The Campus as Stage: A Qualitative Study of the Hypervisibility and Invisibility of African American Female Identity in the Built Campus Environment

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My Mother was asking me not to look to her as a role model. She was devaluing that part of herself that was not Harvard and refocusing my vision to that part of herself that was hard-edged, proficient, and Western. She hid the lonely, Black, defiled-female part of herself and pushed me forward as the projection of a competent self, a cool rather than despairing self, a masculine rather than a feminine self.

(Williams, 1998, p. 20)

The above quote by American legal and critical race theory scholar, Patricia J. Williams, describes the psychological process that she endured to prepare herself to enter Harvard Law School. Her account serves as an excellent example to validate that in order for African American women to succeed in the academy, they have adapted their racial and gender identities to fit the predominant culture (Fordham, 1993). African American women face a unique experience when entering a predominantly white campus space. Not only must they prepare for the academic rigors of attending an institution of higher education intellectually, they must also psychologically prepare for *racially gendered* experiences. A *racially gendered* experience is one that places the intersection of one's racial and gendered identity within the historic, social, cultural, political, and economic context of societal dominant ideologies of identity where issues of racism, sexism, classism, discrimination, harassment, and other forms of oppression manifest (Collins, 1991, 2005; Davis, 1983, 1998; hooks, 1981, 1984, 1989, 1999).

Recent studies of non-white students' experiences within institutions of higher education, specifically those attending predominantly white institutions, have presented issues of invisibility, microaggressions, marginality, tokenism, harassment, and outright discrimination (Brayboy, 2004; Solórzano, Allen, & Carroll 2002; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998; Sue et al., 2008). Certainly student populations on American campuses are continuing to diversify and are predicted to become predominantly non-white (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2008). However, non-white students still report experiences of a non-welcoming campus climate (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). Yet the *built campus environment* has remained a silent element in all of their accounts and thus, rendered neutral (Harris, 2007). The *built campus environment* is a term that will be used throughout this article and is defined as:

> The man-made elements of a campus environment. This includes the architectural, landscape, and environmental design. The materials used to construct and decorate the campus environment are incorporated and include: building materials (bricks, wood, cooper, tile, etc.), the interior design elements (furniture, flooring, paintings, photographs, etc.), and the exterior design elements (sculptures, banners, lighting fixtures, signage, etc.). (Krusemark, 2012)

This definition makes the assumption that the placement, naming, and space allocation of buildings, landscapes, and aesthetic elements communicate the value of identity representation and validation through a historical social, cultural, political, and economic lens (Krusemark, 2012). As such, non-white students have utilized physical and landscaped spaces to exist between the realms of visibility and invisibility, in order to navigate the social system of the built campus environment (Brayboy, 2004; Krusemark, 2010; Patton, 2006). In

this way, the impact that the built campus environment can have on the physical and psychological experience of identity is an area of inquiry that has rarely been considered. Consequently, this will be the main focus of this article.

The Historical, Cultural, Social, and Political Impact of Eurocentrism and Patriarchy on American Campus Architecture

> Space, like language, is socially constructed; and like the syntax of language, the spatial arrangements of our buildings and communities reflect and reinforce the nature of gender, race, and class relations in society. The uses of both language and space contribute to the power of some groups over others and the maintenance of human inequality. (Weisman, 1992, p. 2)

The above quote by feminist architectural scholar, Dr. Leslie Kane Weisman, provides an opportunity to consider how the built campus environment as a "space" serves as a means to communicate messages of oppression and exclusion just as language does. Therefore, while African American women have held the legal right to physically access institutions of higher education for almost 180 years, their presence on American campuses has not been readily reflected within the design of the physical or landscaped spaces in which they learn; especially when we consider predominantly white institutions. This in turn sends messages of their exclusion within the built campus environment (Krusemark, 2010; Demick, Wapner, Yamamato, & Minami, 2000).

In examining the historical foundations of American institutions of higher education, it is difficult to dismiss the fact that institutions consciously embed their values and basic assumptions within their physical manifestation (Bess & Dee, 2008). The architectural design of a campus reflects its history as well as its future aspirations (Markus & Cameron, 2002). In

this way, the physical design of a campus plays an important role in shaping and informing its community members of how education looks and feels, and ultimately, who is rendered visible and invisible (Strange & Banning, 2001). As a result, the message of predominantly white institutions still remains founded in the voice, values, and structure of those in power and those in power continue to be represented by a predominantly white patriarchal group.

As Rudolph (1962/1990) states in his landmark book, *The American College & University*,

> Approximately a hundred Cambridge men and a third as many Oxford men emigrated to New England before 1646; among them were the founders of Harvard, the fathers of the first generation of Harvard students. Their purposes were complex, but among other things, they intended to re-create a little bit of old England in America. (p. 4)

The predominantly white patriarchal group that has maintained its power within predominantly white institutions of higher education gained its power through its historical *Angolophilic* roots (Thelin, 2004). *Anglophilia* is centered on recreating the historical association with England in everything American. As such, *angliophilia* purports that the "distinction and success of colonial colleges was associated with their having transplanted the Oxford-Cambridge ideal to America." (p. 7). The Oxford-Cambridge ideal envisioned students and their professors engaged in a learning environment that promoted intellectual stamina and spiritual morality. Yet, the ideal was rooted in defining its students and their professors as English, white, male, and upper class. Historically, American colleges and universities directed exorbitant amounts of their financial resources to embed the Oxford-Cambridge ideal into their campus appearance since "architecture was considered the [true and ultimate] fulfillment of this collegiate ideal" (p. 9).

The founders of America's original nine institutions established before 1770 – "Harvard, William and Mary, Yale, New Jersey, King's, Philadelphia, Rhode Island, Queen's, and Dartmouth…[were know as] the nine home-grown variations on a theme known in the mother country as Oxford and Cambridge (*sic*)" (Rudolph, 1962/1990, p. 3). Harvard University self-describes its Holden Chapel, built in 1744, as a "solitary English daisy in a field of Yankee dandelions" (p. 7). The academic leaders of William and Mary named their first college building after Sir Christopher Wren, a great English architect, with whom the institution had no relation. *Anglophilia* then can be realized by creating the physical and landscaped structures of the built campus environment in order to replicate its historical association with England.

In the last 20 years, American campuses have spent $107 billion in new construction and renovations with a majority of funding allocated towards new building projects (Zeisler & Abramson, 2000). Aspects of quadrangles and the use of the collegial gothic-inspired architectural style, alongside Greek-styled and Roman-styled busts, and paintings of white male presidents became key physical design attributes of any college or university during our early American history and continue to be contemporary markers of embedding the collegiate ideal (Rudolph, 1962/1990; Thelin, 2004). As such, the historical and contemporary architectural canons that influence the built campus environment exhibit *Eurocentrism*. *Eurocentrism* is the practice of viewing the world from a European perspective and with an implied belief, either consciously or subconsciously, in the preeminence of European culture (Amin, 1989). Thereby, the *angliophilic* roots of American campuses reveal that the architectural canons that inspired their physical manifestation are rooted *Eurocentrism*. As such, this Eurocentric architectural canon does not account for the unique experiences and perceptions of non-European people, rather it perpetuates a Eurocentric and patriarchal

standard of defining the function and symbolism of space (Burke & Grosvenor, 2008; Weisman, 1992). Therefore, the interaction between humans and their environment cannot be dismissed in our conception of the American campus.

Relevant studies on the experiences, interactions, and perceptions of space by race and gender.

In order to understand the impact of the Eurocentric architectural canons of American campus architecture on student identity, key campus studies from the 1970s to present day provide some insight. McNeil and Wapner conducted a study in 1974 on the campus of a predominantly white institution to compare white and black female college students' verbal and pictorial representations of their college environment (Demick, Wapner, Yamamato, & Minami, 2000). The study investigated whether students' racial identity saliency and their perceived role within the environment would differentiate their representations. The findings of the study revealed "striking differences between the two groups in the pictorial representations of their environments" (p. 211). The pictorial representation of the white female students emphasized positive social interactions with others within the environment and a sense of home; whereas, the pictorial representations of the black female students expressed feelings of isolation with no interactions, and a representation of the environment as a prison. This study serves as a compelling example of how one's racial and gender identity can impact one's experience with and perceptions of the built campus environment.

Brayboy (2004) conducted a study in the 1990s that explored the experiences of Native American students in the environments of several American Ivy League institutions. Brayboy's study revealed that the students experienced marginalization, surveillance, and oppression in relation to their campus environments based upon their interactions with those

within the environment. Further, the study found that students in the study navigated the lines of visibility and invisibility in their interactions with their respective campus communities as well as the private and public spaces of their environment to maintain their cultural identity.

Harris (2007) organized a symposium at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign titled, *Constructing Race: The Built Environment, Minoritization, and Racism in the United States* in 2004. The purpose of the symposium"…served initially as a means for further exploration of the broader questions implied by examinations of racial constructions and built form" and resulted in scholarly papers that "examined the role of the built environment in the fortification of social constructions of racial identities and modalities of racism" (p. 1). Harris resonates with Dr. Angela Davis in her beliefs that racism is embedded in the structures of our daily lives and ultimately, "rendered invisible and naturalized within systems of authority. However, Harris adds "[Davis] neglected to consider the actual spaces and built forms that house those very institutions and the landscapes and spaces that are in turn created by them" (p. 2). Thereby, Harris emphasized that the physical structures are not neutral spaces of pure function, but rather that they are physical manifestations of social systems and concepts such as racism. If a dominant racial and class group maintains power and control of the financial resources, architectural profession, and canons of design to create our built environments, one cannot dismiss how the built environment becomes the physical embodiment of the dominant groups' values and beliefs. In this way, the built environment acts as an agent to the development of racial and class identity within our society.

Weisman (1992) focused her research on the dynamics between physical space and gender through a feminist lens of man-made built environments. In her book, *Discrimination by Design*, she discusses the embedded male dominant identity in both the public and private spaces of our daily lives. She purported that, "Gender, race, class, occupation, and other

factors like age and disability collectively create distinctly different spatial experiences for people, even within the same environmental setting" (p. 40). Weisman also emphasized that the design reinforces a social hierarchy of power of some groups over others, namely those from the dominant group over those that are perceived as less dominant. Consequently, the built environment serves as a physical manifestation of a social hierarchy based upon dominant standards of identity in the public and private physical spaces of our lives.

As a result of the ground-breaking work of the aforementioned studies, an awareness and acknowledgment that one's racial, gender, and class identity can impact one's interactions with the built environment should be generated (Demick, Wapner, Yamamato, & Minami, 2000). Furthermore, non-white students in predominantly white campus spaces tend to "navigate the lines of visibility and invisibility in their interactions with the community as well as the private and public spaces of their environment" (Brayboy, 2004). Further, the built campus environment can "act as an agent to the development of racial and class identity within our American society" (Weisman, 1992). As a result, there is great importance for investigating how African American women are experiencing the built campus environment as a physical structure that houses systems of racism, oppression, seclusion, and exclusion (Harris, 2007).

Methods

Study Setting, Purpose, and Research Questions

In order to add to the existing literature that centers the dynamics between space, race, class, and gender, a qualitative dissertation study was conducted during the 2009-2010 academic year to discover, document, and validate the experiences of African American female students attending a predominantly white institution in the Rocky Mountain region.

Located in Denver, Colorado, the institution was founded in 1864 by John Evans who had previously founded Northwestern University in Chicago, Illinois in 1850 (Northwestern University, 2009). Evans intended for the university to serve as a place of higher education to the sons and daughters of those who had moved from the East. He had dreams that the institution would become known as 'The Harvard of the West' (University of Denver, 2008). As a result Evans commissioned the design and construction of the institution's first building, University Hall, at its existing University Park location. University Hall housed the entire university and was comprised of its classrooms, administrative offices, library, chapel, and gymnasium (Fischer, 2009). The building was erected in the Richardsonian Romanesque architectural style that was named after Henry Hobson Richardson one of the "recognized trinity of American architecture" and a man who was noted for his work at Harvard University (O'Gorman, 1991, p. xv). "This style emphasized design elements on a grand scale, including the use of stone exteriors, low Roman archways, and grand staircases" that were expressions of 11th and 12th century southern French, Spanish, and Italian Romanesque characteristics (University of Denver, 2008, p. 10). Thus, this building served as a visual origination of the institution's adherence to the Eurocentric and Anglophobic aesthetics of the Eastern campus design. In 1947, the institution transitioned its architectural canon from the Richardsonian Romanesque style to the Collegiate Gothic style, a style that "[merged the] architecture of Oxford and Cambridge Universities with the local landscape" (Bryn Mawr College, 2009). The university aspired to model and compete with the Eastern Ivy Leagues (Trinity College, Bryn Mawr College, University of Pennsylvania, Princeton University, Washington University, Boston College, University of Notre Dame, Duke University, and Yale University) who were reaffirming their commitment to their Eurocentric and Anglophobic roots through the use of the Collegiate Gothic architectural style. In the 1960s

the institution incorporated the modern International architectural style into the existing mixture of Richardsonian Romanesque and Collegiate Gothic buildings. The introduction of the International style reflected the institution's beliefs in engaging with the global market of technology and diplomacy. During the 1980s the institution returned to its Richardsonian Romanesque architectural roots, deeming this architectural style to be the institutional brand, one that was comprised of its trademark red brick walls and pathways and copper lined towers (Krusemark, 2010). To this day, the institution's leadership, including its Chief Architect travel to European locations to draw their inspiration (Krusemark, 2010). Thus, according to the aforementioned definition of *Eurocentricism*, the institution established itself and then rebranded itself through a Eurocentric architectural style, one that perpetuated the Oxford and Cambridge architectural theme (Amin, 1989; Rudolph, 1962/1990).

Therefore, the purpose of the study was to understand how did African American women experience, interact with, and perceive the built campus environment of a predominantly white institution based on their racial and gender identities? Further, what importance did they place on the built campus environment with regard to their own sense of self and belonging within a predominantly white campus community? And finally, what specific elements of the built campus environment did they feel either reflected or did not reflect their identity and why?

Theoretical framework and methodology: Embedding black feminist theory into the portraiture methodology.

> "Critical scholarship on whiteness is not an assault on white people per se: it is an assault on the socially constructed and constantly reinforced power of white identifications and interests" (Ladson-Billings & Tate 1995, pp. 58–60).

Black Feminism Theory (BFT) focuses on the specific social inequities that Black women experience within institutions that impose a normative gaze. The normative gaze is defined as "Western, White, male, and middle class…one that holds a positivist presumption" (Few, 2007, p. 453). The theory creates a space where the social, political, cultural, geographical, and psychological aspects of Black women can be considered.

Crenshaw (1994) and Collins (1991) purport that in order to understand the Black female experience we must understand how both her racial and gender identities interplay into her whole experience. In this way, the merging of both identities "reveal how Black women are theoretically erased" by the single axis analysis of the system of discrimination (Crenshaw, 1994, p. 41). Additionally, Black Feminist Theory provides a new context outside of the universal or white standards of normalization. Through the descriptive and contextualized writings of Black feminist scholars, the Black female voice finds emancipation and identity saliency and interpretation (Few, 2007). Thus, in a complimentary fashion, the qualitative methodology of portraiture provides the opportunity to validate the social and cultural context of African American women's experiences, interactions, and perceptions by centering their voices in the inquiry of research (Chapman, 2005).

The portraiture method was developed by Dr. Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot with its historical roots in the arts and empirical science (Chapman, 2005). Portraiture is best described as a blending of qualitative methodologies – aestheticism, ethnography, auto-ethnography, critical race theory, oral history, and narrative inquiry, through a naturalistic style of inquiry (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005). This naturalistic style of inquiry centers on the abundant description of one's experience through the expression of one's voice and story (Lather, 1986). This centering allows the portrait to be created through the voices of the

portraitist and her subjects in a dialogical relationship (Lawrence- Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). This dialogue becomes the portrait.

As African people, "the issue of Black women being the ones who really listen to one another is an important one, particularly given the importance of voice in Black women's lives" (hooks, 1989 as cited by Collins, 1991, p. 98). The manner that we engage in dialogue through "Afrocentric communication maintains the integrity of the individual and his or her own personal voice, but does so in the context of group activity" (Asante, 1987; Brown, 1989; Cannon, 1988; Smithermann, 1977; Kochman, 1981 as cited by Collins, 1991, p. 99). Therefore, by creating a black feminist portrait, the voices of the African American women and myself, as both the portraitist and an African American female scholar, allowed us to contribute equally and uniquely through dialogue to create "our" portrait.

Staying true to the portraiture methodology, in the findings section of this article the dialogue between the research participants, their campus community, the built campus environment, and the portraitist is shared. This means that the use of the first and third person is used simultaneously to reflect what Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) defined as the *situated identities of the portraitist*. The *situated identities of the portraitist* is "drawing the portrait within the social and cultural context and shaping the portrait through the dialogue between the portraitist and the subject, each one negotiating the discourse and shaping the evolving image" (Lawrence- Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. xv).

Study setting, study sample, and data collection methods.

At the time of the study, the institution had an overall enrollment of 11,600 undergraduate and graduate students combined, of which 204 students self-identified as African American women (Trevino, et al., 2005; University of Denver, 2009). With the

support of the Institutional Review Board and through a partnership with the Center for Multicultural Excellence, I reached out to all 222 women through purposeful-criteria sampling. As a result, 37 women responded by completing an online screening survey to confirm that they were a current member of the university community, that they self-identified as an African American woman, and an overview of their general experiences in the campus environment. After completing the survey, the women received a follow-up email to thank them for their participation and to invite them to continue their participation through additional in-depth research activities. Consequently, nine women self-selected to continue their participation through a series of audio and video taped cognitive interview tours and in-depth individual interviews, self-reflective journaling, and photo documentation over an eight-week period. The nine women received an email to confirm their participation along with a description of the study and the in-depth research activities, as well as a preliminary timeline to complete each activity and a research participation consent form. Upon signing the consent form, each woman was asked to self-select a pseudonym to be referred to during the study. The women are referred by their pseudonym throughout this article.

The nine women had an age range of 18 – 49, with an average age of 33.5 years and a mean age of 20 years. Five of the women were undergraduate students and four were graduate students. It is important to note that two of the women who identified as graduate students also worked as full-time staff members at the institution. As a group, the women had been at the institution as little as one quarter to 7.5 years, resulting in an average of 2.68 years spent at the institution. The nine women self-identified their racial identity as: African American (3), African (1), Black (2), and Biracial (3).

Data analysis, interpretation, and synthesis: The construction of the narratives.

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) emphasize that once the portraitist is in the

field, "she begins by listening and observing, being open and receptive to all stimuli, acclimating herself to the environment, documenting her initial movements and first impressions, and noting what is familiar and what is surprising" (p. 187). In addition, importance is placed "at each stage of data collection, at the close of each day, the portraitist gathers, scrutinizes, and organizes the data and tries to make sure of what she has witnessed" (p. 187). As a result, an on-going process of analysis was performed by examining and searching for themes from interview transcripts, audio and video interview tapes, and the women's self-reflective journals and photos. In addition, participant observation and institutional archive documentation analysis were conducted by the researcher to provide insight into the historical and contemporary context of the campus environment. Finally, the researcher kept a journal to document lingering thoughts, reactions, and reflections. In this way, the analysis process incorporated multiple formats and modes of meaning-making to validate the emergent themes that arose (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

The data analysis process initially revealed seven initial themes from the online screening survey, the themes included: feelings evoked by the campus, mood and tone of the educational environment, campus demographics, social interactions and behaviors, self image, multiple identities, and beliefs and actions. As the study continued, the seven initial themes became more refined by the narratives of the nine women into four refined themes. The four refined themes included: the importance of campus aesthetics on one's sense of self and belonging, the importance of navigating hypervisibility and invisibility of identity and space, one's sense of institutional care and safety, and the psychological importance of persisting in the campus environment to reclaim the history of African American women at the institution. While four key themes were identified, this article will focus on the theme of *the importance of navigating hypervisibility and invisibility of identity and space*. As a result,

it is important to note, that while nine women participated in the dissertation study excerpts from three women are shared in this article. The three women selected were most vocal and poignant in describing their experiences as related to the theme of the article. The entire narratives of all nine women and all four themes will be included through future publications.

Findings: A Portrait of the Campus Stage

I met with each of the nine women in early January 2010. The weather in Colorado during this time of year can be extremely cold. The campus was just ending its six-week winter break and while a majority of students were starting to return, the classroom buildings were still virtually quiet. The landscape of the campus was dormant. The Koi ponds of the Humanities Garden were drained and dry and the vegetation was yellowed and crisp. The trees had no leaves and the only sign of life were the evergreen shrubs that lined the red bricked pathways. The campus was in a naked state, allowing us to explore it at its most vulnerable stage.

When coordinating all of the initial cognitive interview tours, I asked each woman to choose a place on campus to begin our journey. To my surprise all of the women asked me to select a place for us to meet. I selected the library as a centrally located space on the campus. Beyond the function of its availability and central location, I discovered that several of the women felt that the space allowed them to focus on their student identity. While they commented on its outdated color scheme, worn flooring, and "funky" chairs, tables, and desks, they found comfort in its walls and in the smell of its books. Some of the women commented on their knowledge of the library's history, serving as a structure to stop and deter the 1960s student protests that occurred on the green space that it was located on. Depending on whom you ask this could be a mixed interpretation of fact and fiction. Yet, in a

relevant way, this was the perfect space for us to begin our journey together as an emancipatory act, in line with the portraiture methodology.

Navigating Hypervisibility and Invisibility

Rachel, a biracial undergraduate in her early 20s, has known of the institution since she was a child. She expressed that her mother "has worked here pretty much forever." So when it came time for Rachel to make a choice about where she would attend college, she knew this would most likely be the place she would end up. As a biracial woman, Rachel's parents played a strong role in her life and her racial identity development, especially in order to prepare her for this predominantly white community. She shared, "My mom kind of primed me a little bit. She's like, okay, just so you know, they're all white and they're all pretty rich."

During our cognitive interview tour, I asked Rachel whether she felt comfortable in the environment, she expressed that she felt "hypervisible" in the area known as the Green. This space is considered "the heart" of the campus for students. The student center, three fraternity houses, the alumni center, the College of Law, and the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, can be found here. Rachel shared that this space, in particular, evoked feelings of discomfort and being different.

…I think I had a hard time identifying it early on, just because I was like a new, lost freshman who like felt out of place everywhere. But I think, especially last year, [during] my sophomore year it got worse. Even though I was a student and I knew where I was and knew my way around and had connections on campus, and my mom's really important on campus…even with that, I still felt like in this one spot, more so than any other, I just felt like I don't belong here.

As Rachel and I continue our exploration of the campus she revealed how she navigated her hypervisibility by utilizing the backdoors and back stairwells in order to get to and from her classes and most importantly, to avoid the Green. Rachel shared that she experienced derogatory comments about her hair and clothing by white female students walking in the space and "cat-calls" from white male students who resided in the fraternity houses.

> I don't know, it's like, that's kind of when I feel like I least fit in just because, there's usually a lot of advertisements for Greek life which aren't very diverse, like … rich, white kids... I don't know, it's just like, I feel whenever I'm in the area during that time of day I just want to hurry by as fast as I can just because it's a time when I feel I don't fit in, you know. I just physically feel so out of place on campus and I just want to get to class, you know, where it's my comfort zone and safety zone.

Rachel felt that the Green represents the majority culture and its values and beliefs in activities such as Greek life, as evidenced by the three fraternity houses that sit on the east side of the space's perimeter. In addition, she felt that by simply walking through a crowd of people who did not look like her on a daily basis, her socio-economic identity was also out of place. Rachel revealed that she could never afford a school like this unless her mother worked here. As an employee of the institution, Rachel's mother was given a tuition discount. She struggled with the feeling of being so visible in her racial identity yet invisible in her socio-economic identity in this space.

Abbie, an African American undergraduate in her late teens, recalled the first time she visited the campus during a week-long summer workshop sponsored by the Center for African American Policy for African American high school students. She revealed that she

visited another institution in New York and had full intentions to attend; however, when it came down to financial support, she opted to attend here. When I asked her about her recollections of living on the campus as a first year student, she shared,

> Of course where I live, the dorm has influenced my time here a lot. I am not a fan of my floor, feeling left out of a group of blond sorority girls, but honestly I don't want to be included. The dorms and the Lacrosse stadium (easily visible from my dorm window) are the strongest intimidators for me here.

Abbie lived in a residence hall on the north side of campus. She pointed to a photo she took during the study to capture the alley that she took to get to and from the residence hall. When I asked her why she choose to walk in the alley, one that appeared to be off of the university property, she explained that she wanted to avoid the Lacrosse stadium as much as possible because she experienced harassing comments about her racial and gender identity by the predominantly white male student athletes and that the way the stadium was designed communicated white, rich, and male privilege to her. She expressed that the stadium felt less safe than the alley way.

> [The stadium feels less safe] at night, especially walking through alley way…which is weird. I'm someone that is always advocating, especially if you're a young female; do not walk alone at night. That is common sense. But I have a little safety…on my keys. I feel safe in bigger spaces. Not like really close to a building. Which doesn't make sense because I feel a building would probably be safer, but I like being more out in the open where there's light and stuff and I can see who's coming towards me. Or like I can check who's coming, who's walking behind me and things like that.

The psychological impact of hypervisibility when contemplated into relation to Rachel and Abbie's narratives highlights the concept of safety as a means to maintain one's physical invisibility for African American women. For example, many women who participated in the study indicated that they purposely avoided the main walk ways and open green spaces on campus to avoid being visible and standing out. As a result, the women placed their physical safety in jeopardy, in order to protect their psychological safety. Therefore, psychological safety became more important than physical safety for African American women within the built campus environment of a predominantly white community.

The element of hypervisibility becomes more poignant within the physical spaces of campus, specifically the spaces of residential halls. This particular university requires all of its first and second year students to live on campus as part of their educational experience; however, the campus living environment has placed them in situations where their racially gendered identities have been subjected to racist, sexist, and disrespectful questioning and comments. As we will learn in the next section, Marilyn and Abbie have both had their hair placed on center stage by white female students within their residence halls.

The hypervisibility of our hair.

During an informal conversation with the current Director of Residence Life, he indicated that the shared spaces of on-campus residences were designed to create opportunities for students to discover each other's differences and become more aware of the diverse world we live in. However, this value did not account for the negative and uncomfortable situations that the shared spaces of residence halls can place African American women in based upon their "differences".

Marilyn, a biracial undergraduate in her late teens, reflected on her experience in the shared community bathroom of her residence hall during her first week on campus. She described her fear and hesitancy in allowing other women to see her without her hair done and make-up on. The standards of beauty that are placed on women create a competition, and the standard, itself, is based upon the white standard of beauty. Therefore, not only do African American women have the struggle of competing academically as students, but also to compete in how they are perceived by their physical appearance.

[I was nervous during the first week campus] doing my hair, especially being an African American woman where our hair is quite different than the Caucasian hair. I was actually terrified to let the other girls see me with my hair not pressed, not perfect, you know. When it's like straight from the shower and puffy and just wild. It was really hard the first week because I'm a pretty shy person and, and especially for women, it's hard letting other women see you without your makeup and the first thing in the morning. I think that, just being a woman, that's just hard in and of itself because we have to live up to these standards.

As Marilyn and I walked by her dorm room, she recalled her first week living on campus. She described that she had attended an Asian American Student Association meeting and brought an informational flyer back to her room and placed it on the table next to her bed. The next morning as she was coming back to her room from the community bathroom, she overheard her roommate questioning her racial identity. She stated, "My roommate said, 'Oh she must be Asian American'." Marilyn shared a sad laugh and asked, "Why would she assume that I was Asian American just because I had the flyer on my table, why didn't she just ask me?"

Abbie, like Marilyn, shared how she feared interacting with the white female residents in her residence hall when it came to explaining her hair care routine. In an effort to face her fears directly, she decided to speak to her roommate about her concerns.

I couldn't let that just hang in the air. One thing I was worried about was my hair. I'm a black woman, so I worry about my hair a lot. And I was like wondering how they, people, would look at me. I treat my hair differently than they would. So I like sat down with my roommate and I explained, like, this is my hair regimen and I'm different... I do things different than you.

Marilyn and Abbie shared their concerns about their hair based upon their experiences of living with others who were not African American women. This presented concerns and issues of having to explain the differences of caring for their hair. The frequency and type of hair care is different for African American women; the act of washing their hair is not something typically conducted on a daily basis. The oil production of their hair is a typically slower and can be drastically impacted by a dry climate, such as that found in Colorado, on their scalps. This requires an assurance that moisture is maintained by limited washing. However, the hair care routines of their white female counterparts has built a perception that they do not care for themselves; that they are in some way dirty or soiled.

The African American female body has been depicted as exotic and animal-like (Woollacott, 2006). The American media portrays their curved hips, full lips, and thick curly hair as something wild and 'other' like. The built campus environment of the institution is no different, creating a stage out of the public and private environments where their physical characteristics are objectified and called into question. The physical spaces of residence halls required students to share bathroom space as a community which in turn took the realm of a

perceived private space onto the public stage. The act of maintaining one's hair and the exposure of one's shape and curves made the African American female students into objects for their white female counterparts to question and explore.

Inquiries came in the form of verbalized questioning and physical disapproval. As a result, many of the women in the study personally called into question their own physical appearance and characteristics, while internally comparing themselves to their white female counterparts by striving to simply 'fit in'. As a result, the recognition that they could not 'fit in' nor change who they were, served as evidence that the built campus environment did not accommodate or allow for their identities to blend in, rather it is placed them on the campus stage, front and center.

Conclusion

The dynamics that exist between African American women's racial and gender identity and the built campus environment of a predominantly white community has been presented in this article. The dynamic that occurs between oneself and one's environment supports the idea that African American female students' experiences can be impacted by their racial and gender identity. Critical race theorist and critical feminist scholars purport that one's cultural background, specifically for non-white women, impacts their experiences within society. These experiences are founded on the social constructions and social systems of racism and sexism. When we consider the intersectionality of one's racial and gender identities, African American women have been placed in a complex social and physical environment that has historically and still continues to deny their equal access to higher education based upon its Eurocentric values, beliefs, basic assumptions, and architectural canons.

Consequently, the values, beliefs, and basic assumptions of the architectural language continues to perpetuate the ideals of a Westernized, white, and male dominant world view. Therefore, while African American women have a legal right to physically access the built campus environment, they have had to make a psychological transition in order to adapt, tolerate, and survive the dominant language embedded in the walls that they learn, socialize, and live within. Further, the historical Eurocentric and patriarchal values of identity have been translated from a white male gaze to a white female gaze within the built campus environment. Within Rachel, Abbie, and Marilyn's narratives, both white male and white female students placed them in situations of hypervisibility. In order to navigate this hypervisibility, Rachel intentionally avoided the campus green where she had experienced microaggressions by students. Marilyn and Abbie were both placed in campus living spaces where they experienced the hypervisibility of their hair. Marilyn psychologically internalized white standards of beauty and appearance by strategically navigating the community bathroom. Abbie proactively engaged in a conversation with her roommate to discuss their differences and to augment her own psychological fears and expectations of misunderstanding. This negotiation of being visible in public spaces while engaged in private acts has placed African American female identity into subjection often resulting in harassment and discrimination, whether intentional or unintentional. As a result, the concept of a racially gendered experience presents an unattestable truth that African American women's experiences can only be truly understood, analyzed and interpreted, by critical theories and research methodologies that validate and authentic the African American female identity. This is an important point to state as it pertains to the validity of utilizing the theoretical framework of Black Feminist Theory and the emancipatory research methodology of portraiture for this study.

Ultimately then, the architectural language that exists within the physical and landscaped structures of American campuses, has values, beliefs, and basic assumptions that are foundationally Eurocentric. As a result, the African American female identity has been placed in a position of navigating the boundaries of hypervisibility and invisibility. This hypersensitive awareness of one's visibility in a predominantly white community has created a stage like environment. Thus, this has ignited the necessity for the women featured in this article to navigate the built campus environment in order to become physically invisible. However, their attempts to become invisible have resulted in them placing their physical safety in jeopardy. Therefore, the impact that the built campus environment and the type of social engagement it facilitates should be considered in relation to one's racial and gender identities, and overall well-being. At a time when institutions of higher education continue to see the diversity of their respective student population increase, the reliance on the built campus environment as a facilitator of the learning process must be critiqued and redefined.

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