage (Whisenton, 1989; Maton, Kohout, Wicherski,
Leary & Vinokurov, 2006; Stewart, Williamson & King, 2008). As some disciplines,
such as STEM fields, have produced few black Ph.D.s and considering the need for new
talent to replace retiring faculty, this is a necessary and worthy goal.

However, the argument as often presented is sometimes a distraction from the
matter at hand, and raises some relevant questions. Namely, have all black Ph.D.s who
aspired to tenure-track faculty positions at PWIs actually obtained them? Once hired,
have all these black faculty members obtained tenured status? Are PWIs presently
saturated with black tenure-track faculty? If the answers to these questions are no, the
reasons why should be determined and investigated. But the research suggesting that
simply increasing the number of black Ph.D.s is the solution assumes that the answer to
these questions is yes.

Why does this matter? It is important because blacks tend to take longer to finish
graduate school (Vaughn, 1985). Citing statistics from The Journal of Blacks in Higher
Education, Marable (2008) stated that it takes black Americans an average of 12.5 years
to earn a doctorate after receiving their bachelor’s degrees, and the average age of an African American Ph.D. recipient is 36.7 years. Further, he argued that the percentage of African American faculty awarded tenure declined from 40.8 percent in 1993 down to 38.1 percent in 2003 alone. “At least 70 percent of all black PhDs aren’t even employed in full-time jobs. They hold part-time, adjunct and half-time positions” (Marable, 2008). While this certainly speaks to future faculty opportunity problems, it does not address the quandary of so few black faculty at PWIs right now. Thus, the published accounts of classroom interactions current professors have with their students appear to be overwhelmingly negative because 1) the numbers of these faculty are not substantial enough to increase contact with PWI students and normalize black academic authority (Barbee, 2000); and 2) the literature is based on aggregate descriptions, not in-depth study of individual faculty experiences.

Ramifications of Pre-Study Literature Review for This Dissertation

This dissertation does seek to delve into the individual experience of a black faculty member at a PWI. There are two conspicuous ramifications of this chapter that warrant comment. First, though I expressed the desire to observe the singular and not just assume the experience of the collective in Chapters One and Two, this literature review paradoxically situates my individual study within the aggregate historical experience of black Ph.D. faculty at American PWIs. This is unavoidably necessary to achieve context and proper understanding of what may or may not be revealed by the data. And each story—no matter how similar or divergent—adds another stitch to the tapestry of the group’s history. This is also inescapable.
Second, the foreknowledge contained in this contextual literature review may appear to violate my use of grounded theory as an analysis tool in my study methodology. As will be elaborated in Chapter Three, grounded theory essentially holds that meaning “follows from data rather than preceding them” (Lincoln & Guba, 1981, p. 204). That is, unlike in quantitative research, data collected is understood from the context from which it was taken—not some external source (like a literature review). However, the details of this chapter are not specific to the particulars of my case study, as it was obviously written before my research was conducted. I have searched for and collected some scholarly literature I thought might be pertinent based on my earliest hunches about what I thought could come from my inquiry. But, remaining true to my methodological choice, I did not read these before I concluded my data analysis, and was ready to discuss my findings. The next chapter will fully detail the research methods of this qualitative study.
Chapter Three

Qualitative Research Methods:

“The Power of One”

This dissertation is a qualitative study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed five axioms or basic beliefs of the “naturalist paradigm” that govern qualitative research. Namely: 1) realities are multiple, socially constructed and holistic; 2) knower and known are interactive and inseparable; 3) only time-bound and context-bound working hypotheses are possible; 4) all entities are in a state of mutual simultaneous shaping, so that it is impossible to distinguish causes from effects; and 5) inquiry is value-bound (p. 37). These tenets heavily influenced my decision not to conduct a quantitative study, but rather to focus on one black faculty member at a PWI.

Axiomatic Assumptions

First, my informant (see the “Data Sources” section for description of my selection criteria) is a unique composite of her personality, background and experiences, and their nuanced interaction with her particular professional environment. Thus, I could not necessarily expect her reality to neatly line up with what the literature describes. Second, as the observer, my presence could not be separated from what I “saw.” My subjective lenses affected what I saw and what I missed; and those of my informant—even as I interacted with her directly and with the classroom environment indirectly—helped to shape the data I report. Thus, my data is a symbiotically created set of information. Third, my study was conducted in two classrooms—two sections of a single course at a particular PWI during a single semester at a specific time in history. As my data is a product of this time and this milieu, they cannot speak for all black faculty at all
PWIs at all times in history. Fourth, my informant, the interactions in her classrooms and even I were in constant interrelation with one another, so it was difficult to determine the precise origin of an interaction between the professor and her students. For instance, was it something the professor said first? Or was it a behavior on the part of a student that prompted the professor to respond? Or, did my presence have an effect on either what the professor or student chose to say/do? Finally, my values, lenses and worldview inescapably influenced my research. To say otherwise, is at best, naïve and at worst, intellectually dishonest.

I chose qualitative research, then, because I wanted to use inquiry methods that allowed for greater depth of nuanced examination, understanding description and collaborative interpretation of everyday phenomena than does traditional quantitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). To accomplish this, my dissertation contains several required elements of this methodology.

Central Features

My research was conducted in a natural setting (two higher education classrooms) whose context was essential for understanding the phenomenon being studied (black faculty interaction with students while teaching is taking place). As researcher, I was the human data collection instrument who, unlike a survey or questionnaire, interacted with my study informant (subject) and interpreted the meaning of that interaction as well as the phenomenon being observed. Tacit or intuitive knowledge (what I just know I know from experience but may not be able to articulate or quantify) was just as important for meaning making as propositional or verbally expressible knowledge. Qualitative research methods are more perceptive of the many reciprocally shaping influences quantitative
methods ignore; and flexible/tolerant in dealing with the multiple realities that were surely a part of this study (my informant’s, mine and to a much lesser extent, my informant’s students), as these are naturally present across the human perspective. I used purposive sampling or intentional selection to choose my informant, which I hoped would help increase the richness of data possibly available for me to observe and report.

My data analysis was conducted inductively on the premise of descriptive discovery, not on predictive a priori conclusions. I expected the data I collected to derive meaning from grounded theory, that is, from the actual setting being observed rather than a disconnected, external source. Though this chapter section outlines my methodology, my research design (as alluded to at the conclusion of the previous chapter and elaborated in detail later in the next major section) was more emergent than pre-constructed. This is because it was impossible for me to know in advance what I would observe in a natural (spontaneous and interactive) setting (though I had hunches that I might see some of the behaviors reported about black faculty in the literature).

I negotiated outcomes or meanings with my study informant, who served as my primary data source. In Chapter Four, I wrote up my research results in a friendly, jargon free case study “story” format that includes “thick description” of rich detail. I did my best to interpret study data, with the help of my informant, in terms of the specifics of my particular cases, not in terms of broad generalizations. I tentatively rather than representatively applied my study findings to a broader discussion of black faculty at PWIs in Chapter Five. I expected whatever themes materialized to emerge from my observed setting. Finally, I used paradigm-appropriate criteria of trustworthiness to
conduct this study: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 39-43), to be discussed briefly in a subsequent section.

Because of such variances, neither I nor my choice of methodology can make broad generalizations about all black faculty at PWIs. This is a study that sees value in the single story and what it has to tell us about a given phenomenon (Stake, 2005). If there is to be any transferability to other cases (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)—which I neither predicted nor guaranteed from the outset—I expect it to be tentatively applied, at best.

The Researcher

*Role*

I conducted my research as a “participant observer” (Spradley, 1980; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984), with an exclusive emphasis on passive participant observation rather than participation in the activities of my site. That is, I was in the classroom directly observing my informant while she was teaching. However, I did not participate in the activities of the class (i.e. discussions, assignments, etc.). I was mainly the human instrument watching and recording the goings-on in the classroom between the teacher and her students.

As the “outsider,” I was not there to ascribe meaning to what I saw under the assumption that I “knew” what was happening. My role was to help make the “strange familiar and the familiar strange” to readers (Glesne, 1998, p. 46). I aimed to “start with a conscious attitude of almost complete ignorance” (Spradley, 1980, p. 4). To paraphrase Spradley (1980), I did not know how my informant understood her world in the institutional climate and departmental/classroom culture of her PWI of employ prior to the start of my investigation. As he suggests, “that remains to be discovered” (Spradley,
1980, p. 4). I was consciously and willingly the outsider trying to capture and convey the insider’s point of view in her own terms and voice; even if what my informant reported challenged what I as the researcher had observed (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, p. 110). As such, my role was also as a collaborator with my informant—from interpreting the data to reporting the findings of the study in the final manuscript.

**Biases**

Research done well is as much an art as it is a science. As such, qualitative researchers are not afraid of the inherent subjectivity all human investigators bring to their inquiry (Glesne, 1998). Rather than see bias as something to be controlled for or “eliminated” as almost universally espoused (though impossibly practiced) in quantitative methodology, interpretive research acknowledges and even welcomes it—in “good” doses:

Good bias not only helps us get our work done; by lending focus, it is essential to the performance of any research…Bad bias, then, is a matter of excess…In the case of qualitative research, bias becomes excessive to whatever extent it exerts undue influence on the consequences of inquiry…The way to guard against this is not to deny bias or pretend to suppress it, but to recognize and harness it…The critical step to understand is that bias itself is not the problem…Bias requires us to identify the perspective we bring to our studies as insiders and/or outsiders and to anticipate how that may affect what we report (Wolcott, 1995, p. 165).

Thus, below, at the urging of Wolcott (1995), I “covet my biases, display them openly,” as I continually worked throughout this project to “ponder how they will help [me] formulate both the purposes of [my] investigation and how [I] can proceed with [my] inquiries” (Wolcott, 1995, p. 165).

On the surface, I shared several characteristics with my topic population as a whole, and my informant in particular. Namely, I am a black woman Ph.D. student at a PWI exploring the possibility of a career in academia as a tenure-track faculty member at
a PWI once I complete my studies. Like my informant, all of my formal education—
elementary through post-secondary schooling—has taken place at PWIs, on the East
Coast as well as in the Midwest. I also have connections to the PWI of Inquiry. Also, she
and I were both public school teachers before undertaking our doctoral studies. However,
our identities also diverged in many of the same areas. For instance, I am a first
generation West Indian American, the daughter of two immigrants, while my informant is
of multigenerational Southern African American heritage. Our doctoral study disciplines
are very different, likewise are the locales, demographics and cultures of our childhood
hometowns where we were educated before undergraduate study.

I am well aware that my intersecting lenses in these areas influenced how I
viewed and interpreted what I saw in my study during data collection and analysis.
However, these same lenses helped me to arrive at and pursue my dissertation topic.
Additionally, these qualities may have also lent to an easier rapport (Glesne, 1998, p. 96-
104) with my informant. But, I did not automatically assume at the outset that because
she and I shared certain characteristics (which also include similar age, marital and
parental status) that we would see the same things or interpret phenomenon in the
observational setting the same way. All told, I had to work even harder to make sure that
my informant’s perspective and voice were the dominant ones as I crafted a story of
“what was going on” in her classroom between her and her students. Again, the
collaborative nature of my research study assisted in this area.
Data Sources

Selection Criteria

My case study required a black, Ph.D. holding, tenure-track faculty member at a PWI to participate as an informant. There were several criteria necessary for the participant to meet. First, the professor had to be on the path of traditional career status rather than a non-tenure track instructor (i.e. adjunct, post-doc or visiting scholar, etc.) because it is the hallmark of the academic career, and blacks represent a numerical minority in this area. Second, the informant had to have been a faculty member for at least one year at their PWI of employ in order to compare and contrast teaching experiences they’ve had at their particular institution. Third, my informant had to actively be teaching the semester I collected my data, and willing to have me sit in the classroom and observe them interacting with their students over an extended period of time. Fourth, to solidify my outsider status and help preclude me from assuming I completely knew what was happening, my informant was to be a scholar in a different doctoral discipline/content area than mine. Fifth, my informant was to be easily accessible in terms of institutional entrée, geographical location and personal openness with regard to my research. Finally, my participant was to be as (or nearly as) enthusiastic about my topic as I am: this is an extended research project of considerable energy, contact, communication and contribution over time, and her voice dominates the narrative of my dissertation’s fourth chapter.

The Informant and the Institutional Setting

The PWI where my study was conducted is located in a midsized, Midwestern city within a county of nearly one million people. Of this population, approximately 62
percent are white and 25 percent are black. My informant, “Dr. Eve Bell” (a pseudonym), hails from the city, which is home to several institutions of higher learning, some of them traditional PWIs. Since this study was concerned with the perceptions of black faculty, my informant served as my primary data source. The participant was a black, female, tenure-track faculty member at a midsized, Midwestern PWI, where she also earned her bachelor’s degree. She earned her Ph.D. from a prestigious Research I PWI on the East Coast, where she also taught as a graduate assistant. As such, she was experientially familiar as an instructor in two predominantly white institutional contexts in two very different parts of the country. As of this writing, my informant is in her 30s, married, and the mother of two young children under the age of four.

She had been a tenure-track member of her humanities department’s faculty for around three years at the time the data was collected, and one of a number of black female faculty members at the PWI at large. I selected Dr. Bell after casually emailing all “suspected” black faculty at her PWI; that is, those whose research interests reflected “black” topics; and those who had “black” sounding names (for example, one contacted professor did not have a black research platform, but did have a Nigerian first and last name). I simply asked if I could request a meeting with them to discuss a potential research project for a dissertation. She was one of two respondents (one male and one female) who met all of the selection criteria.

We did meet briefly in person, I introduced myself, and shared my topic. She responded enthusiastically about potential participation in my project. I subsequently met with the black male professor, who thought my ideas was interesting, but expressed concern about being identified, as the PWI of Inquiry had fewer black men faculty than
black women. After some consideration of how the meetings went, I believed Dr. Bell seemed more willing to move forward without hesitation/reservation. She indicated that she taught upper level undergraduate courses, some of which had more than one section that she instructed. It worked out for me to observe one of these courses; she taught two sections of the same class. I observed both sections, and these served as my points for comparison and contrast within the single case: Dr. Bell as instructor.

*Other Data Sources*

I incorporated secondary data sources derived from Dr. Bell’s students, totally void of any personally identifying information. They include verbatim, recorded statements from class discussions, part of the course syllabus outlining expectations and guidelines for success (see Appendix C) and a student course journal entry (see Appendix D) she selected. Relevant text portions of it are used in Chapter Four’s narrative to illustrate the informant’s perceptions of her interactions with students in this course—to corroborate, repudiate or elaborate interesting interactions that occurred in the classroom with students. It should be noted that Dr. Bell repeatedly agreed to provide additional “interesting” student journal entries, as well as her end-of-course aggregate student evaluations for a couple iterations of this course (the observed semester included). However, none of these appear verbatim in this manuscript; only Dr. Bell’s paraphrasing of phrases some of these contained. I did not speak, directly or indirectly, to any of the students during this study. Other sources of data, and ethical issues around the means by which I collected them will be discussed in the next two major sections.
Data Collection Methods

Direct Observation

I was a passive participant observer, and conducted my observations relatively unobtrusively (Spradley, 1980, p. 48). Specifically, for approximately 13 weeks, three times a week (or as many times as the class met as per the PWI’s academic calendar; or when Dr. Bell did not occasionally cancel class; or when I did not have the occasional necessary appointment to attend), I sat in the back or corner and recorded the goings-on of my informant’s two course section classrooms. I hoped my ongoing presence in my informant’s classroom had become like that of anyone else who also is an on-going observer participant over time (i.e. an audit student or faculty evaluator) in the class: routine and unexciting. Higher education students are accustomed to classroom visits by others who observe but do not participate in the course itself, such as the instructor’s senior faculty member who conducted teaching evaluations used to assist in granting or denying tenure. However, the professor announcing the visit in advance to prepare the students, and again introducing the visitor during the first appearance may mitigate any discomfort. As a former elementary school teacher, frequently visited (sometimes unannounced) in the classroom by various people, I can attest to the reality that when this is done properly, students over time “forget” the visitor is there. Indeed, it can and does happen successfully in a closed educational setting.

The Ethnographic Record

During my observations, I made an ethnographic record (Spradley, 1980, p. 63) to document what I observed in my study site. To do this, I used several other data collection elements: field notes, digital audio recordings, photographs of any chalk/white
board work (not of the students or the professor), course articles deemed relevant by my informant and other artifacts made available by my informant, such as the “Ten Commandments” syllabus (see Appendix C) and a student journal entry (see Appendix D). First, I took condensed field notes by hand of what was happening in the classroom. These written notes detailed the time events occurred, what (as well as who and where) occurred in purely descriptive, concrete terms, and, marginally, any personal notes or questions I had based on what I saw. Additionally, I simultaneously used a small, handheld digital audio recorder to capture the verbatim dialogue of each class I observed. After each class observation, I expanded these writings into a fuller account, incorporating transcriptions of the audio recordings. Together, these two processes provided a more complete record of what I observed than if I had done only one or the other, and helped to inform follow-up discussions with Dr. Bell to clarify questions I had about what I saw.

Second, I took a few photographs of any (white/chalk) board work my informant produced during class, in an effort to better understand what she was teaching, and therefore to better describe her interactions with students around course content. Similarly, I acquired copies of selected course articles/readings my informant deemed relevant to help make meaning of these interactions around content. Admittedly, these data were more for more my understanding, and less featured significantly less prominently than the observation field notes, interviews and class session recordings in my analysis. Finally, I viewed and incorporated other course artifacts mentioned previously, including the one produced by one of the students. These increased the trustworthiness of my study findings (Glesne, 1998).
Primary and Follow-Up Interviews

Next to the observations, 11 audio-recorded interviews with Dr. Bell comprised the largest portion of the data collected. These took two forms: two semi-structured, “nonscheduled standardized” primary interviews and nine unstructured, “nonstandardized” follow-up interviews (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). The former followed from a protocol of Institutional Review Board-approved, predesigned questions (see Appendix B) I had for my informant, concerning my informant’s current general experiences as a black faculty at the PWI of Inquiry, as well as her general experiences as a black graduate student and instructor at her doctoral PWI. These protocol questions were asked in stages; about half were asked in the middle of the semester during the longest interview I had with Dr. Bell (about two and half hours); the rest were asked, by telephone, in the final interview I had with her after the semester had concluded. I also asked unscripted, probing questions for clarification and/or elaboration of her responses to my protocol questions. The other nine interviews took place between the morning and afternoon classes in approximately 45 minute-long sessions. All were digitally recorded and transcribed for data analysis. The purpose of these was to get her perceptions of the classroom interactions with her students, and to gain additional insight into my informant’s relevant educational and professional experiences that she felt impacted her perceptions.

The nine follow-up interviews took place weekly in her office during her lunchtime to capture my informant’s thoughts on classroom sessions while they were still fresh in her mind. Again, the purpose was to actively make my informant a collaborator in the interpretation of the data and to clarify her perceptions of what happened in a given
classroom session just after it happened. The questions I asked were from my field notes and from the interviews themselves as they unfolded. These interviews were much more informal and spontaneous. All together, the conversations were transcribed and their contents featured prominently in my data analysis.

*Researcher’s Reflective Journal*

I kept a handwritten fieldwork journal (Spradley, 1980, p. 71) containing my personal reflections on the data collection and analysis processes; including analytic memos (Neuman, 2002) during data collection and coding to help me make sense of my data, generate other questions and begin identifying preliminary themes. This log was more private than anything else. I kept a separate small notebook for this purpose.

*Ethical Considerations*

I must reaffirm that during this study, my spotlight was on the professor, not the students, who played a necessary but non-focal role in my observations and analysis. On my first visit to her classes, my informant introduced me as “someone auditing the class, but she won’t be a part of any of the discussions. She’s here to observe me and the course in general.” I smiled and briefly said, “Hi. I’m Robyn. You won’t hear anything else from me for the rest of the semester.” Because I was not interested in studying the students themselves, and did not interact with them at all during the study (though I did develop pseudonyms for those who served as illustrations in the study’s reported narrative), I hoped to be regarded, more or less, as a “sanctioned fly on the wall,” unobtrusive to either the teaching or learning processes occurring within the classrooms I observed. Functionally, as far as the students were concerned, my presence seemed to be no different than my informant’s classroom observations by her department evaluator, who
was also be privy to whatever verbal and/or behavioral exchanges took place, but who had no interest in the students beyond their interaction with the professor. In fact, no students in either section spoke to me or acknowledged my presence the entire 13 weeks.

As a black female conducting a study significantly about race, my intention was not one of deception for its own sake, but rather to record the honest interactions of the students in Dr. Bell’s classes. Though they were not the focus of my study, I do use the students’ language directly in my write-up (both verbatim and paraphrased) to provide proper context for my informant’s words, which always appear verbatim. As a black female, I believed my racial status and identification as “The Researcher” could have highly skewed the kinds of qualitative revelations these students would ordinarily give if they were aware their class contributions to discussions were being audio recorded, analyzed and discussed with my informant in order to obtain her perceptions of those interactions. I recognized the inherent contradiction of using this secretive method to garner open responses; yet I also knew of no other means to achieve this all-important aim.

Data Collection Procedures

As per department and institutional requirements, I passed my proposal defense and subsequently obtained the necessary Institutional Review Board research approvals. I obtained Dr. Bell’s informed consent (see Appendix A). I collected the data for this study over the course of approximately 13 weeks (I was granted IRB approval in the middle of the third week of the semester, and the final week was for examinations only). As often as Dr. Bell’s classes met, with the occasional exception of previously scheduled appointments to which I had committed and needed to keep, I attended the sessions,
arriving at the start of class. In the morning section, I sat in the back of the end row closest to the classroom door; in the afternoon, I sat in the back of the second row closest to the door. At no time did I interact with the students, nor did they interact with me. While Dr. Bell taught, while class discussion took place, while students met in small groups, and/or while students read passages silently at their desks, I sat silently and observed and took field notes. I recorded class interactions from the moment the professor entered the room until the last student left the classroom.

After the morning class ended, I would often join Dr. Bell on the 5 minute or so walk to her office and talk about her perceptions along the way, keeping them in memory to jot down in my field notes. Weekly, when the academic calendar permitted and when Dr. Bell didn’t have a prior commitment during that time, I would sit in her office for the next 45 minutes or so and have recorded conversations about her perceptions of her two classes. I used the emerging data from my notes to guide these follow-up interviews, which were intended to capture her thoughts, observations and reactions to the class interactions and stressors she perceived she faced in relation to her students as a racialized classroom authority figure.

These informal interviews concluded when it was time to go the afternoon section of the course. I would walk with Dr. Bell the few feet to the other classroom building. She would enter the room first, and then I would enter and take my usual seat. My data collection procedures were identical to those in the morning section. Again, no student in the afternoon section acknowledged my presence the entire duration of my observation visits, and I likewise, did not interact with any of those students.
After each day’s class observations, I reviewed my field notes, and expanded them into a broader narrative. I would also listen to the recorded audio class session files, and write a researcher journal entry when I felt compelled to do so. At this stage, only the interviews with Dr. Bell were transcribed. This overall process was continuous rather than discrete (see Figure 1). Once data collection was concluded, all transcriptions (interviews and class sessions) were completed and reviewed for accuracy against the original recordings.

**Figure 1. Observation Data Collection-Analysis Cycle**

Verification of Data Trustworthiness

As appropriate for qualitative research, I strove for data trustworthiness as identified by Lincoln and Guba (1985). The four elements comprising this are: 1) credibility; 2) transferability; 3) dependability; and 4) confirmability. Below, I briefly
define these criteria. Below, I outline each (see Table 1), then go on to more fully describe the strategies I used to accomplish each.

Table 1.

Methods Used to Obtain Study Trustworthiness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements of Trustworthiness</th>
<th>Methods Used to Obtain Trustworthiness</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Credibility</strong></td>
<td>• Data triangulation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Prolonged engagement in data collection sites</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Observations lasting entire class periods</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Transferability</strong></td>
<td>• Purposive sampling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “Thick description” of data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependability</strong></td>
<td>• Audit of all data by informant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Confirmability</strong></td>
<td>• Audit of study interpretations, conclusions and recommendations by dissertation committee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Credibility*

Twining (1999) described this as the “degree of confidence in the ‘truth’ that the findings of a particular inquiry have for the subject with which—and context within which—the inquiry is carried out” (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993, p. 29). I aimed to achieve credibility several ways. These included prolonged engagement of 13 weeks in my informant’s classrooms, persistent observation lasting the entire class periods, data triangulation from my direct observation (as recorded in my field notes), recorded informant interviews, the audio transcripts of the class sessions, course artifacts, and member checking with my informant.
Transferability

This concept pertains to using knowledge derived from the phenomena of one study to make tentative application to seemingly similar situations (whereas generalizability requires application of findings across all related environments). In other words, the emergent nature of naturalistic inquiry depends on a specific context and interactive dynamics, essentially decreasing the prospect of and interest in a focus on external validity, as in positivistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Gorski, 1998). I aimed to achieve this through purposive sampling to yield interesting data; and through “thick description” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), where I describe the phenomena I observed in rich detail that allowed me to determine the extent to which the goings-on in my informant’s classroom are applicable to other classrooms of black faculty at PWIs.

Dependability

This examines how the methods of the various stages of the study were carried out. It concerns whether these procedures, including analytic techniques, were appropriate to the inquiry undertaken and whether they were applied consistently (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Gorski, 1998). Dependability was achieved through a “dependability audit” of all research data and process documentation from all sources (including the field notes and the researcher journal), which were available to my informant and dissertation committee.

Confirmability

Twining (1999) asserted this is “the degree to which findings are the product of the focus of inquiry and not the biases of the researcher” (Erlandson et al. 1993, p. 34). The constructions, assertions, and facts of my study should be able to be tracked to their
original data sources, and the logic behind their composition should result in an explicit and implicitly coherent and corroborating whole. I aimed to achieve confirmability through “confirmability audit”—an external review to judge the conclusions, interpretations and recommendations of the inquiry—by my dissertation committee, and my informant though she was an “internal” but critical component of the process.

Data Analysis

Analysis in qualitative research is a continuous rather than a discrete stepwise process. That is, data collection, coding, interpretation and resulting negotiated outcomes and theory construction/refinement is conducted sometimes simultaneously but always continually until there is “enough” stable theory and data “redundancy is achieved” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 188). Then, case reports are developed and comparison and contrast across cases (in this study, N=1 in two sections of the same course) can be made before tentative application to other similar contexts. For instance, after each class session, I expanded my field notes and made notes to go over with my informant. I would then meet with her, record those interviews, transcribe them and begin to analyze the resulting data. I would simultaneously listen to the class audio files, and use all of these to form the tentative conclusions at which I arrived at in this stage of the process. I then used these data, along with my research questions, to guide my “gaze” for the next class session meeting for each of the two course sections. This continued until analysis was “complete,” meaning it surfaced no additional data (Dr. Bell was repeating perceptions at that point).
Grounded Theory for Meaning Making

I used grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to interpret meaning from my data. This involved the development of a conceptual network of related constructs about the phenomenon of a particular data set rather than being a formulation about some preexisting reality “out there” (Hill, Thompson & Williams, 1997). As mentioned earlier in this and the last chapter, my study data and the observational context served as the places from which the analysis emerged; rather than merely and automatically affirming or disconfirming theories/realities already established in the literature review.

Further, grounded theory analysis was conducted through constant comparison of data across cases (i.e. the two sections of my informant’s course) during analysis. This started by grouping interview data into cohesive categories, refining these categories, combining and separating those categories into smaller sub-categories, and coding data applicably. From there, theories generated from the data itself emerged and eventually formed “a systematic substantive theory… that it is couched in a form that others going into the same field could use — then he can publish his results with confidence” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 113). To assist in this process, I borrowed elements of the coding mechanism of consensual qualitative research (CQR) (Hill et al. 1997). Although CQR is a team-based methodology, I chose this particular element of it because of its systematic approach to moving from raw data to developing themes to drawing tentative conclusions in a final write-up. I was trained over the course of a year in CQR by two counseling psychology professors, one of whom was a graduate student apprentice of the lead developer of the methodology.
**Coding and Comparison**

Generally speaking, I used the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to “uncover relationships among categories” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 127). Scott (2004) stated that though there is wide discussion of this method, “the process for carrying out the analysis has remained vague” (p. 113), as grounded theory does not specify how to accomplish this. As summarized by Scott (2004), similar data are grouped and conceptually labeled. Then concepts are categorized. Categories are linked and organized by relationship, conditions and dimensions are developed, and finally a theory emerges (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

More specifically, I used a modified version of the constant comparative method as systematically conducted in the coding process of CQR (Hill et al. 1997; Hill, Knox, Thompson, Williams, Hess & Ladany, 2005). Again, I did not use the methodology in its entirety, but chose only the coding method because of its structural simplicity in progressing through the data analysis process from raw data to findings and reporting across cases: Step 1) coding all raw transcription data into overarching themes or “domains”; abstracting “core ideas” from the domained transcript; separating core ideas into main categories within each domain and rearranging the corresponding transcript data accordingly; identifying sub-categories within each category, further separating out core ideas and their corresponding transcript data in each category; Step 2) comparing the data systematically across “cases”; and Step 3) describing findings across domains rather than hierarchically (Hill et al. 1997).

I modified this process by reexamining all coded interview data in Step 1 to determine what sections were germane to my research questions. I re-analyzed those
relevant portions to extract the dominant themes that encompassed them. Finally, I reorganized that data under those themes, further refining (adding, collapsing and renaming) subcategories as I went along. As my research was comprised of a single case study, I bypassed Step 2 and proceeded directly to Step 3.

In the case study narrative of Chapter Four, I present my findings by the eight themes that emerged from my post-Step 1 process (using study data illustratively). In Chapter Five, I discuss the findings, interpreting the themes through the lens of CRT. I go on to present the limitations of CRT in understanding Dr. Bell’s case, focusing on the nuances of her reported experience. I conclude by integrating the themes back into the broader context of the teaching experiences of black faculty at PWIs in a critical literature review organized by my research questions (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Post-Observation Data Analysis Processes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Chapter Four:</strong> The Narrative</th>
<th><strong>Chapter Five:</strong> Discussion of Findings</th>
<th><strong>Chapter Six:</strong> Implications &amp; Recommendations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Review transcripts for accuracy against original audio recordings.</td>
<td>Describe cases. Analyze themes across cases. Identify similarities and differences.</td>
<td>Identify limitations of case study for transferability of findings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review preliminary analyses. Extract data germane to research questions.</td>
<td>Interpret themes via Critical Race Theory main tenets.</td>
<td>Elaborate important implications of findings. Brainstorm recommendations for practice and further research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refine domains, categories and subcategories. Recode data (Step 1 in text).</td>
<td>Conduct critical literature review based on research questions and themes. Incorporate study findings.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyze recoded data for themes. Reorganize data under themes (Step 3 in text). Select interesting passages for narrative.</td>
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</table>
To clarify, this process was used to code the interview data only, as it was the main source of Dr. Bell’s perceptions—the central component of this study. The audio of the two class sections was transcribed, but not coded in this way. Rather, these data were examined using narrative analysis (Thorne, 2000), which “attempts to explain the lives of individuals, the collection of individuals’ stories of their experiences, and meaning of those experiences and then understand them” (Wadham, 2009).

Then “interesting” interaction passages specifically identified by Dr. Bell in her interviews were selected for illustrative inclusion in Chapter Four to help with the rich description of phenomena unique to qualitative studies. And to reemphasize, the purpose of recording the class sessions was not to evaluate the students, but to obtain a richly detailed snapshot of the classroom experience of a black professor in a predominantly white institution.

Theoretical Framework for Data Analysis

**Critical Race Theory**

To reiterate, critical race theory (CRT) is the study and transformation of the relationships among race, racism and power from a broad perspective incorporating, among other elements, historical and social context (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 2-3). CRT began as a movement within the legal profession in the 1970s. It has since been used across disciplines, and features prominent proponents for its application in analyzing and changing the education system (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2002). While I could not forecast what my findings would be, CRT proved useful as a theoretical framework as race and power and their roles in faculty interactions with students (and, more broadly,
their colleagues), particularly as it relates to the experiences of black faculty at PWIs, figure prominently in my study.

For example, my informant’s racial/ethnic identification and mine, as they related to my investigation of this topic—as well as the qualitative nature of the study—contributed to the notion of “voice” articulated above by Delgado and Stefancic (2001), and Ladson-Billings and Tate (2002): “As we attempt to make linkages between critical race theory and education, we contend that the voice of people of color is required for a complete analysis of the educational system” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2002, p. 561). Though my voice is not the dominant one, that of my informant also speaks directly to this important element of CRT.

To conclude, as this dissertation centers on race, CRT is an appropriate theoretical framework. Specifically, I used it in my analyses in Chapters Five and Six by looking at the role race seemed to play in the classroom interplay between a black faculty member and white (and other) students, which may very likely surface issues of power and social standing based on racial status. I included questions on my interview protocols for my informant—such as “What role do you perceive race plays/has played in the exchanges with your students?”—based on what I observed in Dr. Bell’s class. Her answer yielded information that I could see from my doctoral student point of view, which I used to help me understand her professor point of view.

For instance, anecdotally speaking and echoing an example by Thompson and Louque (2005) in the previous chapter, I once had a master’s level course at a PWI with a black tenure-track faculty member. He and I were the only two blacks in the classroom (there were about 15 students in the course). During one of his lectures, he innocuously
mispronounced the name of a fairly well known, private, liberal arts college. As soon as the words left his mouth, one of the students sitting near me turned to another classmate and whispered sarcastically, “See, he can’t even say the name right.” The two then rolled their eyes and shook their heads—completely unaware that I was party to their sidebar. My thinking then, as it is today, was “People misspeak all the time, no big deal. Would they have made a similar comment or had the same reaction if he were white?” Speculatively, yet confidently, I think not. This—and those experienced during the observed semester in Dr. Bell’s classes—is the kind of interaction that CRT can help to explain as more than just a generic exchange of information between professors and their students in the academy.

Plan for Case Report Narrative

Collaboration

Collaboration (Foley & Valenzuela, 2005) between my informant and I played prominently into creating meaning of the data and fostering understanding of my case study site. By the time I crafted the narrative case report that comprises Chapter Four, I had utilized several “key ways…to make [my] cultural critique more collaborative” (Foley & Valenzuela, 2005, p. 222). Certainly, I had full responsibility for and creative control over the development of her story. But for the purposes of my dissertation, I defined “collaboration” as giving my informant voice in the manuscript (i.e. the use of her words verbatim to tell her emic story); and allowing her complete access to the raw data and final manuscript to convey “correct” understanding of the data and to make changes toward that end. First, I developed a friendly and trusting rapport with my informant to help me develop an insider’s perspective of the culture of her classroom
despite my outsider status. Second, I used an informal, conversational style of interviewing, and shared about myself and my experiences when appropriate and relevant—called “counter-storytelling” in critical race theory method (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Denzin and Lincoln (2003) stated:

Critical race theory offers the researcher an opportunity to stand in a different relationship to the research (and researched). Some of the key features of CRT are storytelling, counterstorytelling, and ‘naming one’s own reality.’ The value of storytelling in qualitative research is that it can be used to demonstrate how the same phenomenon can be told in different and multiple ways depending on the storytellers (p. 417).

The result was free-flowing exchanges where we both told stories and counter-stories to express understanding and confirmation of what was being said (Sámano, 2007). My informant has reviewed and, where necessary, edited the transcripts of those interviews. Next, my informant had the opportunity to review my ethnographic manuscript to correct or clarify the interpretations and representations contained therein before I submitted the pre-defense “final” draft of my dissertation to my committee. Finally, I wrote my report in what I hoped would be an accessible narrative style, discussed below.

**Storytelling**

I gravitated toward the stylistic form of the critical tale, which “either explicitly or implicitly… demonstrates concern for the oppressed in a capitalistic society. They are fashioned to illuminate the larger social, political, and economic issues of the society of which the ethnographic study is a part” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 163). In the final manuscript, I organized my findings by my research questions, and “let the reader see for themselves” (Wolcott, 1990, p. 129-130) by inserting relevant, verbatim data by the original speakers taken directly from the raw transcripts. I did make my own voice/insights apparent, using “I” whenever I did so. Overall, I attempted to make my
informant’s experience and the connections I saw apparent to readers in an engaging, clearly written style.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of a black tenure-track faculty member with her students in the classroom while instruction was taking place at a PWI. Specifically, I sought to use case study to garner an in-depth understanding of an individual professor’s classroom experience; partially for the intrinsic value of her story and partially to see how it compared and contrasted with the scholarly narrative of black professors lived experiences in the classroom at PWIs. Approximately 13 weeks of classroom observations of both course sections, semi-structured and unstructured interviews with my informant, Dr. Bell, yielded a wealth of insight into her classroom life as a PWI professor.

The next chapter presents the study findings in a narrative form created directly from the most germane and interesting data. All person’s names connected to the study in this manuscript are pseudonyms. Other details revealed in the research, such as names of cities, schools, Dr. Bell’s area of study, and so forth, have also been masked to protect the privacy and confidentiality of my informant and her family, her students (past and present), her colleagues (past and present) and the institution in which my inquiry was conducted. [Bracketed] and (parenthetical) texts are my insertions, to clarify understanding. For organizational ease, I arranged the narrative by the eight themes that emerged from analysis. Unlike every other chapter of this treatise, Chapter 4 has no conclusion or commentary from me other than what is included in the narrative. In this way, I attempt to allow it (through Dr. Bell’s voice) to speak for itself.
Chapter Four

The Case Study Narrative:

“I’m the Authority in My Class”

Preface

It all went off without a hitch. Well, almost. The start was fantastic. Dr. Bell was as enthusiastic and genial an informant as I could have wanted for this, my final research project as a Ph.D. student. When I first saw her—about 5’6” of brown skin and a huge smile peeping around the desktop computer in her corner office—my first thought was, “Oh, she’s cute!” That’s because the professor, who had worked at the PWI of Inquiry for a little over three years by the time of this undertaking, did have a very youthful face that belied the fact that she was only a couple of years younger than me. When I first spoke with her, my next thought was, “This is going to be good.” Good in the sense that she seemed eager to share her story, and happy to give me a glimpse into her teaching experience in the classroom. As a journalist and former magazine staff editor, my hardest interview was with filmmaker Spike Lee; getting him to talk was like pulling teeth from toothless jaws. Dr. Bell, by comparison, was a breeze. I was excited to proceed, and so was she.

Over the next several weeks, I would learn a lot about her. For example, that she was a married mother of a preschooler. Ornately framed pictures of the child, and Dr. Bell and her spouse adorned her office shelves and desk, usually piled with papers and dog-eared textbooks. Her husband’s occupation kept him away from them for stretches at a time, leaving her to juggle parenting and professor roles—occasionally simultaneously during class time. No big deal to me, a married, full-grown adult with a 23-month old
toddler in diapers and, as I wrote this wrote and revised this final draft, another baby on the way. I understand that kids get sick when it’s inconvenient for their parents. But apparently, some of her under-20-something undergraduate students took umbrage with that fact of life and used their evaluations to convey their displeasure. Those may have been some of the kinder comments she had received over the course of her professional time at this institution, where she too was once a teenaged college coed. During our very first interview, Dr. Bell revealed that student evaluations have, in fact, been a bane of her professional existence.

I still don’t like looking at my evaluations. I have not looked at the course evaluations from last year. I mean, sometimes I’m pleasantly surprised, then sometimes I’m blown out of the water. Sometimes they’re lying because I’m like, ‘I had office hours. You just never came.’ But I’ve been blown out of the water before—blown out the water like, “What? Are you kidding me?”

Yes, I knew this research experience was going to be good. And it was. For around 13 weeks, Dr. Bell’s candidness was as boundless as it was insightful.

The “almost” was the worst part of my inquiry; a few near misses that could have blown my cover as the researcher. Like when Dr. Bell was being observed in her afternoon section, and I side-eyed her white male colleague, “Dr. Dalrymple,” staring intently at me because I was the only one (besides him) sitting among the students, but not a part of the small groups she had just asked them to form. I silently prayed he wouldn’t say anything, as I peripherally saw him start to levitate out of the right-handed desk in which he was seated a few rows to my left. He was just about to speak, when she nearly sprinted from her table in the front of the room to whisper my rescue in his ear. Or the time when I accidentally pressed “play” instead of “record” on my little Sony digital recorder at the start of her morning class one day. What began to air—loudly—were the
opening comments of one of our interviews in her office. Suddenly, all eyes were on me. Luckily, I got my fingers in gear in time to shut the darn thing off a second or two later. I acted like nothing happened. Dr. Bell smiled at me and then went on with her lesson. In both cases, I was paid no attention for the rest of the class period after the impending potential disasters had been averted. After those classes, we laughed about what had almost happened.

She, on the other hand, was not at all bothered or intimidated when I put the red-lighted recorder on her desk between the two of us. During the times we met in her second floor office, I sat in her yellow padded guest chair, occasionally taking in the view of the windowed sky behind her as we spoke. Dr. Bell and I logged double-digit hours of interviews, and I had observed dozens more hours of her two course sections. When it was all said and done, there was much more data than was possible to cover in a project of this length. So I systematically culled and massaged it all down to what was the most salient and interesting, given the scope of my dissertation and focus of my research questions. The eight overarching themes that emerged from that analysis serve as my headings for the rest of this chapter, while subthemes guide the flow of the narrative.

Theme 1: Professor’s Authoritative Interaction Style

Established on First Day

Dr. Bell’s perceptions of her classroom interactions with students in the sections of her course were as many and varied as the outfits she wore to class. Whether she dressed in a fitted turtleneck sweater and wide-leg denim trouser slacks with sensibly heeled black boots (her most common look) or a pretty magenta trench coat dress with brown leather mid-calf stiletto boots (she looked striking), Dr. Bell projected an image
that was authoritative yet approachable. For instance, she believed it was important to establish and communicate her authority to students on the very first day of class:

Since the first day, it’s written out for you. I just have this expectation: you’re college students. It’s not your first semester, so you know how it works.

If there’s something out of your control and you can’t make it to class, let me know so that I don’t just think you just didn’t show up. Here’s my cell number. If something happened on the scene, put a call in. Send a text message.

They have to sign a student/instructor agreement form. It doesn’t mean anything, but it makes them think, ‘Oh, my gosh, I signed this paper.’ It’s purely psychological. I go over everything in detail first: “I know you all can read, but let’s just read it [together anyway]. Any questions? No? Okay. Sign this.”

They need to know I’m not playing. These are the rules and policies. I’m giving you exactly how to succeed. Just come to class on time, turn in your stuff on time and participate sometimes. Revise all the essays at the end.

She had introduced herself as “Dr. Bell,” and not “Eve.” That struck me, as I distinctly remember most of my graduate school professors introducing themselves without the “Dr.” credential, though they all had Ph.D.s. The men, in particular, made it a point to emphasize, “Oh, just call me [first name], which some of my younger peers and just about all of the white ones (to my private disapproval) did. Dr. Bell was having none of that, citing a vexing instance when a white male student did call her by her first name (as opposed to “Ms. Bell”) while she was being observed as a T.A. at her doctoral PWI. She recoiled at it, believing he uttered it to intentionally undermine the little authority she possessed at the time.

**Careful Confidence**

Learning from that exchange and other “trials by fire” she said she endured at her doctoral PWI and at the PWI of Inquiry in previous years, she shared how it took time to grow into the self-assured stance she now took with students.
I think I’ve settled into my authority, too. I know what I’m talking about. I have expertise. You do not. I have a Ph.D. You do not. But, I used to be in this position where I was still unsure.

Still, she felt she had to negotiate the manner in which she executed that authority to avoid falling into certain stereotypes about black women:

I don’t know how much it’s in play this semester. The black woman is [viewed] kind of like, mammy and matriarch and all that. I don’t know if that’s a bad kind of projecting, but many of them have not had a black woman as a professor before. So, I’m always thinking about these things. What can I say that, at least in my mind, will help me escape that [stereotype]? And that’s just to remind them of what I already said, a call to action: “It’s up to you to step up. If you still decide you’re not going to come to my class, you will fail.” That’s what any other professor does.

Throughout our interviews, she frequently referenced two caricatures: “Mammy,” the asexual, longsuffering, jolly black woman caretaker and “The Angry Black Woman,” the bitter, neck-snapping, eye-rolling, loud-talking “black bitch” (Collins, 1990). She was cognizant of their ominous presence, along with other stereotypes about black women and black people in general, in the collective social consciousness. She strived to avoid them at all costs.

Dr. Bell set the tone of the course in terms of expectations for student performance and overarching goals and purposes of what would be taught. There were two components of her syllabus. The first and the biggest portion detailed the objectives, grading rules and other policies governing her course and ended with “The 10 Commandments of [Course Name].” Upon perusing it for the first time, I was, again, struck by its absolute unambiguous thoroughness; it left no stone unturned. The second part was the course schedule of readings and assignments. This document, in conjunction with her authority-reinforcing introduction of it and herself on the first day put students on notice and offered them a window into her classroom interaction style.
But, as interactions are between at least two parties, Dr. Bell initially had to wait a few days to see her students’ approaches to her and the anchors of the course: texts by black women scholars that comprised the bulk of the readings. She discovered her students’ collective disposition toward her early. To say it was coolly subdued, described in the next section, was an understatement.

Theme 2: Low Student Engagement

Chilly Rapport

For instance, every class day upon entering the rather austere looking rooms, Dr. Bell—who, while maintaining a firm professional distance from students, smiled often and spoke affably in her presentation—would offer a cheery “good morning” or “good afternoon” salutation that she meant to be returned. And almost every morning (and slightly fewer afternoons), the reply would be stone-faced silence. On one otherwise sunny day a few weeks into the semester, the uncomfortable quiet became too much for Dr. Bell to ignore:

It took me saying “good morning” three times today. “Good morning.” It’s two words. They don’t even give a smile or an acknowledgement. Consciously, as soon as I hit the door, I smiled and said, “Good morning,” and they were like [silence]. I thought to myself, “Do I try this again? Yes, I’m not going to let them get away with this. They are going to acknowledge me.” And so again, I was like, “Good morning.” Cricket, cricket, cricket. Okay. Let’s try this again, because I know you all heard me. [And again, there was silence]. Very weird.

In her world, greeting others when you first see them is automatic and an act of basic courtesy. It was something she took for granted. Dr. Bell found it off-putting.

I don't know what's going to happen this semester, if they'll eventually loosen up or if I'm just going to be doing the same thing every day. I could have been doing jumping jacks. I could have come walking in on my hands. They just don't talk. I even said, before you came in, ‘Are you awake?’ They didn't even smile.
I thought it strange too, especially since I saw that the students who were present before she walked in would be chatty with each other. Still, she remained optimistic that this would change. “So, we’ll keep working on it,” she said, hoping they would come to respond by the end of the semester. I found that to be the most unfortunate of her learning aims for the term.

General Student Disrespect

I noted several instances when students would interact in ways that, intentionally or not, displayed a disregard for the professor’s authority during instruction. One of the female students in the morning class whom I sat near had a fondness for text messaging for minutes at a time (obscuring her phone with a scarf) while Dr. Bell lectured. Another unapologetically came in late one morning and interrupted the professor while she was lecturing to ask her a question. Dr. Bell acknowledged the student’s entry with a nod, but continued teaching. In our follow-up conversation, she said:

I think in some ways, that behavior can be figured in terms of race, gender—the way they read that. I have no empirical evidence. I think in some ways the perception could be so subconscious that they’re not realizing they’re thinking that way, but it’s just like, ‘What’s she going to do [if I don’t respect her authority]?’

I always think about it. To what extent are there certain things that these students just do in class? For instance, I know there are students who don’t follow directions. You know, they just don’t. But then, what makes me re-think it is if I look directly at them and say, “Okay, do this, because I see you’re not doing it,” and they still won’t do it. It makes me wonder, ‘Are you resisting me or are you just a jerk in general?’ (Laughs) I think it’s all of it: the race, the gender, the age, you know, that people will respond to, and some are just like, ‘She can’t tell me nothing.’

She stressed perceiving this disrespect from students of both races. For instance, her most opinionated white male student in the morning, “Blake,” frequently walked into class
about 15 minutes late; you could set a clock by his entrance time. Her black students, two
in the morning and one in the afternoon, also came late on a fairly regular basis.

*Ignoring Course Policies*

Dr. Bell had one textbook on the syllabus, a discipline-specific guide in its 15th
dition—and as renowned as its white male author—designed to help students improve
their writing. Student response to the book, the foundational text for the first few weeks,
seemed lackluster as evidenced by Blake, a deep voiced, brown-haired, spectacled fellow
with a pundit’s opinion and a graduate student’s ability to wax poetic about esoteric
topics:

> We had to discuss the preface, lessons 1, 2, 3 and 4. And I could tell he didn’t
read, just because of his comments. He always thinks he can just talk. One time,
he even admitted that in class. ‘Well, I didn’t read the essay, but I have lots to
say.’ I’m thinking, ‘You didn’t read the essay?’

The professor cited his repeated tardiness and tendency to monopolize class discussions,
even when he was unread (for class) in the topic, as a function of “his privilege,” which
included his higher socioeconomic status (a journal entry revealed that he had never
worked at a job in his life; in a class discussion, he referred to the counter workers at a
campus-based sub shop as “the mediums between me and my sandwich”). Dr. Bell
thought he would make an excellent cable television “talking head” one day.

The textbook was also the staple reference during a regularly scheduled event
called “peer review.” In it, students used the entire class period to exchange, review and
give feedback on each other’s papers before submitting the assignments to the professor
for a grade after the session was over. Her guidelines for the six peer review sessions
were straightforward:
It’s not good to miss peer review, because then you cannot do the deferred grading policy. At the end of the semester, they can revise any or all of their essays for a final portfolio. And so what they end up getting graded on is their best work. They’re able to take advantage of all the concepts that we talked about and apply them all the way back to the first essay. But if they turn in a paper late, they can’t revise it. If they don’t show up for the group, they can’t revise that unit’s paper.

In spite of the policy, Dr. Bell was bothered that chronic class attendance problems and failure to turn in assignments were more than isolated incidents for some students. These usually resulted in private, one-on-one interactions with the latecomers. For example, one Friday toward the middle of the semester, she thought she had lost the papers of two afternoon section students, “Christy” and “Morgan,” a young lady with brightly dyed neon pink hair cut into a neck-length bob who sat directly in front of me a couple of rows ahead. When Dr. Bell still could not find them three weeks after the assignment was due, she went to the students to apologize for not returning them:

So, I pulled the one aside [before class got started]:

**Dr. Bell:** “Hey, can I talk to you?”
**Christy:** “Oh. Yeah.”
**Dr. Bell:** “Did you turn it in to me?”
**Christy:** “Yeah.”
**Dr. Bell:** “Did you put it in a folder?”
**Christy:** “Yeah.”
**Dr. Bell:** “What kind of folder?”
**Christy:** “I don’t know.”

She always forgets her folder.

**Dr. Bell:** “Was it a manila folder, a file folder?”
**Christy:** “I don’t know.”
**Dr. Bell:** “Maybe I misplaced it because I still haven’t found it.”
**Christy:** “Oh. Well, do you want me to resend it to you?”
**Dr. Bell:** “Sure. You can just email it to me.”

Then the student got quiet. I was thinking she should have been like, ‘Okay, I’ll do that after class.’
Christy: “Well, I don’t think I’ll be able to do that right away because I’m going on a trip with the choir. I sing with the choir and so I have to try to find it.”

Dr. Bell: “Try to find it?”

Christy: “I usually back it up on a flash drive or something.”

I’m thinking to myself, ‘Wouldn’t you have saved the original somewhere on your computer? Hmmm, I think you didn’t do it!’

Dr. Bell: “Sure, give it to me by Monday.”

I didn’t get anything. I didn’t get an email. She didn’t say anything to me.

So, after class, I grabbed the other student because she came in late. I pulled her aside, and explained the situation to her.

Dr. Bell: “Did you turn in your essay?”

Morgan: “Yeah.”

Dr. Bell: “Huh?”

Morgan: “No.”

Dr. Bell: “What? You didn’t?!”

I didn’t mean to be like that, but she went three weeks without telling me that she didn’t even turn it in.

Dr. Bell: “What happened?”

Morgan: “I don’t know. I just knew it wasn’t as good as the first one. I don’t know. I just got writer’s block. I don’t know. I just couldn’t write.”

She’s not looking at me, and I’m trying to look in her face like, ‘Are you kidding me?’ Three weeks— you can’t even get anything other than an F on the paper, but you have to turn it in to pass my class. I said, “You need to get me that paper.” Ask me if she got me the paper. So, I sent both of them an email saying you cannot pass my class without turning in the essays. I was mad that they made me think I lost them.

Repeated offenses of this type on the part of certain students would also usually result in a generalized warning to all pupils during class time.

You all just need to wake up. Another professor is not going to tell you that. They won’t. They just mark you absent, like, “Check. Good, I can move on.” I know professors who delight in that, like, “Yes, I’ve got a pass. I need to have so many F’s, so many D’s, so this is waiting for you.” And I don’t really have that philosophy, like I have to have a certain grade distribution.

Dr. Bell was disappointed at the level of student engagement.
She believed, however, that it wasn’t her responsibility to carry the class; the students had a role to play in raising the level of participation:

I used to think that it was my job to reach everyone and get everybody to be involved. But, now I just know people have responsibility for their own education. I’m going to do what I need to do. I’m prepared. And I try to be enthusiastic. I do my part. But I don't feel like… I don't have the same burden anymore.

She did see a kind of increase when she moved from the textbook to the articles by black women authors: professors at such institutions as Yale and Columbia Universities. These writings were the meat of her course, the substance of which would be training grounds for students to learn how to read critically, respond constructively to arguments and write persuasively. That most of the students were not the strongest in these abilities at the outset was, perhaps, to be expected; they were undergraduates on a learning curve in the middle of their college careers, after all. But Dr. Bell did seem to anticipate that the interactions she would have in teaching these students would be more intense and about more than just mechanics. Once the classes got into the works of those other authors—who included bell hooks, Patricia Williams and Angela Davis—her expectations for more student energy would be met, albeit in a strange way.

Theme 3: White Student Resistance

My hunch, even before I met Dr. Bell, was that at least some white students would present a challenge around any race issues that might come up in class, if any. That turned out to be true, but not overtly. During my observations, no one used the “N” word; no one confronted Dr. Bell directly; there were no angry displays. Because of this, in one of my earliest researcher journal entries, I wrote: ‘You’ve got nothing. Your
research is turning up nothing.’ But, after speaking with Dr. Bell and completing data analysis, my premature pronouncement turned out not to be true.

Refusing to Read Texts

Rather, some white students resisted using a variety of less confrontational methods. Some would sit back and let the black students respond to Dr. Bell’s questions on the readings. She didn’t “want to put pressure on the students of color like, ‘Come on, y’all, say something,’” and sometimes would wait in silence for what seemed like an eternity for someone else to contribute. Other white students would just refuse to read the material altogether.

In the other class last week, two other guys did not read. And I remember—I said, “Make sure you read this. This is how you’re supposed to read it. Make sure you look for this.” So, if nothing else they could’ve just read for that and stopped. So, I put them in groups to talk. So, then their group is like, “I don’t like this because of that,” and “She didn’t do this in the essay,” and so on. I usually find that when students don’t understand, they completely dismiss it. So, I go up to them and I ask, “What are you guys thinking about? Did you read?” They just had these really shamed faces. I said, “Ohhhh.” They reply, “Well, it’s been a really crazy week.” I said, “Oh, so you didn’t read?” Okay. I should’ve known you didn’t read.

Some would read, but not “closely,” meaning they would see the words on the page, but not attempt to grasp the writer’s meaning behind them.

Most of them don’t do very close reading. “I thought it was about race.” And most of them said that. No, you just said that because it’s [written by] a black woman. You saw she mentioned race a couple times. There’s so much you could talk about with race. She just was talking about race? “Well, race is part of it.” I had to really push them and it took us 30 minutes to get there. And she laid it out in her thesis statement in the beginning. “My purpose is…,” and she went A-B-C. Hello!

For example, while listening to morning students talk in small groups about an essay on race, gender, sexual orientation and identity politics by Audre Lorde (which I had intentionally not read at that point), I thought the essay was about cancer and taxis, as
those were the things the students mentioned. When Dr. Bell regrouped them into whole class discussion and asked what they talked about, no one answered. She asked, with what I thought was a kind of nervous chuckle, “Did you forget?” Still, there was no response for at least half a minute. The professor finally asked, “Confession time: who didn’t read the article?” Some students raised their hands, to which Dr. Bell responded, “Thank you for your honesty.” It wasn’t until the afternoon class that I got a clearer sense of the article’s content.

One white male student in the afternoon section commented, “she starts out talking about this dream vacation fairytale, then she goes right into talking about class, race, gay and lesbian rights… it was too much.” A white female student declared that she didn’t agree with her [Lorde’s] ideals and therefore felt no personal connection to what she was saying. When Dr. Bell asked for clarification about what the young lady didn’t agree with, the student didn’t saying anything. Maybe 15 to 20 seconds later, she replied, “She was more interested in the social forces behind her story, not so much the personal aspects of the story itself.”

In a follow-up discussion with Dr. Bell, I shared that I noted, “when prof asks questions [in the afternoon] there is not the prolonged silence of the other earlier section. It’s more silence of processing, not silence of avoidance.” To be clear, there was resistance in the later class, as evidenced by just those two student comments. Dr. Bell agreed that the learners in the second class seemed more open to sharing their reactions, even if they weren’t always sure what those reactions were.
Refusing to Engage With Text or Authors

Other students would resist by questioning the writer’s qualifications. One suggested that, despite the well known, accomplished academic credentials of legal author Patricia Williams, she ‘had to give her work legitimacy by quoting other sources.’

Dr. Bell responded to that assertion during our interview:

It’s so interesting to me that in a lot of the reading in this class they’ll say, “Well, she had to give herself authority, you know, by quoting.” That’s what they said. I’m like, “She already has [authority]. Remember, she’s a professor of law.” At Columbia, she has this monthly column in The Nation magazine. She’s featured on this and that. You know, so she obviously has some authority to speak to these other writers [laughs]. But, they just made this assumption, “Well, no. She has to find some way, she quoted these sources to give herself authority.” Sometimes I wonder, ‘Is it because these are black female writers?’

There were, however, two much more common responses to the professor’s selected course material. The first was to conflate Dr. Bell with the authors. Some students assumed that she thought exactly as the writers did, even when she was only paraphrasing or reading a passage for student consideration and comment, simply because they shared the same racial affiliation.

I’m always thinking about how to position myself. Sometimes I feel like it’s unfair for me to do, that I have to think [like] that. I’m sure there are [white] professors who teach something they do not agree with, that doesn’t represent their position, and they just teach it, right? But, I’m always conscious of making sure I frame it in a way that [the students are] not thinking that I’m siding with the author. Sometimes, because it’s coming out of my mouth, they’re thinking, ‘Oh, she thinks this about white people.’ No. That’s just what the author said. I’m teaching you how to read it.

The second was to attack the personality of the writer and dismiss her argument without unpacking it first. In response to an article by bell hooks, some students lobbed the words “crazy” and “ridiculous” at her, sometimes echoing each other’s words verbatim in agreement. The professor retorted:
How do you dismiss a writer like that: “It’s ridiculous, it’s inappropriate.” No! You can disagree and say, ‘Well, she’s making these assumptions and I don’t see how she’s supporting them.’ But to just be like, ‘I don’t want to even listen to her’—because that’s basically what he’s doing. You’re silencing her by saying, “It’s ridiculous, and that’s all I’m going to say.” I take issue with that.

Dr. Bell admitted that these particular scholars didn’t just write about race. They embodied intellectual expositions of race, gender, class and positionality in American society in all their controversial, complex and confrontational amalgams. She also schooled me that the responses against these thinking black women were rooted in history.

I don’t remember which scholars talk about this, but there’s this discourse of disbelief of black women going all the way back to the 19th century. Like, when Ida B. Wells would talk about lynching, people would be like, ‘There’s no way.’ So, there’s this disbelief that when black women are exposing these things, people just don’t believe them. That’s part of the reason why the black women’s clubs emerged, because of these attacks on black women. They would do it based on their morality: black women are Jezebels so why should we believe them? To me, that’s a similar discourse [in my classes]: “She’s angry, she’s irrational, she’s emotional. She should not be believed.”

Dr. Bell knew, from past semesters teaching this course, to expect some of this. Still, she continued to choose from among these particular authors’ works intentionally to help move the students from responding purely emotionally in a knee-jerk fashion to engaging more academically in a thoughtful way. “Sometimes I feel like I have my work cut out for me,” lamented the professor. “But I expose them to it. They might not ever remember, but something will change in them.”

The Turning Point: Confronting Race

She identified the “black rage” article as the turning point for students on this learning journey in her course. “I’m finally at a place now where I like doing this essay,” stated Dr. Bell, who described her first classroom foray into this text as “intimidating”
because she “didn’t know where to start.” But now, “I already know they’re going to be mad, and this is going to be great. At least we can talk.” There was good reason for some initial trepidation on her part—and on the part of the young people on her majority white class roster. In the essay, from a book by bell hooks—a hard-hitting scholar with a soft speaking voice—the first line reads: “I am writing this essay while sitting alongside an anonymous white male that I long to murder.” In the past, Dr. Bell said student reaction was palpable: “Every time I walked into a classroom I felt the tension. You could literally feel it. You could see it on their faces.”

Interestingly, she said this was the first semester where she didn’t feel that level of intensity from the students, particularly after she gave her “disclaimer.” She offered it in anticipation of push back; she tried to lessen student reticence to speak their minds:

It didn’t feel physically the way it did with other classes, where I walked in and was like, ‘Whoa.’ I felt like they were mad. They did look like, ‘Why did she have us read this?’ Some of them looked hesitant, like, ‘Is she really going to let us say what we want to say?’ They’re all looking at me. I have to give “the disclaimer.” I usually always do: you can say whatever. I’m not going to say you’re racist. I’m not going to think that about you. After I said that, then they were like, “This was stupid.” But they did look tense. They looked different, beyond their usual expressionless selves. They had expression! [laugh]

She noted that though some of her students tried to avoid discussing race with the previous texts, they could not do that with this one.

When we get to that essay, you cannot ignore it. You know, the first line is like bam, and they’re like, “Oh, how could she say that?” Well, you didn't pay attention to the other things that the other authors were saying. They might not have come out in that tone. But they were talking about the same things.

While sharing their responses, some of the white students did pepper their statements with the phrase, “I’m not racist, but…” Dr. Bell felt this was largely due to their conflation of her with hooks.
Then they think, ‘If I (the student) identify with him (the anonymous white male) and she (hooks) is mad at him, that means I (Dr. Bell) must be mad at them too. That’s just my hypothesis to their response, “I’m not racist.” Who said you were? I didn’t say it and she didn’t say it. She’s talking about the anonymous white male. But she did that on purpose, so that you could “insert here,” insert yourself or insert somebody you know.

And for the rest of that class session—probably the most engaging of the term up to that point—students, one by one, seemed to express what they really felt about the racial dynamics hooks presented.

*Silencing Authors*

A common theme among their comments was a desire for the author to not be angry.

It’s always interesting, I mean, some people will be like, “Well, I understand what she was saying, but I don’t know why she had to say it like that.” They don’t want her to be angry. Why do you want her to be nice? The topic of the essay, the title the book is *Black Rage: Killing Racism*. She’s just trying to tell you what she’s going to do. Why do you want to silence her? What makes you think that some black people aren’t mad? And so they get angry. And what’s so funny is they don’t want her to get mad, but they get mad.

“Why didn’t she change that first line?” Well, why does she have to? She is the writer. You are the audience. You get to respond however you want, so she gets to write however she wants. I don’t understand that, but that’s part of their system: we don’t want to hear it. We don’t want her to say it. We don’t even want her to feel it. Now how can you tell her what she should not feel? So then, of course, they don’t read the entire argument because she definitely talks about that throughout the piece. And she ends by talking about how rage can be healing, actually. Because if we’re allowed to kind of feel that, then it humanizes us and now we can mobilize to action—like she did. She didn’t kill the man, she wrote the essay!

During one of our sit-downs, Dr. Bell talked briefly, with amusement in her voice, about a portion of one white male student’s journaled response. In it, he described “the rage I’m feeling” toward the writer:

I have them write an open reaction of whatever they feel. I do that on purpose because I want to see where they are. Then I want to help them move beyond that,
to look at the text more closely. “The rage I’m feeling…” You’re feeling rage? Like you got angry enough, that angry with her?

Another common response of students, mentioned earlier, was labeling the authors as “irrational” or “crazy” for writing what they did. The professor wanted students to give hooks and the other black authors the same respect they would instinctively give white authors. She wanted to teach them how to respond to texts without personal attacks.

You can disagree strongly without calling her crazy. You didn't do careful reading, obviously. Because if you got through the first pages, you would understand what she was saying. [The essay] exposes all of that, ‘I’m not racist and I’m not’… to say, ‘Hey, you are complicit in some of this.’ And do I agree with everything she says? No. There are things I think she needed to explain better. She makes assumptions and doesn’t support them. But does that mean that we can’t engage what she says? No, we can engage it and then we can say she’s making these assumptions here, and I needed more examples from her, or whatever. The same way you would approach the mainstream things you read, with that kind of respect.

The interactions during the conversation around that article impacted Dr. Bell. So much so, that the next class day, she followed up with a discussion of the article suggested by her good friend at another PWI, Dr. White (introduced back in Chapter Three). It turned out that some of her friends in her discipline [different from Dr. Bell’s] had written an article addressing these kinds of student reactions during classroom interactions with their faculty of color at PWIs.

(Contextualizing Resistant White Students’ Responses)

Entitled “Why Are You Shoving This Stuff Down Our Throats?” it shared the results of a study cataloging the kinds of responses white students would give in class to race-focused material. “They looked at hundreds of written and discussion reactions, and then named the different kinds of responses: ‘I’m the victim,’ or ‘I feel guilty’ or ‘Racism doesn't exist anymore.’” Dr. Bell was initially undecided if she was going to have the
students read this piece as a follow-up, but ultimately thought it would help bring about a kind of closure to the hooks discussion, and help the students develop a deeper understanding of how to respond to provocative texts. “As I was skimming it I thought, ‘This is what they do after that bell hooks discussion… almost verbatim. I wanted my students to see that some of what they were saying fell within this broader scholarly narrative.’

I think the students would be upset by race especially because I was teaching texts that were mostly written by African American women that were talking about race. They just wanted to talk about [the] writings, as if writing is just neutral. As if there’s just no way it can ever be affected by race, or any other factor.

Essentially, Dr. Bell chalked up some of the white students’ classroom interactions around those black women scholars’ texts to a general unwillingness or inability to engage in race-centered discussions. But what was even more surprising to both Dr. Bell and I during the observed semester were the interactions with her black students around these writings, and their other behaviors in the course.

Theme 4: Frustrating Black Student Performance

*Distancing From/Denial of Racism*

“Monique,” a svelte, very style conscious young lady with a pristine coiffure updo, in the morning section asserted that she found talking about race to be dull and repetitive, summing up her position with: “I’m just bored with all of this.” Dr. Bell singled out Monique’s comments during our interview:

“Well, I just was bored with it because this has been said before. This was written in ’95.” To me, that type of response is like saying, ‘We don’t need to talk about this anymore.’ This is boring? How many more people [in your major] are going to talk about race? Are you serious?
In the morning class, there was also one biracial student, “Jordan”; super tall and very slim, he seemed to have a liking for zip-front hoodies and black skinny fit jeans, from which a thin silver chain attached to his wallet dangled. The young man, commenting in response to an article about “the commodification of bodies,” adoption and other issues, shared how he thought his [African American] grandmother would “constantly be looking for racism.” Dr. Bell remarked that she didn’t think it was right that he disparage his grandmother in class like that. She went on to say she found it interesting:

To suggest that somehow racism hides, like it’s not really there so you have to look for it. I found you! What?! You’re missing the point. Now you can disagree with her (the author) and say you don’t think it’s systemic. But if that’s the case, then you have to tell me what you think it is. What is it then?

The professor shared during one of our talks that she recognized from whence some of Jordan’s responses—which were generally negative toward blacks when discussing racial politics in class—came:

I think it’s because of his own personal issues with his racial background. There’s some other stuff in his family that for me amplifies his issues with race—for me. Now he, of course, would not say that. But he just is interesting. He does not want to entertain that at all. It’s like he doesn’t want to be associated with [blackness]. I think he’s got the door closed. Like, ‘If I have to entertain that, it’s going to make me question all this other stuff and I’m not ready to do that.’

Monique turned out to be one of Dr. Bell’s most poorly performing students in the course, along with a black male student named “Tariq” in her afternoon section. His trademark, I noted, was a black puffy jacket and a baseball cap—both of which he would always keep on for the duration of class, as if he was continuously thinking about getting up and leaving at any moment. Both students exasperated Dr. Bell both in and out of the classroom: sporadically coming to class, turning in assignments late and repeatedly making office hours appointments but standing up the professor.
Creating Diversions

In one classroom instance toward the middle of the semester, Tariq tried to “play” Dr. Bell, by attempting to make her look incompetent in front of one of her white male colleagues during a class observation. Dr. Bell had just given the students a handout of a sample student essay in preparation for their next assignment—a standard practice of hers that they had been through before in class a few times by that point.

Tariq, you know the black student in the afternoon class, comes and sits down. And he’s sulking, he puts on this face like, ‘I’m just so tired. I’m just so frustrated. This is just so hard,’ thinking I’m going to feel sorry for him. In the beginning of the semester, he was alert and engaged. Now he comes to class just sulking. I’m completely ignoring him. So, I go over to his group. I can tell they’re not really talking. I asked them, “Are you guys stuck? “No.” “So, what did you guys come up with?” Then he says, “Well I don’t really know what this paper’s asking us to do. I mean, it’s not really clear.” I asked, “What do you mean by that?” I really wanted to say, “You don’t come to class half the time, so…” And then I noticed Dr. Dalrymple paying attention, so I’m really being careful about what’s happening.

Tariq says, “Well, I just don’t know. I mean, in terms of the structure. Is this what we’re supposed to be doing? This sample essay, is that supposed to be what we’re shooting for?” I was looking at him like, ‘Now you know when I give you guys sample student essays, I’m not telling you to write this.’ I said, “No, the student essays are for us to look at what’s effective, what’s not effective and how you can apply that.” He shoots back, “Yeah, I know that, but is this…” So I answered him again, repeating exactly what I said when he asked the first time. I cut him off because I was like, ‘I know what he’s trying to do: he’s making excuses.’ Then I said, “That’s a question you can ask me during office hours.” Then I remembered and said, “Wait a minute. You were supposed to come see me, right? But you didn’t show up.” At that point, I walked away. Dr. Dalrymple was like, “Ha ha.”

I said to myself, ‘You’re trying to play me in front of this dude.’ I know the game. You’re trying to play me in front of him. You trying to give me some excuses so it can sound like I’m just not being clear. You can set that up so that when you get a D on the paper, “Well, it wasn’t clear.” No, brother man, you didn’t come to class. You said you wanted to come talk to me because you didn’t understand the assignment. I was waiting for you. You did not come. You didn’t even send an email. So, I was like, “Weren’t you supposed to come see me?” He was like, “It’s been a rough couple of weeks.” That’s garbage. And if you can’t make an appointment, just say, “I’m sorry, I forgot. Can I reschedule?” It happens. People
forget. But don’t do, “I had a rough week.” What does that have to do with you coming to talk to me? So, I just walked away. I’m not going to entertain this anymore. I’m not going to let you keep talking because you’re obviously just making a bunch of excuses and you’re trying to play me.

Here I have to expose you. I have to put you on blast in front of [your group mates]. You should’ve just stayed quiet, brother man. [laughs] You should’ve just been quiet. [laughs] I was like, ‘He is trying to play me!’ I could feel it because when he saw Dr. Dalrymple looking, he started talking louder. He’s trying to make it look like I’m incompetent. You don’t know who you’re playing with; I’ve been observed before. I know how it goes. I know what they look at. I know they want to see good classroom management and whether students are listening. I know all of that. So you just messed up!

The professor perceived that Tariq was trying to create a diversion to siphon attention away from his steadily declining performance in her class. She believed he used Dr. Dalrymple’s presence as an opportunity to publicly undermine her authority, setting her up to be the scapegoat for the outcome (low or failing class grade) of his own choices. This behavior was similar to the white male student at her doctoral PWI—referenced briefly in the beginning of this narrative—who called her by her first name (the one and only time he did so) in front of her observer, also a senior white male faculty member. Dr. Bell saw the interaction with Tariq as a clear example of how gender sometimes complicates racial dynamics, even among people of the same racial affiliation. As with other classroom experiences she’d had over the years, she believed that episodes like that would not have occurred in the same way, if at all, had she been a black male professor.

Chronic Attendance Problems

I noted that Tariq, Monique and a third student, Shavon—the other black female student in the morning section—consistently showed up late to class, sometimes by as many as 10 minutes. Undergraduate class periods at PWI of Inquiry were 50 minutes long, and Dr. Bell often used the last 5 minutes or so of class to make housekeeping kinds
of announcements (e.g. reminding students about upcoming assignments, the locations of
peer review sessions, special office hours appointment times, etc.). Thus, coming in late
could mean missing important parts or substantial portions of a lesson, especially since
Dr. Bell would lecture at the beginning before having students do other classwork and
facilitating the class discussion. Each of these students was also absent frequently enough
from the sessions I observed to be affected by Dr. Bell’s grade reduction policy, which
was enacted once a student missed six classes.

In sum, Dr. Bell experienced challenges with both black and white students. She
found some of these interactions to be more stressful than others. And she shared two
specific strategies she used to cope.

Theme 5: Interaction-Based Strain and Coping Mechanisms

Self-Reported Stress Levels

After each class session I observed, I asked Dr. Bell to self-identify how stressed
she felt during instruction on a Likert scale from 1 to 5 where: 1 = rarely; 2 =
infrequently; 3 = moderately; 4 = frequently; and 5 = almost always. The overwhelming
majority of the time, she reported a “1” or “2,” the lowest levels of stress. The occasional
instances she reported significantly higher stress levels of “3” or higher coincided with
the class discussions of the articles that produced the most intense interactions between
her and the students—such as the bell hooks “black rage” essay. Aside from that
assessment, she articulated a handful of instruction-related psychological and
psychosocial elements that did induce a certain level of apprehension for her during the
semester. Student evaluations were at the top of her list.
**Psychosocial Stressor: Student Evaluations**

For Dr. Bell, end-of-course student assessment of her performance as a professor was one kind of late-stage interaction that was a source of considerable anxiety for her.

My greatest frustration was with the student evaluations. What actually happened in the classroom usually didn’t translate to the evaluation. Because I had so many students who were in my face saying, “Oh, I just loved this class.” At one point, it made me feel like, ‘Okay, are they just lying to me?’ Maybe thinking that would get them a higher grade. And then during the evaluations, they tear me apart. It’s like they know they have some kind of power. You know, “We’ll get ‘em on the evaluation.”

These evaluations were of such concern to her that she modified some of her approaches to teaching, such as the way in which she called out what she perceived to be students’ explicitly racist comments in class:

I think because I’ve had certain experiences, I’ve kind of come up with some strategies. Some of them I have had to rethink, like, ‘That didn’t work, I need to figure something else out.” Because sometimes you’re thinking, “Oh my goodness, that was racist.” But how do you say it in a way where they don’t go, “She’s biased,” because I used to get that on my evaluations. The funny thing is every person comes in with their own politics and is influencing what they’re doing from the way that they set up the syllabus, the stuff they teach. But, students don’t think that.

Everybody’s biased, yes. When you have the same beliefs and worldviews and assumptions, you tend to not see them as biased. But when it’s someone else, ‘Oh, she’s biased.’ Biased in what way? Is it because I’m a black woman? I would also get, ‘I think there should be more diverse readings.’ Are you trying to tell me that all of these authors all thought the same because they’re all black women, and so you didn’t see diversity?

**Psychological Stressor: Worry About Evaluation Reception**

Dr. Bell described having an almost ritualistic approach to reading her evaluations: “I have to get in a place in my mind first: ‘Okay, I know I did the best I could.’ Then I can open them up and read them.” Still, the process was a painfully protracted one for her: at the end of my class data collection a week before the end of the
semester, she indicated she still hadn’t read her evaluations from the previous term. She also worried generally about how her evaluations would figure into her tenure review.

That used to loom so large over me because I know that, even though they say it’s not significant, it is. They’ll say, ‘It’s not that important for tenure (your evaluations).’ But sometimes they do make a case based on them without realizing that race, gender and all those other dynamics can come into play. But it is always in the back of my mind. I wonder how my peers are going to evaluate me based on that; what’s going to be said and thought.

**Psychosocial Stressor: Returning Grades**

She also identified the process of returning graded student papers as “awkward” and “upsetting”:

I don’t like giving papers back because [the students] all just sit around and they don’t leave. I give them back at the end of class, and if it’s not [the grade] they want, they just sit there. They won’t leave. It’s like, ‘You all are free to go! You can leave!’ It’s just awkward. They’re looking like, ‘Why did I get a C?’ I don’t entertain that there. I think it is important to not allow them to come up at that moment to talk about it. They need to re-read what I said. Usually around this time, you’re all ready to go, packing up your stuff five minutes before class ends, but now you can’t leave! So, I still haven’t figured that out But, I do tell them to leave and they don’t go. I usually end up being the one leaving, like, ‘All right! See you!’ The whole thing upsets me.

**Psychosocial Stressor: Student Discussion Comments**

Dr. Bell did describe some student responses during discussions as “irritating,” such as one from “Sarah,” a slim, blue eyed, blonde haired, white female student I sat near in the morning class. Her comment came at the end of the semester in reaction to a third bell hooks essay critiquing a documentary film about two black, inner city, high school basketball stars and their hopes of achieving a better quality of life via the sport.

Dr. Bell also had the students watch the movie independently. After Sarah asserted that all urban blacks “think basketball is the only way out,” Dr. Bell asked the class about stereotypes and hooks’ evidence of them in the film. Sarah responded that she didn’t see
stereotypes in the film, because “I don’t see them in my everyday life.” Dr. Bell responded to that during our interview:

I’m not really sure she entirely gets it. She doesn’t. ‘Because I don’t see that in my everyday life.’ You probably don’t see many black people in your everyday life. You see them on TV, and so you don’t know that those are stereotypes. And just because you don’t see it doesn’t mean it’s not true. ‘It’s not true, because I didn’t see that when I was reading it.’ My thoughts were, ‘You know what? You’re really irritating me with what you’re saying.’ But I was trying to tell myself, ‘Eve, keep your face.’ I ignored her for a long time when I saw her hand up because I just didn’t feel like hearing the two minute thing: ‘Oh, because,’ ‘And to me,’ ‘And I think’ and all that. I just didn’t feel like hearing it at that point. Then she ended up repeating the same thing over and over and over and over.

Because she perceived Sarah as not really getting the deeper concepts around race in the course, Dr. Bell felt herself get a little heated when she saw Sarah text messaging during one of her other lectures that was focused on the subject: “I felt myself get angry. I’m looking at other students and at least they’re looking, paying attention. I look up and I see her not paying attention.”

Psychosocial Stressor: Unexcused Tardiness & Class Absences

She also felt angry with Tariq, who missed class so often, he didn’t know when she returned graded assignments.

I was mad at Tariq in the last class when he asked, “Did we get our papers back yet?” First of all, if you have to ask that question it's because you missed that class. Then for him to be like, “Why not?” I was thinking, ‘Ooh, boy you have crossed the line! Have you lost your mind?!’ [laughs] I wanted to just give him… I think I did give him a look, like, ‘Are you serious?’ Why not? Why did I see you [on campus] once when I let this class out early? Why? The fact that you have to ask if I gave them back, maybe you weren't here. You haven't been to every class. I was just like, ‘I'm done with you, dude. I'm done with you.’

The patterned behavior of certain students, such as Tariq and Monique, that frustrated her throughout the semester prompted her to give them (under the guise of speaking to all the students) one last performance alert less than a month before the semester ended:
I’m not going to tell you anymore, but you need to know that when you do not come prepared, I know it and it’s marked down. Your participation is important in this class. When you come late, I mark it and it is part of your grade. You just need to know that it’s already been figured into your grade. You have three weeks left in the class, which doesn’t give you a whole lot of time to correct it, but I have already given you a warning. We talked about this before midterms so you could’ve corrected it. Do not come to me with, ‘I thought I got an A.’ No, you did not. Your papers are just one facet of this class—one facet. They’re important, but just one aspect. So, don’t come with, ‘But I got an A or B on all my papers.’ So? You get what you put in. You reap what you sow. If you plant absences and late assignments, you get a D or an F! Don’t come to me afterwards and try to argue anything.

Dr. Bell felt that having to assert her authority in this way was emotionally taxing; contrary to the way she functioned when she wasn’t at work. To help manage these stressful situations, she relied primarily on two coping mechanisms: her family’s support, and, ironically, the texts she used in class.

*Coping Mechanism: Family Support*

First, our office interviews were routinely interrupted by a phone call from Mr. Bell. Their conversations were brief, but very loving, frequently sprinkled with “babe,” and always ended with “I love you.”

He tries to call me when he can during his lunch break. At least some normalcy, some love comes through when I'm not feeling any here. There have been many of those times. He's always like, ‘You're a good teacher and you're very concerned about your students.’ He always affirms me. I'm so grateful he's that kind of person.

After the first couple of times it happened, I shut off my recorder during those calls out of respect, even though she didn’t require me to the leave the room. I got so used to his calls to her, in fact, that I would just review my field notes again while they talked, to make sure I didn’t miss anything to ask her about when she was done.
Coping Mechanism: Class Texts

Second, Dr. Bell found the texts helpful, particularly around race-based material. She learned over time to have plenty of scholarly material, so she would not feel like students could accuse her of basing her lessons and comments on her own opinions and experiences.

Back in the [T.A] days before I had texts to really talk about, I just raised discussions. And we'd be everywhere. I found out we had to have something to read. I learned that it helped to protect me, too, so, I'm not just talking about my experiences. They can't just dismiss it: ‘She's biased. She always wants to talk about race.’

The class readings served as a scholarly scaffold on which Dr. Bell could lean to talk about content in a less personal and more productive way. In the classes I observed, the professor never mentioned a personal experience or talked about herself as an example of what she taught.

In spite of the toll it took on her emotionally at times, Dr. Bell expressed feeling prepared for what she did face in class, as she believed it was tame compared to other, previous interactions with her students at the PWI of Inquiry and her doctoral PWI as a graduate teaching assistant. She readily acknowledged that the reasons why she perceived interactions the way she did by the time I observed her were directly attributed to episodes from her professional past.

Theme 6: Classroom Precedent in Professor’s PWI Teaching Experiences

Electing Not to Participate

Dr. Bell shared with me several occasions in which she experienced white student resistance while teaching. One took place while she was a PWI of Inquiry-based fellow after she earned her Ph.D.
There was a class I taught that was an elective course [which focused on African American women]. I had two white women in there and as the class progressed, they refused to talk. There was another white woman in there and she was pretty quiet too. She never said anything. She wrote very interesting stuff, but she never said anything. When I inquired about it, she was like, “Well, I can’t say anything about this because I don’t know what it means to be a black woman.” I had to sit in classes where we read about white men, but I had to say something. Do you go in your [white male centered] class and say, ‘I don't know what it means to be a white man,’ so you can't say anything? I can't respond. I have nothing to say.

But two major incidents involving troubling interactions with white male students stood out from her other examples: the first at her doctoral PWI, and the other at the PWI of Inquiry during the early days in her tenure-track position.

*The Threatening White Male Incident*

She told the first story from when she was a doctoral student T.A. on the East Coast and had a white male student of whom she was afraid:

It probably was my second year. That year, I had started to recognize certain behaviors in certain students. And I really believe that part of what they do as part of larger discourses about race, you know, and all that, and that’s why I was able to kind of recognize those students. The first day of class, he’s sitting in the back of the class, arms crossed, *scowling* at me. Basically, every class, he would sit right in my [line of] sight, so I could see him glaring at me. I would have students kind of resist me, and they would act out, but never like glaring at me where I don’t know what they’re thinking.

The first assignment was a narrative. I described they should write about a conflict they had, and what decision they had to make. He turned his in and it’s about how he challenged a teacher in high school. And I could feel the anger coming off the page. I’m reading it and because of the word choices, it made me feel, ‘This kid does not like me. He’s writing to me. He’s writing to me.’ And it wasn’t written well. I gave him a D because he did the assignment, but it was not well done.

[At that time, we had] peer review outside of the classroom at a little café down the street. He came late, which I was willing to forgive, since it was our first time there; maybe he had trouble finding it. I said, “Well, you need to just join up with the group, it just got started.” He goes over and sits down, then he comes back. I’m sitting at a table, and he’s standing over me talking, “Well, they’ve already started.” And I replied, “Well, you’ll just have to wait because you were
late.” So, he walks over [to the group] again, and then comes back to me, “I don’t understand why I have to be here anyway. I got a D on my first paper. This isn’t going to help me.” He’s talking loud and the other people in the café are looking at me. All of my students are looking at me. I’m sitting down, and he’s towering over me. I said, “I think you need to leave and make an appointment to come see me.” He leaves, and then comes back again! His anger was such that he didn't care [that we were in a public place]. I told him, “No, you need to leave for the day.” Afterward I thought, ‘Why did I say I wanted him to come see me at my office by myself?’

On the day that he was supposed to come… We had rows of cubicles so there were other graduate students in the room. Well, they all left! I was in there by myself. I was like, ‘Oh, no. I’m feeling something. I don't need to be in here [alone].’ I would have been hemmed in my cubicle; I wouldn’t have been able to just say, “You need to leave.” It just was not smart, you know. It’s different if there are other people around.

So, I ended up going and finding my friend “Dwight.” I told him [the situation] and he was like, ‘Oh no, let’s go talk to the director.’ I went and talked with the assistant director who was there [in her office nearby]. She said, “Well, there’s no need for you to be afraid. I’m going to talk to the student.” I said, “No, you don’t understand.” I’m explaining the situation to her. “There’s no reason for you to be afraid…” She was making it sound like it was just me being [paranoid]. In the meantime, Dwight is walking around in the building, and he sees [the WM student]. He came and told me, “This guy is prowling the hallways. He was looking into all these offices looking for you.” The assistant director goes to [the student] and says, “You need to leave the building.” He would not leave. So, then she came back with a different look on her face.

Dr. Bell recalled with feeling how she felt physically threatened by the student, who admitted to acting out bodily with the high school teacher in the paper he submitted to her. And though she did not have further contact with the student—the department administration moved him to another T.A.’s section of the class—she felt doubly defenseless when dealing with the faculty who presided over the transfer (discussed in the next theme section).

The Walkout Incident

The second major, though less volatile, incident occurred at the PWI of Inquiry during an earlier iteration of the course I observed. It was during the class conversation
about hooks’ “black rage” article—admittedly Dr. Bell’s most anxiety provoking
discussion day in the course.

He started going off, “She's stupid.” He’s name calling. “And she's crazy.” He was so angry and was like, “Only crazy people say stuff like that.” I mean he got so upset. And so I did lose it for a minute. I was like, ‘Hold up, hold up. Stop it. You cannot attack an author like that and dismiss what she's saying just because of what you feel.’ And I kind of moved on from that moment because, otherwise, would have just been in this, you know, thing with him the whole time. And so I'm talking, and he's raising his hand. I see him but I'm letting other people contribute. He put his hand down. And he’s scowling in his seat, arms crossed and he's just mad. Then all of a sudden, he just got up and left. He got up and left. He wasn't there for that whole class and then he didn't come to the next class.

So I talked to my chair because I’ve dealt with crazy stuff before. I felt I needed to cover myself: tell the chair what happened. This is what we talked about. This is what he did, this is what I said. And she was, like, “Okay. Send him an email and tell him to come [talk to you during office hours]. If you don't feel comfortable, he can come talk with me.” I wasn't afraid of him. I knew he wasn't going to do anything crazy. So, I did almost verbatim what she said. He did not come to talk to me. He came to the second class after the walkout incident, only because it was a peer review and you have to do peer reviews in order for me to take your paper. So, he came and I asked him, “What are you doing?” He said, “Well, I have to come to peer review because I need to turn my paper in.” I was like, “But I told you that you needed to come see me.” He responded, “I don’t understand why I had to come.” He just wanted to come and act like nothing happened. I don’t think so. He came to class after that, but he didn't talk anymore. Then he missed this class and that class. He wasn't the same and the class dynamics were never the same.

So, she was no stranger to problematic racialized interactions with students in the classroom before the observed semester with me. As such, Dr. Bell also willingly admitted she had an expectation—disappointingly so—that she might encounter similar kinds of responses she received from colleagues around these past incidents, if anything were to have gone awry the observed semester.
Theme 7: Previous Departmental Responses to Challenging Interactions with Students

*Denial and Defensiveness at Doctoral PWI*

Dr. Bell asserted that the two incidents with the white male students could have resulted in sizeable transformation of—or, at the very least, conscientious introspection by—the respective institutions and departments in which they transpired. But they didn’t. And she was frustrated with the responses she did receive from faculty/administration when she sought assistance in dealing with those students. To resume the first tale, when she spoke again with the assistant director (who had unsuccessfully tried to get the intimidating student to leave the building), Dr. Bell recollected feeling *she* was made out to be the difficult party. The assistant director tried to blame Dr. Bell for the student’s behavior, assuming that the real problem was that she had talked about race in the class:

Eventually, the department director goes and meets with him. She said, “Well, I found out he comes from a good family and he's from state college.” I asked, “What does that mean?” She said, “Well, he’s a [STEM] major.” And I was like, “So?” She said, “Well, you know, he’s used to larger classes. And I told him, ‘I know that Ms. Bell talks a lot about race in her class.’” And I replied, “We didn’t talk about race at all in my class.” Then she had this look, like, ‘Oh.’ I told her, “We didn't read anything on race that semester.” And she’s, like, ‘Oh.’ So I thought, ‘Okay, I see.’ So, it was my fault because *he* comes from a small town and a good family. I come from a good family. And he comes from a good family and he’s racist. They removed him from my class. Which, of course, made it much more comfortable, right? We don’t have to address any of those issues. And then the [administration] had a strange reaction. They said, “Oh, we’re going to escort you to class.” The chair of the department called the campus police to escort me to class. I didn't ask for this!

We both chuckled about that last part, the phrase “acting like it’s Little Rock 1957” making its way into our discussion of their response.

I listened as Dr. Bell shared that the administration felt that it was Dr. Bell and her black female T.A. colleagues who needed to read scholarly literature about black faculty experiences, not them. She finished the story:
I sent an email to the director, and the other (male) assistant director. I sat down with her (the director). I explained to her what was going on, and she was like, “Well, what do you want me to do?” I thought, ‘What do you mean?’ So, she decides to meet with [the student]. In the meantime, I’ve gone and talked to some other professors in the department. The director was then saying, “Oh, this is problematic. We need to get a meeting going.” I invited the chair of the department, the director of [the program], and all these other professors. The chair of the department didn't come. The director of the department came late. Other black female graduate students also came.

So we’re sitting around the table. I was saying, look, you're recruiting us but you're not paying attention to the special issues that arise when we enter the classroom. You’re not paying attention. It empowered [the student] to be able to [behave like] that. He had a sense of entitlement, because no one in the administration is telling him this is racist, sexist harassment. Then he doesn’t think it’s a problem. But you all don’t want to name it that. You have something in place to recognize sexual harassment and how to handle that. What about racist harassment? You have nothing, no lens to be like this is what that is. You have no way to identify it, to name it, to say, ‘These are the consequences. You do this and this will happen to you.’ So, there are no consequences, and [students] continue to do it.

And [the faculty/administration] have these confused looks on their faces. One of them started crying. They’re hugging each other. Another one of them was like, “Help me understand because I’m white and I’m always going to be white.” It became almost an excuse. It was as though she were saying, ‘I’m always going to align with whiteness,’ you know. I didn't want them to understand. I just wanted them to listen. So, the director of the program told us to compile some readings to put in a handbook to hand to the new black female graduate students during orientation. First of all, we don’t need to do that. We don’t need to read that. You need to read them because you need to know. You need to read the literature, not us. It was so frustrating. And then, of course, it just went away. It was like, ‘Oh, we had this meeting and we're proud of ourselves. And we don’t ever have to talk about it again.’ So I hurried up and got outta there.

*Dismissal at PWI of Inquiry*

In an interview that took place at a busy, family-style restaurant about a 15 minute drive from the PWI of Inquiry campus, Dr. Bell recounted how she felt her department administration at the PWI of Inquiry responded in nearly an identical fashion to the “walkout” incident, even though that student remained in her class for the entire term.

She talked in between bites and sips:
I sat down and talked to my chair because I’ve dealt with crazy stuff before so I felt I needed to cover myself. Tell the chair what happened. This is what we talked about. This is what he did. This is what I said. She’s feminist and all that. And she said, “Okay. Send him an e-mail and tell him to come. If you don’t feel comfortable he can come talk with me.” I did almost verbatim what she said. He did not come to talk to me. I emailed the chair and told her that he didn’t come to my office or to the next class. I don’t know why I was surprised when she was like, “Well, maybe he just isn’t used to that.” She started to kind of explain things away: “Well, maybe he’s afraid to come talk to you.” And I’m, like, “Okay, that might be so but I’m still the authority in my class and I [determine] the terms of what [students] need to do to be reinstated in my course. I’m not about to overlook this.” I was so shocked so finally I had to just come right out and say, “Race and gender are at play here. They are a part of how he’s responding to me.” And she kind of glossed over that.

She forwarded it to the dean of students who’s a faculty member in the department here. And she was, like, “Oh, yeah. I’ve dealt with students like that before.” And I’m thinking, ‘It’s not the same.’ I’m getting the same types of responses from the people in leadership. And I was like, ‘Oh, you’ve got to be kidding me!’ It was just ridiculous. The fact that they just ignored it when I said “race and gender.” I never got a response that asked, ‘What do you mean?’ Or ‘I don’t understand.’ It was as though I did not say it. And I was, like, ‘How could you not think that—you write about this stuff!’ You write about it as a scholar. But when it’s in your face, then it’s, ‘Oh, that’s not what’s going on. What’s going on is this.’ Well, how do you know? You weren’t in the classroom—you just don’t know! You don’t experience it on a daily basis. I find it so strange that they just don’t listen.

This conversation with the chair contradicted one instance of support that Dr. Bell shared later that she did receive (not connected to that incident, but perhaps in light of it) around the issues of race and gender impacting classroom interactions. After looking at some of the professor’s student evaluations, the chair indicated that she was aware that some of Dr. Bell’s students were not accustomed to having a black woman in authority over them. Further, the chair promised that, if those evaluations became an issue during tenure review, she would defend Dr. Bell’s performance “to the dean” and “to the university.”
Nonetheless, the professor found the reactions of her other colleagues to the incident to be no more supportive than that of department administration as a whole. For instance,

One of my white female colleagues and I were talking. I was explaining some things [that had happened to me in the classroom] to her. And she immediately started, “Well I don’t see the reason for…” I was talking to her about stereotypes of black women and how it plays out in the classroom. And she said, “Well I don’t think of that when I think of you.” And I was like, “That’s not the point.” [laughter] Just because you don’t think that, doesn’t mean students don’t think that. So, I was shaking my head, and was like, “Okay.” Even with my colleagues who were versed in feminist theory and stuff. I was expecting some kind of support during the experience when the student walked out. They didn’t get it, and I was like, ‘Come on, you teach this!’ But there is often a disconnect between theory and practice. I wasn’t looking for sympathy, and I wasn’t looking to make excuses. But I think sometimes they were like, “Well, no, we believe in equality [here].” And I was like, “I’m not saying that you don’t.” But I don’t think they had… there just wasn’t a lens for them. They just wanted to believe that there was an equal playing field simply because they hired me and I was there. But that didn’t mean that those dynamics didn’t play out in the classroom. And so, they just didn’t know how to interpret [the incident].

I could see from her face—the way her huge smile would gradually weaken until it was gone; I could ascertain from her body language—the way she would lean back in the burgundy padded booth seat—as if trying to distance herself from the sting of what she had just described; I could tell that, even though these exchanges had taken place years before, the emotions associated with them were still potent for her.

She noted that both PWI department administrations were more than happy to meet with the students to get their sides of the story, but not as keen to listen to Dr. Bell, their trainee (at the Doctoral PWI) and their colleague (at PWI of Inquiry). In both cases, Dr. Bell’s frustration stemmed from a feeling of not being listened to, of her concerns not being taken seriously, of not being supported as a black woman who taught while living certain realities that her white counterparts did not. Although her one colleague didn’t
seem to think much of black woman stereotypes and their applicability to Dr. Bell, the professor found that many other people did.

Theme 8: Encounters With Stereotypes as a Black Woman Professor

Dr. Bell wasn’t sure how much these caricatures were consciously wandering through students’ minds during my observations. But she recalled feeling like they were in previous iterations of this course.

Sometimes I interpret what happens now based on what happened in the past. I don’t know how reliable that is, but I remember behaviors where white women would kind of give me this look.

You're falling into that stereotype of black women: evil and a monster. Or the laughing, sweet, ‘come let me take care of you’ type: ‘Oh, you poor thing. You didn’t do your assignment. That’s okay.’ So, then they don’t know what to do when you're not like that.

Still, she seemed to constantly have thoughts that they might be at play—and that she had to stand ready to fend them off.

Random Stereotype Experiences

Things she experienced in the past—even with complete strangers—had caused her to be keenly alert to the potentiality of being stereotyped while “on the job” at any time. She detailed a (now) humorous account of a routine errand turning into an unwitting opportunity for one of these archetypes to rear its head:

I had a [white] dentist… I never went back to him after this. He was like, “My son goes to school and he had a black professor before. And I heard that black professors are mean. Is that true?” He actually asked if black female professors are mean. That’s what he said while his hand was in my mouth. I won’t be coming back to your dental office.

And how impromptu conversations on the street with white people she would meet at a campus crosswalk could make her rethink her automatic friendly greetings:
I get some really crazy things said to me when people on the street ask, ‘What do you do?’ I always say, ‘I teach. I’m a teacher.’ I dread when they go, ‘Oh, where do you teach?’” But if they ask, then I’ll say “[PWI of Inquiry].” And inevitably, they say, “Oh, really? Good for you!” I get that all the time: “good for you.” Like, ‘You made it. You are different. You are the exception. You made it out of the ghetto.’ It almost feels like they want to pat you on the head when they say, “Good for you!” That’s why I don’t say I’m a professor at [PWI of Inquiry].

She described the briefest—and most awkward—encounter happening at, of all places, an academic conference in her discipline, to which she was invited to speak.

I was at a conference on a featured panel; it was a prestigious conference, I stuck around on stage… it was one of those plenary sessions so everybody is in there. And, afterwards, the panel was walking to the next event. And this man comes up to me and sneers, “You are so smart.” It was said in this patronizing tone. Well, that’s why I’m part of the featured panel. They asked me to come. I ended up explaining [the exchange] to one of the white women on the panel I befriended. I don’t remember how we started talking about race, gender, class and stuff. I told her about the guy that came up to me and said, “You're so smart.” I told her what that meant and she remarked, “I didn’t even think about that. I thought it was a compliment.” And I asked, “Well, did he say that to anybody else?”

Past experience had been a powerful teacher, and Dr. Bell was wary about being seen as Mammy or The Angry Black Woman. From my field notes and review of the class audio notes, I didn’t see or hear any evidence, explicit or implicit, of black woman stereotypes (as applicable to Dr. Bell) at play in her interactions with the students in either section in the classroom.

Black Students and “The Hookup”

But in our interviews, she again cited Monique and Tariq, who she did perceive to be operating on another negative, race-based assumption about the professor: that she would give them the scholarly version of what is known in some black circles as “The Hookup.” This term is typically used commercially, and refers to some blacks expecting to get goods and services they would pay for from a white establishment for free (or at a deep discount) from a black one; particularly if they know the owner, or know someone
who does (Edmond, 2009). Applied within this study, Dr. Bell perceived these students as wanting to do as little work as possible, but still pass the class (or even get a good grade), simply because they shared the same racial affiliation with her.

How else do you explain Monique’s behavior? She comes up to me after class and asks, “Can I come talk to you? You have office hours today, right?” I said, “Yeah.” “Can I come talk to you because I need to get a good grade on a paper?” “Yeah.” She said, “Okay,” and that she’d be there at such and such time. Doesn’t come. Then she asks me if she can come on Thursday, yesterday. I don’t usually do that because I’m working on research [that day], but I said, “Sure.” Didn’t show. Did not come and then didn’t say anything to me today. Next time you ask me, I’m not going to go out of my way. I’m not going to bend over backwards to rearrange my schedule anymore if two times you stood me up and you didn’t even send an email saying, ‘I’m sorry. Such and such came up or I forgot.’ Your image is going down in terms of the way you talk about ‘Yeah, I want to get an A in the class.’ It’s not going to happen… not like this. That kind of frustrated me.

Especially as I have all these other things I have to do with my research and deadlines that are pressing on me now. I don't have it in me to do extra for you, because I don't even have extra. So, for me to go out of my way to meet with you means I have to put aside the chapter that I'm working on for my book that I have to get done by my upcoming deadline so I can send it to somebody to give me feedback so I can get the manuscript out by the final deadline. So, yeah, how about that? I don't have time for this.

At one point, she asked me, “Do you know what my grade is because my parents wanted to pay for a trip for me, but it all depends on what I’m getting.” I felt like she was trying to tell me that so that I would be like, ‘Okay, let me make sure she gets a B.’ That little story is not going to influence me, pressure me to give you whatever. She sent me an email saying this. So, that was all a little ploy. I really think she thinks she can get by with her charms. She thinks she’s being cute and being friendly, but that won’t work with me. Sorry.

The professor said that Tariq never went so far as to ask for a specific grade, but he did want to know if he could skip certain parts of assignments she gave the class. For example, Tariq didn’t want to watch to the documentary film she assigned students to view outside of class to aid in their understanding of hooks’ essay critique:

He comes up to me after class and he asks, “Well, do I have to watch this movie?” He said he went to the school that the guy in the film, I can’t remember which,
attended. “I went to that school.” I looked at him and said, “Okay?” And he continued, “And I’ve seen that movie I don’t know how many times. I mean, I know it backwards and forwards…” And I was, like, “Okay?” You’re sitting here trying to convince me… just go watch the movie. If those are the directions I gave to the class, then watch the movie. Oh, you’re exceptional because you went to that school? I don’t care. I mean, the other students could be like, ‘Well, I went to [PWI of Inquiry] and this guy [one of the film’s stars] went to [PWI of Inquiry]. So I should be able to just tell you about the culture of [PWI of Inquiry], and not have to watch the movie.’ And I don’t even know how long ago he watched the movie. What does that have to do with anything? This dude really is trying to get over. I understand he’s got whatever issues, but I’m not going to excuse that. You haven’t demonstrated to me: I’m giving it my best shot. I’m working as hard as I can because I really am determined about making this work. And then you come up to me and say, well, I’ve seen this movie before so I don’t even want to, you know, do something as simple as that.

To recontextualize Dr. Bell’s stance with these two students, she reported that both of them habitually would turn in assignments late, make appointments to see her during office hours then fail to show up, come to class late or not come at all.

In particular, Tariq—also one of her program advisees—irked Dr. Bell because he had previously been dismissed from school, but reinstated. She didn’t believe he was taking his second chance seriously:

I was like, ‘Don’t you need to come see me for advising?’ He said, “Well, I already picked out the classes I’m going to take.” Okay, but I’m your advisor in [the discipline]. You have to come see me. I said, “Oh, so you're not coming to see me?” He said, “Well, I can.” Oh, you can. Especially after he had been kicked out of school. He has to come see me. I asked, “Have you gone to another advisor or something that I don’t know about that has given you permission to register?” “Well, I mean, I can. When are you…when can I come?” I was like, I have times posted on my door and then I also have further office hours that you can come. “Okay, well, maybe I’ll come on Monday.” So, I was like, you can’t not come in, and that’s it. You’re aren’t going to be like, ‘Oh, I’m sorry. I didn’t know. I’m coming,’ and then avoid me because he knows I’ll ask, ‘So [student’s name], what are you doing? I thought you said… but I’ve got your plan of action right here: contact and meet with teachers on a weekly basis; weekly or bi-weekly academic advising meetings. Oh. Maybe I wasn't here when you stopped by…’

All I know is that everything he’s doing is setting him up for failure—not just in my class, but overall. And it's not because he doesn't have what it takes. Students who are, ‘Well, who cares,’ and blow it off end up in a jam. And when I get a
form from [the college in which the discipline is housed], I have to be honest: ‘I think he has great potential, however, comma…’ I’m saying, you want me to advocate for you, but you’re not giving me anything to work with. I can’t be like, ‘He’s a brother. You just need to give a black man a chance!’

I shared with the professor that I found it fascinating that her greater frustrations in terms of her interactions with students seemed to come from the black ones. The scholarly literature on the relationship between black professors and black students at PWIs is generally positive, focusing heavily on the mentor-protégé relationship that many faculty of color take on with students of color at these institutions. She replied:

I don’t know if it’s because people are afraid to air dirty laundry or something; make it look like we don’t have it together. I think in some ways, some students aren’t prepared when they come [to college]. They haven’t had the type of educational background some of their white counterparts have had. This is a whole new ballgame. You need study skills. You need time management skills. You’ve got to be on it. I’m just thinking about some of my other experiences, grad school experiences, with some of the people that were students with me. The ones that dropped off, they were afraid to go to talk to their professors if they were having a problem. It was this kind of, “I need to prove that I can do it. But they were failing and struggling. Some of them ended up getting kicked out of school or dropped out of school.

[As a professor now] I could take a stance of, “Oh well. You’re not performing.” But I want to reach out to them because I see where it’s going to go. You are going to fail. You are going to get kicked out or are going to drop out of school. I feel this responsibility to help, but at the same time, I get frustrated. I just told you what [you need] to do. And in the very next class, you don’t do it. I’m not going to buy any excuses. And I understand, one talk is not going to fix it. But why is it immediately after we talk, you disappear, you don’t show up to class and then you come in with some lame excuse that I’m just tired of? That is not going to work. It’s not going to get you out of trouble. In fact, it’s making it worse for you because I’m just like, “You’re full of excuses” instead of owning up, like, “I messed up, I didn’t do it, I know it’s going to be late. What do I need to do to make sure [I pass] or whatever?” Don’t give me the puppy dog eyes. I don’t care. I want to know what’s between [your ears]. I know you have something there, but you are not performing. It’s frustrating me.
In short, Dr. Bell viewed interactions with these students as them expecting her to continuously excuse their behavior without repercussions; she did see the applicability of the two stereotypes in these instances.

There are times when I felt like I was expected to be mothering even though that’s not what I’m there for. I’m not there to, “Oh, you poor thing. Oh, I’m so sorry, yes, I’ll take your late essay” or whatever. And sometimes I felt like they would come to me like that with that expectation. And I was, like, “Sorry.” Then I became the Angry Black Woman. ‘She didn’t take me under her wing. She’s supposed to be there to make me feel good.’

Dr. Bell stated that even in the instances where students chose not perform up to standard in her class, she perceived that they would still negatively rate her in the end-of-term evaluations. “Sometimes they’re lying because I had office hours. You just never came,” she quipped about one comment by a student who claimed she was unavailable outside of the classroom.

How The Semester Ended

By the end of the term, Dr. Bell expressed pride that at least some of the students learned how to read more closely and respond to the author’s arguments more constructively. Talking about the class discussions on the third bell hooks essay about the documentary film, I noted that I had never heard “anyone in the classes read something directly from the text and then talk about it. Usually, they all just kind of give their opinion.” That is, up until the end, no student had even mentioned a page number to direct everyone’s attention to before they spoke. Dr. Bell said:

It was a good discussion. I was proud of them because it was bell hooks. I think [it was] because of the way we approached it [over the course of the semester]. They had to read [her] stuff three times, do multiple revisions, and they had to really think about it. And then that article, “Why Are You Shoving This Down Our Throats,” made them understand. I was proud of them to be able to really engage this time, even offering critiques because she’s making assumptions that everybody is going to agree [with her] without [her] giving evidence. So, I
thought overall they did a good job. I was proud of them. I think they did a good job.

Reflecting on her overall interactions with students, she stated:

In some ways, I think there was student behavior typical of that particular generation. I would talk with colleagues and they talked about that too, students who were texting or on Facebook; or who would just walk in late and walk right in front of the professor and not say anything. Those kinds of behaviors I didn’t really interpret as them doing because I’m a black woman. But when and if I would address it— and their responses to that correcting—would make me think that because I’m black and a woman, they’re responding in certain ways.

For example, Dr. Dalrymple who [also] observed me [in the third class] noted Monique walked in late. Afterwards, he said, “Oh this happens to you too.” I was like, “Yeah.” The way he handles it is to stop opening the door, lock the door, or publically call them out on things [on the spot]. I felt like if I did that [laugh], they would be complaining about me, or saying I was mean, or would write something on the student evaluations later. So I was always trying to think of how to figure out how to address these things without coming across as the Angry Black Woman or The Mammy who just lets them do whatever they want. I was always trying to negotiate when it came to me asserting my authority. The classroom management issues I think were similar. It’s the way I would respond to address them.

She summed up her perceptions of the interactions this way:

I think that race was always playing a part. Just due to the fact that I was an African American woman in a position of leadership, in an authority position in the classroom, where there were mostly non-black students. So I feel like every moment of every day was in some way impacted by race. Even if it was just me thinking about it, me thinking about how students might respond to a text that we were going to read; or how they would respond to me asserting my authority and having to correct them; or me having to grade their papers; if it wasn’t on their minds constantly, it was on mine. Constantly. I just felt like it was always a factor.

In closing, some of her earliest perceptions of some of her white students and later “victories” with them during the observed semester were validated by one of her afternoon students, who referenced her course in an essay written for another class. The student shared it with Dr. Bell, and she (after de-identifying the author) shared it with me
for this study. Some excerpts about the student, the class and the student’s perceptions of the PWI of Inquiry in general read:

My first three semesters at [PWI of Inquiry] were very monotonous and similar to my time in high school… racist jokes, mostly all privileged peers. There was no cultural diversity. Everyone on my floor in my dorm was white and from the Midwest.

My own roommate of three years now is almost completely against diversity. He feels that able white men should be in power [in] every situation at every time… I have had neighbors in the dorms that have openly made racist jokes and said they have never even directly spoken to a person of color.

As far as I could tell, [PWI of Inquiry] almost had nothing to offer in terms of culture… Diversity was not emphasized… I was not from the Midwest and I was hoping for a very big change by coming here.

Then there was [Dr. Bell’s Course Name]. My professor was [Dr. Eve Bell], an African-American woman from [the city of PWI of Inquiry]. Nearly every class, we read another piece from an African-American woman who felt great oppression in her life. Whether it be racism, sexism, or other struggles with identity, the pieces were both enlightening and powerful. They were written to generate thoughts and they were chosen to spur deep and honest discussions in class. Professor [Bell] has us read works by bell hooks (sic), Angela Davis [and others]… I stopped jumping to stereotypes whenever I saw someone different from myself. It was something of a revelation, and I looked forward to that one class every day.
Chapter Five

Discussion of Findings:

“Are You Kidding Me?”

Introduction

Building from the narrative of Chapter Four, the following sections of this chapter provide the analysis that gives Dr. Bell’s story meaning. First, I describe the two classroom cases, and make the comparative and contrasting distinctions the data revealed across cases. Second, I interpret the themes of the reported data, incorporating Dr. Bell’s voice, through the lens of Critical Race Theory. Third, I synthesize the findings back into the broader scholarly narrative of the teaching experiences of black faculty at PWIs. Fourth and finally, the chapter ends with a concluding summary of some of my thoughts on the data collection and analysis processes of my study.

Description of Course Sections

Class 1: The Morning Section

Dr. Bell’s first section was comprised of 14 students total (11 white, 2 black, 1 biracial; 10 female, 4 male). None of the students were freshmen, though a few had majors other than the discipline in which the course was offered. The class met from 10 am to 10:50 am on the second floor of a different college-housed building. Aside from the green chalkboard that ran the length of the front wall of the classroom and the rows of desks facing it, the room was austere in appearance and function. Ironically, given the types of classes ordinarily taught there, there was no lectern and no technology setup. The professor sat at a short table equipped with a basic metal chair in front of the chalkboard.
Class 2: The Afternoon Section

The afternoon session began two hours after the morning section ended, running from noon to 12:50 pm. It also enrolled 14 students (12 white, 1 Asian, 1 black; 7 female; 7 male). The class met on the top floor of a building also dedicated to another college within the university. And similarly, the classroom was relatively stark save for a chalkboard, table and chair for the professor, and student desks. This room seemed “cheerier” though, likely due to its larger size, orange-painted walls and the higher energy level in the interactions between Dr. Bell and the students.

Course Section Similarities

Course Details

The course met three times weekly. Allowing for holidays, examination periods and other breaks dictated by the PWI of Inquiry’s academic calendar, there were a few days when the two classes did not meet. The professor cancelled these for personal reasons, mainly to take care of her child who occasionally fell ill. The professor was rarely late, though there were usually a handful of students in the room before she arrived. Many students entered just before the professor did; a few consistently arrived late—some of those by as many as 10 to 15 minutes. As per the syllabus, students had to complete six papers and attend all peer review sessions to be able to revise the original work in exchange for the higher grade of the two versions. All students were issued the syllabus, and signed and submitted a form on the first day of class indicating that they understood the syllabus and agreed to be bound by its terms. The reading schedule, texts, assignments and due dates were identical. Dr. Bell taught all classes in both sections; no substitutes were used.
Perceptions of Interactions With Black Students

Our interviews revealed that Dr. Bell had nearly identical perceptions of the interactions she had with the black students in both sections. She also thought their course performances (or lack thereof) were similar. Namely, she felt that Monique, Tariq and Shavon, (who actually was the most promising of the three) seemed to have an expectation that Dr. Bell would help them in spite of the fact that they: consistently showed up for class late when they did come; turned in assignments late; repeatedly made appointments to meet with the professor then did not show up or offer an explanation for why they missed the meetings; and sporadically missed class.

While she frequently used the words “frustrated” and “angry” to characterize her emotions when interacting with Monique and Tariq, the professor sounded more disappointed than anything when talking about her exchanges with Shavon, an introspective student who she described as “insightful” and full of “raw talent”:

She is insightful. She had a research internship or something one summer where she was helping this professor. She got paid for it and she did all this reading and she really got engrossed in it. It was radical feminist stuff. Then she did a McNair thing. She’s read stuff that [the other students] have not. It’s made her want to go to graduate school. She’s already working on that.

She came to me to say, “I want to thank you for helping me lift my spirits.” She’s having problems in all her classes, but she’s so intelligent. I said, “You have the raw talent.” She’s like, “I know, but I don’t just want to try to make it by on that anymore. I did that in high school and it’s just not working anymore. And because I have these goals to go to graduate school, I know I can’t do that.” We talked about it and I said, “If I show you a resource, will you implement it?” “Yes!” But then she didn’t she come to class the next day! She doesn’t ever email me. She never emails to say, “I’m sorry.”

The professor indicated that in previous iterations of the course, she felt the presence of her black students “comforting,” and that she didn’t have to be the one to “bring up
certain things” pertaining to race-based text discussions. She did not express either of these sentiments during the observed semester but rather asserted:

As a professor, they think you’re just being hard on them. I heard the lady from [PWI of Inquiry’s educational program for first generation and low income students] say, “I’ve heard about your class. They’re getting their butts whooped.” Why? It’s just normal stuff that I ask the students to do—the same stuff every other professor asks of students. I’m not making them do anything different. I’m “hard” because I don’t accept the excuses. If everybody else was able to get it in, then I’m sorry. It is not my problem. It was yours!

In sum, her classroom perceptions of all three of her black students in the two sections during the observed semester were generally negative. This proved to be the case in spite of her apparently having some extended relationship with each outside of the classroom (e.g. teaching them in other courses, serving as a program adviser, and knowing about their schooling and career interests in some detail).

Course Section Differences

Perception of Interactions with White Students

Even though there were instances of resistance on the part of white students in both sections, Dr. Bell perceived the white students in the afternoon section to be considerably more open interacting with her than those in the morning class. “They’ll at least think about things, even if they don’t know what they want to say or where they stand on it. They’ll kind of think out loud.” Indeed, where my field notes indicated more awkward silences and personally-distancing attacks on the authors during the morning coverage of the material, the afternoon section offered a few more introspective comments and questions directed to Dr. Bell in attempts to understand what the authors were saying. These were not perfect correlations; the afternoon students’ interactions were not totally void of resistance to Dr. Bell and the course texts.
Perceptions of Student Engagement

Likewise, the professor noted a slightly higher level of engagement by students overall in the afternoon section. I wondered if a part of that could be due to Dr. Bell’s role in the interactions. Specifically, I observed that she seemed to be more relaxed and that she flowed a bit more smoothly in the second session, and thought that maybe it was because she was that much more comfortable in her presentation of the material than in the morning. She believed there was some truth to that, as in the morning she was also putting aside whatever personal stress she had to deal with at home. For instance, when her child didn’t sleep well some nights before class, it would interrupt their morning routine, which would then affect her state of mind while teaching first thing in the morning. My notes documented those days when Dr. Bell seemed more subdued than usual, and she would attribute it to this scenario. By the afternoon, by contrast, she was back to her usual energy levels, which could have then translated into the students being more responsive as well. Beyond that, though, the professor thought the afternoon students just seemed to come to class more prepared (i.e. having done the readings) and ready to engage the material than those in the morning section.

To conclude, my observations suggested that the material differences between the two courses were slim, but the “feeling” in the afternoon classroom was slightly less antagonistic than in the morning one. I believed that some of this atmospheric variation could have be directly attributable to Dr. Bell’s end of the interactions that took place during instruction as noted above, while some of it could also have been the result of the natural gradations in individual student traits and behavior in the two classes. For
example, I did not see any instances of texting during teaching and other such “generational” behavior in the second section as was clearly evident in the morning class.

Original Contributions to Scholarship

My research data adds to the existing scholarly narrative in three ways. First, this is the first study on this topic to rely on ethnographic observation—recording data while instruction is taking place—rather than just reflective professor-researcher self-report which currently dominates this area of inquiry. My ability as the researcher to see and hear what was going on in the classroom firsthand, and then make meaning of that data with Dr. Bell before reporting it, produced a richer, more comprehensive view of what was actually happening in a black professor’s classroom with students during instruction.

Second, my finding of a black professor’s negative perceptions of interactions with black students in the classroom (and also outside, as was touched upon in this study) at PWIs adds another layer and counterstory to the prevailing accounts that overwhelmingly describe this relationship as positive, affirming and constructive. Only Tuit (2012) and Moore and Toliver (2008) explicitly elaborate, albeit briefly, on black faculty’s downbeat feelings about interactions with black students on these campuses.

Third and finally, there are studies and articles on black faculty perceptions of interactions with students at PWIs. However, none of these commentaries seem to trouble their own data around questions about such nuances as legitimate (though unlikable) white student responses to a professor’s course content choices, and whether or not the faculty member sets a contextual tone that explains exactly why these students need to learn about race and other identity issues in the way the faculty intend to teach them in a
given class over the course of a semester. These two issues, among others, are discussed at the conclusion of the next major section.

Interpretation of the Data

To reiterate, race certainly played a role in each of the eight themes, either explicitly or implicitly. This is not surprising according to CRT, the theoretical lens through which I viewed the study data and my dissertation as a whole. Race as a central facet of all spheres of American life is imbedded in the first principle of CRT. In the first of three subsections, I demonstrate how the data in many of my study themes generally (and non-predictively) seemed to “fit the profile” of CRT’s main premises. While several themes fall under more than one tenet of CRT and certain principles are more pertinent than others to my study, the framework as a whole did prove to be a useful tool for further understanding my informant’s classroom experience as a black professor at a PWI. In the second subsection, I will elaborate the limitations of CRT in understanding Dr. Bell’s perceptions of her classroom experiences by drawing attention to the nuances she identified that made her case study unique from the aggregately reported experiences of black faculty at PWIs in the literature. Finally, in the third subsection, I will address some challenging questions about my study and attempt to play Devil’s Advocate around some of Dr. Bell’s perceptions in an effort to problematize the data for reflective consideration of the complex, idiosyncratic nature of race/racism in this overall research topic.

Study Themes Via Lens of Critical Race Theory

As a starting point for understanding qualitative data, identifying themes is important (Bazeley, 2009). My data analysis yielded eight overarching themes. Five
emerged from my informant’s perceptions of her classroom interactions with students while teaching at the PWI of inquiry during the observed course sections: 1) professor’s authoritative interaction style; 2) low general student engagement; 3) white student resistance; 4) frustrating black student performance; and 5) interaction-based strain and coping mechanisms. The other three themes surfaced from Dr. Bell’s reflections on why she perceived the interactions the way she did: 6) classroom precedent in professor’s PWI teaching experiences; 7) previous departmental responses to racialized, problematic interactions with students; and 8) encounters with stereotypes as a black woman professor.

To view these through CRT, let us revisit the asserted six central tenets (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 3) of this theoretical lens. Here, I paraphrase these principles and narrow their definitions to the elements that best describe Dr. Bell’s applicable perceptions of her interactions and experiences during the observed semester and prior. Thus, the wording varies slightly from the original introduction of these items in Chapter One.

**Tenet #1: Racism is a Permanent, Normal Fixture in American Society**

First, CRT maintains that in every facet of American life, all other things considered equal (i.e. educational attainment levels, professional position, etc.), race trumps just about everything else for people of color. Dr. Bell identified race as the most influential element emerging from the data, and something she “thought about all the time” in the classroom. Rather than occurring as a discrete phenomenon, race and power dynamics spilled over into just about all of the other data themes in ways that were often difficult to tease apart. She cited examples of some of her students refusing to give the
same levels of basic respect to her (Theme 2 and Theme 4), the black female writers and their texts that they would instinctively and immediately give to these scholars’ white male counterparts (Theme 3). Similarly, the race-denying responses Dr. Bell said she received from administration at two separate PWIs when she went to them for guidance in dealing with the two precarious incidents with white male students also surfaced racial dynamics: though she was a colleague, they aligned themselves with the students who were not their peers but who were of their racial affiliation (Theme 7).

Tenet #2: Whites Have Little Incentive to Eliminate Racism

Second, CRT holds that racism is so difficult to cure because large segments of society have little reason to eliminate it. Specifically, Delgado and Stefancic (2001) assert that racism advances the material interests of elite whites and the psychological interests of working class whites. Dr. Bell’s white students psychologically resisted her and/or her efforts to engage them in race-related discussions from the texts, either by refusing to read (Blake), talking about race from an impersonal place (Sarah) or attacking the personalities of the authors who wrote about that subject (Theme 3). And the doctoral PWI department administration’s ability to suppress Dr. Bell’s complaints about the problematic racialized interaction with her student helped maintain the status quo; which then helped the department and the university at large to maintain a positively constructed image around its espoused narrative of equality; which they used to continue recruiting black female doctoral students (resulting in federal race-based funding to the university) to teach as T.A.s without addressing the race-based challenges they faced in that institution; thereby reinforcing the perpetuation of institutionalized racism (Theme 7).
Tenet #3: Race is Socially Constructed and Manipulated When Convenient

Third, CRT asserts that race is a social construction, not a biological reality, and that society invents, manipulates, or retires these formations when convenient. There was not much data from my study that could be further illuminated by this tenet. The only example that seemed to fit here was the exchange after Dr. Bell gave her “disclaimer” at the start of the morning class discussion of the “black rage” essay (Theme 1). Jordan, the biracial male student, was the first to comment. He adamantly declared the article “ridiculous,” (Theme 4) and both Dr. Bell and I perceived a kind of collective sigh of relief by some of his white classmates (Monique did not go to class that day, and Shavon walked in late, after his comment). “Yeah, they all laughed like, ‘Yeah, I thought so too.’ You heard this kind of chuckle,” confirmed Dr Bell. Though Jordan didn’t consider himself black, his white classmates at that moment did. Their construction of his racial identity served to 1) alleviate the anxiety of one of them being the first student that morning to express that thought; and 2) validate their dismissal of the text/author, since a “black” student did it first (Theme 3).

Tenet #4: Subordinate Groups Are Racialized in Ways To Sustain the Racial Hierarchy

Fourth, CRT argues that groups of color are assigned different characteristics at different times for different purposes, but always to maintain the dominant group’s position. Dr. Bell was well aware of the role stereotypes about black women played in this practice: from the dentist who asked her if it was true that black women professors were mean to the conference attendee who impugned her intelligence. From street acquaintances that thought her a credit to her race because she somehow managed to become a professor (Theme 8) to the students, black and white, who saw her as a long-
suffering caretaker or an angry black woman in agreement with the other angry black women whose work they read all semester (Theme 3 and Theme 4). This includes the actions of the assistant director at her Doctoral PWI of consoling the difficult white male student because Dr. Bell “talks about race a lot in her class” (Theme 7). All of these encounters served, intentionally or not, to impose, reinforce or acquiesce to a label of “otherness”: a kind of expectation of abnormality in and deviancy of black people in general that stood in direct contrast to the standard of normalcy that the dominant group has conferred upon itself as deserving the position it holds in relation to the groups it stigmatizes. Dr. Bell’s interviews with me emphasized negotiating the assertion of her authority in trying to combat these depictions and their implications for her professional practice inside and outside the classroom (Theme 1).

Tenet #5: Subordinate Racial Groups are Seen as Monolithic

Fifth, CRT contends that people of color are often assumed to have a singular, simplistically stated identity with others of their respective groups. For instance, some of her white students viewed her as being one and the same in mind and spirit with the black women scholars from whose texts she taught, in spite of Dr. Bell stating that she disagreed with what they wrote the majority of the time (Theme 3). When speaking of past student evaluations that labeled her as “biased” because of this conflation, Dr. Bell did point to a singular display in her past experiences of support and acknowledgement of the existence of racial dynamics in her classroom from the chair of her department at the PWI of Inquiry:

She was well read in critical race theory and does work with race, even though she’s a white woman. I once had to sit with her during our yearly review and she looked at my student evaluations. She said, “I know that some of this is some of the students having to deal with an African American woman.” Then she said, “If
the issue comes up when it comes time for tenure, I will defend this. I will explain this to the dean, to the university.” And that was comforting to me.

Tenet #6: Scholars of Color Must Voice Their Own Experiences

Sixth and finally, CRT affirms that professors of color in the academy need to share the stories of their experiences within the mainstream narrative of the academy. Dr. Bell’s willingness to participate in my study without hesitation was a direct belief in the need to voice one’s own account of events. Describing the course I observed, she stated: “our hook, if you want to call it that, is the personal is political.” I felt that mantra aptly applied to Dr. Bell as well. For instance, in the meeting she initiated with the department administration at her doctoral alma mater, she articulated the issues she was having in her classroom while also expressing concern for the larger community of black female T.A.s who came after her. Even though she felt her voice around the problematizing effects of race and gender intertwined on classroom interactions was largely ignored there, it did not stop her from speaking up again later at PWI of Inquiry when she faced a similar encounter. Dr. Bell then incorporated the works of different scholars expressing their own realities into her classroom, challenging conventional and stereotypical representations of who and what black women were able to be, say and do.

Limitations of Critical Race Theory as a Lens for This Study

To reiterate, CRT served as a practical and relevant analytic lens for most of this research study. Certainly, Dr. Bell perceived many of her interactions with students during instruction as falling under the six main principles described by Delgado and Stefancic. But CRT came up short as a framework for understanding when examining other, more ambiguous and nuanced elements of the professor’s perceptions. For instance, on more than one occasion, she voiced uncertainty about whether her gaze was
more a projection of her past than an accurate view of her present reality during the observed semester. This was an instance of a tension between what she perceived and what I saw and heard.

For example, I noted that she frequently alluded to a heightened guard against being stereotyped by her students. However, I did not see or hear any evidence of this phenomenon during the classroom interactions I chronicled. Even Dr. Bell admitted that she wasn’t sure “how much that was at play this semester”: indeed, all the examples she mentioned occurred either during previous academic terms or in professor role-related-but-non-classroom settings. An admitted criticism of CRT by some of its foes is what Delgado and Stefancic (2001) describe as:

critical race theorists’ nonchalance about objective truth. For the critical race theorist, objective truth, like merit, does not exist, at least in social science and politics. In these realms, truth is a social construct created to suit the purposes of the dominant group (p 92).

Therefore, CRT could be used to psychologically support Dr. Bell’s feelings about being racially stereotyped—because it is an experience that fits some of the criteria set forth by the main tenets. However, the reality of whether that was actually happening to her (which the professor herself questioned) would be harder to justify by a CRT-based argument. As I am not a member of the dominant group, and this was my observation, I don’t believe CRT could accuse me of coming to this conclusion by constructing this “truth” to suit my own purposes.

Additionally, she wondered whether what she perceived currently was actually always and only race-based. While she believed that race was a part of every interaction—even if it was only on her mind “constantly”—she did wonder which aspects of the exchanges were actually about race and which could have been due to some other
factor, such as gender or age (in terms of the generational gap between her and her undergraduate students). For example, she almost always verbalized “race and gender” as a tag-team influence on her interactions with her students, and the way they responded to the other black female scholars they read. She rarely referenced either construct separately. Delgado and Stefancic do acknowledge that racism is a complex mechanism that takes various forms and can, for instance, be “tinged with homophobia or sexism” (p. 25). However, CRT still only addresses the intersection of race, racism and power in society and institutions. It leaves “intersectionality” (pp. 57-62) with other identity issues that, while likely complicate or are complicated by race, are not inherently about race or ethnicity to separate, derivative areas of critical study (critical race feminism being one of them) that do not address the focus of this dissertation.

One of the original contributions of this study to the scholarly conversation on black faculty perceptions of their classroom interactions with students is the fact that Dr. Bell expressed the most frustration with her black students. This finding is not only fascinating given the positive reports in the literature of the black professor-black student relationship at PWIs—it also escapes explanation through CRT, which explicitly is concerned with white racism and its institutionalized power over groups of color. In fact, the “black-white binary” that is the focal centerpiece of CRT is one of its largest criticisms, given its use of the term “race,” which Delgado and Stefancic admit “means, quintessentially, African American” (p. 75). As specifically applied to the issue of negative black professor-black student interactions, CRT provides no mechanism for scrutinizing problematic relationships between people of varying power differentials within racially subordinated groups.
Troubling the Data

As alluded to in the introduction of this chapter’s major section, there are additional questions my data raised around issues of race and course content that have not been addressed in other studies covering this topic. Particularly, there are three issues of contention: 1) my professor’s choice of class content in relation to the purposes of the course and its bearing on the kinds of responses her resistant white students produced; 2) whether or not Dr. Bell set a contextual tone in the beginning of the course that specifically explained why students needed to know what she was teaching them in the way she chose to teach it; 3) and whether my professor knew for certain whether race was the actual reason behind the kinds of interactions she had with her students.

I’ll address the third question first, as it is the one for which I have a ready, unambiguous answer. Dr. Bell did admit that she did not always know what pieces of her interactions with students were race-based and which were due to some other factor. For instance, she acknowledged that she considered some of the disrespectful behaviors she encountered—such as texting during lectures or walking in late without explanation—were mostly the product of the social mores of her students’ generation. She felt that if and when she addressed these specific behaviors, however, the students would respond to her in racially motivated ways. For example, Dr. Dalrymple, her white male faculty observer, did say that he noted some of those kinds of behaviors in his own classes. He responded to them by calling students out on the spot for their misbehavior or locking the door behind him (to prevent latecomers from entering the classroom). Dr. Bell felt that if she took the same approaches he did—or when she addressed these at all—then it became
a race issue. She acknowledged that it was often difficult to tease apart which parts of her interactions were based on race, and which were not.

Now, I’ll answer the first question. To begin, the learning objectives of the class were for students to learn to read closely, think critically and write persuasively—not to appreciate, analyze or interpret perspectives by members of socially subordinate groups generally or black women specifically. Given the generic nature of these goals, it is interesting that Dr. Bell consistently chose (again, by her own admission) the work of some of the most provocative black women scholars (i.e. bell hooks, Angela Davis, Audre Lorde, etc.) as her anchor texts for this course, in every iteration she taught. Yet she seemed to expect responses from students to be materially/emotionally submissive to the level of provocation these women raised in their essays.

I believe Dr. Bell picked these women and their texts because they were among her areas of professional interest (namely, “black women” as a scholarly subject, among others she had), and not necessarily because she was just trying to elicit negative responses around race from students for controversy’s sake. That said, my data revealed Dr. Bell repeatedly expressing frustration about the kinds of responses she did generally receive from her most resistant white students—from her teaching assistant days at her doctoral PWI through the observed semester at the PWI of Inquiry. She did not seem to notice a possible correlation between the subject matter as presented by these women authors and the types of reactions these students had to them. That Dr. Bell had the right to choose these authors’ works to accomplish the learning goals is not in question; merely the fact that a professor’s choice of content can and sometimes does impact student response types and interactions in a class.
As for the second question, it is broadly related to the first. Again, given the general nature of the desired student outcomes of the course, it would have behooved Dr. Bell to establish for her students an initial framework for understanding why she chose her selected authors’ texts. That is, students may have been curious as to why they needed to know about race at all, much less in the way it was presented, in order to become more proficient in the close reading, critical thinking and persuasive writing skills comprising the core of the course learning goals. I was not physically present on the first day of class (I obtained IRB approval in the third week of the semester) and thus cannot say whether she attempted to set this contextual tone or not. Dr. Bell did not mention having done this in any of our interviews, and to be honest, it did not occur to me to ask her during my data collection.

This tone-setting action should not be confused with the professor having to defend her prerogative to select whatever texts she thinks will be interesting, thought provoking or stimulating of conversation. Rather, it should be considered in light of the study topic, and the act’s influence on the interactions she had with her students during instruction. If her pupils had a concrete sense of the relationship between the goals and the content, perhaps they would have responded differently. Of course, there would have been no guarantee of this had Dr. Bell made this contextual connection explicit on the first day or in the first week of class (and because I was not there, I cannot say for certain that she did or did not). But at least students would then have been offering more unambiguous racially motivated comments such as “this is ridiculous” or “she’s crazy” out of pure ignorance of the content itself rather than because of a possible unawareness of the critical link to course purposes.
To close, all three issues addressed in this section directly concern the professor’s view of race and how she allowed it to influence her perceptions of her interactions with students while teaching was taking place. The literature on this subject overwhelmingly focuses the spotlight on the (white) students at PWIs and how they seem to regard or treat race in relation to their black professors. My study, on the other hand, highlights the way in which the professor I studied did this, to much the same effect. As interactions are between at least two parties, it is important to examine the contributions both sides make to the resulting exchanges that take place in order to better understand what is happening.

Synthesis of Data: Critical Literature Review

Following the conventions of qualitative data analysis, I employed a “funneling” lens to dissect a broad collection of raw data and narrow it down to a focused presentation of central themes and ideas. Continuing in the standards of this methodological school of thought, I now move from the specifics of my research back to the general context within which it falls. A critical literature review specific to the details of my study is useful in this effort. It will also help me to cautiously ascertain what, if anything, might tentatively transfer from my case study to the broader experiences of black faculty at PWIs around their perceptions of interactions with their students in the classroom (see Chapter Six). I weave discussion of Dr. Bell and her experiences present into the review of the literature, organized by my research questions. I answer each question “for her” first, then go on to present and critique the scholarly narrative.

Examination of the in-vivo classroom experiences of black faculty and their perceptions of their interactions with their students is virtually non-existent (McGowan, 2000). Indeed, inquiry into the comprehensive work lives of faculty of color in PWIs is
rare (Stanley, 2006), and particularly lacking in direct observation methods of data
collection. For example, although Stanley (2006) cites observing classrooms of faculty of
color for 15 years, her scholarship has produced no studies solely on black professors in
PWIs. Indeed, there is a scarcity of studies on the actual teaching experiences of black
faculty of color at PWIs from their perspective, though some scholars have shed
theoretical light on some of the teaching challenges faculty of color face in aggregate
(Kauper, 1991; Johnsrud & Sadao, 1998; Aguirre, 2000; Brayboy, 2003; Bradley, 2005;
Smith & Anderson, 2005; Hassouneh, 2006; Sampaio, 2006; Stanley, 2006; Hendrix,
2007; Marley, 2007; Saavedra & Saavedra, 2007; Skachkova, 2007).

This dissertation focused on the lived classroom experiences of a black tenure-
track faculty member, and her perceptions of her interactions with her students during
instruction. Comprehensive keyword literature searches yielded few results that were
specifically about black faculty perceptions of their classroom interactions with students
as they were teaching at PWIs. There is, presently, a limited quantity of articles
specifically describing professor-student interaction phenomena that routinely occur
during instruction between black faculty and white students at PWIs. However, their
number is sufficient to get a collective snapshot of the reported landscapes inside these
scholars’ classrooms. There are no studies, however, on the perceptions of interactions
between black faculty and black students in PWI classrooms while instruction is taking
place from the professor’s vantage point; only a few comments in passing while chiefly
discussing interactions with white students. Rather, descriptions of a mentor-protégé
alliance dominate the literature around these two parties, though few draw attention to the
more problematic dynamics of these relationships.
Having laid out this introduction, I now proceed to the critical literature review. It is arranged by each of my six research questions. I return to these here to systematically answer each one thoroughly and thoughtfully.

Research Question 1:
How Do Black Professors at PWIs Perceive Classroom Interactions With Students?

*Black Faculty Perceptions of Interactions During Instruction*

Dr. Bell perceived her interactions with her students around instruction in numerous ways: “interesting,” “frustrating,” “proud” and “upsetting.” In harmony with Harlow (2003), she described her classroom style as “authoritative,” elaborating at length during our interviews. Further, she expressed her interactions as being different with her white students (N= 23) than with her black learners (N=3). She used words including “resist” and “attack” repeatedly when talking about behaviors by some of her white students, and terms like “excuses” and “trying to get over” when talking about the performance of all of the black ones. Finally, consistent with Chaisson (2004), she perceived that race was a central component of her classroom interactions and her perceptions about them, largely because she was “an African American woman in a position of leadership.”

For instance, Harlow (2003) interviewed 29 black tenure-track faculty (n=16 men, n=13 women) at a large Midwestern state university with a 91 percent white student population. Findings of the study revealed that 76 percent of those faculty members (94% for men compared to 54% for women) perceived that students questioned their expertise, credentials and authority. Harlow compared these faculty members to their white counterparts (N=29, identical participant composition by gender), only seven percent of
whom reported these challenges in the classroom. The wide discrepancy in the reported experiences of the black male and female faculty is supported by Ford (2011): “women of color recognize that their bodily experiences are markedly different from those of their white female and white and non-white male colleagues” (p. 453). In other words, female faculty of color realize that they experience a professional reality that is different because they are members of socially subordinate groups in addition to being women.

For example, black men reported having greater challenges to the to their intellectual authority. One black male professor in the study talked about a white male student who kept repeating, “That’s wrong, that’s wrong, that’s wrong, that’s not true” while he was explaining a concept during a class lesson (Harlow, 2003, p. 354). Black women, meanwhile, believed their physical authority was challenged more often than their qualifications or content knowledge, although students also questioned their academic expertise. They, for instance, spent more projecting an authoritative classroom style by doing such things as insisting students call them “Dr.” or “Professor” and not “Mrs.” or by their first names (p. 354). Dr. Bell informed me that spent almost the entire first class session establishing her authority with the students.

Themes in the Literature

All together, Dr. Bell’s lived experiences in my study lined up, albeit imperfectly, with those appearing in the literature, which yielded two main themes: white student resistance and black faculty countermeasures. First, resistance characterizes the classroom interaction mode of some white students and takes the following forms: questioning integrity of professor and/or material; devaluation of professor authority; avoidance; and writing negative evaluations. Second, the concept of countermeasures
exemplifies black faculty interactions in response to or expectation of those white student behaviors: projecting authority; anticipatory teaching; depoliticizing and disarming; and using whiteness as a teaching strategy. Huston (2005) and Perry et al. (2009) agreed that these classroom exchanges between this pair typically take place regardless of the discipline being taught or the PWI type, respectively. Indeed, even the PWI locale didn’t seem to matter in the examples scattered throughout the scholarly narrative.

White Student Resistance in Portrait

The literature depicts the recalcitrant white student, bucking against what may be seen as the imposition of black faculty and their “otherness” (Jennings & Lynn, 2005) onto his or her intellectual development. Perry and colleagues (2009) reported a sub-study of 20 professors of color (11 of whom were black) in various disciplines at a PWI in the Midwest. Their findings, consistent with sentiments expressed by Tuitt, Hanna, Martinez, Salazar and Griffin (2009), showed that sometimes, it was the very presence of these professors students resisted: “There is a pervasive resistance within the academy to their right, as outsiders, to be in positions of authority” (p. 89). Some of the study participants, in accord with Chaisson (2004) and Joyce (2005), believed this was because most of their white students had little, if any, contact with or substantial exposure to people of color in positions of authority in any realm.

Moule (2005) conducted a self-study of job responsibilities that fell to her over a five-year stint as an assistant professor of education at a PWI in the Northwest. Teaching about social justice was one of those activities, and she found that some white students rejected the message of her department’s mission simply because she was the messenger. Stanley (2006) concurred, highlighting an excerpt of a school newspaper-published letter
from a white male student to his black woman political science professor. The faculty member incorporated social justice themes that did not appear in the school catalog course description into the course, which he described as “deceptive advertising.” He vented feelings of being “ambushed” by those “ancillary topics.” Elsewhere, Carter, Honeyford, McKaskle, Guthrie, Mahoney and Carter (2007) argued that attempts to challenge the privileged emotional space of white students is “immediately disciplined” (p. 155). This squared with Hamilton (2002), who wrote that there is “a mostly unspoken demand [to] be careful of white students feelings” (p. 34), though no reciprocal expectation exists institutionally for white students toward their black professors. This is seen, for example, in students’ questioning the integrity of their professors, addressed in the next section.

*Questioning Integrity.* Harlow (2003) presented examples of white students interrogating the integrity—academic credentials, content knowledge and intellectual capacity—of their black instructors. In the earlier illustration of the black male participant being told he was “wrong” by his white male student as he was teaching, the professor shared how “very, very hurtful” the interaction was for him. McGowan (2000) stated that some white students perceive black professors as “not competent to teach” (p. 20). Nordick (2009) highlighted the classroom interactions at a PWI law school class in which a black woman professor reported being “interrogated at length” by some white students during lectures because they “were unwilling to accept the answers she gave.” In one incident, the professor misspoke during instruction, using a word other than what she intended to communicate. “After discussing it amongst themselves and referencing a
dictionary, the students decided to trap [her] by asking her to explain the word’s meaning” (p. 180).

Ho, Thomsen and Sidanius (2009) conducted a quantitative study at a Southern PWI on the effects of stereotypes on undergraduate student perceptions of academic competence on their evaluations of their black (n=14) and white (n=120) professors. They found that both black (n=201) and white (n=3,123) students scrutinized the academic competence and credentials of the black faculty more closely. Said the researchers: “In principle, one does not know whether this differential weighting was conscious and deliberate, or the result of the students’ implicit and unconscious biases” (p. 401). But they concluded: “We think it is more likely that the nondeliberative general expectancy invoked by the stereotype [of black intellectual inferiority] led to certain kinds of information being attended and remembered, and that these had disproportionate influences on overall impressions.”

To integrate the findings of Ho et al. and Harlow, some students operate from stereotypical beliefs or assumptions, rather than from any empirical evidence, to malign the attributes at the heart of their black professors’ classroom authority over them. The black male professor openly criticized in the Harlow (2003) example indicated it was so hurtful because, “it came from someone who was not an excellent student” (p. 354). Other scholars maintain that these encounters are upsetting for three reasons. First, what some students (black and white) believe to be true about the intellectual ineptitude of black people generally usually isn’t correct (Perry et al. 2003), and this stereotype—imposed from the outside—contradicts the factual reality of the academic achievements of their tenure-track black professors specifically (Steele, 1997; Taylor & Antony, 2001).
Second, the students doing the appraising are several stages below these scholars in terms of academic preparation and accomplishment themselves. And third, these students would not likely question their white professors in these ways, if at all (Ho et al. 2009; Harlow, 2003; Johnson, Rich & Cargile, 2008; Nordick, 2009). Taken together then, this questioning is not only unkind, it is disrespectful (McGowan, 2000). McIntosh (1989) described white privilege and some of the forms it takes. Dr. Bell discussed the concept of this privilege while referring to a white male student who would consistently come to class late by about 15 minutes, sit in the front row and dominate class discussions by opining, even when he admittedly had not read the course texts. I contend that she would concur that these other examples also demonstrate white privilege in action. The next section reveals that student diminishing of these professors’ content, particularly around race, is yet another.

*Devaluation.* Perry and colleagues (2009) go on to suggest that when the professor’s integrity cannot be disputed, their course content can become fair game. When material challenges white students and their worldview, some simply refuse to engage and dismiss it, choosing not to recognize black professors’ content as legitimate (Moule, 2005). These interactions also seek to undermine the authority of these black scholars, who are experts in their content areas. And again, this disrespect looks different depending on the gender of the black faculty member.

Baszile (2006) held that black women faculty represent a triple threat to white student comfort with the status quo of the academy because their very existence as “the ontoepistemological in-between” permits them to contest “the reification of blackness around maleness, the reification of gender around whiteness, and the reification of
intellectualism around white maleness” (p. 200). Thus, explains Ford (2011), some white students view their subject matter as having a certain illegitimacy, a sinister political agenda, simply because it’s coming from a black woman scholar. A qualitative study of black women faculty’s classroom interactions with white male students by Pittman (2010) disclosed that several of the professors interviewed felt that many of their white male students “rejected both the multicultural content they presented and their outsider identities, using each as an excuse to reject the validity of the other” (p. 191).

Dr. Bell spent a good deal of time discussing the devaluation of the black women authors of her course texts. She did not address the stereotype of black intellectual inferiority during the study. However, she did reference deflecting other stereotypes about black women, namely “Mammy” and “The Angry Black Woman” (Harlow, 2003; Allison, 2008). This latter archetype was the one that students, consciously or not, seemed to invoke when discussing these scholars’ works.

On the male side, McGowan (2000) referenced a black male professor who reported being so inundated with white student complaints about his course content, that he essentially assigned them “the grades they wanted” to escape the “harassment.” He asserted that some of the students would relentlessly claim they didn’t understand the assignments based on that particular content, “even when he had provided a detailed description and expectations” for their work (p. 21). In other words, he thought they feigned ignorance to avoid having to deal with the content. This kind of escapist behavior is examined in the next section.

*Avoidance.* This can take many forms, including not attending class when discussions of race are scheduled (Chaisson, 2004). On one of her bell hooks discussion
days, Dr. Bell noted that five of her 14 morning students failed to show up. None asked permission to be excused in advance, and none gave her a reason subsequently for being absent on that particular day. Watts (2007) identified eight constructs students who do come to class use to thwart deep, challenging dialogues on oppression: denial (asserting that apprehension inducing stimuli does not really exist); deflection (directing attention to something other than what is being discussed); rationalization (using logic to subvert understanding); intellectualization (approaching content from a purely cerebral perspective); principium (citing religious or personal principle to avoid engagement); false envy (employing flattery to deny the complexity of oppression); minimization (reducing the magnitude of an “other” expressed issue, offense or emotion); and benevolence (using charitable acts to cover up complicity in oppression) (pp. 120-122).

Johnson et al. (2008) elaborated four similar but not identical themes to describe white students evasive interactions with race-based course content: acknowledgement (racism does exist “out there” and is perpetrated only by extremists); white self-preservation (avoiding identity crisis through persuasion that “I’m not racist,” thereby rejecting responsibility and accountability for racism); diversion from structural power (deflection away from racism and white privilege); and investment in white supremacy (subscribing to the “U.S. grand narrative of meritocracy) (p. 118-130). They contend that knowing these kinds of typologies can better equip professors to prepare for and constructively confront white student resistance.

Dr. Bell cited other instances of avoidance in her two classes. For example, some students would talk about race in a contrived way rather engage what an author actually wrote about it, she said:
And some of them try to talk about race and gender. They’ll make an attempt to kind of try to think about it. I think because of the nature of what we were reading, they think sometimes they think they’re supposed to: “Oh, I have to talk about it, so let me think of something.

“I thought it was about race.” And most of them said that. No, you just said that because it’s [written by] a black woman. You saw she mentioned race a couple times. There’s so much you could talk about with race. She just was talking about race? “Well, race is part of it.” I had to really push them and it took us 30 minutes to get there.

Joyce (2005) also confirmed the pervasiveness of avoidant interactions in her class while a professor in literature at a PWI in the Northwest. She chronicled that most of her white students “attempted to escape the racial dimension of African American literature,” displaying an “unwillingness to face the horrors of racism and their resistance to accept the interpretation of their black professor” (p. 37). They wanted, instead, to discuss the literature from a “universal perspective” (p. 36).

Carter et al. (2007) discussed some of the avoidant behaviors some white students employ to circumvent discussions of race. The first author, a black, tenure-track faculty member at a large Midwestern PWI, was the professor of four of the co-authors, three of whom were white. The three detailed their initial uses of denial, rationalization, deflection and intellectualization, and learning how to recognize these behaviors in the professor’s course. Ultimately, these students came to regard their experience in the course and with the professor positively. Negative opinions of black faculty, however, are reported to be the norm among resistant white students, discussed next in this theme’s final section.

Negative Evaluations. Dr. Bell’s apprehension around student evaluations was not unfounded. Smith and Hawkins (2011) found that black faculty tend to receive considerably lower ratings from students on measures of “overall value of course” and
“overall teaching ability” (p. 158). Indeed, many faculty of color believe they are
negatively affected by student evaluations of their teaching (Stanley, 2006). Alexander
and Moore (2008) reported the experience of a black women professor who taught for
eight years at a Midwestern PWI with a student body of 15,000, 14,500 of whom were
white. Though she received favorable tenure ratings from the department, evaluations by
some of her white students consistently rated her low. Some said, “she always talks and
gives too many assignments about black people” and “she shows her true colors” (p. 10).
Nordick (2005) featured the example of a celebrated black woman professor who had
been teaching for nine years before accepting a post at a particular PWI law school. She
was its first black woman professor, and reported students evaluating her at the end of
that first year as follows:

The substantive [evaluations] say that what I each is “not law.” The nonsubstantive
evaluations are about either my personality or my physical features. I am deified,
reified, and vilified in all sorts of cross-directions. I am condescending, earthy,
approachable, and arrogant. Things are out of control in my classroom, and I am
too much the taskmaster. I am a PNCNG (Person of No Color and No Gender) as
well as too absorbed with ethnicity and social victimhood. My braids are described
as being swept up over my “great bald dome of a skull,” and my clothes, I am
relieved to hear, are “neat.” I am obscure, challenging, lacking in intellectual rigor,
and brilliant. I think in a disorganized fashion and insist that everyone think as I do.
I appear tired all the time and talk as if I’m on speed, particularly when reading
from texts. My writing on the blackboard is too small. (p. 186)

Her evaluation scores were also published in the school newspaper.

Chaisson (2004) hypothesized the dynamics undergirding this phenomenon—
students of lower educational position by virtue of their attainment levels to their black
professors but of higher social position because they are white—this way: “When a
person of presumably lower status challenges the students’ sense of identity, then the
projections of “racist” and incompetent” are used to dismiss the person and reaffirm their
status as superior to that person” (p. 355). Dr. Bell, validated this, saying this was the main way some white students asserted their “power” in response to her authority. She described it as the only way students could legitimately (and privately) lash out at her without fear (real or imagined) of repercussion on their grade or of being regarded as racist in the public sphere of the classroom (Smith & Hawkins, 2011). And there was no way to change this; all of her strategies to counteract student pushback had to come earlier in the semester while instruction was in full swing.

Black Faculty Countermeasures

Black faculty at PWIs often use their interactions with students during instruction to respond to white student resistance. Perry et al. (2009) described strategies, discussed below, that help these professors manage their classroom roles and curriculum in the face of this opposition. Pittman (2010) has also identified some of these strategies as stress relieving coping mechanisms.

Projecting Authority. Hendrix (1995) studied professor perceptions of the effects of race on classroom credibility at a PWI. She indicated that black male professors consciously used the first day of class to establish an authoritative atmosphere more than their white counterparts. Ford (2011) validated this practice among black female faculty, presenting interviews with two black women professors at PWIs. One shared (“with a sigh”) giving a “background routine” at the start of every semester, and the other maintained that it was imperative not to “slip” in the classroom authority area because “you will never regain that” (p. 468). A black female professor interviewed by Harlow (2003) insisted, “at every turn I have to remind students that I am the professor, I am not just the instructor” (p. 356).
Dr. Bell recalls developing her authoritative style after her first semester teaching as a T.A. at her doctoral PWI. In that first class, a white male student threw paper airplanes and called her by her first name while she was being observed by a white male faculty member.

I looked up, like, “Huh?” And everybody looked back at him and I had no idea, like what do I say? What do I do? Because you’re just in the classroom by yourself, you don’t know. But I thought that was the weirdest thing. You called me [Eve]. Why would you do that? I had some issues in that class.

She indicated having since “settled into my authority,” and was determined to let the students know “I’m not playing” during the observed semester. Her prior teaching experiences also taught her to be prepared for student opposition in whatever form it might come. The literature identified this as a strategy commonly employed by black faculty at PWIs.

*Anticipatory Teaching*

Perry et al. (2009) defines this as expecting to be challenged and planning in advance how to respond when resisted. Some black faculty reported compiling additional course resources that would reinforce their authority and academic competence. Dr. Bell did use this strategy: “I learned that it helps to protect me, too, so that I'm not just talking about my experiences. They can’t just dismiss it; ‘But she's biased. She always wants to talk about race.’” Nordick (2005) details one black female law professor who “spent countless hours preparing for her classes because she knew she would be challenged with comments like: ‘Professor, your point doesn't make any sense because I have a law review article that takes the opposite position’” (p. 179).

Yancy (2009), a black male professor of philosophy at a PWI, preemptively confronts potential challenge by laying out expectations on the first day of class for
“fearless speech” and “fearless listening” that will “not be penalized, even though they may result in anger and misunderstanding” (p. B36). Pittman (2010) echoed “heading off” threats at the start of the semester (p. 72). Johnson et al. (2008) developed “instructional modules that make connections between the past and present and the dialectical tensions between the structural and the personal” (p. 130), showing students how they are part of an ongoing dialogue and “larger patterns of meaning” before getting into tough conversations about race. Still, no matter how well a professor is prepared to facilitate these interactions, they are often tense. Thus, some professors employ other strategies, discussed next, to try to reduce classroom conflict.

Depoliticizing and Disarming

These were two approaches that Dr. Bell did not employ during the observed semester. Perry et al. (2009) define depoliticizing as presenting politicized and or contentious subject matter in a way that will be less threatening, particularly to white students and particularly around race issues. For example, the professor may allow students to approach material from a safely distanced position (i.e. studying racism strictly as a historical phenomenon without exploring how the present is affected by and often perpetuates the past). Disarming involves the professor protecting his or her credibility and authority in a way that “minimizes non-rational challenges from students” (p. 98) and “includes every student’s perspective” (p. 99). They cautioned that employing these approaches could undermine “some dimensions” of the goals professors set for student learning and engagement.

For example, students, especially those who are members of socially subordinated groups, can view these tactics negatively. The fourth doctoral student author of Carter et
al. (2007), a black female, wrote about asking a white female student to explain her view of the difference between race and ethnicity during a presentation she was giving on whiteness. Afterward, the white peer accused her black classmate of having an agenda, and of trying to make her a spokesperson for all white people. The black professor agreed during a class discussion, resulting in the black female student perceiving the professor as siding with the white student in the matter. “What was so disturbing,” wrote the black student, “was the way in which one hint of emotional and psychic violence (which is inflicted on students of color all of the time) directed toward a white student was immediately disciplined” (p. 155). In their write-ups, the white student co-authors only mentioned interactions with their peers of color during those kinds of challenging conversations; perhaps implying that it was their peers, not the professor, who confronted them and their worldviews.

Johnson et al. (2008) rallied against the use of practices like depoliticizing and disarming in order to produce dialogue that is more “polite” (p. 114). Rather, they argued that professors “must work diligently to address the challenges students present in discussions of white supremacy as well as navigate their own anxieties and relationship to it” (p. 114). Yancy (2009) concurred, stating: “professors should strive to create safe spaces within their classrooms where honest dialogue can develop” (p. B36). But, he cautioned, “it is important that we don't confuse safety with dishonesty or fear of challenging the status quo. Such ‘safe spaces’ actually end up shutting down discussion, stifling creativity, and demeaning the students” (p. B36). Pittman (2010) also reported the use of “safe spaces for white students” as a strategy (p. 71).
The lead author of Carter et al. (2007), would likely counter Yancy and Johnson et al. that all students, not just white ones, must be challenged around race: “any time students made generalizations about race, class, gender or religion, they were asked by me… to think of the implications of their statements” (pp.152-153). Even so, Dr. Carter and her students scrutinized whiteness in her course, entitled “Critical Perspectives of Whiteness in Education.” Other black faculty also incorporate teaching the construct of whiteness as a countermeasure in their classroom interactions with their students.

**Teaching Whiteness**

Johnson et al. (2008) did contend, “confrontation can be accomplished with kindness and humanity, but it requires addressing racism directly” (p. 115). To accomplish both of those aims, some black professors use the construct of “white privilege” as a pedagogical tool to help lessen or overcome student resistance to engaging racial issues in class. Dr. Bell did indicate encouraging students to read McIntosh (1989) in an earlier iteration of the observed course, in response to the comments of the white male student who, shortly after she started talking about it, walked out of her classroom. However, whiteness as a topic wasn’t an integral part of the course content during my study.

Puchner and Roseboro (2011) describe the teaching whiteness in this context as “a pedagogy of purposeful compromise” which “accepts that most white students will not, in the space of one course, recognize their own agency in the perpetuation of privilege and racism,” but may acknowledge white privilege as a larger structural process that inhibits the opportunities of people of color (p. 381). Chaisson (2004) incorporated the study of whiteness and privilege with her students at a PWI by showing films and
conducting experiential exercises in addition to assigning readings to her white students to help facilitate self-examination and “plant the seed for growth” (p. 355). Reason (2007) maintained that whites with a critical sense of what whiteness means on micro and macro levels may be better able to engage in dialogues about race and other identity constructs without the avoidant behaviors Watts (2007) and Johnson et al. (2008) identified.

In closing, almost all of the scholars presently contributing to the literature on interactions between black faculty and their white students during instruction at PWIs are in harmony about the challenging aspects of those exchanges, and the approaches used to counteract them. What isn’t reported nearly as much are the interactions between these faculty and black students in the classroom. The next sections surfaces what is known about this area.

Black Faculty and Black Student Interactions

Overwhelmingly, the picture painted in the literature of the relationship between black professors and black students at PWIs has been positive. However, few studies have been conducted on the perceptions of these relationships from the professor’s perspective, and fewer still are on the interactions of these parties in the classroom at PWIs during instruction. Most inquiry in this latter area has been from the black student point of view (Hendrix, 1998; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Guiffrida, 2005; Tuitt, 2009; Tuitt, 2012).

On the professor side, Pittman’s (2010) studied black women faculty experiences in the classroom with white male students. She summarized a few of the participants’ brief mention of their black students, who described these learners as “knowledgeable...
and aware of racial bias, active participants in discussions” (p. 187). Comprehensive
literature searches yielded one article completely devoted to surfacing the more
problematic aspects of these connections from professors’ perspective. Moore and
Toliver (2008) acknowledged that the narrative “has been relatively silent about aspects
of the relationship between black professors and black students that may be perceived as
negative” (p. 932). Relevant findings from their focus study with black faculty cited
difficult interactions occurring when: 1) students mistakenly think they would be able to
“kick back and get easy passing grades in the course because of their race” (p. 937); 2)
students thought the professors would scold them for not measuring up to their
expectations; and 3) when professors perceived students as making excuses for not
working hard to achieve academic goals.

The second and third points also speak to black professors, like Dr. Bell, who
perceive that their black students instinctively view them as more than just teachers who
assign them grades, but also as mentors deeply concerned about them as whole beings.
For instance, Dr. Bell shared knowing her black students beyond a classroom context.
She spoke about an enjoyable but draining internship that Monique was undertaking;
Tariq’s larger problems pertaining to his dismissal and reinstatement to the PWI of
Inquiry for academic reason; and Shavon’s aspirations for graduate school. Clearly, she
had a relationship with these students that extended beyond the four walls of her
classrooms.

Indeed, all three factors affected Dr. Bell’s interactions with all three of her black
students in the observed course. She perceived that Tariq and Monique, in particular,
expected to pass the class with a good grade without putting in the necessary effort to
earn it just because they shared a black identity with her. Shavon performed the best of the three in the classroom when she was there, but would frequently make office hours appointments with Dr. Bell and then not show up for them—despite having shared she was “having trouble in all her classes.” And all three made excuses repeatedly for the poor performance in class, though Dr. Bell believed each student to be bright and capable of doing well if they applied themselves and did the things she asked “every other student to do.”

The few reported accounts of negative interactions in the classroom with black students appear as part of discussions largely about exchanges with white students at PWIs. Harlow (2003) interviewed a black male faculty member who was approached by a black male student at the conclusion of his third lecture in class who told him, “I’m so glad you’re here. I’ve never had a black professor before. And you’re competent too” (p. 352). The professor only described the student’s comments as “very, very interesting.”

Braddock (1978) wrote that “most black faculty are cognizant, on some level at least, of the fact that in predominantly white institutions of higher education, black students are, in large measure, their raison d’être’ (p. 239). If this is the case, then it is understandable why professors would perceive their interactions with black students as negative when those students perform poorly, particularly in their classes. It could be seen, for example, as reflecting badly on the professor and, in turn, undermine his or her authority with other students in the class simply because of the shared racial affiliation. The next section discusses how interactions with students shape professor perceptions of the students themselves, and the process of teaching them.
Research Question 2:

How Do Those Interactions Affect Professor Perceptions of Students and Teaching?

Dr. Bell was “frustrated” with the black students and “irritated” with some of her more resistant white students. Yet, she was still able to make distinctions between the students who performed well, those who were resistant to her and the course content, and those who did annoying things that were “just what students in this generation do.” While she did express some frustrations, she didn’t speak negatively about teaching in general. For example, she stated finally being able to enjoy teaching the “black rage” essay, which had historically been one her most stressful days in the classroom.

For some black professors at PWIs, the interactions they have with their students in the classroom, compounded by systemic slights they perceive suffering in other areas of their jobs (i.e. research, service and tenure considerations, relationships with colleagues, etc.), can inspire serious thought about why they should remain in the academy. Some of those thoughts may sound like this: “I am done! I am tired, irritated, frustrated, and just done! Why do I have to deal with these things? Why can’t I just go about my business, do my job, focus on my career…why does the fact that I am a person of color keep interrupting my life?” (Tuitt et al. 2009, p. 69). And indeed, some of these faculty members do make up their minds to find the closest exit. Jayakumar et al. (2009) reported that 10 percent of black faculty planned on leaving academia altogether.

Others just “depart” psychologically, creating emotional distance between themselves and the institutions in which they teach (Griffin, Pifer, Humphrey & Hazelwood, 2011). This includes maintaining a certain professional “coolness” between themselves and their students generally (Ford, 2011). But there are those who determine
their professional calling is in those classrooms, having those interactions with those
students (Chaisson, 2004). The thoughts accompanying the decision to stay remind them
to concentrate on why they entered the profession in the first place. As stated again by
Tuitt et al. (2009): “Then I hear that small voice say, ‘Whoa—slow down, speed racer!
Remember your goals, keep your eye on the prize, don’t let this stop you! Focus!’” (p.
71). In these cases, black professors need to regularly reflect on how they allow race, to
the extent they have control over it, to shape both their classroom interactions with
students, and their perceptions of them. This latter point, as it relates to Dr. Bell, was
discussed at length in the “troubling the data” section of the chapter that preceded this
literature review. As it relates to black faculty at PWIs generally, this point is addressed
in the implications section of Chapter Six.

Research Question 3:
To What Extent Do Black Professors Believe Their Perceptions and Interactions Are
Racial in Nature?

Role of Professor Self-Perception

The answer to this question depends on a number of complex factors, including
the professor’s identities around race and gender. Dr. Bell believed that race was “always
a factor” in her classroom interactions because she was a black woman:

Even if it was just me thinking about it, me thinking about how students might respond to a text that we were going to read; or how they would respond to me asserting my authority and having to correct them; or me having to grade their papers; if it wasn’t on their minds constantly, it was on mine.

This was a considerable shift in her thinking. Reflecting on her earliest teaching
experiences at her doctoral PWI, Dr. Bell said that she thought that if she just worked
hard and did what she was supposed to do (Daniels, 2004), she would essentially be viewed the same as her other graduate student T.A. peers:

I think in the beginning, my first class ever, I think I may have been naïve, thinking I could just be like every other graduate student. I’m going to have the same challenges they have. And then when it was just absolutely crazy things – my authority being challenged, and even when a mentor who was assigned to me—a white male mentor—would say, “Oh, they’re doing these things to you because you’re young and black and a woman.” I think it was going through the fire of those trials, that I was like, “Okay, wait a minute. This is different and I need to think about these things.”

Almost half of the black participants in Harlow’s (2003) study were initially hesitant to admit that their race mattered to learners, or that race negatively influenced their classroom experiences at all. These participants either internalized the racial challenges they faced, or downplayed them altogether (p. 351). Harlow seemed to interpret these initial responses as denial of the realities of the racialized challenges that these professors nonetheless went on to describe. However, this could also be seen as a coping mechanism to help these faculty do their jobs in spite of those classroom conflicts (Pittman, 2010).

Harlow (2003) described the process of “selective identity construction”—called “self-fragmentation” by Ford (2011)—which influenced how several black professor informants perceived the role of race in their classroom interactions and on their perceptions of those exchanges. Essentially, it focusing on the aspects of interactions with students that reinforce the professor’s self-conception, and ignoring ones that do not. Dr. Bell did not address this concept in our interviews, instead seeming to rely solely on her own self-concept, completely exclusive of the interactions she had with students.
**With White Students**

Dr. Bell also believed her perceptions regarding her resistant white students were, in part, influenced by race, citing previous, problematic experiences with white students in the classrooms, negative interactions with colleagues around those interactions, and fighting off stereotypes of black women professors. Ford (2011) advanced the importance of professors examining their own race-based perceptions, asserting that women faculty of color could also make assumptions about their white students that may not be true. Dr. Bell did question some of these perceptions, stating: “Sometimes I interpret what happens now based off of what happened in the past. I don’t know how reliable that is.” Still, during the observed semester, she did seem able to distinguish between: her white students who were truly resistant and those who were a little quieter in class but attended every session, completed every assignment on time, and wrote “interesting stuff” in response to texts in their student response journals.

**With Black Students**

Tuitt (2012) briefly mentioned considerations for black professor interactions with black students. He posited that black professors have to learn to walk a fine line between two, paradoxes. The first is treating their black learners as “native informants,” using them as racial experts whose class comments speak for the experiences of all black people. The second is adopting a color-blind teaching philosophy in which all students, regardless of race, receive equal treatment. Dr. Bell seemed to lean toward the second proposition with regard to meeting basic class expectations: coming to class prepared and on time, turning in assignments on time, and contributing to class discussions. She did acknowledge that generally, some black students come to college without the same skill
preparations and academic grounding that many white students have had. However, she maintained that with these three, “I know you have something there,” but they were just making excuses for not performing.

To conclude, Dr. Bell surmised that this area is not discussed in the literature, perhaps out of fear of being culturally reprimanded for “airing dirty laundry.” The published accounts of the relationship between black professors and black students on PWI campuses seem to be held inviolate. Just as there are few positive reports of the work experiences of black faculty at PWIs, so too is there practically no mention (save for the two articles cited in this critical review) of negative interactions between these two groups. The reason for this is unknown. I speculate that the absence of these counterstories serves two purposes: 1) to bolster collective validation that black professors and black students deserve to intellectually reside at PWIs; and 2) to confirm that each group needs the other to make the pain of their respective journeys (as reported in the literature) more bearable and worthwhile. Further research could shed more light on this fascinating issue.

Research Question 4:

What Professional Experiences Contribute to/Explain Professor Perceptions of These Classroom Interactions?

The literature has identified two primary influences on the perceptions of black faculty toward their interactions with students at PWIs: 1) the classroom interactions themselves; 2) and interactions with colleagues around certain of those classroom interactions. First, each classroom interaction shapes perceptions of the next interaction and so on, in a continuous fashion over the course of a scholar’s teaching career. Second,
black faculty have reported approaching colleagues/administration in the respective departments around the most disruptively problematic interactions with those students for professional support. In both cases, positive and negative dynamics are at play. However, what has been published has tended to focus more on the provocative or negative aspects on these two areas.

*Previous Classroom Interactions With Students*

The experiences that inform the perceptions of black professors’ interactions with students during instruction have been documented and discussed under the first research question heading in this literature review. I will not, therefore, spend a great deal more time in this section. Rather, I’ll move on to examine what experiences black scholars have reported with regard to the responses they have received from peers to reports of disruptively problematic interactions with students in the classroom.

*Faculty Responses to Classroom Interactions*

Certainly, academic colleagues routinely interact in several ways within their departments. From collaborating on research to performing evaluations of teaching, collegiality has traditionally been an essential part of a professor’s job description (Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006). Regarding problematic interactions with students in the classroom, however—particularly around race and gender issues—black faculty have reported little departmental support from their white peers at PWIs. Stanley (2006) declared: “Majority white faculty often say that faculty of color are quick to ‘play the race card.’ In fact, some will even go further to refute racism when it is called into question, saying that faculty of color are too sensitive and that all faculty members encounter many of the [same] experiences” (p. 722).
Dr. Bell reported experiencing these and other similar kinds of responses from colleagues past and present around the disruptively problematic interactions she had with some resistant white students. She expressed being “frustrated” that the responses she received from her white faculty/colleagues at both her doctoral PWI and the PWI of Inquiry were so alike, in that they both tried to convince her that race and gender played no part in her exchanges with the two antagonistic white male students. Further, they both dismissed her perceived seriousness of her experiences, stating things like, “Oh yeah. I’ve had students like that before.” At her doctoral PWI, the assistant director also suggested that Dr. Bell just needed “to grow a backbone.” In context, these are examples of microaggressions (Sue et al. 2007).

Patton & Catching (2009) described various microaggressive responses colleagues, departments and universities have given to black tenure-track faculty who reported disruptively problematic interactions with students: 1) placing the burden to offset the situations encountered in class squarely on the back of the black faculty member by holding him/her accountable for changing racist behaviors in his class without offering substantive feedback on how the student(s) should own their part(s) in the interaction and respond appropriately to the professor’s authority in the future; 2) failing to acknowledge the relevance of race and/or gender in the situation; 3) avoiding the roles of racism and/or sexism in the professor’s reported experience by suggesting that all teachers have classroom challenges; 4) suggesting that the faculty members themselves are the cause for these issues; and 5) suggesting that professors view their experiences through a lens other than race. These slights accumulate over time, amalgamate in collective memory (Delgado and Stefancic 2001), and serve to influence
perceptions both of what happens in the classroom, and how the department will or will not support faculty who report difficult dynamics again in the future. Between the responses at her doctoral PWI and the PWI of Inquiry, Dr. Bell heard some variation of all of these examples.

Stanley (2006) contends these behaviors help maintain the status quo, fail to challenge systemic oppressive paradigms, and ignore the contextual role of race in these scholars’ experiences. They are symptomatic of a larger issue in the academy in that faculty of color have a difficult time finding mentors who ‘get it’ and whom they can trust to offer sound advice and guidance when needed. Dr. Bell shared:

The challenging part for me is when I don't have anyone else to talk to in the department about it when I have a situation like that. Not feeling like I can trust if I tell someone about it that they won't be like, ‘Oh, she's just having classroom management issues.’

Research Question 5:
What Classroom-Related Stressors Do Black Faculty at PWIs Identify and How Do They Cope?

Classroom Related Stressors

The literature describes black faculty experiencing stress while working at PWIs (Thompson & Dey, 1998). A study by Smith and Witt (1993) detailed that black faculty reported higher levels of occupational stress than their white counterparts. For example, Griffin et al. (2011) reported black female faculty as feeling strained due to performing “time-consuming and exhausting” levels of service (p. 54), in addition to teaching and research, as compared to their male counterparts. Black male professors felt stress due to feelings of constantly being scrutinized, “as if someone was always watching” (p. 56).
These kinds of stressors were directly related to their marginalized status in the academy. Alfred (2001) mentioned Parks (1950), who suggested that being marginalized “leads to psychological conflict, a divided self, and a disjointed personality” (p. 5). With specific regard to their classroom interaction experiences, three sources of stress dominate the narrative: dealing with student resistance; determining the origin of student resistance; fighting stereotypes. Coping mechanisms are discussed last.

*Dealing With Student Resistance*

There are few studies specifically dealing with the physical and emotional toll of counteracting white student resistance in the classroom. Johnson et al. (2008) argued that confronting student resistance in the classroom could feel overwhelming, as these interactions are emotionally and well as ideologically intense. Furthermore, the challenging of their credentials, lack of respect and lower student evaluations can all be sources of stress for black faculty (Pittman, 2010). For example, Dr. Bell repeatedly expressed significant anxiety, past and present, around student evaluations, particularly by resistant white students.

*Difficulty in Determining Origin of Student Resistance*

This is true especially for black female faculty. Dr. Bell rarely described her experiences without mentioning both race and gender together when reflecting on challenging interactions she’d had inside and outside of the classroom. Unfortunately there is little scholarly research on how race and gender can simultaneously shape professors’ work experiences and outcomes (Griffin, Bennett & Harris, 2011), particularly in the classroom. Still, it should be expected that black female faculty see stress derived from work with students differently than their black male counterparts.
Harlow (2003) surmised that black women tend to integrate race and gender issues when analyzing the challenges they face in the classroom with students, rather than focus on one or the other, because the gender issues are already “so widely acknowledged” (p. 359). Thus, for example, they may not only have to deal with white male student resistance to both their race and gender, they may have trouble distinguishing which of their two identities is being resisted (Ford, 2011). Their “double jeopardy” status just adds another layer to the psychological strain with which they contend while teaching at PWIs.

Fighting Stereotypes

Some black faculty spend an inordinate amount of psychic energy fighting stereotypes with which their students may associate them (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007). For instance, Dr. Bell spoke a great deal about fighting stereotypes about black women, although she also said that she wasn’t sure how much they were actually at play during the observed semester.

I was always trying to think of how to figure out how to address these things without coming across as the Angry Black Woman or The Mammy who just lets them do whatever they want. I was always trying to negotiate when it came to me asserting my authority.

Allison (2008) discussed that some white students tend to have more negative attitudes toward blacks outside of stereotypical roles (such as the student athlete, cafeteria worker or department janitor). Whether changing their diction or communication style (Allison, 2008), altering their appearance to look more mainstream (Ford, 2011), toning down the intensity of their content (Perry et al. 2009) or trying to prepare for “the inevitable” backlash in interactions with resistant white students (Johnson et al. 2008), scholars...
content that black faculty fight stereotypes mind, body and soul. This depletes finite stores of energy that could be devoted to other, more scholarly activities.

*Coping Mechanisms*

It has been established that classroom interactions with students at PWIs can often be stressful. Many of black scholars “have persisted in higher education despite these stressors” (Pittman, 2010). Fortunately, black faculty have identified a stable of coping mechanisms to ease this strain.

*In-class coping mechanisms.* A study by Pittman (2010) yielded five strategies black professors used in class to cope indirectly with classroom stressors, some previously identified as countermeasures: 1) returning focus to learning objectives; 2) creating and maintaining safe spaces for white students; 3) anticipatory actions; 4) non-reactively questioning student assumptions; and 5) establishing authority assertively. Constantine, Smith, Redington, & Owens (2008) reported “choosing battles carefully” and accepting “that subtle racist treatment will always exist to some degree in academia” (p. 85) as two other methods black faculty used to cope with stress in the classroom.

*External coping mechanisms.* Outside of the classroom, Harley (2008) cites reliance on the family and the community as a common stress reliever for black women faculty in particular: “They talk with each other about their experiences and challenges. Then they strategize about ways to respond” (p. 27). Constantine et al. (2008) also cite spiritual forms of coping, such as prayer, meditation and church attendance. Consistent with the strategies reported in the literature, Dr. Bell used a variety of both in-class and external coping strategies to cope with her instruction-related stress. Namely, she relied
on family (mainly, her husband), compiled course resources in anticipation of student resistance and asserted her authority with students.

Research Question 6:

Why Do Black Professors Decide to Teach at PWIs?

Dr. Bell chose her PWI of Inquiry because it was located in her hometown and near family and friends. She did mention a kind of psychological steering by her doctoral program’s faculty of black Ph.D. graduates toward PWIs: “that pressure’s on you, like you need to get [a] tenure track [position]. There’s sometimes that unspoken kind of thing, like, ‘You need to increase the presence.’” Griffin et al. (2011) detailed that the first black scholars at PWIs “welcomed the opportunity to work at these campuses because it allowed them to focus more on their research” (p. 45). Others cited “the challenge to excel at these institutions” (Burden, Harrison & Hodge, 2005, p. 227). I surmise the larger reason, not stated explicitly by literature, is simply because they can.

For example, I am reminded of a clip from the Public Broadcasting Service’s “American Experience” documentary film “Citizen King.” In it, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said in a late 1960s interview with recently deceased journalist Mike Wallace: “it is humiliating to say to anybody that because of your race you must be confined to a certain area” (Bagwell & Walker, 2004). He was referring to living conditions, with most blacks restricted to slum dwellings in the urban North of the United States. But the quote is equally as applicable to black faculty choices to work in PWIs. For many decades, it was humiliating for black Ph.D.s like Edward Bouchet to be confined to teaching positions only at HBCUs and other schools designated for solely for blacks. Not because these institutions weren’t honorable places to work and that these scholars’ talents
weren’t in dire need in them; but because these scholars had earned, by virtue of their academic training and earned degree credentials, the right to work wherever their abilities could take them. It was mainly due to the institutionally racist, systemic lack of opportunity I chronicled in Chapter Two that they were confined to certain teaching areas. Certainly, not every aspiring black professor desires to work at a PWI. But those who do and can should be afforded the opportunity to do so wherever such openings in exist.

Concluding Summation

Admittedly, I took issue with the literature’s presentation of the interaction actors in blanket terms. To illustrate, logic would dictate that all white students cannot be resistant to their black professors and/or their content. Yet this is seemingly how all white students were portrayed. If that were true—given the other challenges the literature on black faculty at PWIs report around denigration of research platforms and excessive service appointments, and the impact of these failing to attain tenure at the same rates as their white counterparts—these faculty would just be miserable all the time, as most of their students are white. I cannot imagine these faculty choosing to toil in environments that were so thoroughly oppressive. Thus, there must be positive aspects of these faculty members’ careers at PWIs that are not reported in the literature. I wonder why they are not. Young black scholars in training who may aspire to faculty roles at these institutions may read these accounts and decide to look for happier work elsewhere, when the black faculty who work at these institutions are happy at least part of the time with their jobs. Dr. Bell didn’t strike me a person who would sit and languish in discontent for years,
even though her reported perceptions during the observed course seemed to be more negative than positive.

To be transparent, only after data collection and analysis were concluded and Chapter Four and the earlier parts of this chapter were completed, did I conduct a literature search on the themes that emerged from my study. I had not previously read any of the articles I cited on those themes—not including the few works that were referenced in Chapters One and Two, but that were applicable where used in this one—before this point in my writing process. At the onset of my research, I had hunches about how her students might behave (I thought, for example, that interactions would be more overt than they were), but I was not looking for any particular behaviors. I did think, however, as alluded to in Chapter One, that it would be interesting if Dr. Bell’s account turned out to totally refute what the literature said about the aggregate experiences of black faculty teaching at PWIs. The literature review that appears in this chapter is what was currently available on and directly relevant to the phenomena I studied.

Subsequently, I was struck by how closely her perceptions of her observed and prior experiences seemed to mirror what was documented in the scholarly narrative specific to my study. Sometimes, it was like reading verbatim what she shared in our interviews. Take, for instance, the following passage from Harlow (2003) and two excerpts from my interviews with Dr. Bell, respectively, on navigating student use of the two stereotypes of black women:

I do feel like some students expect that I’m gonna be more maternal, and if I don’t live up to that, then the only place that’s familiar to them that they can go to in terms of judgments is “Oh, then she must have an attitude.” So I’m not like “Oh come here, honey, let me hug you, feel my bosom” kind of thing, right… but I really do feel like I don’t have options. That there are these sort of two caricatures
of black womanhood that they’re familiar with, and that somehow, I have to work within those. (Respondent 9: black female) (p. 357)

There are times when I felt like I was mothering even though I felt that’s not what I’m there for. I’m not there to, “Oh, you poor thing. Oh, I’m so sorry, yes, I’ll take your late essay” or whatever. And sometimes in past classes I felt like they would come to me like that and I felt this expectation. And I was, like, “Sorry.” Then I became the angry black woman. Like, “She didn’t take me under her wing.” Like, she’s supposed to be there to make me feel good.

You're falling into that stereotype of black women: evil and a monster. Or the laughing, sweet, ‘come let me take care of you’ type: ‘Oh, you poor thing. You didn't do your assignment. That's okay. Let’s go sing some songs!’ So, then they don’t know what to do when you're not like that. (Dr. Eve Bell)

Having Dr. Bell share her story in her own words was one of the most enjoyable aspects of conducting this research. It was a privilege to be able to conduct observation-based inquiry while she was teaching, and thereby contribute one of, if not the first, study of this kind to the scholarly narrative on the perceptions of black faculty of classroom interactions with students during instruction at PWIs.

To repeat, the finding of this dissertation that most extends the conversation of the scholarly literature is the troubled interactions between Dr. Bell and her black students during the observed semester. To reiterate, Toliver and Moore (2008) published the only study mentioning the more negative aspects of the relationship between these two parties at PWIs, as perceived by the black professors they interviewed. Moreover, it was a focus study, and this facet was but one of three topics covered by the researchers. My analysis of this area continues in the next (and final) chapter.
Chapter Six

Implications and Recommendations:

“That’s Not What I’m Here For”

Teaching is a multifaceted activity, whose complexity is amplified when individuals, such as black faculty, discern that race impacts instruction (Stanley, 2006). This study served to examine and understand the perceptions of a black faculty member’s perceptions of interactions with students while instruction was taking place at a PWI. It surfaced various issues, including: the impact of race and gender on instructor actions, student reactions and vice versa; assumptions made on both sides about the other in interactions inside (and sometimes outside) of the classroom; the overlay of the broader social racial hierarchy and the power differentials ingrained in those identities (i.e. white privilege vs. black subordination) on classroom interactions, as well as the power differentials inherent in the student-professor positional relationship; and the role of colleagues in the perceptions of racialized interactions with students in the classroom.

This chapter concludes my inquiry, and makes explicit connections between the data, the literature and the broader experiences of black faculty in this topic.

Cautions Around Tentative Transferability of Findings

What can we apply from the study findings to the broader experiences of black faculty at PWIs? In many ways, it does seem that Dr. Bell’s account aligns with what has been reported in the literature about black professor perceptions of their interactions with students during instruction at PWIs. But, given that this was a case study with a single informant, there are several points to be considered before making a determination about what tentatively applies or not in the study implications.
Demographic Considerations

First, the literature itself on this topic is sparse, and as such, cannot paint a holistic picture of all or even most of the range of experiences black faculty at PWIs face in the classroom while teaching students. Second, Dr. Bell is a woman, and thus, her experiences should not expect to speak to those of black male faculty. Third, Dr. Bell worked at a particular institution, in a particular city, each with their own cultures, climates and histories concerning black people. These may not be identical to those of the institutions and locations where other black faculty work. Fourth and similarly, Dr. Bell worked in a specific geographic region of the country, with different outlooks and ways of life than may exist in other provinces. These do impact the institutions located in them, as well as the racial and cultural compositions of the student bodies that attend them. Fifth, Dr. Bell studied and taught in particular discipline area that differs from many other black faculty at PWIs. Thus, her experiences as a function of her content would vary from black professors who are learned and teach in other subjects.

Sixth, Dr. Bell was in her 30s and untenured at the time of the study. Her experiences as a function of her age (for example, how students interacted with her in relationship to how old they thought she was) and tenure status would likely not be applicable to black faculty who were older or younger, and who were tenured. Seventh, Dr. Bell’s students were unique individuals with composite backgrounds, histories and life experiences all their own. Thus, who they were as individuals impacted how the interacted with her, as well as how they interacted collectively with their classmates to her. As no two people are like, the experiences Dr. Bell had with those particular students at that particular time are certain to differ in breadth and nuance from those of other black
faculty at PWIs. Eighth, Dr. Bell, likewise, was a person who was the sum of her life experiences, educational choices, personality, marital status, and so on. How she interacted with her students and her perceptions of those exchanges also cannot be identical to how other black faculty interacted with their students during instruction.

Ninth and finally, Dr. Bell’s revealed perceptions were a result of exchanges with me. It is possible she could have shared other perceptions had the researcher been a different person—a white female, black male or white male, for instance. Our interactions were also unique as a function of who we are both as individuals and as black women. I perceived that there was a certain simpatico dynamic between us that helped foster a level of rapport that not only made her feel safe in sharing certain things with me, but that also helped her feel comfortable with me sharing those things with a broader audience.

Case Study Research Design Considerations

Put simply, much can be learned from investigation of a single case of some phenomenon (Stake, 2005; Donmoyer, 1990) though “case study method has been too little honored as the intrinsic study of a valued particular” (Stake, 2005, p. 448). And a well-told, richly detailed story can transport a reader to a place s/he could not have gone him/herself, and increase his/her understanding in the process. Indeed, I found the three advantages of using a case study format as proposed by Donmoyer (1990).

First, by focusing intensively on one case, my readers vicariously experienced the particular context and details of Dr. Bell’s story and the observation settings that I experienced directly as the researcher. Second, through thick description to bring readers into her classrooms (Donmoyer, 1990), they were allowed to see phenomena from the
professor’s emic or “insider” perspective (Franklin, 2009) and “see things we might otherwise not have seen” (Donmoyer, 1990, p. 194). For instance, it is easy to miss details when casually inhabiting a given setting simply because one is not studying the landscape with a researcher’s eye. Finally, this vicarious experience may have lessened readers’ “defensiveness and resistance to learning” (Donmoyer, 1990, p. 196). For example, race is often a controversial, emotional and sensitive subject for many when discussed or experienced personally. Reading about it, however, may allow some readers to remain more open to considering perspectives they might not ordinarily in more direct communication.

My purposive or intentional sample of one particular faculty member “weakly represents the larger group of interest” (Stake, 2005, p. 450); that is, black faculty at PWIs. I chose Dr. Bell with the eye that she was “of some typicality but leaning toward those cases that seem to offer opportunity to learn” (Stake, 2005, p. 451) something in my topic area. This seems to contradict the qualitative premise that generalizability (itself a quantitative term) is not possible with such studies. While I clearly do not claim widespread applicability of my case, I do acknowledge the tricky nature of the fact that my informant does, unavoidably, share some characteristics with other black faculty at PWIs.

As explained in Chapters One and Two, this treatise examined the particular experience of a black faculty member at a particular PWI, within a framework of consideration of the broader subculture of black faculty at PWIs—without automatically assuming the collective reality of the latter would necessarily be that of the former or vice
versa. Thus, my research fell on the continuum somewhere between *intrinsic* and

*instrumental* case studies. In intrinsic case study, Stake (2005) argues:

> one wants better understanding of this particular case. It is not undertaken primarily because the case represents other cases or because it illustrates a particular trait or problem, but instead because, in all its particularity and ordinariness, this case itself is of interest (p. 445).

Instrumental case study, on the other hand, is examined mainly to provide insight into an issue or to redraw a generalization. The case is of secondary interest, it plays a supportive role, and it facilitates our understanding of something else. The case still is looked at in depth, its context scrutinized and its ordinary activities detailed, but all because this helps us pursue the external interest. The case may be seen as typical of other cases or not (p. 445).

That my study was not “either/or” (it was rather “more/less”) fortunately does not present a problem, as Stake (2005) indicated these types are not hard and fast rules: “reports and authors often do not fit neatly into the…categories” (p. 447). This guideline mirrors the flexibility found in the role of the investigator in a qualitative study of this type.

To summarize, I was interested in the in-classroom experiences of black faculty at PWIs. However, due to my intentional use of the qualitative methods I chose, I did not intend for this dissertation to speak to or for the experiences of *all* black tenure-track faculty at *all* PWIs in the United States. My investigation was a case study—and thus, on its face, cannot be broadly applied. More specifically, I observed a 30-something, married mother, pre-tenured, black woman professor in the humanities at a doctorate-granting PWI in the Midwest. Thus, her experiences in the classroom, then, could reasonably be expected to qualitatively differ, for example, from that of a 50-something, single,
childless, tenured, black male professor in a STEM (science, technology, math) field at a liberal arts PWI in the Northeast.

Because of such variances, I do not make broad generalizations about all black faculty at PWIs in this chapter. This was primarily a study that saw value in a single story and what it had to tell us about a given phenomenon (Stake, 2005). If there was to be any transferability to other cases (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)—which I neither predicted nor guaranteed from the outset—I expected that what I observed and the conclusions I drew from all my data would be able to be tentatively applied, at best, while still contributing to the broader tapestry of this research topic area. All told, there are two important discoveries from Dr. Bell’s experience that could cautiously be applied to her peers at PWIs for deeper understanding of their perceptions of interactions with students during instruction.

Implications

One finding that emerged from this study speaks to black professors’ ability to interrogate the perceptions of their perceptions of their students, black and white. Interactions are always between at least two bodies, both acting and reacting to each other. Dr. Bell admitted that she judged the present by past experiences, but occasionally, she wondered if that was always the appropriate thing to do. Ford (2011) stated:

the social constructedness of race and gender presumes that bodily misrecognition may be a reciprocal phenomenon (e.g. WOC can be misrecognized by white students and WOC can also misrecognize or make racial assumptions about white students (p. 473).

First, the literature reported some white students making racialized presumptions about, for example, black professors’ integrity. But it would follow, based on Ford’s assertion, that professors’ are not immune from making racial presumptions about those white
students also. Perhaps this is why the examples in the literature almost always present the black faculty talking about “white students” as opposed to “some white students.” In other words, black faculty do not want their resistant white students responding to them by way of stereotypes—which combine all members of a group together without allowance for differentiation. Yet, the faculty members in the literature demonstrate responding to all their white students in aggregate, based on their experiences with a few. In both cases, this obviously impacts perceptions of the other, which in turn affects how they interact with one another. If black professors perceive their classroom interactions with some white students as problematic, they must be willing to also ask if their view of the student is accurate. This is complex.

Second, black faculty should likewise be mindful of how they see their black students and how those perceptions influence their interactions with them. For instance, Guiffrida (2007) indicated that “othermothering,” or viewing (only) black faculty as parental figures, is a common phenomenon among some black students. Dr. Bell inferred that her black students who related to her in this way—with all the benefits and challenges inherent in such an association—may have been based on the “Mammy” caricature of the black woman as selflessly nurturing and longsuffering. Perhaps for some of these students, the “othermothering” dynamic was at play instead. Whichever may be the case in these interactions, black faculty should be willing to examine their views of these students as well.

Another finding involved the role of faculty departments in response to professors’ expressed concerns about problematic interactions with students during instruction. Teaching, by and large, is sometimes viewed as a private activity; instructors
and their students sequestered in a classroom in some corner of campus. By extension, the issues that surface in these spaces could be viewed as just between professor and pupil. Thus, reports of them could be dismissed as just “classroom management” issues by administration. McGowan (2000) says this response, when given to black faculty about their disruptively problematic racialized interactions, is not appropriate and can have far-reaching repercussions for the department and university itself.

They must recognize that African American faculty may face classroom challenges that have the potential to interfere with the teaching and learning process. Many times these challenges affect the African American faculty members’ morale and whether they will choose to continue working at a given university (p. 21).

The implications here are two-fold. First, black faculty should speak up about their experiences to administration. Not doing so, even if the anticipated response is negative or non-existent, only creates an appearance that the problem does not exist. This forces the professor to suffer “in private,” while serving the very public image most universities have about being sensitive to issues of social justice and equality. This will ultimately lead to resentment, and fuel an even stronger desire to leave, which benefits neither party.

Second, if departments and universities are serious about their social justice mission statements, they need to intervene and support their faculty members where necessary. To dismiss these kinds of problems is effectively communicating to students that they need not take responsibility for their part in the troubling interactions, nor respond to their black professors in the same respectful manner the administrative faculty would expect from those students. This is tantamount to saying to those scholars: “we don’t care what happens to you here.” And the end result is the same: the departure of the
scholar. This ultimately benefits no one: not the professor, the department or the students. Further, it renders the department’s public image void.

Because of the important ramifications of these findings, suggestions for improving the classroom lives of black scholars at PWIs are necessary and appropriate here. The recommendations that follow are a direct result of my thinking about my study data on Dr. Bell’s experiences. To clarify, readers will not see recommendations only on teaching (the first two suggestions under the black faculty subsection), as this study dealt primarily with perceptions of interactions during teaching. Her story surfaced issues that needed to be addressed by several stakeholders—her, her black and white students, and the department administrations of the PWIs that hired her to and “supervised” her teaching appointments as a scholar-in-training and as an tenure-track faculty member. Thus, my recommendations for practice address the roles of all these stakeholders, as all ultimately affect the classroom experiences of black faculty members at PWIs.

Recommendations for Practice

For Black Tenure-Track Faculty at PWIs

Advance Awareness in the Classroom. Black faculty need to continue to facilitate knowledge of “other knowledge,” including privilege and prejudice, with compassion. Teach for awareness, not necessarily for acceptance. As stressful as the process can be, it will ultimately be rewarding enough to realize that once something is known, it cannot be unknown. That is all black faculty have control over, and they shouldn’t frustrate themselves trying to surmount that reality.

Analyze Your Own Perceptions. To reiterate, black scholars must also critically examine the source(s) of their perceptions of their students around race, where applicable.
Just as students may bring misconceptions of their professors to the learning process, faculty also may bring misperceptions about their students to the teaching process. If challenging interactions are the result of misreadings on both sides, professors do well to honestly self-reflect on their contribution, if any, to the misunderstandings. This action should be undertaken in order to correct them and move the entire class along to a place of constructive scrutiny of the issues at play so the teaching and learning process may effectively proceed.

Conduct Research. In keeping with the notion of “voice” in the critical race theory literature, black tenure-track faculty at PWIs need to conduct more inquiry, both quantitative and qualitative, on the perceptions they have about interactions with students in the classroom during instruction. They should attempt to make clear distinctions, when applicable, in lived experiences by gender in this research, even though “the way in which race and gender intersect is often difficult to untangle” (Ford, 2011, p 453). This research will not only be informative, it can also help to eliminate feelings of isolation and build a case for institutional change of a pervasive problem.

Advocate Change. Black faculty at PWIs must continue to advocate for themselves and educate their department and university administrators about the challenges they face around problematic interactions with students in the classroom around race and gender with the expectation that some changes will be made in response. They should seek unambiguous confirmation of whether teaching race-related content “will place them at risk in regard to tenure and promotion, merit or reappointment” (Stanley, 2006, p. 726). They should make connections with other black faculty across disciplines to form alliances working toward institutional change around these issues.
Make Allies. Whenever and wherever possible within their institutions and departments, black faculty should seek out allies who truly care about and are committed to working toward a better institutional culture from a social justice perspective. They should also be open to anyone, regardless of race or gender, willing and ready to support their efforts in research and advocacy.

Keep Perspective. Black faculty don’t just experience challenges around race and gender at work; they are members of a socially subordinated group who have been navigating life in a racialized and gendered society all their lives. Thus, it is important for these faculty to maintain perspective when they do encounter problematic interactions with their students and to remember the resiliency they possess that has helped them get where they are. They should ask themselves, “If I leave the academy, will I not have to deal with racial and/or gender issues anymore? If I stay, will I only be dealing with these issues?” They should also practice self-care and surround themselves with peers and other supports who will not patronize them, but who will encourage them to keep their focus on what is real.

While this study focused on black faculty at PWIs, the recommendations that follow apply to the groups highlighted by Dr. Bell’s experiences encountered

For PWI Department Administrators

Listen to Faculty Concerns. Black faculty who reported their experiences in going to department administration with concerns about their classroom interactions with students commonly reported feeling unsupported and disregarded by their white colleagues. Sometimes, all faculty want is to be heard and validated in their experiences. If that is what they indicate they need, administrators can and should give it to them. It
costs nothing financially to do, but yields big benefits for both parties: a more empathetic, mutually respectful and pleasant working atmosphere.

*Develop Action Plans.* These need to be the actionable companions, the verbs following the nouns of the mission statements promoting social justice, which most PWIs espouse. Plans specifically regarding the handling of problematic racialized interactions between faculty of color and their students should be developed with significant input from these faculty, implemented and, most importantly, enforced. They should include consequences for the most egregiously inappropriate behavior, and means of holding perpetrators accountable for their conduct.

*Support Advocacy.* Admittedly, this is the hardest action item to execute, as racial issues are complex, pervasive and institutionalized. They are also often subtle and, on a personal level, sometimes unintended. But this makes them no less damaging and dehumanizing. PWI faculty with responsibilities and influence in the hiring, retention and promotion—along with, ideally, all faculty in a department—should find ways to support the advocacy of their black colleagues and help to enact change wherever possible. This will be painful, as it requires the relinquishing of privileges conferred by the status quo. It will also be difficult, given the institutionalization of race and privilege. But even the smallest actions help to dismantle injustice, which, in the end, helps everyone.

*For White PWI Students*

*Resist Less.* As in the case of PWI administrators, altering attitudes and behavior is painful and difficult. But change can be made, even if only out of self-interest. Black faculty are not going to disappear from PWIs, so resistant white students need to find ways to constructively adjust to that reality in ways that will help them too. It is hard to
imagine that resisting, by the very definition of the word, is any less stressful and draining than the process of counteracting resistance. As a starting point, there is an abundance of empirical literature available on “performing whiteness” and privilege. Resistant white students (and their more agreeable peers) should read it, if only to learn more about how they exist and are perceived in the world. It will likely feel better if it is read voluntarily and leisurely in private, where the hard work of introspection and slow process of change can begin in earnest.

*Respect More.* It is possible to respect a position and not particularly care for the person holding that office. Perhaps resistant white students can employ this strategy a good-faith exercise in civility and common courtesy. A black professor is an authority figure, like it or not, and as such deserves the deference that comes with the title. Students, of any color, are not required to like these faculty members. But they owe it to themselves and their professors to conduct themselves in a respectful manner, particularly if they expect the professor to respect them in return.

*For Black PWI Students*  

*Expect Less.* It is well documented that PWIs are often challenging social terrains for black faculty and students alike to navigate. And in such a climate, where these populations are typically small, it is understandable to want to believe everyone who shares a racial affiliation is going to be at best, friendly, and at worst, civil. Unfortunately, this assumption can result in feeling even more disconnected when neither turn out to be true. Black students should assume that their black professors will indeed be their classroom authority figures. Beyond that, they should see them as just people with issues, obligations and agendas that may not include engaging them outside of the
classroom. Black students should keep their expectations for their black faculty in perspective.

*Eliminate the Hookup Mentality.* Likewise, black students need to be responsible for their own learning and not expect that their black professors are going to make things easier for them just because they share racial affiliation. They will need to be prepared to work to reach their academic goals, and not rely on these faculty members to help steer them in the ways they should go.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

I identified five primary areas where additional research is needed. First, this study is the first to use direct observation of classroom teaching to surface professor perceptions of these interactions with students. More studies using this method of data collection are needed to help paint a deeper, more vivid picture of what professors describe in interview form. Seeing behaviors, hearing actual dialogue and being able to incorporate both into manuscripts can help to foster a greater understanding of what is happening in these professors’ classrooms at PWIs.

Second, additional research on these interaction experiences need to be disaggregated by gender, by institutional type, size and geographical location, and by academic department for a more nuanced and accurate picture of the experiences of black faculty in PWI classrooms. To begin, throughout my interviews, the informant consistently paired race and gender in her description of her encounters with students and colleagues around problematic, racialized exchanges during instruction. The literature does indicate that the interaction experiences of black men and black women faculty are
qualitatively different, but there are presently too few examples of what those variances look like.

Next, the kind, scope and locale of an institution may have an effect on the types of experiences black faculty have in the classroom at PWIs. Dr. Bell’s doctoral PWI was a large state university on the East Coast, while the PWI of Inquiry is a midsized private university in the Midwest. Different schools have different climates and cultures—and they absorb the cultural influences of the regions in which they are situated. As a result of these dynamics, they may foster different kinds of interactions between students and professors. Finally, the academic departments in which black faculty at PWIs teach are likely to have an impact on the kinds of exchanges that take place between students and their black professors. Would there be a significant difference, for instance, in the perception of interactions in a cultural studies department versus a life science discipline?

Third, there are virtually no studies on the classroom interactions black faculty at PWIs have with their black students in the classroom during instruction. This would be an interesting contrast and comparison point to the interactions these scholars have with white students. Additionally, it may help to provide a more comprehensive picture of this aspect of these professors’ work lives. For instance, if the literature tends to report what is provocative or interesting and the negative interactions with white students is what exists, could it mean that interactions with black students tend to be more positive (and thus boring)? If so, could this be a point of encouragement and validation for black faculty who otherwise report stressful and challenging interactions in other areas of their work lives?
Fourth, research on black faculty professor meta-perceptions (perceptions of their own perceptions) of their interactions with students during instruction would be fascinating. These studies might excavate misperceptions professors have about their students—which in turn affect how they interact with them, and then perceive those interactions. If challenging interactions professors perceive are sometimes the result of misreadings on both sides, additional solutions for improving these interactions could surface. Inquiry into the self-reflections of black faculty at PWIs around their perceptions would assist in the answer-finding process. Fifth and finally, additional research needs to focus on the experiences of faculty members belonging to other socially subordinated racial groups. In the literature, the experiences of faculty of color are often grouped and presented together, though the differences between them (and within each group) are vast. Separate inquiry into the professorial work realities of Latina women, Asian American men, etc., will help to tease out these variations and paint a more detailed graphic of the challenges and rewards all of these scholars face in their classrooms at PWIs.

Closing Statement

Our nation has long reached a point where it is untenable to think that black scholars should not be allowed teaching positions in what some call predominantly white institutions. Still, the professional access these professors have to these institutions is sometimes overshadowed by the broader complexities and problems that race plays in American life generally. Using ethnographic methods to examine college classroom phenomena related to these dilemmas is time consuming and, at times, overwhelming.
But the level of private access into the experiences of one of these scholars was, for me, worth the effort.

Surveys, questionnaires and aggregated reports can only allow us to understand but so much of what actually happens in these settings. I am proud of my decision to use direct observation—and grateful for my committee’s support in refining my methods and focus—to bring you a rarely seen, intimate glimpse into what it meant for one person to teach as a black faculty member at a PWI. While my informant’s perceptions were entirely her own, they did help to foster a dialogue that extends the scholarly conversation about an aspect of the role race continues to play in the real lives of black professionals who have chosen a life of the mind as their career path. There is much work yet to be done in this area. I am glad to have contributed but a tiny part to this effort.
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MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY
AGREEMENT OF CONSENT FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS
Black Faculty Perceptions of Classroom Interactions with Students at a PWI
Robyn Clarke Ngwabi
Educational Policy & Leadership

You have been invited to participate in this research study. Before you agree to participate, it is important that you read and understand the following information. Participation is completely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether or not to participate. Whether or not you choose to participate in this study will have no impact on your employment or standing at [blank].

PURPOSE: The purpose of this research study is to better understand the in-vivo classroom experiences of a tenure-track black faculty member with his/her students at a predominantly white institution. It is anticipated that you will be the only participant in this case-study research project.

PROCEDURES: Your participation will consist of a semester of six weekly follow-up interviews after class sessions and at least three additional interviews of 45-60 minutes each. You will be audio taped during the interviews to ensure accuracy. The tapes will later be transcribed and destroyed 3 years beyond the completion of the study. For confidentiality purposes, your name will not be recorded.

RISKS: The risks associated with participation in this study are minimal and are not greater than you would experience in everyday life as a faculty member. There is a small risk that because this is a case study it may be possible to identify you in publications, even if your identifiers are not published. The researcher will make all efforts to maintain your confidentiality.

BENEFITS: There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study. This research project may give additional voice to the classroom experiences of black faculty at predominantly white institutions.

CONFIDENTIALITY: All information you reveal in this study will be kept confidential. All your data will be assigned a pseudonym rather than using your name or other information that could identify you as an individual. When the results of the study are published, you will not be identified by name. The data will be destroyed by shredding paper documents and deleting electronic files three years after the completion of the study. Because this is a case study and you are the only participant it may be possible to identify you in publications; the researcher will make all possible efforts to ensure your confidentiality. Your research records may be inspected by the Marquette University Institutional Review Board or its designees, and (as allowable by law) state and federal agencies.

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF PARTICIPATION: Participating in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Notify the researcher if you wish
to discontinue participation. Any data collected prior to withdrawing from the study will be used for research purposes unless you instruct the researcher otherwise.

**CONTACT INFORMATION:** If you have any questions about this research project, you can contact Robyn Clarke Ngwabi at (973) 449-6690 or robyn.clarke@mu.edu. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you can contact Marquette University’s Office of Research Compliance at (414) 288-7570 or orc@mu.edu.

I HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO READ THIS CONSENT FORM, ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH PROJECT AND AM PREPARED TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROJECT.

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APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. How did you arrive at the decision to become a professor? What influenced you to become a professor?
2. How would you describe your teaching style?
3. How prepared did you feel to teach at PWI of Inquiry?
4. How would you describe your overall experiences as a black faculty member at PWI of Inquiry?
5. Compare and contrast your teaching experiences at your doctoral PWI and PWI of Inquiry. Have you found any similarities? Differences?
6. What have you found to be qualitatively different about teaching black and other students of color compared to white students at PWI of Inquiry?
7. How often have you generally felt stressed while teaching at PWI of Inquiry? (on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = rarely; 2 = infrequently; 3 = moderately; 4 = frequently; 5= almost always )
8. How much of that stress would you directly attribute to your interactions with students in the classroom?
9. Please describe the worst interaction you have had with students in your classroom while teaching. Where and when did this incident occur?
10. Why did you choose to teach at a PWI?
11. How would you describe your treatment as a professor by your students?
12. Is there anything else about your teaching experiences as a black faculty member at PWI of Inquiry that you would like to share or add that I did not ask?
APPENDIX C: PARTIAL COURSE SYLLABUS

Instructor: Dr. [Name]
Office: [Address]
Office Hours: MW 2-3:30 PM and by app’t
Office Phone: [Phone number]
Email: [Email address]

Course Description:

According to Jacqueline Jones Royster, the essay is “one type of literate action.” In this workshop/discussion course, we will explore the use of essays for sociopolitical action, examining in particular how essayists engage the world around them, at times calling their audiences to action, at times using their personal reflections to challenge our beliefs and behaviors. Because African American women essayists have an interesting and long-standing tradition of using essays for sociopolitical action, we will focus our studies on their essays. You will be asked to write your own essays on topics you choose that range from personal reflection to political advocacy and activism. Along the way we will sharpen our rhetorical decision-making skills, learning how to employ language in ways that will move audiences.

At the end of the semester, I hope we will produce a class magazine that includes one piece of writing from each class member. This limited edition publication will be edited and produced by class members. We’ll decide whether you want to do this magazine electronically or on paper. If paper, $10 per person should cover the cost of printing two copies each. We’ll decide soon after then determine production responsibilities, a budget, and a calendar.

Course objectives:

1. To improve our writing abilities, with a particular emphasis on revision and style.
2. To set, modify and meet writerly goals
3. To improve our critical analysis abilities
4. To explore the use of essays for sociopolitical action
5. To define and write good non-fiction essays aimed for sociopolitical action

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

- Joseph Williams, *Style: The Basics of Clarity and Grace* 3rd ed. (Style)
- $25-$30 for copying drafts and printing materials
- Two folders, one for keeping work and another for handing in portfolios

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS ON [ ]—How to access [ ] in three easy steps:

1. Log on to [ ]
2. Enter your [ ] user ID and Password
3. In the “My [ ] Courses” box, click [ ] you’ll find yourself on our class page
4. Click the “content” link in the top left-hand corner and you will be taken to a page with all course handouts.

[Note: If you are registered for a course, you are automatically registered for [ ]]

COURSE POLICIES:

1. **Attendance:** Daily attendance is required. In a workshop/discussion course such as [ ], your success and the success of the course depend upon you being on time and ready to participate. In addition, your attendance may influence your grade via the following policies of the [ ]: (1) if you miss more than 2 weeks of classes (6 days), your final grade may be lowered 1/2 a grade for each absence thereafter; (2) if you miss more than 3 weeks of classes (9 days), you may be disenrolled from the class. If life’s circumstances prevent you from attending class for some reason, please let me know in advance (or as soon as possible) via email or voicemail. Remember, you are responsible for any work you missed due to an absence.

2. **Grades:** To receive credit for this course you must submit all assignments. Assignments include four major essays, a journal, and participation in writing groups.

Your end of the semester grade will be determined by the following criteria:

- Essay One 15%
- Essay Two and Casebook: 25%
- Essay Three 20%
• Essay Four 20%
• Journal 12%
• Writing Groups 8%

Final Grades will be awarded on the following scale: A 100-93; A/B 92-88; B 87-83; B/C 82-78; C 77-73; C/D 72-68; D 67-63; F 62 and below.

3. Major Essays: To earn course credit you must submit each of the essays required for each unit as a portfolio. Due dates are listed on the course calendar. Each unit portfolio must include:

   • Major essay with cover sheet
   • Draft that you read to your peer review group with notes you took regarding their responses
   • Journal writings for the particular unit

4. JOURNAL: These weekly, 1 page, single-spaced writings should be thoughtful, detailed responses to the readings and class discussions of the week. DO NOT SIMPLY SUMMARIZE the readings. Instead, demonstrate that you are engaging the readings. Your response may take any form: agree, disagree, compare, discuss assumptions and/or implications, critique strategies, or make links to your personal life or experiences and/or issues in the world around you (campus, local, region, national, global). Also, don’t feel constrained by a traditional essay format. You might, for example, write a poem, or you might type out a passage from a text and respond to it. This journal will be a good place to try out topics for your essays and/or say what you didn’t say in class.

I will collect a hard copy of your journal at the beginning of class on Friday. Therefore, make sure you keep a hard copy of your responses and save them in a folder or binder. You will turn in all of your responses as a complete portfolio at the end of the semester. Although your journal will be collected, recorded, and receive a response from me, it will not receive a letter grade until I’ve read it in its entirety.

5. Final Portfolio: At the end of the semester, on the __________ of finals week, you will turn in a final portfolio containing all of your formal papers, any revisions you choose to do of them (see Deferred Grading), your journal, and a reflective self-evaluation letter.

6. Deferred Grading: Writing is more about an on-going process than a final product. To emphasize the value of revision of that process, I will use a deferred grading policy. You will be expected to be writing and revising throughout the semester. When you turn in each essay, I will respond with lots of comments and assign an initial grade on the essay. If, and only if, you complete all assignments on time, you can take advantage of the deferred grading system by revising your work and submitting it in the final portfolio for a new grade (along with your self-
reflective essay). When you do this, the initial grade on the essay is erased and only your best work counts toward the final grade. In this way, you are evaluated on what you’ve learned by the end of the semester. To reap the full benefits of deferred grading, please govern yourself according to the following conditions:

- You forfeit the deferred grading privilege on any paper for which you miss the writing group or that you submit late.

- All papers that are submitted for a new grade in the final portfolio must be accompanied by the original paper, graded paper, and a revision cover sheet explaining the changes you’ve made.

- Papers that receive an initial X grade (explained below) are not eligible for re-submission unless the X grade is removed before the next essay is due.

7. X Grades: If you turn in a paper with (on average) more than three mechanical errors per page OR if you turn in a paper with a faulty Works Cited page, you may receive an X grade for your paper. An X grade means: (1) you receive the grade you deserve on the paper with the errors factored in, and (2) the paper grade has an X over it, signifying that you may revise the paper to remove the X grade. To remove the X and potentially raise your grade, you are required (1) to conference with me about your errors before you may turn in your revised paper and (2) to turn in the revised paper within one week of my returning your graded paper. If you do not turn in your revised paper by that deadline, your initial grade under the X is recorded and factored into your final grade. Remember, papers with an X grade can not be re-submitted for deferred grading unless the X has been removed before the due date of the next essay.

8. Writing Groups: Peer review enhances your critical thinking, reading, and editing abilities and provides you valuable feedback on your essay before it is graded. I’ll provide detailed instructions for each peer review we have. Participation in these groups is mandatory. In order to receive full credit for each peer review session, you should (1) copy the peer review sheet on and (2) copy and fill out the author sheet on bring both to class on peer review day, along with a completed essay draft. That way, you and your peers may respond to one another in terms of your intentions (as stated on your author sheet) and in terms of the grading criteria (as stated on the assignment sheet and turned into questions on the peer review sheet). Remember: the decision for what to change and what to keep in your draft is yours. NOTE: To receive peer review points, you must attend the peer review sessions with a draft of your essay; points will be awarded on the depth of your responses.

9. Late Papers: All writings are due at the beginning of class; anything turned in later is considered late. Late drafts will not be reviewed by your peers or by me; as a result, your essay grade may suffer. (Note: if you show up on peer review day with no draft, you will not be
allowed to participate or receive points; if you show up late to the writing group you will not be allowed to interrupt the group, thus losing half your points. Late unit papers may have their grades lowered by one grade (from A to A/B) for every day it is late. Furthermore, late papers forfeit deferred grading, so if you have an emergency, please contact me to make arrangements for other due dates. If you need to be absent for several days, contact your dean’s office; they will send letters to all your instructors.

10. Missing Papers: All essay assignments must be submitted to pass the course.

11. Class Participation: It is not enough to bring your body to class—you must also be ready and willing to exchange your ideas in provocative yet respectful ways. This means you have prepared yourself by doing all the readings and bringing the materials to class. Your participation can affect your grade when it comes time to decide whether to round a marginal grade up or down. All thoughtful comments will be entertained.

12. Conferences: I plan to require at least one conference this semester. You may also schedule other conferences or drop by during my office hours. At these conferences I will entertain specific questions you have about your drafts; in other words, don’t come to the conference and ask, “Is my paper OK?” but rather ask, “Is my arrangement clear?” or “Does my voice come through?”

Top 10 Ways to Succeed In This Class

Or, The 10 Commandments of

1. THOU SHALT COMMUNICATE EARLY AND OFTEN: Do you have a question about an assignment? A concern about a grade, workload, or any other aspect of this class? By all means, ask questions, stop by my office, leave me a voicemail or send me an email. The key here is to keep the lines of communication open before you run into any problems.

2. THOU SHALT COME TO CLASS ON TIME AND BE READY TO PARTICIPATE: This issue of attendance and participation bears repeating—If you miss class you miss important information given by me and your classmates; you may miss important deadlines and/or peer review days; and you could forfeit your deferred grading privilege with late or missing assignments. I understand some absences are beyond your control, but do your best to have your face in the place.
3. **THOU SHALT TURN ASSIGNMENTS ON TIME:** I understand that when you are trying to finish an assignment, computers, disks, printers can do eat up your paper; roommates can spill pizza on your folder; and dogs can eat your homework. However, a late assignment is a late assignment and subject to penalty (including revocation of deferred grading privileges), no matter the reason. So make sure you do what you need to do to make sure you turn in your papers on time.

4. **THOU SHALT MAKE USE OF THE WRITING CENTER:** Quiet as it’s kept, it helps to talk to someone about your writing (that’s why we have writing groups in our class). Located on the

5. **THOU SHALT KEEP YOUR WORK:** Don’t throw any of your work away until the semester is over. Save your work to a disk and make backup copies of those disks. Keep the essays with my comments on them; keep hard copies of your revisions. This way you can benefit the most from our deferred grading system and protect yourself from any unforeseen mishaps.

6. **THOU SHALT RESPECT THY FELLOW CLASSMATES:** It is essential that we speak respectfully and listen attentively to each other, not just the instructor. Respectful behavior should be extended to everyone. We may not all think alike, come from the same places, or like the same things, but we will all be respectful to one another. We should strive to be honest and supportive; scoffing and dismissive comments will not be tolerated. We are here to offer, analyze, and connect a variety of viewpoints so that we can strengthen our own abilities as thinkers and writers.

7. **THOU SHALT USE INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE:** Written work in this course should employ inclusive language, which shows that the writer honors the diversity of the human race by not using language that would universalize one element of humanity to the exclusion of others. For example, two areas where this exclusivity commonly occurs are religion and gender. Scholarly conventions are: use BCE (Before Common Era) instead of B.C., and CE (Common Era) rather than A.D.; use men and women or people or humanity instead of the "generic man"; use they or alternate he and she instead of the "generic he."

8. **THOU SHALT UPHOLD STANDARDS OF ACADEMIC HONESTY:** As an institution, takes academic dishonesty, or plagiarism, very seriously. Using someone else's language or ideas as your own without careful citation is always unethical and, at times, illegal; conversely, letting someone else use your work is also unethical. Academic dishonesty is a serious offense and may result in, among other things, your receiving a grade of "0" for the
plagiarized assignment. For university policy, see the following URL:

9. THOU SHALT USE THE BUDDY SYSTEM: If for some reason you can’t attend class, or you have a question about an essay (at the 11th hour), you can contact your class “buddy” who can help fill you in and keep you accountable. This way you don’t fall too far behind.

10. THOU SHALT HAVE FUN! One goal of this course is to improve our writing abilities. In my opinion, the best way to learn is to have fun! You will have the opportunity to write about topics that are important to you and to learn about issues you may have never encountered before. Be creative! Try something new! Make up your mind now that you will do what you need to in order to get the most out of this class. I know I will!
Appendix D: De-Identified Student Journal Entry

Where is it?

I can split my experiences here at [redacted] in two distinct phases. I have been attending this school for five semesters and I can vividly differentiate the first three from the final two. The reason being diversity, actually. The past two semesters have opened my eyes more than I ever imagined, and I have grown and matured in a way that completely changed my entire view on society.

My first three semesters at [redacted] were very monotonous and similar to my time in high school: private school, racist jokes, mostly all privileged peers, and nothing new or exciting in life. There was no cultural diversity. The only difference between people was the town they came from and what baseball team they cheered for. Everyone on my floor in the dorm was white and from the Midwest. All of them had dreams of becoming doctors and lawyers and were planning on riding their parents' money all the way to the top. A few people got into trouble, a few people left the school here and there, but nothing major changed. The curriculum had nothing to offer on a daily basis. History was the same, English only focused on proper writing, and the sciences do not offer a lot in terms of culture. As far as I could tell, [redacted] almost had nothing to offer in terms of culture. Everyday I saw and did the same things. Dorms, classes, it was all the same. Diversity was not emphasized, especially in my eyes. I felt that I did not have as much to offer as I originally hoped. I was not from the Midwest and I was hoping for a very big change by coming here. I did not see that early on. What I saw was the same bubble that I had been a part of most of my life, and everyone perfectly comfortable remaining in that bubble forever.

Then there was [redacted] semester. That semester was the most exciting and enlightening of all my time at [redacted]. My [redacted] professor was [redacted] an African-American woman from [redacted]. Nearly every class, we read another piece from an African-American woman who felt great oppression in her life. Whether it be racism, sexism, or other struggles with identity, the pieces were both enlightening and powerful. They were written to generate thoughts and they were chosen to spur deep and honest discussions in class. Professor [redacted] had us openly talk about stereotypes, racism, and sexism in all forums. Both the black and white perspectives were represented in the class discussions, and everyone felt comfortable with one another. This was the first experience I had with any sort of diversity "training", if you will. One of my peer reviewers was an African-American student from inner city [redacted]. I got the opportunity to read all of his work for the semester and speak with him personally about different societal issues following the discussions in class. His personal experiences, philosophies on life, and the general discussions in the class allowed me to gain a great understanding of different cultures. Furthermore, Professor [redacted] had us read works by Belle Hooks, Angela Davis, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and a few other historic African-American figures. I quickly became much more understanding of other cultures and stopped jumping to stereotypes whenever I saw someone different.
from myself. It was something of a revelation, and I looked forward to that one class every day for fifteen straight weeks.

In addition to _, I also took Introduction to _ with _. She was native Jamaican and was the only other black teacher I had dating back to middle school. For this class, one of the requirements was a Service Learning project to help us understand the field a little better. I opted to go to a non-profit organization that dealt with social work and inner city children. I was not a part of the social work aspect, but I did develop a better respect for the department.

The goal of the class was to understand better, but stresses Service Learning as an opportunity to reach out to the community and help. Little do they know that most of the time the students doing these projects are stuck in a corner office once a week with no interaction with anyone for the entire semester. For the classes at least, there is no community aspect to these projects. Some of them were never even completed, so the company most likely did not gain anything out of them either. After my stint at, I was very confused about the purpose of this program. Service Learning looked great on paper, and the presentations that students give at the beginning of the class sound interesting, but why is this program so popular or a requirement for some classes? Other students in my class felt like it was a waste of time, so why doesn’t realize this? “It gives students the opportunity to grow and learn in the context of serving others” is one of the descriptions listed under the Service Learning program. This sounds nice but doesn’t it conflict with the “development of a deeper understanding of diverse domestic and international communities in which they will exercise leadership” as stated in mission statement? From my experiences in Service Learning, the students are put in a place other than the classroom, but sheltered in such a way where there is no learning taking place. can all they want about the “community” programs they organize, but those students who have gone through it know that it does not help the community in anyway.

Once I saw that these programs may not always be what they are described as, I focused more on gaining an education in diverse cultures in the classroom. This semester I took the racism and ethnicity class, and _ for an requirement. In my class we covered eight different minority groups that exist in the workforce, but the emphasis was not on gaining a respect for their own culture. We only acknowledged how they are different from our own and then moved on to the next group. We moved at a rapid rate, and learned something new about all of these different minority groups, but the class did not incorporate true, honest discussions to follow up the readings. Different people had different experiences and stories to contribute, but a deep understanding and respect of different cultures was not the first objective in the class.

This class was the first time I have approached racial issues in an academic setting. Through the readings and discussions, there is a clear intent to find the basis of these racist views and gain a deep, genuine understanding for different cultures. I have personally gained a deep insight into different ethnicities and groups, and it because of this class and that has inspired me to pursue a career in specializing on diversity and employee relations.
For the question of analyzing diversity at [redacted], I would have to say that there is next to none. Thoughts that really stuck in my mind throughout this semester were the ratio of white teachers to black teachers at [redacted] (which I remember hearing is 400:8), and the tiny white space on the demographics chart during the Powell powerpoint. All I could think about when learning these two stats was, “My company is not going to be like this.” There is an issue of diversity here on campus. There have been times when I am walking in between classes with a friend of mine who is black or Latino or Indian and I can see people’s eyes dart back and forth between me and my friend as we pass. In all of my classes over the semesters spent here at [redacted], the number of minority students in those classes can be counted on one hand every semester. In the dorms, there is a complete lack of any ethnic diversity. The only areas where minorities are represented are maintenance and food service jobs, and in [redacted] reports on campus. This only leads to an increase of stereotypes amongst the student population, and does not say a lot for the university either. In some cases, there have been strides made to at least teach about diversity. Due to some of the classes I have taken I feel that I have a great advantage over other students who do not have my interests in the matter and have not studied it in the manner that I have. However, in all the different classes, the fact that only two have given me insight to other cultures is atrocious. The curriculum, especially the core of common studies, only emphasizes monotony and American identity. The introductory courses in math, science, English, and history are predominantly taught by white professors. Many of them are from the Midwest and may have even gone to [redacted]. This does nothing to expand the thinking of the new students every year in these classes. The curriculum really does not make an effort to encourage difference, and that leads to little change in student demographic year after year.

My own roommate of three years now is almost completely against diversity. He feels that able, white men should be in power of every situation at every time. I have had teachers that do not acknowledge differences between cultures in the classroom or they single out the one particular student and ask for their entire culture’s perspective on the matter at hand. I have had neighbors in the dorms that have openly made racist jokes and said they have never even directly spoken to a person of color. These sayings really stress the lack of diversity on [redacted] campus. Some teachers and classes teach about other cultures, but effectively getting the message of universal acceptance across to students is a completely different matter. This institution has not done their part to educate students about cultural identity and acceptance. In order for these young adults to grasp the concept of diversity, there needs to be more lessons taught than, “Do not go beyond [redacted] St. or [redacted]“