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# Contextualizing Multilayered Sexual Subjectivities of Heterosexual Black Female Undergraduate Students at a Predominantly White Institution in the South

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Contextualizing Multilayered Sexual Subjectivities of Heterosexual Black female  
Undergraduate Students at a Predominantly White Institution in the South

by

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Bachelor of Arts

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2013

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For the Degree of Master of Science in Public Health in

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## DEDICATION

TO THOSE EMBRACING THE JOURNEY OF ADULTHOOD AND NOT JUST THE DESTINATION.

“I AM CONVINCED THAT MOST PEOPLE DO NOT GROW UP...WE MARRY AND DARE TO HAVE CHILDREN AND CALL THAT GROWING UP. I THINK WHAT WE DO IS MOSTLY GROW OLD. WE CARRY ACCUMULATION OF YEARS IN OUR BODIES, AND ON OUR FACES, BUT GENERALLY OUR REAL SELVES, THE CHILDREN INSIDE, ARE INNOCENT AND SHY AS MAGNOLIAS.”

— MAYA ANGELOU, *LETTER TO MY DAUGHTER*

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## ABSTRACT

This study uses an intersectional theoretical framework to examine Black college women's sexual health by focusing on how they engage in sexual decision making within their social contexts. This qualitative study analyzed 20 individual in-depth interviews of Black female undergraduate students, ages 18-22, who attend a predominantly white institution (PWI) in the Southeastern United States. The themes that emerged from qualitative data analysis include Black female undergraduate students' perceptions of the sexual culture of their campus and the protective strategies they employ to navigate the sexual culture in order to achieve and/or maintain physical, emotional, and social well-being. Key findings include perceptions of gender and racial disparities on campus, which shape the sexual culture; the internalization of racial and gendered stereotypes and their impact on participants' actual and potential intimate relationships; and participants' strategies of sexual protection, which include the significance of knowing one's sexual partner, delaying sexual initiation, voluntary abstinence, and exercising sexual agency. The insights yielded from this study highlight the value of centering the sexual subjectivities of Black young women in research on sexual health.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION/ BACKGROUND

#### **A. Problem Identification: Sexually Transmitted Infections & Black young Adults**

Emerging adulthood is the developmental period that occurs between the ages of 18 to 24 years (Arnett, 2000). This developmental period is marked by the transition from adolescence to adulthood when individuals attain a greater cognizance of their identity (Arnett, 2004), engage in sexual inquiry (Reid, 2013; Schulenberg & Maggs, 2002), and partake in elevated risky health behaviors (i.e., condomless sex, substance use) (Shifren, Furnham, & Bauserman, 2003). With increased engagement in sexual exploration, emerging adults, specifically Black young adults, can face adverse health outcomes. Black youth, ages 13 to 24, represent 57% of HIV incidence in the United States. Among men ages 13 to 24, Black men have higher rates of HIV infection than any other race/ethnicity. Most Black young women, ages 13 to 24, contract HIV through heterosexual contact (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2014). In 2010, about 86% of young women ages 13 to 24 contracted HIV through heterosexual contact in the United States. Of that 86%, Black women had the highest incidence among women of all races (CDC, 2012). The risk of contracting HIV is heightened by the fact that African Americans are more likely to have sexual relations with other African Americans (CDC, 2014). Despite such individual risk behaviors as sex without a condom or multiple concurrent sexual partners, the odds of contracting an STI increase with each sexual

encounter for African Americans, particularly among Black women (CDC, 2014).

### **Problem Definition**

The data on disproportionately higher rates of HIV/AIDS and STIs among Black young adults are the most commonly reported information about their sexual health practices and outcomes; what we know less about are Black college students' sexualities. Even less is known about how they make sense of and experience their sexualities and the contextual factors that shape their individual sexual health outcomes. As others have already documented (e.g., Geronimus and Thompson, 2004), there is an overemphasis on both cultural and individualistic explanations for sexual health disparities among racial-ethnic minorities in public health research. Such work neglects social determinants and related contextual factors that inform the sexual health behaviors and outcomes of people of color in general and African Americans in particular.

While the gender and racial inequalities present in HIV/AIDS and STI statistics call for continued public health efforts regarding sexual health education and prevention, the agentic efforts of Black young adults to protect their physical/sexual, emotional, and social well-being should not be overlooked. The fact that there is minimal information about how STI infection rates vary by social class among Black college students is also problematic and such information can provide greater insight for prevention strategies. This study is intended to fill this gap by shedding light on the strategies Black female college students who attend a predominantly White institution of higher education (PWI) use to avoid negative sexual and reproductive health outcomes, such as STIs and unintended pregnancy.

Using an intersectional theoretical framework, this paper pushes against the dominant deficit approach to Black women's sexual health that focuses almost exclusively on their sexual 'risk-taking' behavior, which is widely used in public health research to analyze the sexual practices of Black communities. Instead, this paper adopts an asset-based approach in order to uncover how Black female college students, ages 18-22, protect themselves emotionally, physically, and socially from intersecting forms of marginalization (i.e., racism, sexism, and classism). This study recognizes the significance of literature that provides commentary on sexual 'risk-taking' in the Black community, particularly those pertaining to STI prevention interventions, and therefore, does not intend to diminish the impact of interventions aimed at reducing STI 'risk behavior,' specifically among Black women who are disproportionately impacted by STIs. However, focusing exclusively on 'risk' in analyses of Black women's sexual health disparities pathologizes Black communities. Furthermore, it is unfair and potentially damaging to frame the sexual narratives and practices of Black women as homogenous when the sexual subjectivities of this population have been historically marginalized through a voyeuristic lens in which they are rendered both hyper visible *and* invisible.

#### **D. Justification of Research**

By gaining an understanding of how such factors as race, class, and gender influence the sexual self-concepts of heterosexual Black female undergraduate students at PWI in the South, this study promotes a move away from the dominant deficit framework that has been used to narrate the sexual health outcomes of Black women in public health scholarship. This study's use of narrative inquiry and individual in-depth interviews aims

to give voice to the often silenced socio-cultural and institutional factors that influence this demographic's health outcomes.

Sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (2000) developed the concept of the matrix of domination to define how “intersecting oppressions originate, develop, and are contained. . . through schools, housing employment, government, and other social institutions that regulate the actual patterns of intersecting oppressions the Black women encounter” (246). As a theoretical concept, the matrix of domination exposes how ideals of equity within such “social institutions” obscure such underlying systemic inequities of sexism, classism, racism, and heterosexism. These systemic inequalities shape the lived experiences of Black women, and serve as critical sites of “intersecting oppression” (291) and possible spheres of resistance. Collins proposes that Black women can resist systemic marginalization when they “become self-defined and self-determining” (291) via acts of consciousness-raising and resistance to transform the frameworks of sites of “intersecting oppression” (291). Collins frames Black women's spheres of oppression and resistance on the following three interlocking levels: personal biography, interpersonal, and institutional. When theorizing Black women's modes of resistance, Collins argues that when Black women practice acts of self-definition and position their narratives at the center of inquiry, their narratives expose their interlocking experiences of racial, gendered, and class marginalization. Black women's narratives also expose the intersecting racial, gendered, and/or class privileges of the individuals that have defined their personhood and positionality based on time, space, and circumstance (i.e., White men, White women, Black men, and other Black women). While marginalized individuals may not have issues identifying their personal experiences of marginalization,

they may not recognize how their ideologies and behaviors are influenced by macro factors outside their control and uphold other individuals' subordination (i.e., White women subordinating Black women, Black women subordinating other Black women).

In order to combat how the matrix of domination operates with the oppressed oppressing others, Collins (2000) urges further analysis of how the sustainability of the matrix of domination is dependent on a continuum of interpersonal versus systemic mechanisms of domination. Interpersonal mechanisms of domination pertain to “day-to-day practices of how people treat one another” (Collins, 2000, 306). U.S. Black women have historically been framed as “passive, unfortunate recipients of abuse” (306). Such negative framing that reduces the capacity of Black women to be their own problem-solvers, which may adversely impact how they treat themselves and alternatively how others treat Black women. Systemic mechanisms of domination address how “social institutions as interdependent entities have worked to disadvantage Black women” (295). For example, Black women have historically been denied access to the best schools, jobs, and housing which results from a multitude of policies intentionally made to deny Black women their “full citizenship rights” (295).

Black women in particular are systematically subjected to controlling images that deny and minimize their humanity as well as the heterogeneity that exists among Black women. Historically, Black female sexuality has been caricatured by racialized sexual stereotypes informed by White supremacist, capitalist patriarchy (hooks, 2000) and more specifically, the institution of slavery. The four stereotypes that have defined and been used to control Black women's sexuality in historical context are: the promiscuous Jezebel, the asexual Mammy, the over-reproductive Welfare Queen, and the emasculating

Matriarch (Collins, 2000; Morton, 1991). These stereotypes have been reworked and reimagined through contemporary hip-hop culture, producing the following controlling images: the Diva, the Gold Digger, Freak, Dyke, Gangsta Bitch, Sister Savior, Earth Mother, and Baby Mama (Stephens & Few, 2005a). As Collins (2000) notes, these controlling images oversimplify, homogenize, and stigmatize Black women and their sexualities. These controlling images also deprive Black women of their autonomy and capacity to be the primary authors of their sexual self-concepts and their sexual health.

This study seeks to apply Collins' theory of the matrix of domination in an analysis of Black female college students' sexual subjectivities, including their sexual decision-making and the strategies they employ to exercise sexual agency. By analytically centering the narratives of this demographic, this study examines how such intersecting oppressions as racism, sexism, and classism are convergently and divergently experienced and actively resisted as these women maintain their physical/sexual, social, and emotional well-being and navigate a fraught environment. First, this study examines how this demographic makes meaning of the sexual culture of a PWI and more specifically their intersecting experiences of marginalization as racism, classism, and sexism. Second, this study explores the array of strategies used by young adult Black college women to uphold their emotional, physical, and social well-being within their social contexts. The insights yielded from narrative analysis of the interview data have implications for rethinking dominant approaches to sexual health promotion among young Black women.

#### **E. Preview**

This exploratory, qualitative study answers the following research questions:

1. How do Black female college students, ages 18-22, attending a PWI make sense of the sexual culture on their campus?
2. What protective strategies do these young women employ to navigate the sexual culture of the PWI in order to achieve or maintain their physical, emotional, and social well-being?

By placing the narratives of Black female college students at the center of analysis, this study seeks to contribute to Black feminist scholarship that recognizes the multiplicity of Black women's personhood and lived experiences (Collins 2000, 2004).

After an extensive literature review that addresses concepts, theories, terminology and previous studies that have informed this study, the research design is discussed. The research design is shaped by an intersectional framework that accounts for the multilayered factors that shape the sexual subjectivities and sexual agency of heterosexual Black female college students, ages 18 through 22, who attend a PWI in the South. After discussing the research design, the results produced as a result of narrative inquiry are presented. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications and limitations of the study for future research and health promotion practices.



## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### *The Sexual Cultures of College Campuses*

The social scientific scholarship on the sexual cultures of college settings has largely focused on gender and its relationship to social class (Armstrong, Hamilton, and Sweeney, 2006; Boswell and Spade, 1996; Hamilton and Armstrong, 2013; Martin and Hummer, 1989). Most research in this domain has focused on Whites and minimal research has addressed how intersectional inequalities pertaining to race, class, and gender may influence young Black female college students' sexual behaviors. Sanday's (1996) groundbreaking qualitative research on rape culture on college campuses addressed how rape perpetuates unequal, separatist gender norms. These gender norms marginalize women who are sexually objectified by men who "struggle to retain or gain control of their environment" (194). She found that men engage in practices of acquaintance rape in order to assert their dominance over women and prove their superiority to other men (Sanday, 1996).

More recently, Hamilton and Armstrong (2013) conducted a longitudinal ethnographic study of college women's romantic and sexual experiences at PWI. They found that while heterosexual women face gender inequalities in their engagement in hookups and relationships, the romantic experiences of college women also vary by social class. Hamilton and Armstrong (2013) established a typology of the college women they studied based on social class between the economically privileged and the

less privileged. Regarding romantic ideologies/behaviors, the more privileged women were more likely to engage in hookups because it aligned more with their class expectations of abstaining from any distractions that may obstruct their self-development and academic achievement during college. While hookups aligned with the more privileged group's class ideologies, hooking up caused gender double standards to arise regarding women abstaining from non-romantic sex and the need for women to be in committed romantic relationships – what Hamilton and Armstrong (2009) define as “the relational imperative” (593). Hookups also produced such negative effects as personal shame, stigma from peers, and increased male control over the terms of the hookup.

Conversely, hookups were less appealing to less privileged women who brought class-based ideologies about romance and expressions of sexuality from their communities that were different from those that predominate in college. The less privileged participants typically transitioned to adulthood earlier than the more privileged women, and did not see committed romantic relationships as a barrier to their educational and professional development (Hamilton & Armstrong, 2009). Based on the personal development culture of college, the less privileged women were forced to choose between abandoning the familiar logic of their hometowns or adopting the privileged culture of their environment. The less privileged were also faced with delaying their transition to adulthood through marriage and parenthood (Hamilton & Armstrong, 2009).

Both Sanday (1996) and Hamilton and Armstrong (2013) illuminate important dynamics about how college settings can facilitate harmful sexual cultures that promote male sexual violence against women and reproduce class inequalities; however, both studies focused almost entirely on White populations. Neither study attends to the impact

of such sexual cultures on Black populations and more specifically to how Black female college students negotiate the sexual cultures in college settings.

In a more robustly intersectional analysis that attended to Black college students' heterosexual norms and interactions, Ray et al. (2010) investigated how normative institutional arrangements facilitated Black and White fraternity men's interpersonal relations with women at a PWI. Using a mixed methods approach, Ray et al. (2010) found that the racial differences in how men in fraternities interacted with women was largely influenced by the living arrangements and the racial make-up of the broader community in which the university was located. These arrangements tended to privilege White men and disadvantage Black men. Due to the small Black community at the PWI, the Black fraternity men felt that they were hyper visible in the majority White population, in which their treatment of their romantic partners was associated with their high social status and reputation. Conversely, the Black fraternity men were able to exhibit more intimacy and romanticism with their romantic partners due to their off-campus living arrangements as opposed to the non-private, on-campus fraternity houses of mainly White fraternity men. While Ray et al.'s work sheds light on how normative institutional arrangements influence the raced and classed sexual cultures of college campuses, it does not offer commentary on how Black women college students experience the sexual cultures of a PWI and in turn, how that may influence their sexual decision making.

### ***Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) and Black students***

The 4-year college/university setting is a classed structure where students aim to preserve and/or enhance their economic status (Hamilton and Armstrong, 2009). This

setting promotes an imperative of personal development, achievement, and improvement. The focus on the self that college promotes encourages students to delay marriage and parenthood until they have completed their education and established a career (Hamilton and Armstrong, 2009). This dominant life course strategy, which is prevalent among White, middle-class and affluent people, can be problematic for students of color, especially for those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. The university setting provides an ideal environment to explore the diverse beliefs and experiences of Black female students at PWI. This space provides Black students from an array of geographic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds the opportunity to interact with each other as peers for protracted periods of time (Smith & Moore, 2000).

At PWIs, socio-economic stratification influences Black students' experiences during their time in college. Ethnic minority students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds that attend PWIs are more likely to experience and/or perceive greater isolation and alienation, higher dropout rates, and less academic preparation in high school (Loo & Rolison, 1986; Magner, 1988). Black students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may also make substantial familial, personal, and social changes in their attendance at PWI (D'Augelli and Hershberger, 1993). Many Black students from lower socioeconomic communities come from ethnic communities and high schools in which their race/ethnic group was in the majority and must deal with being in the minority on their respective college campus. Regardless of social class or gender, Black students will experience racism during college at PWI (D'Augelli and Hershberger, 1993).

For students, ages 18 to 24, who are enrolled in college or graduate school, there is a lower percentage of men to women (39:47). This gender inequality of men to women

has been observed for Blacks (31:43), Whites (43:51), Hispanics (26:36), and other racial/ethnic groups (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Since 1988, the number of women enrolled in post-baccalaureate degree programs has surpassed men. Between 2001 and 2011, the number of full-time female post-baccalaureate students increased by 56% in comparison to males (36 percent) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). While the majority of Black students obtaining post-baccalaureate and graduate education attend PWIs, most research exploring the sexual behaviors and STI risks for Black college students is taken from students that attend HBCUs (Bazargan, Kelly, Stein, Husaini, & Bazargan, 2000; Berkel, N.Furlong, Hickman, & Blue, 2005; Burns & Dillon, 2005; Chng, Carlon, & Toynes, 2006; Meilman, Presley, & Cashin, 1995; Sandelowski, 2006). Even though the information collected from HBCUs provides critical behavioral and ideological information for Black students that attend HBCUs, the data is not generalizable to Black students that attend PWIs (Shegog et al., 2012).

In addition to gender inequalities within the realm of education and such systemic inequalities as high rates of incarceration and employment disparities for Black men (Alexander, 2010), the sexual self-concepts and sexual subjectivities of Black female young adults that attend PWIs are also influenced by heterosexual double standards. Empirical research has shown that Black college women that attend PWIs are more likely to engage in risky sexual behavior than Black college students at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), because the pool of eligible Black men is more scarce which may increase anxieties about the availability of suitable males (Bynum, 2001). These gender double standards encourage and facilitate Black men to affirm their sexualities by having pre-marital sexual relations and relations outside their committed

romantic relationships (Fullilove et al., 1993), and may also influence Black women to conceal risky sexual behavior they perceive as necessary to obtain a romantic partner (Stephens & Phillips, 2005).

### ***Young Women's Subjectivity and Sexual Agency***

Anglo-American feminist scholars began studying sexual agency and sexual subjectivity in the 1970s; their subjects were predominantly adult women (Schalet, 2010). Sexual subjectivity refers to an individual's "sense of oneself as a sexual person who is entitled to have sexual feelings, and to make active decisions about sexual behavior" (Tolman, 2002, 5-6). The scholarship on sexual subjectivity focused on women's understanding of their gendered relationships, awareness of their internal bodily functions, and acknowledgement of sexual desire (Schalet, 2010). More recently, scholars have theorized sexual agency as a dimension of sexual subjectivity, which refers to the actions an individual takes with a romantic partner(s). Both terms refer to an individual's sexual cognizance, appreciation of sexual desire and pleasure, experiences of control in sexual relationships, and the ability of the individual to envision herself as the subject, as opposed to the object, of sexual acts (Schalet, 2010). How a young woman sees herself as a sexual being, as agentic, passive, or some combination therein, may influence her sexual practices; conversely, her sexual behaviors may shape how she comes to see herself as a sexual being (Houlihan et al., 2008).

Moreover, the development of a sexual self-concept is a normative and multi-faceted part of adolescence that extends into young adulthood and accounts for the positive and negative sentiments an individual has towards herself as a sexual being (Chilman, 1983; Gagnon & Simon, 1973; Longmore, 1998). One's sexual self-concept is

theorized to comprise three dimensions: sexual openness, sexual esteem, and sexual anxiety (Hensel, Fortenberry, O'Sullivan, & Orr, 2011). Sexual openness denotes an individual's acknowledgement of sexual arousal and pleasure and the efficacy to pursue select sexual behaviors (Horne & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2005; Nicholson, 1994). Sexual esteem involves positive assessments of one's sexuality (Snell, 1998), sexual feelings and behaviors (Zeanah & Schwartz, 1996), and one's body within the sphere of sex (Horne & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2005). Lastly, sexual anxiety relates to negative evaluations of one's sex life, and such emotions as sexual tension, apprehension, and discomfort (Snell, 1998).

A woman's sexual self-concept and sexual subjectivity is especially shaped as she chooses to participate in and/or abstain from such intimate behaviors as dating and sexual activity. Her ideologies regarding these behaviors are shaped by such factors as her socio-economic status and gendered ideologies prior to her matriculation to college and may be altered, voluntarily or involuntarily, during her tenure in college.

While some women are empowered by White and/or class privilege to exercise sexual agency (Armstrong et al., 2014; Tolman et al., 2015), women of color face structural conditions that constrain their sexual agency. For example, Black women must negotiate stereotypes about Black women's hypersexuality and lack of self-control in the context of their intimate and sexual relationships (Armstrong et al., 2014; Attwood, 2007; Bettie, 2003; D'Emilio and Freedman, 1988; Reid and Bing, 2000; Stephens and Phillips, 2003).

Figure 2.1 is a conceptual map that illustrates how the variables of race/ethnicity, gender, and social class influence the sexual concepts and subjectivities of Black female students that attend PWIs.

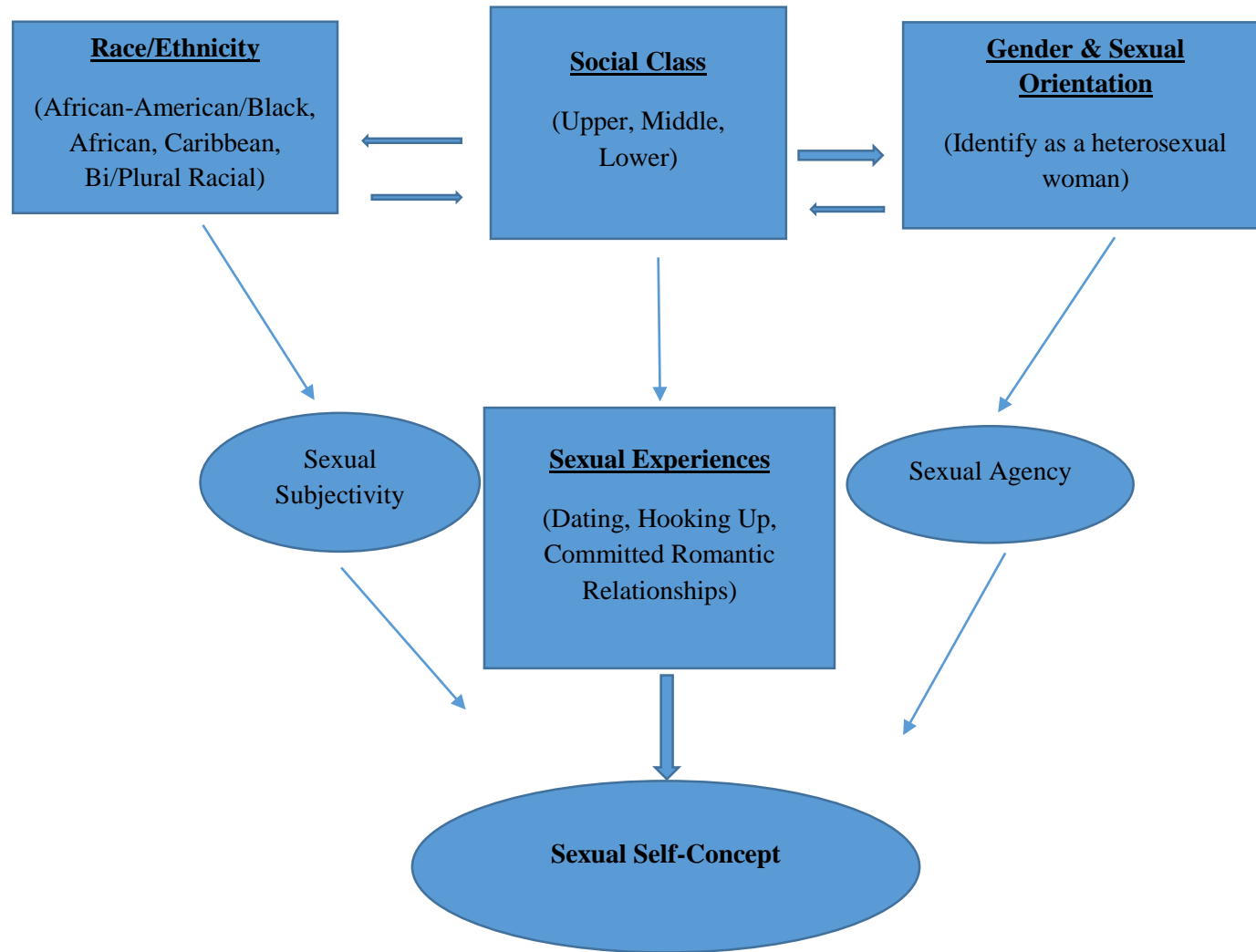


Figure 2.1: Conceptual Map



### ***Intersectionality and the Matrix of Domination***

While there are multiple conceptions of intersectionality (Grzanka, 2014; McCall, 2005), it is widely understood as a theoretical paradigm that explores how race, class, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity are “reciprocally constructing phenomena” that function both as interlocking systems of oppression and as sites of resistance (Collins, 2015; Hooks, 2000). Intersectionality theory emphasizes how such socially constructed categories of difference and inequality collectively interact and how no one category of identity and experience can be prioritized over another; they are experienced simultaneously within historically and culturally specific contexts (Tsouroufli, Rees, Monrouxe, & Sundaram, 2011). Although the term was originally coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1989), intersectional approaches to the study of the social world first emerged in the 19th century when Black women writers and activists such as Anna Julia Cooper, Sojourner Truth, and Mary Church Terrell sought to theorize multiple systems of oppression (i.e., racism, sexism, classism, etc.) as a way to dismantle them (Church Terrell, 1898[2005]; Crenshaw, 1995; Truth, 1851[2005]; Wells-Barnett, 1901[2005]). These intellectuals theorized about interlocking dimensions of race, class, and gender by acknowledging how the categories were interconnected (King, 1988). Single axis analyses ignore the multidimensionality of Black women who cannot separate the categories of their lived experiences. For example, research studies show that Black women align just as intensely with their gender as their race (Gay & Tate, 1998).

Sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (2000) developed the concept of the *matrix of domination* to define how “intersecting oppressions originate, develop, and are contained. . . through schools, housing employment, government, and other social institutions that

regulate the actual patterns of intersecting oppressions the Black women encounter” (246). As a theoretical concept, the matrix of domination exposes how ideals of equity within “social institutions” obscure such underlying systemic inequities of sexism, classism, racism, and heterosexism. These systemic inequalities shape the lived experiences of Black women, and serve as critical sites of “intersecting oppression” (291) and possible spheres of resistance. Collins proposes that Black women can resist systemic marginalization when they “become self-defined and self-determining” (291) via acts of consciousness-raising and actual acts of resistance to transform the frameworks of sites of “intersecting oppression” (291). Collins frames Black women’s spheres of oppression and resistance on the following three interlocking levels: personal biography, interpersonal, and institutional. When theorizing Black women’s modes of resistance, Collins argues that when Black women practice acts of self-definition and position their narratives at the center of inquiry, their narratives expose their interlocking experiences of racial, gendered, and class marginalization. Black women’s narratives also expose the intersecting racial, gendered, and/or class privileges of the individuals that have defined their personhood and positionality based on time, space, and circumstance (i.e., White men, White women, Black men, and other Black women). While marginalized individuals may not have issues identifying their personal experiences of marginalization, they may not recognize how their ideologies and behaviors are influenced by macro factors outside their control and uphold other individuals’ subordination (i.e., White women subordinating Black women, Black women subordinating other Black women).

In order to combat how the matrix of domination operates with the oppressed oppressing others, Collins (2000) urges further analysis of how the sustainability of the

matrix of domination is dependent on a continuum of interpersonal versus systemic mechanisms of domination. Interpersonal mechanisms of domination pertain to “day-to-day practices of how people treat one another” (Collins, 2000, 306). U.S. Black women have historically been framed as “passive, unfortunate recipients of abuse” (306). Such negative framing that reduces the capacity of Black women to be their own problem-solvers, which may adversely impact how they treat themselves and alternatively how others treat Black women. Systemic mechanisms of domination address how “social institutions as interdependent entities have worked to disadvantage Black women” (295). For example, Black women have historically been denied access to the best schools, jobs, and housing which results from a multitude of policies intentionally made to deny Black women their “full citizenship rights” (295).

Black women in particular are systematically subjected to controlling images that deny and minimize their humanity as well as the heterogeneity that exists among Black women. Historically, Black female sexuality has been caricatured by racialized sexual stereotypes informed by White supremacist, capitalist patriarchy (hooks, 2000) and more specifically, the institution of slavery. The four stereotypes that have defined and been used to control Black women’s sexuality in historical context are: the promiscuous Jezebel, the asexual Mammy, the over-reproductive Welfare Queen, and the emasculating Matriarch (Collins, 2000; Morton, 1991). These stereotypes have been reworked and reimagined through contemporary hip-hop culture, producing the following controlling images: the Diva, the Gold Digger, Freak, Dyke, Gangsta Bitch, Sister Savior, Earth Mother, and Baby Mama (Stephens & Few, 2005a). As Collins (2000) notes, these controlling images oversimplify, homogenize, and stigmatize Black women and their

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This study applies Collins' theory of the matrix of domination in an analysis of Black female college students' sexual subjectivities, including their sexual decision making and the strategies they employ to exercise sexual agency. By analytically centering the narratives of this demographic, this study examines how such intersecting oppressions as racism, sexism, and classism are convergently and divergently experienced and actively resisted as these women maintain their physical/sexual, social, and emotional well-being and navigate their campus's sexual culture. First, this study examines how Black female undergraduate students make meaning of the sexual culture of a PWI and more specifically their intersecting experiences of marginalization as racism, classism, and sexism. Second, this study explores the array of strategies used by young adult Black college women to uphold their emotional, physical, and social well-being within their social contexts. The insights yielded from the narrative analysis of the interview data have implications for rethinking dominant approaches to sexual health promotion among young Black women.

CHAPTER 3  
METHODOLOGY

**A. Setting**

This study took place at a flagship PWI located in the Southeastern United States. Table 3.1 illustrates the most current institutional enrollment data from 2014 of full-time undergraduate students disaggregated by race/ethnicity and sex. These statistics illustrate racial/ethnic disparities on a macro level with White students representing the overall majority (17,929; 82.7%) followed by Black students (2,168; 10%); a difference of almost 15,800 more White students than Black /Black students. Among the Black /Black students, there is a gender disparity between female students (1,307; 60.3%) and male students (861; 39.7%); a difference of almost 450 more women than men (Office of Institutional Research and Assessment [OIRA], 2014).

**Table 3.1: Full-time undergraduate students disaggregated by race/ethnicity and sex**

<b>Race /Ethnicity</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Average Age</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Average Age</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Average Age</b>
<b>White</b>	8,197	22	9,732	20	17,929	20
<b>Black or African American</b>	861	22	1,307	23	2,168	23
<b>Hispanic</b>	455	22	519	20	974	22
<b>Asian</b>	291	20	317	20	608	20

Source: Office of Institutional Research and Assessment [OIRA], 2014

## **B. Recruitment and Interviews**

The inclusion criteria for recruitment required that all the research participants identify as having African ancestry and be heterosexual female undergraduates, ages 18-22, enrolled as full-time students during data collection. All of the participants were students at a large public university in the Southeast that is classified as a PWI due to the racial composition of the student body. They also had to report having engaged in consensual, heterosexual sexual activities at some point in their lives. The criteria of engagement in heterosexual sexual activity was due to the fact that the study addressed heterosexual gender standards between men and women. While identifying as cisgender was not a criteria for enrollment in the study, all the study participants identified with the gender they were assigned at birth (i.e., female).

The participants were recruited via digital fliers/announcements distributed on departmental/course listservs and extra-curricular organizational listservs, fliers hung up across the campus in various departmental buildings, and via verbal announcements made by the PI at such campus locations as the horseshoe, Thomas Cooper Library, and the Russell House University Union. These locations were frequently composed of Black female undergraduates, ages 18-22. Whether the participant first learned of the study via the digital and visual announcements/fliers, through a peer, or through direct contact with the PI, they were required to fill out and submit a demographic survey (Appendix A: Demographic Survey) to the PI. If the participant met the study's age, gender, and race/ethnic identification requirements, the PI contacted her by phone or email to schedule an interview. By utilizing maximum variation to recruit participants that differ

in regards to the aforementioned factors, the PI strove to ensure that the study was not biased in perspective and that an array of backgrounds was represented (Patton, 2002).

This study utilized purposive sampling in order to obtain maximum variation on key characteristics within the study target population (Patton, 2002). Purposive sampling was the best sampling strategy to fulfill the study's intent of gaining in-depth information from information-rich cases. This study also utilized snowball sampling by asking the recruited research participants, prior to their interview, if they had any peers who would fit the criteria of the study and had insight to offer the study (Patton).

The principal methodology for this qualitative study was 20 individual in-depth interviews that lasted on average from 60 minutes to 90 minutes. Individual in-depth interviews were chosen because of the sensitivity of this research topic and the study's goal of making sure that the participants felt comfortable sharing their narratives in a non-judgmental environment. In this study, the interview guide questions (see Appendix B: Interview Guide) were written to encourage the respondents to reflect on their sexual agency and sexual subjectivity. Their responses to questions about how they viewed themselves within and outside of the sexual culture of the university informed how they defined sexual activity and safer sex practices. The interview questions were ultimately intended to explore how the respondents' multi-layered identities influenced their ideologies regarding their engagement in sexual activities in their collegiate setting.

Of the 20 research participants interviewed, the first two participants received a pilot run of the interview guide to ensure that the questions were procuring the responses needed to answer the research questions, and ensure that the additional research participants would understand the questions effectively. All the research participants

received a \$15 incentive for their participation in the interviews. The PI, a Nigerian American graduate student, interviewed all the participants. This study was approved by the University of South Carolina's Institutional Review Board.

### **C. Measurement**

The questions asked in the individual in-depth interviews were used to explore the following research concepts: 1. Socio-demographic and socio-economic factors that underscore one's engagement in sexual activity, 2. Gendered ideologies regarding hooking up and dating relations, 3. Sexual motivations, 4. Gender double standards, 5. Sexual subjectivity, and 6. Communication with family, peers, and/or other referent individuals regarding one's sexual behaviors (See Figure 1.3). The principal topics that were accounted for in the interview questions were: sexual self-concept (sexual openness, sexual esteem, and sexual anxiety) (Hensel et al., 2011), and sexual motives (approach motivated versus avoidance motivated) (Impett & Tolman, 2006). Some additional socio-demographic factors and topics that were accounted for are: early sexual experiences, safe sex practices (condom use, STI testing), and perceived gender expectations and double standards.

### **D. Participants**

Table 3.2 contains data on the demographic makeup of the participants interviewed. The PI assigned each participant a pseudonym in order to protect their identity (See Table 3.2). The majority of the participants identified their home state as South Carolina (76.2%). The majority of the participants were age 20 years old (23.8%) and 19 years old (23.8%). The majority of the participants reported their class level as sophomore (33.3%), followed by senior (28.6%), junior (23.8%), and freshman (14.3%)



respectively. The majority of the participants reported their socio-economic status (SES) as working class (WC) (42.9%), followed by middle class (MC) (28.6%) and upper middle class (UMC) (28.6%). While the study inclusion criteria was open to Black female students, ages 18-22, the majority of the study participants ages ranged from 18-22, with only one participant identifying as 23 and no respondents identifying as 24.

Regarding the race/ethnicity criteria, this study used the race/ethnicity typology of sociologists Sandra S. Smith and Mignon R. Moore (2000). This study was inclusive of participants who identified as: 1. Monoracial, meaning they identify with one racial heritage that has African ancestry (Black /African American/African, etc.), 2. Bi-racial, meaning they identify as Black and White or Black and another racial heritage, or 3. Ethnic identified, meaning they identify with a particular ethnicity, religion, and/or language of the African diaspora (Smith and Moore, 2000). This study defines the African diaspora by the dominant trade posts of the transatlantic slave trade (i.e., Africa, the Caribbean, North America, and Europe). While the majority of participants identified as Black and/or African American, a few of the participants identified as bi-/multi-racial (i.e., Afro-Latina, Black and White, etc.), or by an ethnic/national identity (i.e., Nigerian, Jamaican, Liberian, etc.).

The SES of the research participants was measured via questions on the demographic survey that ascertained their guardian(s) occupation(s) and highest educational attainment. Social class was also measured by questions that determined if the respondent received work study and/or a federal Pell grant. This study used the SES typology established by Hamilton and Armstrong (2009) in their analysis of how social class impacts the sexual ideologies and behaviors of college women. In this study,

participants were classified as having an upper middle class (UMC) SES if they did not receive a Pell grant and work study. Parent(s) educational attainment was not included in the UMC measurement because some of the participants did not receive the Pell Grant and work study, but their parent(s) educational level was below a bachelor's degree. Participants that received the Pell grant and/or had work study and their parent(s) highest educational attainment was a bachelor's degree or higher, were classified as having a middle class (MC) SES. Participants that received the Pell grant and/or work study and their parent (s) highest educational attainment was below a bachelor's degree was identified as having a working class (WC) SES.

**Table 3.2: Research Participants Demographic Backgrounds**

Participant Name	Age	Major	Home state	Race/Ethnicity	Class Level	SES
1: Jessica	20	Public Health	GA	Black	Senior	UMC
2: Sharon	23	Retail	NC	Black	Senior	WC
3. Helen	20	Public Health	SC	Black (1st generation Nigerian)	Junior	MC
4. Cindy	22	Marketing	SC	Black	Senior	WC
5. Erin	20	Public Health	SC	Black and Caucasian	Junior	UMC
6. Dylan	22	Public Health	SC	Jamaican	Junior	WC
7.Allison	19	Psychology	SC	African American	Sophomore	WC
8. Candace	18	Public Health	SC	Black	Sophomore	MC
9. Bonni	22	Psychology	GA	African American	Sophomore	WC
10. Nancy	22	Media Arts	SC	African American/Panamanian	Senior	WC
11. Sandra	20	Biology	SC	Black /Latina	Senior	UMC
12. Alexandra	19	Broadcast Journalism	NY	American/Black /African (Liberia & Senegal)	Sophomore	MC
13.Courtney	19	Accounting/Finance	SC	Black /African American	Sophomore	UMC
14. Kate	18	Nursing	SC	Black	Freshman	UMC
15.Maxine	19	Accounting	SC	African American	Sophomore	MC

16. Colette	18	Women's and Gender Studies	SC	Black	Freshman	WC
17. Sage	19	Public Relations	GA	African American	Sophomore	UMC
18. Mallory	18	Marketing	SC	African American	Freshman	MC
19. Jordan	20	Exercise Science	SC	African American	Junior	WC
20. Undrea	20	Chemistry	SC	African American, West Indian	Senior	MC
20. Miranda	20	Psychology	SC	Black /African American	Junior	WC

### E. Data Collection

Month	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A
Human Subjects Approval	■								
Recruit Participants		■	■						
Individual In-depth Interviews		■	■						
Transcribing				■	■	■	■		
Data Analysis									
Writing of Results							■	■	
Master's Thesis Defense									■

**Figure: 3.1 Gantt Chart**

Figure 3.1 is a Gantt chart that illustrates the timeline for this study's progression. Recruitment of study participants took place over two months. Throughout the recruitment and interview process, the PI collected the audio data for analysis. Five months were allocated to transcribe the audio data. The transcriptions were put into ATLAS.ti for coding and then analyzed for common and divergent themes and concepts. After five months of transcribing and thematically coding the data, the PI wrote the final report. The PI intends on submitting manuscripts based on her study to peer-reviewed journals and conferences in order to disseminate the findings to larger audiences.

In order to ensure the professional and ethical basis of this research, at the beginning of the interview appointment, the research participants were required to undergo an informed consent process. Prior to the participant signing the informed consent form, the PI verbally explained the participant's rights as a participant

emphasizing that their responses would be kept confidential and their ability to withdraw at any time during the study. The PI also explained how their participation was voluntary and how their responses would only be used for the purposes of the study. Each participant received an identification number in order to protect her identity. Their audio responses and interview transcriptions were saved in a password-secure database that could only be accessed by the PI, which was identifiable only by an identification number.

#### **F. Data Analysis and Theory Construction**

All of the interviews were audio recorded. This study utilized theoretical sampling in order to take advantage of “opportunities to develop concepts in terms of their properties and dimensions, uncover variations, and identify relationships between concepts” (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, 143). 15 of the 20 interviews were transcribed verbatim and the remaining interviews were analyzed using memoing, noting specific commentary that addressed the study’s themes and questions. Only 15 interviews were transcribed verbatim because data saturation had been reached where no new themes or concepts were emerging, and the transcribed data revealed nuanced convergent and divergent relations that sufficiently answered the research questions (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). The PI was the only coder of the data. The audio recordings and transcriptions were saved within a password secure database that only the PI could access, and were identifiable only by an identification number created by the PI.

The transcriptions were coded using ATLAS.ti. This study utilized a modified approach to grounded theory (GT), wherein researchers enter the situation of inquiry with questions as opposed to hypotheses based on prior research, and those questions are modified throughout the research process so that the data reflexively informs the project

(Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This study's approach to GT is described as 'modified' because the PI approached the coding process with a few themes she was interested in addressing based on her analysis of related literature, and recurring themes that emerged during the interview and transcription processes. Despite her preconceived ideas about certain convergent and divergent themes, she still used open coding consistent with GT to allow new themes to emerge during the coding of the data. As such, this qualitative study took an emic approach where in the researcher attempted to let the participants' commentary dominantly inform the themes and concepts that emerged (Patton, 2002). This study used the participants' narratives to contribute to theory construction about the sexualities of Black heterosexual female college students, ages 18-22, who attend PWIs.

Data analysis focused on how participants made meaning of their lived experiences in the context of the narratives generated during the interviews (Polkinghorne, 1988). How the participants talk about their perceptions of and experiences with sexuality reveal how they see themselves within a particular context and, in turn, how they want to be perceived. Focusing on such narratives allows for a greater understanding of participants' sexual self-concepts, their sexual subjectivities, and the extent to which they exercise sexual agency (cf. Barcelos and Gubrium, 2014). Often referred to as 'narrative inquiry,' this modified approach to grounded theory is particularly useful for studies that seek to improve the framing and/or understanding of an ambiguous or developing construct and for exposing how macro-level social factors influence the well-being of persons at and beyond the intrapersonal level (Polkinghorne, 1988).

## CHAPTER 4

### CONTEXUALIZING MULTILAYERED SEXUAL SUBJECTIVITIES OF HETEROSEXUAL BLACK FEMALE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION IN THE SOUTH<sup>1</sup>

#### **Introduction**

Emerging adulthood is the developmental period that occurs between the ages of 18 to 24 years (Arnett, 2000). This developmental period is marked by the transition from adolescence to adulthood when individuals attain a greater cognizance of their identity (Arnett, 2004), engage in sexual inquiry (Reid, 2013; Schulenberg & Maggs, 2002), and partake in elevated risky health behaviors (i.e., condomless sex, substance use) (Shifren, Furnham, & Bauserman, 2003). With increased engagement in sexual exploration, emerging adults, specifically Black young adults, can face adverse health outcomes. Black youth, ages 13 to 24, represent 57% of HIV incidence in the United States. Among men ages 13 to 24, Black men have higher rates of HIV infection than any other race/ethnicity. Most Black young women, ages 13 to 24, contract HIV through heterosexual contact (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2014). In 2010, about 86% of young women ages 13 to 24 contracted HIV through heterosexual contact in the United States. Of that 86%, Black women had the highest incidence among women of all races (CDC, 2012). The risk of contracting HIV is heightened by the fact that

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<sup>1</sup> Anakaraonye, A., Mann, E.S., Annang Ingram, L., Henderson-Platt, A. To be submitted to *Culture, Health, and Sexuality*.

African Americans are more likely to have sexual relations with other African Americans (CDC, 2014). Despite such individual risk behaviors as sex without a condom or multiple concurrent sexual partners, the odds of contracting an STI increase with each sexual encounter for African Americans, particularly among Black women (CDC, 2014).

The data on disproportionately higher rates of HIV/AIDS and STIs among Black young adults are the most commonly reported information about their sexual health practices and outcomes; what we know less about are Black college students' sexualities. Even less is known about how they make sense of and experience their sexualities and the contextual factors that shape their individual sexual health outcomes. As others have already documented (e.g., Geronimus and Thompson, 2004), there is an overemphasis on both cultural and individualistic explanations for sexual health disparities among racial-ethnic minorities in public health research. Such work neglects social determinants and related contextual factors that inform the sexual health behaviors and outcomes of people of color in general and African Americans in particular.

While the gender and racial inequalities present in HIV/AIDS and STI statistics call for continued public health efforts regarding sexual health education and prevention, the agentic efforts of Black young adults to protect their physical/sexual, emotional, and social well-being should not be overlooked. The fact that there is minimal information about how STI infection rates vary by social class among Black college students is also problematic and such information can provide greater insight for prevention strategies. This study is intended to fill this gap by shedding light on the strategies Black female college students who attend a predominantly White institution of higher education (PWI)

use to avoid negative sexual and reproductive health outcomes, such as STIs and unintended pregnancy.

Using an intersectional theoretical framework, this paper pushes against the dominant deficit approach to Black women's sexual health that focuses almost exclusively on their sexual 'risk-taking' behavior, which is widely used in public health research to analyze the sexual practices of Black communities. Instead, this paper adopts an asset-based approach in order to uncover how Black female college students, ages 18-22, protect themselves emotionally, physically, and socially from intersecting forms of marginalization (i.e., racism, sexism, and classism). This study recognizes the significance of literature that provides commentary on sexual 'risk-taking' in the Black community, particularly those pertaining to STI prevention interventions, and therefore, does not intend to diminish the impact of interventions aimed at reducing STI 'risk behavior,' specifically among Black women who are disproportionately impacted by STIs. However, focusing exclusively on 'risk' in analyses of Black women's sexual health disparities pathologizes Black communities. Furthermore, it is unfair and potentially damaging to frame the sexual narratives and practices of Black women as homogenous when the sexual subjectivities of this population have been historically marginalized through a voyeuristic lens in which they are rendered both hyper visible *and* invisible.

This exploratory, qualitative study answers the following research questions:

1. How do Black female college students, ages 18-22, attending a PWI make sense of the sexual culture on their campus?



2. What protective strategies do these young women employ to navigate the sexual culture of the PWI in order to achieve or maintain their physical, emotional, and social well-being?

By placing the narratives of Black female college students at the center of analysis, this study seeks to contribute to Black feminist scholarship that recognizes the multiplicity of Black women's personhood and lived experiences (Collins 2000, 2004).

After an extensive literature review that addresses concepts, theories, terminology and previous studies that have informed this study, the research design is discussed. The research design is shaped by an intersectional framework that accounts for the multilayered factors that shape the sexual subjectivities and sexual agency of heterosexual Black female college students, ages 18 through 22, who attend a PWI in the South. After discussing the research design, the results produced as a result of narrative inquiry are presented. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications and limitations of the study for future research and health promotion practices.

### **Literature Review**

#### ***The Sexual Cultures of College Campuses***

The social scientific scholarship on the sexual cultures of college settings has largely focused on gender and its relationship to social class (Armstrong, Hamilton, and Sweeney, 2006; Boswell and Spade, 1996; Hamilton and Armstrong, 2013; Martin and Hummer, 1989). Most research in this domain has focused on Whites and minimal research has addressed how intersectional inequalities pertaining to race, class, and gender may influence young Black college students' sexual behaviors; particularly Black young women. Sanday's (1996) groundbreaking qualitative research on rape culture on

college campuses addressed how rape perpetuates unequal, separatist gender norms. These gender norms marginalize women who are sexually objectified by men who “struggle to retain or gain control of their environment” (194). She found that men engage in practices of acquaintance rape in order to assert their dominance over women and prove their superiority to other men (Sanday, 1996).

More recently, Hamilton and Armstrong (2013) conducted a longitudinal ethnographic study of college women’s romantic and sexual experiences at PWI. They found that while heterosexual women face gender inequalities in their engagement in hookups and relationships, the romantic experiences of college women also vary by social class. Hamilton and Armstrong (2013) established a typology of the college women they studied based on social class between the economically privileged and the less privileged. Regarding romantic ideologies/behaviors, the more privileged women were more likely to engage in hookups because it aligned more with their class expectations of abstaining from any distractions that may obstruct their self-development and academic achievement during college. While hookups aligned with the more privileged group’s class ideologies, hooking up caused gender double standards to arise regarding women abstaining from non-romantic sex and the need for women to be in committed romantic relationships – what Hamilton and Armstrong (2009) define as “the relational imperative” (593). Hookups also produced such negative effects as personal shame, stigma from peers, and increased male control over the terms of the hookup.

Conversely, hookups were less appealing to less privileged women who brought class-based ideologies about romance and expressions of sexuality from their communities that were different from those that predominate in college. The less

privileged participants typically transitioned to adulthood earlier than the more privileged women, and did not see committed romantic relationships as a barrier to their educational and professional development (Hamilton & Armstrong, 2009). Based on the personal development culture of college, the less privileged women were forced to choose between abandoning the familiar logic of their hometowns or adopting the privileged culture of their environment. The less privileged were also faced with delaying their transition to adulthood through marriage and parenthood (Hamilton & Armstrong, 2009).

Both Sanday (1996) and Hamilton and Armstrong (2013) illuminate important dynamics about how college settings can facilitate harmful sexual cultures that promote male sexual violence against women and reproduce class inequalities; however, both studies focused almost entirely on White populations. Neither study attends to the impact of such sexual cultures on Black populations and more specifically to how Black female college students negotiate the sexual cultures in college settings.

In a more robustly intersectional analysis that attended to Black college students' heterosexual norms and interactions, Ray et al. (2010) investigated how normative institutional arrangements facilitated Black and White fraternity men's interpersonal relations with women at a PWI. Using a mixed methods approach, Ray et al. (2010) found that the racial differences in how men in fraternities interacted with women was largely influenced by the living arrangements and the racial make-up of the broader community in which the university was located. These arrangements tended to privilege White men and disadvantage Black men. Due to the small Black community at the PWI, the Black fraternity men felt that they were hyper visible in the majority White population, in which their treatment of their romantic partners was associated with their

high social status and reputation. Conversely, the Black fraternity men were able to exhibit more intimacy and romanticism with their romantic partners due to their off-campus living arrangements as opposed to the non-private, on-campus fraternity houses of mainly White fraternity men. While Ray et al.'s work sheds light on how normative institutional arrangements influence the raced and classed sexual cultures of college campuses, it does not offer commentary on how Black women college students experience the sexual cultures of a PWI and in turn, how that may influence their sexual decision making.

### ***Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) and Black students***

The 4-year college/university setting is a classed structure where students aim to preserve and/or enhance their economic status (Hamilton and Armstrong, 2009). This setting promotes an imperative of personal development, achievement, and improvement. The focus on the self that college promotes encourages students to delay marriage and parenthood until they have completed their education and established a career (Hamilton and Armstrong, 2009). This dominant life course strategy, which is prevalent among White, middle-class and affluent people, can be problematic for students of color, especially for those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. The university setting provides an ideal environment to explore the diverse beliefs and experiences of Black female students at PWI. This space provides Black students from an array of geographic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds the opportunity to interact with each other as peers for protracted periods of time (Smith & Moore, 2000).

At PWIs, socio-economic stratification influences Black students' experiences during their time in college. Ethnic minority students from lower socioeconomic

backgrounds that attend PWIs are more likely to experience and/or perceive greater isolation and alienation, higher dropout rates, and less academic preparation in high school (Loo & Rolison, 1986; Magner, 1988). Black students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may also make substantial familial, personal, and social changes in their attendance at PWI (D'Augelli and Hershberger, 1993). Many Black students from lower socioeconomic communities come from ethnic communities and high schools in which their race/ethnic group was in the majority and must deal with being in the minority on their respective college campus. Regardless of social class or gender, Black students will experience racism during college at PWI (D'Augelli and Hershberger, 1993).

For students, ages 18 to 24, who are enrolled in college or graduate school, there is a lower percentage of men to women (39:47). This gender inequality of men to women has been observed for Blacks (31:43), Whites (43:51), Hispanics (26:36), and other racial/ethnic groups (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Since 1988, the number of women enrolled in post-baccalaureate degree programs has surpassed men. Between 2001 and 2011, the number of full-time female post-baccalaureate students increased by 56% in comparison to males (36 percent) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). While the majority of Black students obtaining post-baccalaureate and graduate education attend PWIs, most research exploring the sexual behaviors and STI risks for Black college students is taken from students that attend HBCUs (Bazargan, Kelly, Stein, Husaini, & Bazargan, 2000; Berkel, N.Furlong, Hickman, & Blue, 2005; Burns & Dillon, 2005; Chng, Carlon, & Toyne, 2006; Meilman, Presley, & Cashin, 1995; Sandelowski, 2006). Even though the information collected from HBCUs provides

critical behavioral and ideological information for Black students that attend HBCUs, the data is not generalizable to Black students that attend PWIs (Shegog et al., 2012).

In addition to gender inequalities within the realm of education and such systemic inequalities as high rates of incarceration and employment disparities for Black men (Alexander, 2010), the sexual self-concepts and sexual subjectivities of Black female young adults that attend PWIs are also influenced by heterosexual double standards. Empirical research has shown that Black college women that attend PWIs are more likely to engage in risky sexual behavior than Black college students at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), because the pool of eligible Black men is more scarce which may increase anxieties about the availability of suitable males (Bynum, 2001). These gender double standards encourage and facilitate Black men to affirm their sexualities by having pre-marital sexual relations and relations outside their committed romantic relationships (Fullilove et al., 1993), and may also influence Black women to conceal risky sexual behavior they perceive as necessary to obtain a romantic partner (Stephens & Phillips, 2005).

### ***Young Women's Subjectivity and Sexual Agency***

Anglo-American feminist scholars began studying sexual agency and sexual subjectivity in the 1970s; their subjects were predominantly adult women (Schalet, 2010). Sexual subjectivity refers to an individual's "sense of oneself as a sexual person who is entitled to have sexual feelings, and to make active decisions about sexual behavior" (Tolman, 2002, 5-6). The scholarship on sexual subjectivity focused on women's understanding of their gendered relationships, awareness of their internal bodily functions, and acknowledgement of sexual desire (Schalet, 2010). More recently, scholars

have theorized sexual agency as a dimension of sexual subjectivity, which refers to the actions an individual takes with a romantic partner(s). Both terms refer to an individual's sexual cognizance, appreciation of sexual desire and pleasure, experiences of control in sexual relationships, and the ability of the individual to envision herself as the subject, as opposed to the object, of sexual acts (Schalet, 2010). How a young woman sees herself as a sexual being, as agentic, passive, or some combination therein, may influence her sexual practices; conversely, her sexual behaviors may shape how she comes to see herself as a sexual being (Houlihan et al., 2008).

Moreover, the development of a sexual self-concept is a normative and multi-faceted part of adolescence that extends into young adulthood and accounts for the positive and negative sentiments an individual has towards herself as a sexual being (Chilman, 1983; Gagnon & Simon, 1973; Longmore, 1998). One's sexual self-concept is theorized to comprise three dimensions: sexual openness, sexual esteem, and sexual anxiety (Hensel, Fortenberry, O'Sullivan, & Orr, 2011). Sexual openness denotes an individual's acknowledgement of sexual arousal and pleasure and the efficacy to pursue select sexual behaviors (Horne & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2005; Nicholson, 1994). Sexual esteem involves positive assessments of one's sexuality (Snell, 1998), sexual feelings and behaviors (Zeanah & Schwartz, 1996), and one's body within the sphere of sex (Horne & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2005). Lastly, sexual anxiety relates to negative evaluations of one's sex life, and such emotions as sexual tension, apprehension, and discomfort (Snell, 1998).

A woman's sexual self-concept and sexual subjectivity is especially shaped as she chooses to participate in and/or abstain from such intimate behaviors as dating and sexual activity. Her ideologies regarding these behaviors are shaped by such factors as her socio-

economic status and gendered ideologies prior to her matriculation to college and may be altered, voluntarily or involuntarily, during her tenure in college.

While some women are empowered by White and/or class privilege to exercise sexual agency (Armstrong et al., 2014; Tolman et al., 2015), women of color face structural conditions that constrain their sexual agency. For example, Black women must negotiate stereotypes about Black women's hypersexuality and lack of self-control in the context of their intimate and sexual relationships (Armstrong et al., 2014; Attwood, 2007; Bettie, 2003; D'Emilio and Freedman, 1988; Reid and Bing, 2000; Stephens and Phillips, 2003).

### ***Intersectionality and the Matrix of Domination***

While there are multiple conceptions of intersectionality (Grzanka, 2014; McCall, 2005), it is widely understood as a theoretical paradigm that explores how race, class, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity are "reciprocally constructing phenomena" that function both as interlocking systems of oppression and as sites of resistance (Collins, 2015; Hooks, 2000). Intersectionality theory emphasizes how such socially constructed categories of difference and inequality collectively interact and how no one category of identity and experience can be prioritized over another; they are experienced simultaneously within historically and culturally specific contexts (Tsouroufli, Rees, Monrouxe, & Sundaram, 2011). Although the term was originally coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1989), intersectional approaches to the study of the social world first emerged in the 19th century when Black women writers and activists such as Anna Julia Cooper, Sojourner Truth, and Mary Church Terrell sought to theorize multiple systems of oppression (i.e., racism, sexism, classism, etc.) as a way to dismantle them



(Church Terrell, 1898[2005]; Crenshaw, 1995; Truth, 1851[2005]; Wells-Barnett, 1901[2005]). These intellectuals theorized about interlocking dimensions of race, class, and gender by acknowledging how the categories were interconnected (King, 1988). Single axis analyses ignore the multidimensionality of Black women who cannot separate the categories of their lived experiences. For example, research studies show that Black women align just as intensely with their gender as their race (Gay & Tate, 1998).

Sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (2000) developed the concept of the *matrix of domination* to define how “intersecting oppressions originate, develop, and are contained. . . through schools, housing employment, government, and other social institutions that regulate the actual patterns of intersecting oppressions the Black women encounter” (246). As a theoretical concept, the matrix of domination exposes how ideals of equity within “social institutions” obscure such underlying systemic inequities of sexism, classism, racism, and heterosexism. These systemic inequalities shape the lived experiences of Black women, and serve as critical sites of “intersecting oppression” (291) and possible spheres of resistance. Collins proposes that Black women can resist systemic marginalization when they “become self-defined and self-determining” (291) via acts of consciousness-raising and actual acts of resistance to transform the frameworks of sites of “intersecting oppression” (291). Collins frames Black women’s spheres of oppression and resistance on the following three interlocking levels: personal biography, interpersonal, and institutional. When theorizing Black women’s modes of resistance, Collins argues that when Black women practice acts of self-definition and position their narratives at the center of inquiry, their narratives expose their interlocking experiences of racial, gendered, and class marginalization. Black women’s narratives also expose the

intersecting racial, gendered, and/or class privileges of the individuals that have defined their personhood and positionality based on time, space, and circumstance (i.e., White men, White women, Black men, and other Black women). While marginalized individuals may not have issues identifying their personal experiences of marginalization, they may not recognize how their ideologies and behaviors are influenced by macro factors outside their control and uphold other individuals' subordination (i.e., White women subordinating Black women, Black women subordinating other Black women).

In order to combat how the matrix of domination operates with the oppressed oppressing others, Collins (2000) urges further analysis of how the sustainability of the matrix of domination is dependent on a continuum of interpersonal versus systemic mechanisms of domination. Interpersonal mechanisms of domination pertain to “day-to-day practices of how people treat one another” (Collins, 2000, 306). U.S. Black women have historically been framed as “passive, unfortunate recipients of abuse” (306). Such negative framing that reduces the capacity of Black women to be their own problem-solvers, which may adversely impact how they treat themselves and alternatively how others treat Black women. Systemic mechanisms of domination address how “social institutions as interdependent entities have worked to disadvantage Black women” (295). For example, Black women have historically been denied access to the best schools, jobs, and housing which results from a multitude of policies intentionally made to deny Black women their “full citizenship rights” (295).

Black women in particular are systematically subjected to controlling images that deny and minimize their humanity as well as the heterogeneity that exists among Black women. Historically, Black female sexuality has been caricatured by racialized sexual

stereotypes informed by White supremacist, capitalist patriarchy (hooks, 2000) and more specifically, the institution of slavery. The four stereotypes that have defined and been used to control Black women's sexuality in historical context are: the promiscuous Jezebel, the asexual Mammy, the over-reproductive Welfare Queen, and the emasculating Matriarch (Collins, 2000; Morton, 1991). These stereotypes have been reworked and reimagined through contemporary hip-hop culture, producing the following controlling images: the Diva, the Gold Digger, Freak, Dyke, Gangsta Bitch, Sister Savior, Earth Mother, and Baby Mama (Stephens & Few, 2005a). As Collins (2000) notes, these controlling images oversimplify, homogenize, and stigmatize Black women and their sexualities. These controlling images also deprive Black women of their autonomy and capacity to be the primary authors of their sexual self-concepts and their sexual health.

This study applies Collins' theory of the matrix of domination in an analysis of Black female college students' sexual subjectivities, including their sexual decision making and the strategies they employ to exercise sexual agency. By analytically centering the narratives of this demographic, this study examines how such intersecting oppressions as racism, sexism, and classism are convergently and divergently experienced and actively resisted as these women maintain their physical/sexual, social, and emotional well-being and navigate their campus's sexual culture. First, this study examines how Black female undergraduate students make meaning of the sexual culture of a PWI and more specifically their intersecting experiences of marginalization as racism, classism, and sexism. Second, this study explores the array of strategies used by young adult Black college women to uphold their emotional, physical, and social well-being within their social contexts. The insights yielded from the narrative analysis of the

interview data have implications for rethinking dominant approaches to sexual health promotion among young Black women.

## **Methodology**

### **1. Setting**

This study took place at a flagship PWI located in the Southeastern United States. Table 3.1 illustrates the most current institutional enrollment data from 2014 of full-time undergraduate students disaggregated by race/ethnicity and sex. These statistics illustrate racial/ethnic disparities on a macro level with White students representing the overall majority (17,929; 82.7%) followed by Black students (2,168; 10%); a difference of almost 15,800 more White students than Black /Black students. Among the Black /Black students, there is a gender disparity between female students (1,307; 60.3%) and male students (861; 39.7%); a difference of almost 450 more women than men (Office of Institutional Research and Assessment [OIRA], 2014).

**Table 3.1: Full-time undergraduate students disaggregated by race/ethnicity and sex**

<b>Race /Ethnicity</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Average Age</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Average Age</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Average Age</b>
<b>White</b>	8,197	22	9,732	20	17,929	20
<b>Black or African American</b>	861	22	1,307	23	2,168	23
<b>Hispanic</b>	455	22	519	20	974	22
<b>Asian</b>	291	20	317	20	608	20

Source: Office of Institutional Research and Assessment [OIRA], 2014

### **B. Recruitment and Interviews**

The inclusion criteria for recruitment required that all the research participants identify as having African ancestry and be heterosexual female undergraduates, ages 18-

22, enrolled as full-time students during data collection. All of the participants were students at a large public university in the Southeast that is classified as a PWI due to the racial composition of the student body. They also had to report having engaged in consensual, heterosexual sexual activities at some point in their lives. The criteria of engagement in heterosexual sexual activity was due to the fact that the study addressed heterosexual gender standards between men and women. While identifying as cisgender was not a criteria for enrollment in the study, all the study participants identified with the gender they were assigned at birth (i.e., female).

The participants were recruited via digital fliers/announcements distributed on departmental/course listservs and extra-curricular organizational listservs, fliers hung up across the campus in various departmental buildings, and via verbal announcements made by the PI at such campus locations as the horseshoe, Thomas Cooper Library, and the Russell House University Union. These locations were frequently composed of Black female undergraduates, ages 18-22. Whether the participant first learned of the study via the digital and visual announcements/fliers, through a peer, or through direct contact with the PI, they were required to fill out and submit a demographic survey (Appendix A: Demographic Survey) to the PI. If the participant met the study's age, gender, and race/ethnic identification requirements, the PI contacted her by via phone or email to schedule an interview. By utilizing maximum variation to recruit participants that differ in regards to the aforementioned factors, the PI strove to ensure that the study was not biased in perspective and that an array of backgrounds was represented (Patton, 2002).

This study utilized purposive sampling in order to obtain maximum variation on key characteristics within the study target population (Patton, 2002). Purposive sampling

was the best sampling strategy to fulfill the study's intent of gaining in-depth information from information-rich cases. This study also utilized snowball sampling by asking the recruited research participants, prior to their interview, if they had any peers who would fit the criteria of the study and had insight to offer the study (Patton).

The principal methodology for this qualitative study was 20 individual in-depth interviews that lasted on average from 60 minutes to 90 minutes. Individual in-depth interviews were chosen because of the sensitivity of this research topic and the study's goal of making sure that the participants felt comfortable sharing their narratives in a non-judgmental environment. In this study, the interview guide questions (see Appendix B: Interview Guide) were written to encourage the respondents to reflect on their sexual agency and sexual subjectivity. Their responses to questions about how they viewed themselves within and outside of the sexual culture of the university informed how they defined sexual activity and safer sex practices. The interview questions were ultimately intended to explore how the respondents' multi-layered identities influenced their ideologies regarding their engagement in sexual activities in their collegiate setting.

Of the 20 research participants interviewed, the first two participants received a pilot run of the interview guide to ensure that the questions were procuring the responses needed to answer the research questions, and ensure that the additional research participants would understand the questions effectively. All the research participants received a \$15 incentive for their participation in the interviews. The PI, a Nigerian American graduate student, interviewed all the participants. This study was approved by the University of South Carolina's Institutional Review Board.

### **C. Measurement**

The questions asked in the individual in-depth interviews were used to explore the following research concepts: 1. Socio-demographic and socio-economic factors that underscore one's engagement in sexual activity, 2. Gendered ideologies regarding hooking up and dating relations, 3. Sexual motivations, 4. Gender double standards, 5. Sexual subjectivity, and 6. Communication with family, peers, and/or other referent individuals regarding one's sexual behaviors (See Figure 1.3). The principal topics that were accounted for in the interview questions were: sexual self-concept (sexual openness, sexual esteem, and sexual anxiety) (Hensel et al., 2011), and sexual motives (approach motivated versus avoidance motivated) (Impett & Tolman, 2006). Some additional socio-demographic factors and topics that were accounted for are: early sexual experiences, safe sex practices (condom use, STI testing), and perceived gender expectations and double standards.

#### **D. Participants**

Table 3.2 contains data on the demographic makeup of the participants interviewed. The PI assigned each participant a pseudonym in order to protect their identity (See Table 3.2). The majority of the participants identified their home state as South Carolina (76.2%). The majority of the participants were age 20 years old (23.8%) and 19 years old (23.8%). The majority of the participants reported their class level as sophomore (33.3%), followed by senior (28.6%), junior (23.8%), and freshman (14.3%) respectively. The majority of the participants reported their socio-economic status (SES) as working class (WC) (42.9%), followed by middle class (MC) (28.6%) and upper middle class (UMC) (28.6%). While the study inclusion criteria was open to Black

female students, ages 18-22, the majority of the study participants ages ranged from 18-22, with only one participant identifying as 23 and no respondents identifying as 24.

Regarding the race/ethnicity criteria, this study used the race/ethnicity typology of sociologists Sandra S. Smith and Mignon R. Moore (2000). This study was inclusive of participants who identified as: 1. Monoracial, meaning they identify with one racial heritage that has African ancestry (Black /African American/African, etc.), 2. Bi-racial, meaning they identify as Black and White or Black and another racial heritage, or 3. Ethnic identified, meaning they identify with a particular ethnicity, religion, and/or language of the African diaspora (Smith and Moore, 2000). This study defines the African diaspora by the dominant trade posts of the transatlantic slave trade (i.e., Africa, the Caribbean, North America, and Europe). While the majority of participants identified as Black and/or African American, a few of the participants identified as bi-/multi-racial (i.e., Afro-Latina, Black and White, etc.) or by an ethnic/national identity (i.e., Nigerian, Jamaican, Liberian, etc.).

The SES of the research participants was measured via questions on the demographic survey that ascertained their guardian(s) occupation(s) and highest educational attainment. Social class was also measured by questions that determined if the respondent received work study and/or a federal Pell grant. This study used the SES typology established by Hamilton and Armstrong (2009) in their analysis of how social class impacts the sexual ideologies and behaviors of college women. In this study, participants were classified as having an upper middle class (UMC) SES if they did not receive a Pell grant and work study. Parent(s) educational attainment was not included in the UMC measurement because some of the participants did not receive the Pell Grant



and work study, but their parent(s) educational level was below a bachelor's degree.

Participants that received the Pell grant and/or had work study and their parent(s) highest educational attainment was a bachelor's degree or higher, were classified as having a middle class (MC) SES. Participants that received the Pell grant and/or work study and their parent (s) highest educational attainment was below a bachelor's degree was identified as having a working class (WC) SES.

**Table 3.2: Research participants Demographic Backgrounds**

Participant Name	Age	Major	Home state	Race/Ethnicity	Class Level	SES
1: Jessica	20	Public Health	GA	Black	Senior	UMC
2: Sharon	23	Retail	NC	Black	Senior	WC
3. Helen	20	Public Health	SC	Black (1st generation Nigerian)	Junior	MC
4. Cindy	22	Marketing	SC	Black	Senior	WC
5. Erin	20	Public Health	SC	Black and Caucasian	Junior	UMC
6. Dylan	22	Public Health	SC	Jamaican	Junior	WC
7.Allison	19	Psychology	SC	African American	Sophomore	WC
8. Candace	18	Public Health	SC	Black	Sophomore	MC
9. Bonni	22	Psychology	GA	African American	Sophomore	WC
10. Nancy	22	Media Arts	SC	African American/Panamanian	Senior	WC
11. Sandra	20	Biology	SC	Black /Latina	Senior	UMC
12. Alexandra	19	Broadcast Journalism	NY	American/Black /African (Liberia & Senegal)	Sophomore	MC
13.Courtney	19	Accounting/Finance	SC	Black /African American	Sophomore	UMC
14. Kate	18	Nursing	SC	Black	Freshman	UMC
15.Maxine	19	Accounting	SC	African American	Sophomore	MC
16. Colette	18	Women's and Gender Studies	SC	Black	Freshman	WC
17.Sage	19	Public Relations	GA	African American	Sophomore	UMC
18.Mallory	18	Marketing	SC	African American	Freshman	MC
19. Jordan	20	Exercise Science	SC	African American	Junior	WC

20.Undrea	20	Chemistry	SC	African American, West Indian	Senior	MC
20. Miranda	20	Psychology	SC	Black /African American	Junior	WC

## E. Data Analysis and Theory Construction

All of the interviews were audio recorded. This study utilized theoretical sampling in order to take advantage of “opportunities to develop concepts in terms of their properties and dimensions, uncover variations, and identify relationships between concepts” (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, 143). 15 of the 20 interviews were transcribed verbatim and the remaining interviews were analyzed using memoing, noting specific commentary that addressed the study’s themes and questions. Only 15 interviews were transcribed verbatim because data saturation had been reached where no new themes or concepts were emerging, and the transcribed data revealed nuanced convergent and divergent relations that sufficiently answered the research questions (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). The PI was the only coder of the data. The audio recordings and transcriptions were saved within a password secure database that only the PI could access, and were identifiable only by an identification number created by the PI.

The transcriptions were coded using ATLAS.ti. This study utilized a modified approach to grounded theory (GT), wherein researchers enter the situation of inquiry with questions as opposed to hypotheses based on prior research, and those questions are modified throughout the research process so that the data reflexively informs the project (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This study’s approach to GT is described as ‘modified’ because the PI approached the coding process with a few themes she was interested in addressing based on her analysis of related literature, and recurring themes that emerged during the interview and transcription processes. Despite her preconceived ideas about

certain convergent and divergent themes, she still used open coding consistent with GT to allow new themes to emerge during the coding of the data. As such, this qualitative study took an emic approach where in the researcher attempted to let the participants' commentary dominantly inform the themes and concepts that emerged (Patton, 2002). This study used the participants' narratives to contribute to theory construction about the sexualities of Black heterosexual female college students, ages 18-22, who attend PWIs.

Data analysis focused on how participants made meaning of their lived experiences in the context of the narratives generated during the interviews (Polkinghorne, 1988). How the participants talk about their perceptions of and experiences with sexuality reveal how they see themselves within a particular context and, in turn, how they want to be perceived. Focusing on such narratives allows for a greater understanding of participants' sexual self-concepts, their sexual subjectivities, and the extent to which they exercise sexual agency (cf. Barcelos and Gubrium, 2014). Often referred to as 'narrative inquiry,' this modified approach to grounded theory is particularly useful for studies that seek to improve the framing and/or understanding of an ambiguous or developing construct and for exposing how macro-level social factors influence the well-being of persons at and beyond the intrapersonal level (Polkinghorne, 1988).

## **Results**

During the data analysis process, the PI sought to first analyze the participants' perceptions of the sexual culture on their campus. The following themes were found in regards to their negotiation of the sexual culture: 1. Gender and racial disparities within the entire student body. The second part of the results analyzed the salience of controlling

images of Black women by examining the following themes: 1. Intrapersonal internalization of racial/gendered stereotypes, and 2. White and Black men's fetishization of Black women. The final part of the results analyzed the participants' strategies of sexual protection by examining the following themes: 1. the significance of knowing one's sexual partner, 2. Delaying sexual initiation, and 3. Sexual subjectivity and agency.

### **A. Perceptions of the Sexual Culture of a Southern PWI**

#### ***Gender and Racial Disparities within the Student Body***

The interviews suggest that the study population is hyper aware of gender and racial disparities on their campus. Most of the participants commented that there were more women than men in the Black community at USC; referred to by most of the participants as 'Black USC.' The majority of participants indicated that the gender imbalance within the Black community disadvantaged the Black women more than the Black men being that the Black men had more female intimate partners to choose from within and beyond the Black community. It is also important to note that while not all the participants were solely interested in having intimate relations with Black men, the majority of them preferred Black men as sexual partners and had had the most sexual experience with Black males. Whether engaged in a committed romantic relationship or a hook up, the small Black community at USC, facilitates more individuals having multiple concurrent sexual partners which the members of this community are cognizant of, despite the desire to keep romantic relations private and monogamous.

21-year old Jessica is representative of many of the participants in her explanation of how Black women are disadvantaged by the gender imbalances in the Black community at USC:

*I would just say that hooking up at USC, especially the Black students at USC, is very common, but it's also very secretive. Cause you know since it's like such a tight knit group, um it's kinda like one of those things if you hook up with this person then all of your friends find out, and then they're like I don't really wanna hook up with them too so You're kinda like. . .if you hook up with someone at a very, like your freshmen, sophomore year, then kinda like your junior and senior year you're like. . .not stuck with that person, but just kind of like everyone knows and so if you want to keep having sex with them then you can because you might as well. Everyone knows and none of your friends, nobody's really gonna try and have sex with them either because they know that you've already hooked up with them.*

Jessica provides commentary on how having multiple concurrent partners becomes unavoidable over the course of the standard four years needed to complete one's undergraduate degree. Her use of the adjective "secretive" to describe the sentiments many members of Black USC have in relation to their intimate relations and sexual history, suggests that having concurrent relations is not a desired behavior but ultimately unavoidable due to the small size of the Black community. While Jessica states that hooking up with a guy on-campus does not make the individuals "stuck with" each other, she does emphasize how a person might as well be "stuck with" their previous sexual partners throughout their undergraduate tenure. Because many members of the Black community have sex with each other and the community is small, sexual relations may make certain individuals off limits to individuals who are aware of the sexual linkage. However, some individuals may not be off limits as sexual option to individuals who are unaware of a sexual linkage or do not care about the linkage.

Jessica's sentiments are also shared by 19-year-old Sage. In the excerpt below, she comments on how the PWI sexual culture is advantageous to the majority White student body, being that they have more intimate partner options to choose from:

*I guess like not saying White people do have it easier, I just feel like there is less drama associated with...I don't know I can't really explain it...cuz they have a whole...they're surrounded by a whole bunch of people who look like them, think like them, act like them, they have a lot more options to choose from and I just feel like there's...within*

*the Black community, there's so much drama and a lot of it is associated with sex. So I just feel like it makes it harder being a Black woman here.*

Sage's remark provides commentary on how the scarcity of partner options in the Black community facilitates drama and discord within the Black community. She specifically addresses how the drama within the community is specifically "associated with sex" and disadvantageous for Black women who have few Black male partners to choose from.

21-year-old Undrea commented on how multiple concurrent sexual relations are disadvantageous to women due to gender double standards that valorize men for having many sexual partners, and negatively sanction women for exploring their sexuality with multiple partners. These women's social reputations are stigmatized within the Black community as a means to control their behavior.

*I've seen people's reputations like bashed and thrashed, but it's kinda like you have the option of keeping your legs closed and findin' somebody off campus like Benedict or a local or somethin'. But I always say you can't really help who you're attracted to, or circumstances in how you're attracted to somebody. Like say you had sex with a guy and you didn't really hit it off. You and his friend have more of a connection. Ya'll ended up havin' sex. To me, that's not really a hoeish act. You can't help who you connect with, but being that there's so little to choose from, and somebody's gonna run their mouth. Somebody's gonna tell somebody. Makes you seem like a hoe, but when a guy does it, it's totally fine.*

Here, Undrea simultaneously internalizes and resists the Virgin-Slut binary (Bay-Cheng, 2015). Undrea initially condones the social condemnation of women's social reputations being that they have the agency to keep their "legs closed and" find "somebody off campus." She suggests that Black female students can find potential sexual partners at other schools, specifically at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) (i.e., Benedict) or "local" men in the surrounding community. She then switches from her sentiments of women having agency regarding their sexual behaviors, to suggest that one's sexual attractions are not controllable and vary based on circumstance and setting.

Despite the social harm that can result from multiple concurrent sexual partners, 20-year-old Erin suggests that Black female students must almost choose hooking up as a default due to the lack of maturity of their Black male counterparts.

*Erin: I think in the sense of there being more of a female presence than a male presence, that can lead to more like partners so to say, or more of a hooking up sort of situation.*

*Interviewer: Why do you think there would be more hooking up situations with a smaller Black male population than Black female population?*

*Erin: I think like in college, no one, not saying no one, but this is your time to let loose, party, do whatever you want, and I think until you are really at that point to settle down most guys are just looking for a hookup or nothing serious, and I can see guys wanting, you know, to just explore their options.*

Erin's commentary about college being a time "to let loose, party" and engage in more casual intimate relations is reminiscent of Hamilton and Armstrong's (2009) typology of more privileged women's class expectations about hookups. The more privileged women engaged in hookups because it enabled them to focus on their self-development and academic achievement during college. However, Erin's recognition of guys exploring "their options" sexually suggests that their female counterparts must adjust their sexual behaviors and attitudes based on their state of development/maturity.

## **B. Salience of Controlling Images of Black Women**

### *Intrapersonal Internalization of Stereotypes*

Some of the participants expressed feeling that gender double standards disadvantaged women, specifically Black women. While they did not discuss historical stereotypes of Black women's hypersexuality (i.e., Collins, 2000; Morton, 1991), their commentary on how they felt pressured to conform to certain behaviors, alludes to these historical stereotypes and frames. Some of the women felt even more frustration when myths of hypersexuality were internalized and perpetuated by men toward them, specifically by Black men.

When asked by the interviewer about double gender standards, 19-year-old Alexandra expressed feeling pressure to suppress her expressions of sexuality in order to not perpetuate hypersexuality:

**Interviewer:** *Do you think there are codes of conduct that Black girls have to live by that Black guys don't?*

**Alexandra:** *Yes. You know, like you can't have casual sex. I feel like they are looked at as like they have to be very put together.*

**Interviewer:** *What do you mean by put together?*

**Alexandra:** *Like they have to be very not out of control. Like sometimes one has one too many drinks, but I feel like sometimes we are looked as it is not okay to do that.*

**Interviewer:** *How does that make you feel, if anything?*

**Alexandra:** *I feel like we are all so different. Why should one race or gender be expected to act a certain way. I don't want to sound stereotypical.*

**Interviewer:** *Speak your truth*

**Alexandra:** *Like I said, the first relationship I was in, I told you he cheated on me with another Black female. Girls would call him a dog for a little while then throw themselves at him. Guys would still talk to him. Society would still move on. My friends were like why would you ever date him? There goes that difference. Who gets penalized?*

Within this excerpt, Alexandra distances herself from potentially harmful stereotypes against Black women by using the pronoun “they.” She uses “they” in reference to the belief that Black women should be “put together” and “not out of control.” However, she asserts her negation of these standards and includes herself as a member of the Black female community with her use of the pronouns “I” and “we.” She uses “I” and “we” as she personalizes the hypocrisy of gender double standards to her personal experiences from high school. In her case, her former boyfriend cheated on her and was momentarily sanctioned by peers more for being caught as opposed to cheating. Despite his adultery, he was still coveted by women and praised by men, while she was “penalized” and questioned for her choice of an intimate partner.

Of all the participants, Jordan was a unique participant because she was only one of two of the participants engaged in a long-term committed romantic relationship with a



White male partner. She suggested that Black women's difficulties to obtain and maintain long-term intimate relationships were due to their hyper-independence:

*Jordan: Black women have this stigma of being independent or whatever . . . and I feel like we're less desirable by men because they feel like they aren't needed cause we're so independent I guess. Like we can't depend on them for anything. I don't know. Well it's different because I am in a relationship with a White guy. I don't really get. Well I have had Black men ask for my number or whatever, but it's not a lot. I don't know.*

*Interviewer: Do you think there's anything wrong with that stereotype of Black women being hyperindependent?*

*Jordan: I mean no because I am independent. My boyfriend knows I don't really need him. I can do stuff by myself, but I guess it's negative because it might fend away a possible partner or it's not really our fault because if they don't really wanna approach us because they think that, then that's their problem. Not ours. So overall, no I don't think it's a bad stereotype.*

Jordan's remark expresses ambiguity concerning whether the gendered and racialized stereotype of independence associated with Black women is empowering and agentic or harming for Black women seeking intimate partners. She initially justifies Black men's lack of interest in Black women because of how they are stereotyped as "too independent," which is not socially constructed as a feminine quality. Her narratives suggests she has internalized the stereotype due to her use of the collective pronoun "we." Jordan quickly distances herself from the stereotype when asked to elaborate on her sentiment, possibly for fear of being seen as not independent by the Black, female PI. She signals she is aware that the opposite of independent- being dependent- is not a positive quality in today's so-called post-feminist culture. She asserts her sense of independence as a Black woman by stating that her boyfriend "knows that [she doesn't] really need him" and that she "can do stuff by [herself]." However, she attributes her independence as an autonomous being to her relational attachment to her boyfriend. Here Jordan negotiates across these multiple means of (Black) womanhood in being vulnerable

within her intimate relationship, at yet independent outside of her relationship in her narratives.

### ***White and Black Men's Fetishization of Black Women***

Some of the participants did not see interracial dating as a possibility due to their cultural differences with White men. While only a few of the participants spoke about experiencing disrespect from White males that positioned them primarily as hypersexual objects, I include them here to exemplify how controlling images can be internalized through the ideologies and actions of individuals outside of marginalized communities, to consciously or subconsciously justify their treatment of these communities. For example 20-year old Miranda commented on how she could not conceive of dating a White man, particularly White men from the South, due to historical, cultural, and ideological differences.

***Miranda: I feel like just from a societal standpoint, I mean White experiences are so different from other races. So, I mean, I mean I've tried to. I think that when it comes to that it would definitely be a big . . . like a big pill to swallow, or like an elephant in the room. I don't know. I mean if it happened and I met someone who was more understanding of that, I guess I wouldn't be opposed to it, maybe once I go to some Northern or Western place, but in the South White guys are a lot different.***

***Interviewer: What do you mean by a lot?***

***Miranda: They're very different. They don't seem to understand the Black experience. They'll more so be fetishizing me than like wanting to date me for me, and that's what I've kind of gotten from White guys.***

Miranda identified a recent occasion where a White male peer objectified and simplified her positionality as a Black woman by marginalizing her as a sexual object.

***With a recent White guy, he was just really trying to have sex with me. I think that's kinda what turned me off slightly. He was like really only trying to have sex with me. He was like yeah, I'll pay your Uber driver. I'll pay your Uber if you'll like come over here and have sex. Like he was just very like that's too much. Yeah he was very like . . . persistent. Like every weekend, he would like call me. Wake up. It's like eight missed calls, text messages. Like, hey where are you? Come over please. I'll pay for your Uber. Yeah.***

Miranda's repetition about her White male peer only wanting to have sex demonstrates that she understands that she was being objectified and fetishized. While she does not address the historical sexual abuse of Black women by White men, her commentary about White men's fetishization of Black women and White men not "wanting to date [her] for [her]" alludes to the historical objection of Black women's bodies and dismissal of their personhood by White America; particularly in the South and particularly by White men.

Some of the participants also expressed frustration with Black men's apparent lack of interest in intimate, long-term committed relationships with Black women and their disrespect of Black women. 21-year-old Sandra remarked on how sexual double standards are exploited by Black men and the high standards and expectations placed on Black women's sexuality:

*Um, I don't know, it's like, we have to work twice as hard to like, be accepted as like, a good girlfriend, or like, a good sexual partner or whatever, and like, sexually, if it's like a guy who's not Black, then you're expected to be really like, aggressive and rambunctious or whatever. Um, and even Black guys, some of them the ones who are like, really like, 'I only date White girls, but I'll have sex with a Black girl, 'they expect that same stereotype, um I don't know, there's just so much you gotta do.*

Sandra highlights how not only non-Black men have internalized the Jezebel controlling image of Black women as "aggressive and rambunctious," but also how Black men have as well. From the perspective of Sandra, Black men objectify Black women as sexual objects when Black men will not commit to long-term committed romantic relationships with them, but will "have sex with [them]."

### **C. Strategies of Sexual Self-Protection**

#### ***Significance of Knowing Sexual Partner***

All the participants had engaged in intimate sexual relationships with men at some point in their lives. Only a few of the participants were currently involved in committed romantic relationships. The majority of the participants were either engaged in voluntary or involuntary sexual abstinence or engaged in non-committed sexual relationships with former boyfriends or peers. Only one of the participants indicated she had sexual relations with individuals who were not her boyfriend despite being in a committed romantic relationship.

Many of the participants discussed that it was important to them to only having sex with individuals they knew personally or via a close friend or family member. It was apparent from these accounts that participants utilized such an approach as a strategy by which to protect their (physical) sexual health and their emotional well-being. For example, when asked to define what a hook up is, 19-year-old Maxine expressed the significance of hookups being with someone you know.

*A hook up is two people who basically wanna have sex with each other. They express that to each other and they have sex with each other. Like not necessarily, well to me you have to know them. You have to have some kind of friendly relationship with them and yeah. It's not your boyfriend. Cause to me that's not a hookup if that's gonna keep on happenin'.*

While Maxine at first frames hooking up as exclusively about sexual behavior, she then contests this definition by referring to her own experiences. While she asserts that one does not “hook up” with a boyfriend, for her, a hookup must occur with someone she knows and, to some extent cares about - in other words- someone she has a “friendly relationship with.”

When asked about her definition of a hookup, 21-year old Sandra, shared Maxine’s sentiments about a hookup partner needing to be someone with whom she has a sense of rapport.

*I've never like had a one night stand. I usually have to be with somebody that I know and, like who I have feelings for, whether they be romantic or not. Like I have to like, at least care about the person. So, I have one person who, like, I'm like a regular 'friends with benefits' with, kind of, and we both know that we don't want a relationship with each other. We literally just call each other in between relationships and we're like 'you know what it is.' So, yeah.*

While a hookup partner or 'friend with benefits,' addressed by some of the participants by the acronym 'FWB,' is a partner that may not be intended to be one's boyfriend, Sandra still requires for her hookup partner to be an individual she has some care for. The context she addresses needing her FWB in (i.e., "in between [committed] relationships"), provides commentary on how a FWB serves as an emotional and physical placeholder that a boyfriend would generally fulfill, without the deeper emotional ties and potential distractions that can come with a committed romantic relationship.

22-year old Cindy also discussed the emotional and physical placeholder position that a hookup partner serves. Cindy has sex with her ex-boyfriend between her romantic relationships.

*Um after we broke up, I was afraid to date. So since then, it's kinda like I will have sex with you, but I don't want to date you. So that went on through two people and so it's like no, I can't be afraid to date. I'm gonna have to get back out there and date, and in between those two people, if he's single, my ex, if he's single and I'm single, we like have sex, but I feel like, okay, enough is enough you need to breathe and like let go. But in between guys, I love Maury, but I think it's funny and ghetto (giggles), but like I can't be on Maury. I need to know who my baby daddy is so (giggles). So in between each partner, I take like a two-month man fast. Um so I separate them two months.*

Here, Cindy remarks on how sex with her former boyfriend in between relationships provided her emotional protection as she rebuilt her self-esteem to date again. Her former boyfriend was her first sexual partner and she was his first sexual partner, and they had a deep understanding of each other's sexual preferences. Within Cindy's response she separates her actions from the stereotype of the over-reproductive Welfare Queen (Collins, 2000; Morton, 1991) by mentioning how she does not desire to be the women,

predominantly women of color from low-income backgrounds, who do not “know who [their] baby daddy is.” In an effort to distance herself from potential outcome of casual sexual affairs, she takes a “two-month man fast” where she is celibate. When asked by the PI why she did not use a birth control method to prevent STI or an unintended pregnancy, she addressed protective factors to prevent both adverse outcomes.

*Um at that point I knew he wasn't seeing anyone else. I was just going by his word and. . . .so yeah, I knew he wasn't seeing anyone, at least that's what he said and he told me he was tested the month before and so at that point, he said he was only with me and I trust him for now. So yeah and I have a habit of . . . I don't really trust people and then I strongly feel like your status should not be a verification of mine so I need to get tested. So I definitely get tested on the regular. So in that two month man fast I get tested (giggles).*

While Cindy's infrequent use of condoms with her ex-boyfriend is a 'risky' sexual behavior, she has an undeniable sense of rapport with her ex-boyfriend based on their history that leads her to trust him. Despite this trust, she still understands that he may not be forthcoming with all his previous sexual partners, which could put her health at risk. As a means to protect herself, she gets tested for STIs during her “two month man [fasts].”

Despite being in a committed romantic relationship, Collette represents a unique participant in that she uses hookup partners as emotional placeholders who provide her with the intimacy her boyfriend cannot due to his medical condition.

*Collette: Um me and my current boyfriend aren't sexually active together and that really, I'm not gonna say it bothers me, but it can be sexually frustrating. So, I sexually desire him constantly, it feels like, but he can't reciprocate that due to his health. He has a kidney disease so.*

*Interviewer: Gotchu. So when you can't have sex with him, even though you're sexually desiring him, what do you do?*

*Collette: Um usually I cry. (giggles) Sometimes I cry. Usually I will masturbate um or we do have an arrangement where I can go have sex with someone else if I choose to do that. It's really not the same though. You know I've tried it a couple times, but it's not what I need. So I don't really do that anymore.*

Collette's engagement in casual sexual relationships was a mutual decision between her and her boyfriend. He understood that she was sexually frustrated and needed sexual intimacy. However, while the casual sexual relations provided Collette the sexual intimacy her boyfriend was unable to provide her, these relationships could not replace the intimacy of her boyfriend, which was why she stopped them.

### ***Delaying Sexual Initiation***

Most of the participants discussed a strategy whereby they waited to engage in sex as a form of risk management. 21-year old Undrea commented on her strategy for abstaining sex to establish trust and rapport with her sexual partner.

***So like I was testing the waters, seein' what type of dude he was. So, he lived like a couple a floors below her. I would start off slow. I would just go by for a couple of hours, hangout with him and his friends, talk, then leave. Then as 2 or 3 months started goin' by, I really started to get a feel for him and I don't believe in a time limit on havin' sex, but because I believe in like not just letting anybody between my legs, I had to feel it through. So I would stay over sometime. Nothin' would happen, except kissin' and stuff. No sex. So I started feelin' him out, then cause he lives in Columbia, he would start coming to visit me at school.***

Here, Undrea discusses how she got to know her former intimate partner who attended a local HBCU and coincidentally lived on the dorm floor below her best friend. As she got to know him better, their level of intimacy increased. She did not engage in sex with him until she established trust and rapport with him, and he engaged in actions that indicated mutual commitment to her by performing such actions as "visit[ing her] at school."

Unlike Undrea who abstained penetrative sex in order to establish rapport with her intimate partner, 18-year-old Candace used sex as a means to define her relationship with her White male partner.

***But before sex, we still didn't really know. We were still tryna figure out each other basically. Or figure out each other's personality more than each other. Cause like we knew each other, but didn't know what role we were gonna play in each other's lives. Um so after sex, he was all about it. Like I couldn't sit on the couch without being like***



*touched. I'm like oh my God, whatever. So Um it's just like now he's trying to bring it back to that like innocent thing before sex, but it's not gonna happen.*

Without establishing and communicating clear boundaries for the “roles they’d play in each other’s lives,” their relationship became reduced to solely sexual behaviors, even though Candace desired more emotional commitment and intimacy. Candace felt shame in prematurely having sex with her partner, even though she wanted to abstain. Here, Candace comments on how her best friend and she had devised a plan for her to abstain from sex in order to determine her partner’s intentions. When Candace did not follow through with the plan, she did not tell her best friend.

*Interviewer: Why haven't you told her about that?*

*Candace: I just, I feel weird like uuuhhhhhh. I was tryna like wait and not do anything cause we were ok. So how are we gonna do this cause we were tryna get like a plan to see where he was with things. Talkin' about him and me. Where we stood.*

*Interviewer: You and Stephen?*

*Candace: Yes and she was like, okay, don't have sex with him until October which is now. I was like, "Okay, what if we're not talkin' by then or dating?" She was like, "well then we'll know like what's going on." I was like, "Okay, fine." So I'm not gonna tell her I had sex with him cause then she'll be like, "dang Candace," and I'll be like, "I know." But um so I basically told her it wasn't gonna work, and she was like, "on to the next." But uh I didn't tell her about that.*

Candace knew that by not following through with the plan she and her best friend had devised, and not having the outcome she wanted by having sex with her partner, her best friend would heighten her disappointment in her inability to subdue her sexual desires. This excerpt further illustrates how some women shape their sexual ideologies, feelings, and behaviors by the intentions of the man. Instead of Candace having the freedom to have sex with her partner on her own terms and timing without fear of repercussions, she had to make “a plan to see where he was with things,” and adjust her desires accordingly.

### ***Sexual Subjectivity & Sexual Agency***

Most of the participants articulated their sexual subjectivity and by association, sexual agency, in regards to their consistent use or inconsistent use of birth control



methods and/or condoms in order to experience sexual pleasure. All of the participants had used male condoms and/or an additional form of birth control (i.e., birth control pills) at some point in their sexual history to avoid contracting an STI and/or to avoid an unintended pregnancy. None of the participants reported having ever used the female condom or/or such long-acting reversible contraceptives as the implant or intra-uterine device (IUD). For some of the participants, their sexual pleasure involved them assertively insisting that their male partner consistently wear condoms in order to avoid contracting an STI and/or to prevent an unintended pregnancy. However, for some of the participants, sexual pleasure was connected to inconsistent condom use because they wanted to experience a heightened level of physical intimacy with their partner. All of the participants that reported inconsistently using a male condom reported consistently using a birth control method (i.e., birth control pills) to prevent an unintended pregnancy. None of the participants reported never using any type of contraceptive method.

22-year old Cindy commented on why she consistently uses contraceptives to prevent unintended pregnancy and STIs, and her fear of being perceived as promiscuous by men in her efforts to practice safer sex, saying:

*I'm really cautious. So even right now at home, I have a year's supply of birth control. So if somebody randomly walks in there, they'll probably think I'm tryna start something, but no, I have a year's supply of birth control. I have a bin in my bathroom. I have everything from condoms to lube cause it's important just to keep these things around and that's another thing. Being a girl, I feel the need to, not really hide, but, like I put it on the top shelf so when people come in, they can't visibly see it. So it's like, I shouldn't have to hide condoms, but, cause I don't want like my landlord to randomly judge when like he randomly walk in and sees all these condoms, but it's important to keep yourself safe too. Um So like I see they're life and I see even my friends in high school. Some of them had STDs and like that's not ok. So it's like I try to live my life based on other people's experiences. I try to prevent what I see.*

While Cindy first states that she does “not really hide” her contraceptive protection, she quickly retracts her statement by explaining how she hides her bin of contraceptives “on the top shelf” in

her bathroom, so no one who enters can “visibly see it.” Although not stated, there is a level of anxiety and stigma she associates with her use of contraceptives, and she justifies her sentiments and concealment of her contraceptives to the judgment she may face from people who see it, specifically her male “landlord,” due to her gender of “being a girl.” Despite the adverse judgment she may receive from others, particularly men, she understands the “importance [of keeping herself] safe” in order to not contract STIs like her high school friends. While not included in this excerpt, she also uses birth control to prevent having an unintended pregnancy like many of her family members experienced, and the financial and emotional burdens that may arise from them.

Unlike Cindy, 20-year-old Jordan does not consistently use condoms as a means to prevent contracting an STI. She explains how her inconsistent use of contraceptives is a barrier to her experiencing intimacy with her long-term boyfriend, by saying:

***Interviewer: Have there ever been times where you two had sex, and you didn't use any kind of contraception?***

***Jordan: Well I always take my birth control, but there have been times where we didn't use a condom.***

***Interviewer: So the times that you didn't use a condom, why didn't you?***

***Jordan: Mainly because he didn't want to and it does feel better without the condom, but I use them as a backup plan. I feel more confident, I feel better, if I use a condom and I know I'm on birth control cause it'll lower my chances of getting pregnant, but sometimes I just don't worry about it and it doesn't matter. I'm just like, "Oh, you don't have to worry about it," but mainly it's because he doesn't want to cause it feels better to him.***

***Interviewer: So when he tells you, can we not use one cause it'll feel better, and you do have sex, what are your thoughts after you have sex?***

***Jordan: Hmmmm they don't really change, because he doesn't actually ejaculate inside of me. So I feel like I won't get pregnant. There's still, I worry in the back of my mind that there's a possibility that I will, but I'm never too worried about it. If that makes sense.***

While Jordan expresses mild worry about the prospect of getting pregnancy, despite being on birth control, due her inconsistent use of birth control with her boyfriend, she does not express any concerns about the prospect of contracting an STI. Her lack of anxiety about contracting an STI may be due to the trust she has established with her

long-term boyfriend regarding expectations of monogamy, honesty, and faithfulness. She seems to place more significance on preventing an unintended pregnancy due to her beliefs about the faithfulness of her partner. Regarding unintended pregnancy prevention, Jordan views condom as a “backup plan” because she “always takes [her] birth control.” One may also infer that since she and boyfriend practice the pull-out method due to her remark about him not “actually ejaculating inside of [her].” While she ultimately does not use a condom due to her boyfriend not wanting to and feels “more confident and “better” when using a condom, the sexual pleasure and intimacy she and her partner experience, “feels better” for her.

Like Jordan, 19-year old Sage inconsistently wears condoms in her relationship in order to experience an elevated level of sexual intimacy. Despite her inconsistent use of condoms, she does have a consistent birth control method.

*Interviewer: Okay, cool. So the times that you two have had sex together, do you two use any contraceptives?*

*Sage: I'm on birth control. So that's what contraception we use.*

*Interviewer: Do you use any type of contraception to prevent STIs?*

*Sage: I guess not technically, no. We have use condoms, but we don't use condoms every time.*

*Interviewer: So the times that you two don't use condoms, why not?*

*Sage: I guess because it feels better...um...that's not really a good reason*

After stating that having sex without a condom “feels better,” Sage quickly admonishes herself for own actions by stating, “that’s not really a good reason.” With this remark she exemplifies how she is conscious that her inconsistent use of condoms is not socially acceptable due to the heightened risk of contracting an STI. Despite this knowledge about this risk, her consistent sexual partner and her mutually experiencing sexual pleasure is tantamount to contracting an STI. Despite her inconsistent use of condoms, Sage is intentional about preventing an unintended pregnancy based on her use of birth control.

## **Discussion**

Using an intersectional lens, this study explored how Black female college students perceive the sexual culture of a PWI they attend, and narrate various strategies by which they maintain their emotional, physical/sexual, and social well-being in the context of sexual and intimate relationships. The sexual culture of this PWI, which is informed by intersecting social inequalities, clearly influences the sexual behaviors and attitudes of this demographic. While this study used an intersectional theoretical framework to examine similarities and differences in the sexual experiences of Black undergraduate female students in attendance at a PWI, in this study, race and gender proved to be more salient intersections than socio-economic class. This finding differs from the class-stratified insights of Hamilton and Armstrong (2009), where students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds found hookups less appealing and did not see committed romantic relationships as a barrier to their educational and professional development. This difference may be due to Hamilton and Armstrong's (2009) study being conducted on mainly white female participants, who did not face the racial and gender disparities faced by Black female students attending PWIs. In this study, despite socio-economic class, because most of the study participants perceived a dearth of eligible male intimate partners within and outside of their racial community on-campus, hookups were almost unavoidable in order to experience sexual pleasure and intimacy. Notably, all the participants in this study expressed middle-class ideologies of self-development and academic achievement afforded and/or enhanced by their collegiate setting (Hamilton and Armstrong, 2009).

Moving beyond an examination of the risky sexual behaviors of young, Black women, this study utilized a modified approach to grounded theory to explore how this group narrates their sexual decision making, which they largely framed as protective, and how these strategies may or may not be consistent with public health research regarding STI prevention strategies. This study contributes to empirical voids in sexual health research that do not adequately address how unequal institutional arrangements at PWIs influence the individual behaviors and population-level outcomes of female Black students in attendance.

First, this study provided an analysis of the following factors within the sexual culture of a collegiate setting: 1. Gender and racial disparities within the student body, 2. Intrapersonal internalization of racial/gendered stereotypes, and 3. White and Black men's fetishization of Black women. As informed by Ray et al.'s (2010) examination of how normative institutional arrangements divergently facilitate fraternity men's interpersonal relations with women at a PWI, it was significant to explore how the participants interpreted and narrated the sexual environment of the campus, because of how the environment is informed by and facilitates certain sexual ideologies and behaviors. The narratives of the participants mirror the statistics that show there is a gender imbalance within the (heterosexual) Black /African American student body and racial disparities within the entire student body. This gender imbalance is less than advantageous for the women who identify as heterosexual who have few male partners to choose from who: 1. Meet their personal standards regarding character and physique; 2. Have not slept with other women within the small Black community on campus; and 3. Are mature and actually want to be in a committed romantic relationship. Due to the

small number of men for the Black women to choose from, it is almost unavoidable for them not to have concurrent sexual relations with a male partner that one of their peers has not slept with. The majority of the participants expressed a desire to keep their previous intimate relationships private, but stated that this was ultimately impossible due to how gossip spreads. Many of the participants ultimately engaged in hookups and/or had FWBs outside of the university community due to the inability of their male partners to remain faithful with the abundance of women within the Black community on campus. For these women, a hook up partner served as an emotional and physical placeholder for a boyfriend, because he provided her the sexual pleasure and intimacy she desired without the emotional investment of a committed romantic relationship.

All of the participants implicitly made references to modes of resistance, which reflects Collins' (2000) concepts of the matrix of domination, gendered and racialized "controlling images," and the objectification that results from these images in their interpersonal relations, specifically with Black men. Some of the main images that arose during the interviews included 'the Promiscuous Jezebel,' 'the Over-reproductive Welfare Queen,' and 'the emasculating Matriarch.' Avoiding the hypersexuality associated with the "Promiscuous Jezebel" (Collins, 2000) was the most prevalent in the participants' narratives. Many of the participants sought to suppress their sexual desires and limit their engagement in sexual activity in order to not be seen as too sexual, while still remaining sexually attractive to their male counterparts. A few of the participants expressed a heightened sense of scarcity of Black men being that many Black men also sought White women as sexual partners. Unlike Black women, White women have the racial privilege to be more explicit in their expressions of sexuality (Hamilton and

Armstrong, 2009). While both Black and White women experience slut-shaming, White women attending PWIs are afforded more invisibility within their more populous racial communities to explore their sexualities in addition to having more sexual partner options. This opportunity is not as available to Black women who face additional systemic barriers (i.e., racism and sexism) and institutional barriers (i.e., gender disparities within the Black community) in their selection of intimate partners.

With the low number of Black male partners to choose from, it would seem that Black female students would choose to engage in interracial relationships. However, the majority of the participants were not interested in interracial relationships due to the following factors. First, participants spoke at length about the cultural differences and corresponding redundancy associated with educating their (White) partner on racism. For many, this was a routine of their lives, not only as students at a PWI, but as Black women in predominantly White settings. Second, participants experienced being sexually objectified, particularly by White men. The racialized sexual fetishization of Black women by White men at a PWI in the south is problematic based on the historical sexual fetishization of Black women by White males in such institutions as slavery and Jim Crow. Interestingly, when asked about their attitudes towards interracial relationships, the majority of the participants only mentioned White men. Only one participant mentioned her romantic experiences with Latin men, which may be partially due to her own ethnic/racial identification as an Afro-Latina. Beyond this respondent, none of the participants mentioned relations with men from such racial/ethnic groups as Asian, American Indian/ Alaska Native, or Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. This may be due to a number of factors, but of particular significance may be the low number of students

enrolled at USC from these ethnic/racial groups and/or the participants' sentiments of racial allegiance and cultural pride.

Second, this study pushed beyond the deficit framework that predominates in public health research on Black women's sexual health to examine young Black women's subjectivities and their strategies of sexual self-protection. An asset-based framework was used to explore how Black female undergraduate students resist racism and sexism in their socio-sexual culture to protect their emotional, physical, and social well-being as sexual beings with multi-dimensional identities, backgrounds, and ideologies. While the majority of the participants were not involved in committed romantic relationships, most of them were involved in sexual relationships with men that they knew personally (i.e., friends, peers, former boyfriends, etc.), or individuals that they got to know based on the individual's relation to their friends or relatives. While most of the participants reported that they had no intentions of becoming involved in committed romantic relationships with their casual but steady sexual partner(s) (i.e., hook-up partner, FWB, etc.), they still expressed a desire to care for and respect their sexual partner(s). However, the participants made sure to state there was a limit to feelings of care and respect in order to emotionally protect themselves from the emotional investment of committed romantic relationships. Casual romantic partners served as placeholders for the emotional (i.e., sexual desire) and physical support (i.e., sexual pleasure) provided by boyfriends, but seemingly unavailable due to the low number of options possible for Black female students within and beyond the Black community at the PWI.

Many of the participants expressed the importance of delaying sexual initiation with a new partner for a specified period of time in order to establish trust, and gain an



understanding of their partner's intentions prior to having sex with them. Lastly, in order to protect their social well-being many of the participants engaged in intimate relationships with individuals that were not students at the PWI in order to protect their on-campus reputation and self-dignity. Many pursued sexual relationships with men from high school, their hometown, the local community, and/or local colleges/universities (and particularly HBCUs).

The majority of the participants who had casual but steady sexual partners stated that their condom use was inconsistent due the trust they had established with their partner, and their belief that their partner was being monogamous because they were being monogamous. This finding illustrates how the public health messaging about disproportionately higher rates of HIV in the Black community, particularly in the South, which is attributed to inconsistent condom use in the context of multiple concurrent partnerships (CDC Fact Sheet, 2014), is not translating to the general public. While this demographic is cognizant that they may or may not be engaging in sexual activities with someone their peer(s) has, they do not associate risk with their sexual activities because it is common and almost unavoidable due to their institutional arrangement. This finding is particularly disconcerting because this educated population expressed more anxiety about having an unintended pregnancy than contracting an STI. Some of the participants were also unable to differentiate between contraceptives that prevent STIs (i.e., male and female condoms) and contraceptives that prevent unintended pregnancies (i.e., birth control pills, male and female condoms, etc.). While there was awareness among some of the participants that their partner(s) may not be honest about fidelity, which compelled them to get tested for STIs regularly and/or wear condoms, there is still a need to make

public health population data more accessible, relatable, realistic, and achievable for populations that do not have backgrounds in public health.

For many of participants, the emotional and physical pleasure associated with having sex with or without a condom trumped the distant, but still ever present, threat of contracting an STI, and the potential financial, social, and emotional costs of experiencing an unintended pregnancy. Despite these facts, many of the participants still took precautionary measures to experience safer sexual pleasure, such as non-penetrative sex (i.e., oral sex). While these participants' strategies have their own risks associated with them and varying degrees of effectiveness, they can and should be understood as protective strategies used by young Black women to protect their health outcomes.

### **Conclusion**

This study aims to contribute to public health scholarship by exploring the racial, gendered, and socio-economic factors that may constrain or liberate Black women at PWIs to engage in or abstain from sexual behaviors. As mentioned previously, there are few, if any, published studies that explore the sexual subjectivities of Black female college students that attend a PWI. In addition to the academic purpose of this study, this study also serves a social justice purpose of examining how Black young women give meaning to their sexuality in relation to their decisions to engage in or refrain from sexual practices. As noted previously, the sexualities of Black women are often characterized in a pathologic manner in public health and the social and behavioral sciences. This study aims to decenter the dominant approach of pathologizing Black women's sexual health by exposing the psychic and socio-cultural factors that may influence their sexual practices.

There were several limitations for this study. First, while the inclusion criteria for this study required that the participants self-identify as being of African ancestry, there was a lack of national, regional, and ethnic diversity among the participants. Most of the participants were born in or predominantly raised in South Carolina. While this is not surprising given the fact that the study was conducted at a public university in South Carolina, the historical and cultural distinctions of South Carolina, specifically in regards to African American history and race relations undoubtedly influenced the responses of the participants born and/or raised in South Carolina, specifically regarding interracial dating. Given that all the participants were enrolled at a PWI in the South and taking into account the distinct socio-political climate of the Southeastern United States, parts of this study may not be generalizable to Black female students at PWIs located in other regions of the United States.

Moreover, while the study inclusion criteria was open to Black female students, ages 18-22, the majority of the study participants ages ranged from 18-22, with only one participant identifying as 23 and no respondents identifying as 24. Because most of the study participants were ages 18-22, the results of this study are not generalizable to Black females students ages 23 and 24 who attend a PWI, even though the study originally aimed to target this age demographic as well. Additionally, because the inclusion criteria required all the participants to have engaged in heterosexual sexual activity at some point in their life, this study did not capture the narratives of Black female undergraduate students that had never engaged in heterosexual sexual activity and the factors that influence their abstinence.

The results of this study were enhanced by the semi-structured format of the interview guide, in which the PI used different probes based on the interviewee and the type of data that needed to be disclosed (Schutt, 2012). The different probes used may have influenced the reliability of the data because the PI could be obtaining different responses across the study participants. The semi-structured format of the interview guide also allowed the participants' perspectives and experiences to drive the inquiry. Moreover, some of the interview questions required the participants to think back to past experiences, which could also skew the data due to recall bias. However, because this study is centered more so on authenticity from the participants as opposed to validity from how the PI interprets the data, recall bias may not affect the overall findings of this study.

Lastly, unlike Hamilton and Armstrong's study (2009), this study is cross-sectional as opposed to longitudinal and will not be able to measure and contextualize how the participants' sexual self-concepts change over time, nor will this study be able to remark on temporal sequence. Despite these limitations regarding the structure of the study, this study is just the beginning of a larger study that, with more resources and time, may explore how the sexual self-concepts and sexual subjectivities of Black female students that attend a PWI evolve over an extended period of time. Future studies may also implore through an intersectional lens how the socially constructed sexual landscape of PWIs shape the sexual ideologies and behaviors of Black male students and the socio-cultural factors that underlie their interpersonal relations with women, particularly Black women.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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Have not slept with other women within the small Black community on campus; and 3. Are mature and actually want to be in a committed romantic relationship. Due to the small number of men for the Black women to choose from, it is almost unavoidable for them not to have concurrent sexual relations with a male partner that one of their peers has not slept with. The majority of the participants expressed a desire to keep their previous intimate relationships private, but stated that this was ultimately impossible due to how gossip spreads. Many of the participants ultimately engaged in hookups and/or had FWBs outside of the university community due to the inability of their male partners to remain faithful with the abundance of women within the Black community on campus. For these women, a hook up partner served as an emotional and physical placeholder for a boyfriend, because he provided her the sexual pleasure and intimacy she desired without the emotional investment of a committed romantic relationship.

All of the participants implicitly made references to modes of resistance, which reflects Collins' (2000) concepts of the matrix of domination, gendered and racialized "controlling images," and the objectification that results from these images in their interpersonal relations, specifically with Black men. Some of the main images that arose during the interviews included 'the Promiscuous Jezebel,' 'the Over-reproductive Welfare Queen,' and 'the emasculating Matriarch.' Avoiding the hypersexuality associated with the "Promiscuous Jezebel" (Collins, 2000) was the most prevalent in the participants' narratives. Many of the participants sought to suppress their sexual desires and limit their engagement in sexual activity in order to not be seen as too sexual, while still remaining sexually attractive to their male counterparts. A few of the participants expressed a heightened sense of scarcity of Black men being that many Black men also

sought White women as sexual partners. Unlike Black women, White women have the racial privilege to be more explicit in their expressions of sexuality (Hamilton and Armstrong, 2009). While both Black and White women experience slut-shaming, White women attending PWIs are afforded more invisibility within their more populous racial communities to explore their sexualities in addition to having more sexual partner options. This opportunity is not as available to Black women who face additional systemic barriers (i.e., racism and sexism) and institutional barriers (i.e., gender disparities within the Black community) in their selection of intimate partners.

With the low number of Black male partners to choose from, it would seem that Black female students would choose to engage in interracial relationships. However, the majority of the participants were not interested in interracial relationships due to the following factors. First, participants spoke at length about the cultural differences and corresponding redundancy associated with educating their (White) partner on racism. For many, this was a routine of their lives, not only as students at a PWI, but as Black women in predominantly White settings. Second, participants experienced being sexually objectified, particularly by White men. The racialized sexual fetishization of Black women by White men at a PWI in the south is problematic based on the historical sexual fetishization of Black women by White males in such institutions as slavery and Jim Crow. Interestingly, when asked about their attitudes towards interracial relationships, the majority of the participants only mentioned White men. Only one participant mentioned her romantic experiences with Latin men, which may be partially due to her own ethnic/racial identification as an Afro-Latina. Beyond this respondent, none of the participants mentioned relations with men from such racial/ethnic groups as Asian,



American Indian/ Alaska Native, or Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. This may be due to a number of factors, but of particular significance may be the low number of students enrolled at USC from these ethnic/racial groups and/or the participants' sentiments of racial allegiance and cultural pride.

Second, this study pushed beyond the deficit framework that predominates in public health research on Black women's sexual health to examine young Black women's subjectivities and their strategies of sexual self-protection. An asset-based framework was used to explore how Black female undergraduate students resist racism and sexism in their socio-sexual culture to protect their emotional, physical, and social well-being as sexual beings with multi-dimensional identities, backgrounds, and ideologies. While the majority of the participants were not involved in committed romantic relationships, most of them were involved in sexual relationships with men that they knew personally (i.e., friends, peers, former boyfriends, etc.), or individuals that they got to know based on the individual's relation to their friends or relatives. While most of the participants reported that they had no intentions of becoming involved in committed romantic relationships with their casual but steady sexual partner(s) (i.e., hook-up partner, FWB, etc.), they still expressed a desire to care for and respect their sexual partner(s). However, the participants made sure to state there was a limit to feelings of care and respect in order to emotionally protect themselves from the emotional investment of committed romantic relationships. Casual romantic partners served as placeholders for the emotional (i.e., sexual desire) and physical support (i.e., sexual pleasure) provided by boyfriends, but seemingly unavailable due to the low number of options possible for Black female students within and beyond the Black community at the PWI.

Many of the participants expressed the importance of delaying sexual initiation with a new partner for a specified period of time in order to establish trust, and gain an understanding of their partner's intentions prior to having sex with them. Lastly, in order to protect their social well-being many of the participants engaged in intimate relationships with individuals that were not students at the PWI in order to protect their on-campus reputation and self-dignity. Many pursued sexual relationships with men from high school, their hometown, the local community, and/or local colleges/universities (and particularly HBCUs).

The majority of the participants who had casual but steady sexual partners stated that their condom use was inconsistent due the trust they had established with their partner, and their belief that their partner was being monogamous because they were being monogamous. This finding illustrates how the public health messaging about disproportionately higher rates of HIV in the Black community, particularly in the South, which is attributed to inconsistent condom use in the context of multiple concurrent partnerships (CDC Fact Sheet, 2014), is not translating to the general public. While this demographic is cognizant that they may or may not be engaging in sexual activities with someone their peer(s) has, they do not associate risk with their sexual activities because it is common and almost unavoidable due to their institutional arrangement. This finding is particularly disconcerting because this educated population expressed more anxiety about having an unintended pregnancy than contracting an STI. Some of the participants were also unable to differentiate between contraceptives that prevent STIs (i.e., male and female condoms) and contraceptives that prevent unintended pregnancies (i.e., birth control pills, male and female condoms, etc.). While there was awareness among some of

the participants that their partner(s) may not be honest about fidelity, which compelled them to get tested for STIs regularly and/or wear condoms, there is still a need to make public health population data more accessible, relatable, realistic, and achievable for populations that do not have backgrounds in public health.

For many of participants, the emotional and physical pleasure associated with having sex with or without a condom trumped the distant, but still ever present, threat of contracting an STI, and the potential financial, social, and emotional costs of experiencing an unintended pregnancy. Despite these facts, many of the participants still took precautionary measures to experience safer sexual pleasure, such as non-penetrative sex (i.e., oral sex). While these participants' strategies have their own risks associated with them and varying degrees of effectiveness, they can and should be understood as protective strategies used by young Black women to protect their health outcomes.

### **Conclusion**

This study aims to contribute to public health scholarship by exploring the racial, gendered, and socio-economic factors that may constrain or liberate Black women at PWIs to engage in or abstain from sexual behaviors. As mentioned previously, there are few, if any, published studies that explore the sexual subjectivities of Black female college students that attend a PWI. In addition to the academic purpose of this study, this study also serves a social justice purpose of examining how Black young women give meaning to their sexuality in relation to their decisions to engage in or refrain from sexual practices. As noted previously, the sexualities of Black women are often characterized in a pathologic manner in public health and the social and behavioral sciences. This study aims to decenter the dominant approach of pathologizing Black women's sexual health

by exposing the psychic and socio-cultural factors that may influence their sexual practices.

There were several limitations for this study. First, while the inclusion criteria for this study required that the participants self-identify as being of African ancestry, there was a lack of national, regional, and ethnic diversity among the participants. Most of the participants were born in or predominantly raised in South Carolina. While this is not surprising given the fact that the study was conducted at a public university in South Carolina, the historical and cultural distinctions of South Carolina, specifically in regards to African American history and race relations undoubtedly influenced the responses of the participants born and/or raised in South Carolina, specifically regarding interracial dating. Given that all the participants were enrolled at a PWI in the South and taking into account the distinct socio-political climate of the Southeastern United States, parts of this study may not be generalizable to Black female students at PWIs located in other regions of the United States.

Moreover, while the study inclusion criteria was open to Black female students, ages 18-22, the majority of the study participants ages ranged from 18-22, with only one participant identifying as 23 and no respondents identifying as 24. Because most of the study participants were ages 18-22, the results of this study are not generalizable to Black females students ages 23 and 24 who attend a PWI, even though the study originally aimed to target this age demographic as well. Additionally, because the inclusion criteria required all the participants to have engaged in heterosexual sexual activity at some point in their life, this study did not capture the narratives of Black female undergraduate

students that had never engaged in heterosexual sexual activity and the factors that influence their abstinence.

The results of this study were enhanced by the semi-structured format of the interview guide, in which the PI used different probes based on the interviewee and the type of data that needed to be disclosed (Schutt, 2012). The different probes used may have influenced the reliability of the data because the PI could be obtaining different responses across the study participants. The semi-structured format of the interview guide also allowed the participants' perspectives and experiences to drive the inquiry. Moreover, some of the interview questions required the participants to think back to past experiences, which could also skew the data due to recall bias. However, because this study is centered more so on authenticity from the participants as opposed to validity from how the PI interprets the data, recall bias may not affect the overall findings of this study.

Lastly, unlike Hamilton and Armstrong's study (2009), this study is cross-sectional as opposed to longitudinal and will not be able to measure and contextualize how the participants' sexual self-concepts change over time, nor will this study be able to remark on temporal sequence. Despite these limitations regarding the structure of the study, this study is just the beginning of a larger study that, with more resources and time, may explore how the sexual self-concepts and sexual subjectivities of Black female students that attend a PWI evolve over an extended period of time. Future studies may also implore through an intersectional lens how the socially constructed sexual landscape of PWIs shape the sexual ideologies and behaviors of Black male students and the socio-

cultural factors that underlie their interpersonal relations with women, particularly Black women.

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## APPENDIX A: DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

1. NAME [F,L]:
2. EMAIL ADDRESS:
3. AGE:
4. GENDER:
5. SEXUAL ORIENTATION:
6. MAJOR (S):
7. HOMETOWN:
8. CULTURAL/RACIAL/ETHNIC IDENTIFICATION:
9. CLASS LEVEL (FRESHMAN, SOPHOMORE, ETC.):
10. WHAT EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES DO YOU PARTICIPATE IN ON-CAMPUS AND/OR OFF-CAMPUS?
11. DO YOU RECEIVE WORK STUDY?
12. DO YOU RECEIVE A FEDERAL PELL GRANT?
13. WHAT WAS YOUR GUARDIAN(S) OR YOUR PERSONAL INCOME LAST YEAR (2014)?
14. GUARDIAN(S) HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT [HIGH SCHOOL, COLLEGE, GRADUATE/PROFESSIONAL DEGREE]?
  - A. MOTHER:
  - B. FATHER:
  - C. OTHER PRIMARY GUARDIAN(S):
15. WHAT IS YOUR GUARDIAN(S) OCCUPATION(S)?
  - A. MOTHER:
  - B. FATHER:
  - C. OTHER PRIMARY GUARDIAN(S)



## APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

*I'd like to get started today by learning a bit more about you.*

1. What characteristics would you use to describe yourself?
2. What was it like where you grew up?
  - a. Rural or Urban?
  - b. North, South, Midwest, etc.?
  - c. Race and socio-economic?
3. Who did you live with growing up?
  - a. Siblings?
  - b. Both parents in household or single parent-home?
  - c. Extended family living in the residence?
  - d. Apartment, house, etc.
4. What was your high school like?
  - a. Public or private (religious or secular)?
  - b. Racial, socio-economic make-up?
  - c. What kinds of classes did you take?
  - d. What were your high school friends like?
    - i. Racial/ethnic make-up
5. Did you have a boyfriend in high school?
  - i. **If YES:** Are you still with him?
6. Thinking back to your senior year of high school, what were your goals for the future?
  - a. What were your personal, academic, and romantic goals?
7. Now that you are in college, have those goals remained the same or changed?
  - a. **STAYED THE SAME:**
    - i. How have your goals stayed the same?
  - b. **CHANGED:**
    - i. How have your goals changed?
    - ii. What factors do you think have caused those goals to change?

### Early Sexual Experiences

1. What do you think it means to be “sexually active”?
2. Based on this definition, have you ever been sexually active?
  - a. **IF YES:**
    - i. **Let's think back to the first time you had sex. Please tell me about the events that took place prior to you engaging in sex.**

1. What feelings compelled you to have sex?
2. What feelings did you feel during sex?
3. What feelings did you feel after having sex?
- ii. If you could change anything about the first time you had sex, what would it be?
- iii. What aspects would you keep the same?
- ii. What characteristics would you use to describe yourself as a sexual partner then?
- iii. What characteristics would you use to describe yourself as a sexual partner now?
- b. **IF NO:**
  - i. What factors have kept you from being sexually active?
  - ii. Proceed to #3 Desire

### Desire

3. Describe your ideal romantic partner.
  - a. Physical attributes, intellect, hobbies, key characteristics, etc.
4. How would you define desire? Sexual desire?
5. When was the last time you felt sexually desired?
6. When was the last time you sexually desired someone else?
7. Did you act on your sexual desire?
8. How do you know when you are feeling desire [by someone else or for someone]?
9. Do you believe in masturbating?
  - a. Have you ever masturbated?

### Hookups

10. How do you define a hookup?
  - a. What actions and feelings do you associate with the term hookup?
11. Have you ever engaged in a hook up[s]?
  - a. **IF YES:**
    - i. **Take me back to your most recent hook up experience. Describe the events and feelings that compelled you to engage in your hookup?**
      1. What is/was your relation to this hookup partner?
      2. How many times have you and this partner hooked up?
      3. What is it about this individual(s) that compels you to hook up with him?
  - b. **IF NO:**
    - i. Why do you feel you have never engaged in a hook up relationship?
    - ii. Proceed to #1 Relationships
12. Have you ever engaged in oral sex with a hook up partner?
  - i. **IF NO:** Proceed to Relationships #1
  - ii. **IF YES:**
    1. Did you practice oral sex with your most recent hook up partner?
      - a. **IF yes:**

- i. Did you give your partner oral (fellatio)?
      - ii. Did your partner give you oral (Cunnilingus)?
        - 1. **If yes,** how did you feel that he gave you oral?
        - 2. **If no,** how did you feel that he did not give you oral?
    - b. **If no:**
      - i. Thinking back to the last person you had oral sex with, did you give your partner oral (fellatio)?
      - ii. Did your partner give you oral (Cunnilingus)?
        - 1. **If yes,** how did you feel towards yourself and/or your partner that he gave you oral?
        - 2. **If no,** how did you feel towards yourself and/or your partner that he did not give you oral?
13. Did you experience an orgasm with your most recent hook up partner?
- a. **If yes:**
    - i. Did you communicate to your hook up partner that you experienced one?
    - ii. How did he react emotionally and/or physically?
  - b. **If no:** have you ever experienced an orgasm?
    - i. **If NO:** Proceed to #9
    - ii. **If yes:**
      - 1. How do you typically feel towards yourself and/or your hookup partner when you've experienced an orgasm?
      - 2. How do you typically feel towards yourself and/or your hookup partner when you don't experience an orgasm?
14. Did you and/or your most recent hookup partner(s) use condoms and/or any other contraceptive methods to prevent pregnancy?
- a. **IF YES:**
    - i. What contraception did you and/or he use?
  - b. **IF NO:**
    - i. Why did you and/or he choose not to use contraception?
15. Did you and/or your most recent hookup partner(s) use condoms and/or any other contraceptive methods to prevent STIs?
- a. **IF YES:**
    - i. What contraception did you and/or he use?
  - b. **IF NO:**
    - i. Why did you and/or he choose not to use contraception?
16. Have you ever hooked up with someone from a different race/ethnicity?
- a. **IF NO:** Why not?
17. Have you ever hooked up with someone from the same race/ethnicity as you?
- a. **IF NO:** Why not?
18. What do you typically hope to fulfill and/or gain from your hook up experiences?

- a. If those needs are met:
  - i. How do you feel?
  - ii. How do you act?
- b. If those needs are not met:
  - i. How do you feel?
  - ii. How do you act?

### **Relationships**

19. How do you define a committed romantic relationship?
- a. What feelings and actions do you associate with a committed romantic relationship?
20. Have you ever been in a committed romantic relationship?
- a. **IF YES:** Proceed to #21
  - b. **IF NO:** Proceed to #25
21. Are you currently in a committed romantic relationship?
- i. **If YES:**
    - 1. How long have you been in this romantic relationship?
    - 2. How did you two meet?
    - 3. **Take me back to the time when you and/or he decided to be in a committed romantic relationship. Can you describe what events and/or actions took place when you both decided to take your relationship to this stage?**
  - ii. **If NO:**
    - 1. Have you ever been in a committed romantic relationship?
      - a. **If YES:**
        - i. How long did your most recent romantic relationship last?
        - ii. How did you two meet?
        - iii. **Take me back to the time when you and/or he decided to be in a committed romantic relationship. Can you describe what events and/or actions took place when you both decided to take your relationship to this stage?**
      - b. **If NO:** Proceed to #7

22. Do you and your current romantic partner [Did you and your most recent romantic partner] have sex?

- a. **If YES:** Proceed to #5
- b. **If NO:** Proceed to #7

23. **Going back to the last time you had sex with him/her, describe the events that took place prior to you engaging in sex.**

- i. What feelings compelled you to have sex?
- ii. What feelings did you feel during sex?
- iii. What feelings did you feel after having sex?
- iv. If you could change anything about the last time you had sex, what would it be?

- v. What aspects would you keep the same?
- 24. Did you experience an orgasm with your most recent/current romantic partner?
  - a. **If yes:**
    - i. Did he know that you experienced one?
    - ii. How did he react emotionally and/or physically?
  - b. **If no:** have you ever experienced an orgasm?
    - i. **If NO:** Proceed to #7
    - ii. **If yes:**
      - 1. How do you typically feel towards yourself and/or your partner when you're experiencing an orgasm?
      - 2. How do you typically feel towards yourself and/or your partner when you don't experience an orgasm?
- 25. Do you practice oral sex?
  - a. **IF YES:**
    - i. When you gave your most recent romantic partner oral sex (fellatio), did you expect him to give it back to you as well?
      - 1. **If YES:**
        - a. Why?
      - 2. **If NO:**
        - a. Why not?
        - b. Proceed to #9
- 26. Did you and/or your most recent hookup partner(s) use any contraception to prevent pregnancy and/or STIs?
  - a. **IF YES:**
    - i. What contraception did you and/or he use?
  - b. **IF NO:**
    - i. Why did you and/or he choose not to use contraception?
- 27. How do you feel about interracial dating?
- 28. Have you ever been in an interracial romantic relationship?

### **Communication**

- 1. What person/ people do you feel the most comfortable talking about your sexual feelings and/or experiences with?
- 2. What characteristics does this individual(s) possess?
- 3. Do you feel comfortable talking to other women about your sexual life/sexuality?
  - a. **YES:** How do you feel when you are expressing your thoughts and feelings to other women?
  - b. **NO:** What do you think would make you more comfortable expressing your sexual experiences with other women?
- 4. **For women who are sexually active:** Do you feel comfortable expressing your sexual desires with your sexual/romantic partner(s)?
  - a. **YES:** How do you feel when you are expressing your thoughts and feelings to your partner(s)?
  - b. **NO:** What do you think would make you more comfortable expressing your desires with your partner(s)?

## **Conclusion**

5. Before we finish, is there anything else you'd like to add that would help me understand your sexual experiences and feelings as a Black female student at USC?