

**Overcoming Whiteness: An Autoethnographic Account of a Black Female Administrator's
Journey at a Community and Technical College**

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Black and racially minority women are underrepresented in administrative positions of authority in higher education, especially at predominantly white institutions (PWIs). These women are forced to work in environments of articulated boundaries that do not permit their voices or perspectives to be heard and they are overwhelmingly disregarded, in comparison to their white counterparts, as competent leaders mainly because of their intersectionality with race and gender. Consequently, Black and racially minoritized women struggle to be included, accepted and respected as higher education professionals. Additionally, the experiences of Black and racially minoritized women are the result of an environment that encourages discrimination, isolation and exclusion. As a result, Black and racially minoritized women experience feelings of insecurity and invisibility and often self-segregate in order to survive in the environment. While each racially minoritized women encounters differing backgrounds and beliefs, their shared experiences within the realm of higher education warrants further review.

The purpose of this dissertation is to understand the system and the effects systemic institutional racism has on a Black female administrator employed at a community and technical college. I utilized autoethnography as my research method, and the concepts of white racial framing and critical race theory, as the theoretical lenses to inform the reader of my experiences. I served as both the researcher and the participant for this study. Through my voice, using reflexive journaling, storytelling, and personal narratives, I inform the reader of my experiences as a Black

female administrator employed in a system that continuously challenged my intersectionality and made every effort to silence my voice.

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Preface

*“You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I’ll rise.”* (Angelou, 1978)

In my opinion, racism is one of the worst atrocities any one person should ever face. No one should be discriminated against, hated, or intentionally harmed simply because of race. Throughout my life, I was taught that my success is dependent upon how I choose to respond to struggle or discontent. I was taught I could choose to be a victim, or I could choose to fight. The first time I read the above words from the poem *“Still I Rise,”* by Maya Angelou (1978), I remember thinking how someone rises above hate. How is it possible to overcome the prejudices and injustices that the white dominant culture chooses to inflict on the lives of marginalized individuals, simply because of the color of their skin? As I reflect on the words, I realize that it is about choices. Do I choose to be a victim, or do I choose to stand up? For me, there is no choice, there is only one way to respond. I choose today, and every day, to respond by fighting back.

I never intended to use autoethnography as my research method for my dissertation. My original research proposal was to identify and implement high-impact strategies that would encourage transformative change and a sense of belonging for racially minoritized students attending predominantly white institutions (PWI). I believed that my intersectionality as a Black female, who attended a PWI, provided me with the knowledge and experiences I needed to address the issue. However, most importantly, I also believed my positionality as a Black female administrator working at a community and technical college afforded me the authority and environment to properly research and investigate the issues needed to generate change. It is

important to note here that I was not naïve in my approach. I knew change could only occur if those, meaning the white dominant culture at my institution, wanted change to occur. But why wouldn't they? Especially after being admonished for not having a plan for the diversity, equity, and inclusion of marginalized students, faculty, and staff in place at the institution. Unfortunately, I quickly learned the answer to that question. Hence, the reason I needed to modify the scope of my dissertation research.

My autoethnographic journey not only validates the experiences Black female administrators face daily in higher education, but my journey also serves as a catalyst to amplify minoritized voices, precipitate change, and inform other Black female administrators how to respond to the atrocities of racism. This was a difficult journey to not only experience, but also relive and document. My journey could not have been articulated without the support and guidance of individuals who believed in me as a human being, a Black woman, a daughter, a wife, a mother, an activist, a crusader, and a competent researcher. It truly took a village to make my journey come to fruition.

I acknowledge and thank my parents, who raised me to believe I could accomplish anything in life. I especially thank my father for teaching me to always show up as my authentic self, never apologizing for being who I am – a Black woman. You both are the reason I achieve success. I also acknowledge and thank my immediate family (husband, daughter, son, and granddaughter) for the unconditional love, for always believing in me, for providing me comfort during the most difficult and humiliating times, for supporting me, wiping my tears, and creating the space for me to continue to rise. Also, my deepest and sincerest thank you to my dissertation committee, especially my chair for providing another option for me to continue my goal. You never gave up on me and you served as the beacon of light I needed to complete my doctoral degree. Finally, I

also thank those who intentionally inflicted hurt and harm on me. Those at my institution, who for no other reasons than my race and gender, felt they could control me, imprison me within a system of hate, and believed they possessed the power to prevent me from achieving my personal and professional goals. The racial trauma and fatigue I experienced from you motivated me to not be a victim. It is because of your inherent white supremacist practiced ideologies that I continue to rise. As a result, your hate has now provided a blueprint for other Black female administrators working in higher education to also rise.

1.0 Section 1: Naming & Framing the Problem of Practice

1.1 Broader Problem Area

According to the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR), in comparison to White employees, Black employees make up ten percent of professional employees in higher education. Additionally, the gap between Black versus white higher education professionals who are classified as administrators or senior-level executives in higher education is even greater, with Blacks representing less than eight percent of professionals serving at an administrative level. (Whitford, 2020). Black women are even more under-represented and are often not treated like professionals when serving in an administrator's role due to their intersecting identities of race and gender (Young & Anderson, 2021). Research provides multiple explanations for the disproportionate levels of professional administrative attainment for Blacks. Whitford (2020) states a partial reason for the low representation is due to a pipeline problem, meaning higher education is not graduating a large number of Black doctoral students who meet entry-level requirements to apply and achieve racial equality as administrators in higher education. However, other research states the pipeline is not the issue. Instead, Blacks face many other challenges that have a direct impact on their ability to achieve these professional levels in higher education (D'Andrea & Daniels, 2007; Cook, 2014; Whitford, 2020), such as a multifaceted nature of racism in the United States (Andrea & Daniels, 2007), racialized patterns of inequity (Hughes, 2013), explicit acts of marginalization (Tevis et al., 2020), and systemic racial oppression and white racial framing to name a few (Esterline, 2015; Feagin, 2013).

Constantine (2006) explains how multifaceted racism can manifest into intentional and unintentional acts of individual, cultural, or institutional racism. Regardless of the intent, the acts of discrimination within themselves are destructive and are displayed because of the inherent cultural belief of the white dominant group in their own rights of privilege, and social and moral superiority. Such beliefs support Feagin's (2013) concept of white racial framing. According to Feagin, the historical exposure of racial oppression is linked to the social injustices and racial inequities that currently exist and displayed in society today. In his book, "*The White Racial Frame: Centuries of Racial Framing and Counter Framing*," Feagin (2013) states that whites are deliberately ignorant or misinformed about the oppressive life conditions that many Americans of color experience daily. This delusional or distorted perception of history reveals persisting exposures of various forms of racial discrimination, such as racial stereotypes, prejudices and biases, and racialized inclinations to discriminate simply based on race. As a result, according to Feagin (2013), this white racial framing functions as a means to conceal the historical violence of racism and provides a way for the white dominant culture to rewrite history, from their predominant perspectives, to only benefit and justify the harm and disruption that actually occurred. Feagin's (2013) framing is directly aligned with the tenants of critical race theory (CRT).

The first tenant of CRT deals with the notion that racism is not an anomaly. Instead, it is an expected occurrence, primarily due to the notion of colorblindness and meritocracy, both which serve to marginalize specific populations of society (Black and other ethnic minorities) and legitimize racism and white supremacist ideologies. The dominant culture's acceptance of this, and other tenets, continues to fuel racism and empowers the white dominant culture to behave unjustly and exhibit despicable behaviors of hate and microaggressions, which constructs a blueprint of

social injustices that encourage continued discrimination of marginalized populations. In 1980, Bell introduced the theory of interest convergence as a critical component of CRT. According to Bell (1980), in society, Blacks will achieve racial equality only when the interests of Blacks is able to converge with the interests of whites (Bell, 1980, as cited in Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Unfortunately, in society, a structural power system exists which epitomizes the power and interests of the white dominant group which determines the success of Black and ethnic minorities. Higher education is a microcosm of society. Therefore, in higher education, the same structural power system exists and determines the success of Black female administrators who face discrimination based on race and gender. Women are ranked the lowest in both systems, with the order of rankings being white males first and then proceeded by Black males, white females, and Black females (Cook, 2014). It is not only deplorable that Black females rank the lowest, but even more egregious that race and gender, also known as multiple marginalities, are used to dictate their achievement and success. The use of multiple marginalities as a method to determine success for Black female administrators is also known as hierarchical microaggressive intersectionalities (HMI) (Young & Anderson 2021). HMI indicates that the communicative systemic valuing (or devaluing) of Black women based on their role and multiple marginalities creates a structural disadvantage that leads to deprofessionalization, racial and gender trauma and fatigue, and invisibility (Anderson & Young, 2021). In 1989, Kimberle' Crenshaw used the term *intersectionality* to describe the same concept. Intersectionality creates distinct experiences for people with multiple identity categories (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). When systems of oppression overlap, the white dominate culture, mainly white males, continue to maintain control in society and in higher education. Therefore, in relation to this study, success as a Black female administrator in higher education can only be achieved when the white dominant culture

relinquishes power and when diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives become a priority in the higher education system.

1.1.1 Community Colleges Within the Broader Problem Area

Community colleges play a vital role in the higher education system. The creation of community colleges has evolved from a focus on building skilled workforce to providing high-quality higher education programs and experiences to students in a timely manner (Kezar & Posselt, 2020). These institutions of higher education offer associate degrees, certificate programs, developmental courses, distance learning opportunities, flexible scheduling, counseling, workforce education, and employment opportunities for the communities they reside in (Darby-Hudgens, 2012). Community colleges also offer general education courses at a fraction of the cost of traditional four-year colleges. Therefore, community colleges serve an access or entry point for many students who plan to attend a traditional four-year college or university.

Comparatively to four-year colleges, community colleges enroll the greatest number of first-generation, low-income, racially minoritized students, and academically at-risk students (Kezar & Posselt, 2020). Since their formation, community colleges have served more than 40% of the U.S. undergraduate population (Walters, 2021). Consequently, community colleges are responsible for providing a safe and secure environment for all students and, because of their history, are poised to provide innovative training, credentialing, and job-preparedness programs and curriculums to meet the needs of its students. Community colleges are also responsible for meeting the same national and regional accrediting guidelines as four-year colleges and universities and include policies and practices that are non-discriminatory and promote diversity

and inclusion initiatives that are relational to the workforce industry. Adhering to these guidelines is increasingly critical considering demographic changes, specifically the projected increase in the number of Black and ethnic minorities attending college and entering the workforce. As a result, the community college environment should also mirror the demographic changes in business and industry and encourage participation in a globally changing world.

1.1.2 Organizational Structure

Tri-State Community & Technical College (Tri-CTC) (pseudonym) is an open enrollment institution. The colleges political alignment dictates organizational structure, governance, and values. Tri-CTC is located in West Virginia (WV) and is within close proximity to the bordering states of Ohio and Kentucky. Residents of each state have affectionally labeled the three-state area as the Tri-State Region (TSR). Within the TSR, there are three colleges, Tri-CTC being one of them, within thirty minutes of the other offering associate degrees and transfer agreements to baccalaureate institutions. As a result, the three colleges compete for the same student enrollment. The TSR is not infused with diversity. The majority of the residents are native to the region and are white. State governance in all three states is almost equally divided among the two major political party lines, with the Republican party gradually dominating at the polls over the last 20 years. WV is considered a healthy republican state, with the republican presidential candidate winning the last three presidential elections. The current governor of WV ran as a Democrat but switched his political party affiliation to Republican within nine months of being elected governor. The governor's political alignment is reflected in the organizational structure and governance of higher education in West Virginia in that the governor appoints the individuals who serve on institutional governing boards. Those appointed to serve possess the power to shape, positively

and negatively, the higher education system. Consequently, Tri-CTC's organizational structure and governance emulates the political climate of the state. Tri-CTC's senior leadership is predominantly white male, which mirrors the political leadership of the state. Additionally, during my tenure at the college, the college operated under a policy governance mandate, meaning all decisions and policies were made by the president and without feedback from stakeholders. Therefore, changes in the Tri-CTC system only occurred when the results benefitted and met the core values of those who possessed power or dominance.

Students are recruited from high schools and career and technical centers located within the tri-state area. The majority of faculty and staff working at Tri-CTC are graduates of one of the two largest colleges located in the state. Tri-CTC is governed by a state college system, known as the community and technical college council (CTC Council), and an institutional Board of Governors (BOG). Tri-CTC's president reports directly to the BOG, with accountability of system measures, student recruitment, retention and graduation rates also monitored by the CTC Council. Individuals who serve on the BOG are recommended by the CTC Council and approved by the governor.

In 2017, 88% of the student population enrolled at the institution were white and 6% were Black or ethnic minorities (IPEDS, 2017). In the same year, Tri-CTC employed 127 full-time faculty and staff, of which only one person employed at the institution was a person of color (Black). Senior administrators, as well as the BOG, were all white and majority male. Despite applications for open positions from Black and ethnic minority groups, the complexion of faculty and staff at the college remained relatively the same the following year. In 2019, there was a 2% increase in the racial composition of students. Additionally, in the same year, the total number of Black and ethnic minority faculty and staff increased, with the hiring of four Black staff. As a

result, the total number of Black staff employed at the college increased to five (IPEDS, 2019). Also, during 2019, there was an increase in the number of promotions and significant salary increases given to white employees at the institution, in spite of increased responsibilities given to Black employees without additional pay. The last four appointments to senior level administrative positions were internal promotions with two of the promotions given to white employees who did not meet the minimum education and/or years of work experience required for the positions. It is important to note that two of the positions were newly created positions by the interim president and the individuals promoted had worked at the institution less than three years in areas different from their area of promotion. Additionally, the vacancies were not announced nor advertised internally, therefore not giving all qualified employees, specifically Black staff, an opportunity to apply. Furthermore, at the time of the promotions, one of the white employees self-disclosed they did not have any experience in the area of their promotion. These appointments were made at a time in which cultivating a diverse and inclusive climate, and fully integrating racially minoritized students into the college environment was a growing concern for many employees and students at the college, as well as the college's accrediting agency.

Tri-CTC's mission and nondiscrimination statements imply that the college provides equal opportunities to all members of the student body, faculty, and staff without regard to race, color, age or any other protected class. Tri-CTC's website indicates the college is home to a diverse and dedicated workforce who make the college a great place to work and learn. Both the college's non-discrimination statement and the website information infer that the institution provides equal opportunities for everyone. Unfortunately, the racial demographics of the full-time faculty and staff, as well as the college's promotion history, does not accurately reflect the college's statement or commitment to provide equal opportunities for all prospective and current employees.

Tri-CTC operates under a policy governance mandate, meaning the college president creates all institutional policy and holds full authority and decision-making power involving all key issues at the college. The BOG has only charged the president with providing a written report and an oral overview of the events and activities occurring at the college at each board meeting. As a result, the president has full authoritative power to ignore institutional policy or solicit feedback from the BOG, or the President's Council, who are appointed by the president, when addressing issues or concerns of the college. Membership for the President's Council consists of only those leadership positions who report directly to the president. The Council consists of five white males and two white females. Therefore, when Black staff or students make complaints and concerns, it is up to the President's Council to address the issue and determine if change needs to occur. As a result, change does not occur unless the change benefits the dominate culture, which is similar to Bell's (1980) interest convergence theory.

Sadly, despite of large numbers of complaints and concerns regarding implicit and explicit racially-biased behavior and the need to improve diversity and cultural awareness, the administrative structure within Tri-CTC continues to malfunction and the racial disparities continue to exist. The continued racial inequities and overt racist behaviors that exist at the college provide the context for my problem of practice.

1.1.3 Stakeholders

Through my analysis of the system, I have discovered that I can make an argument to include every internal and external individual or group as a viable stakeholder that can influence and/or impact my problem of practice. However, after a more focused and critical analysis of the system, and a deeper exploration of behaviors, interests, levels of power or authority to change the

system, I narrowed my stakeholders to three groups. The groups I identified as stakeholders are either directly or indirectly affected by the lack of diversity, equity, and inclusion at the college, or they hold the most significant power or influence on my problem of practice.

1.1.3.1 Racially Minoritized Staff

Race is the most visible means in which the college can obviously and deceptively show diversity at the college. The positionality and intersectionality of stakeholders play a critical role in their ability to influence change. For my problem of practice, racially minoritized staff have the highest level of interest in change occurring at the college, but unfortunately possess the lowest level of power or influence for change to occur. Therefore, this group of stakeholders are the most important stakeholders to my problem of practice. I understand I am a stakeholder in this group. At the time of this research study, I was also the only Black employee in this group of stakeholder to hold an administrative position at the college. Research has found that stereotypes about white females are focused on their skills, while stereotypes for Black females have more to do with their identities (Cook, 2014). Consequently, it is no surprise that, according to the organizational chart, my position is not listed at the same level as my white female peers. Therefore, as a Black female administrator I find it more difficult to navigate through the cultural assumptions, expectations, and social identities at the college.

1.1.3.2 Senior-Level Administrator's and BOG

The senior-level administrators and BOG stakeholders' group are comprised of those stakeholders who are collectively labeled as senior-level leadership and responsible for the overall operation of the college. Their responsibility includes ensuring the college adheres to federal and state laws regarding equal opportunities for employment. They are also responsible for ensuring

the campus environment is diverse and inclusive and is free of racism and discrimination. These stakeholders are deemed equipped to make the best decision for all students, faculty, and staff, regardless of race and gender. This stakeholder group develops, approves, and implements institutional policy and ensures all policies directly align with the mission of the college. These stakeholders possess the power to make significant changes.

1.1.3.3 Student Stakeholders

The student stakeholders are comprised of both racially minoritized students and their white peers. The racially minoritized students are directly impacted by my problem of practice. They are the student demographic for which transformative change needs to occur. Their white peers are the indirect stakeholders. Each student demographic greatly influences the campus climate. Their individual and collective needs must be met by the college in order to promote overall student success, which includes providing a space in which racially minoritized students feel engaged, connected, and possess a sense of belonging to the institution. Individually, Black and other racially minoritized students possess little power to change the environment, but collectively with their white peers, they can leverage their interest and use their influence to shift the focus of those in power. Preliminary feedback and input from these primary stakeholders demonstrated they have a significant interest in my problem of practice because they are impacted and affected by the climate that does not embrace and does not readily accept marginalized students. This was expressed in the student empathy interviews I conducted as a preliminary collection of data for my research study. The interviewed stakeholders expressed concern with the poor representation of Black and other racially minoritized faculty and staff at the college. One student stakeholder, a racially minoritized student, stated he only attended classes and immediately

left because he felt uncomfortable, and the college did not provide safe spaces for students who looked like him.

1.1.4 Statement of Problem of Practice

Tri-CTC has a long history of institutional racism as evidenced by historical and more recent efforts to address equity and diversity across the institution. The college's infrastructure and organizational structure, including the establishment of internal divisions, mimic a dominant racial caste system in that an unspoken, but visually seen, hierarchy of white superiority formally exists (Wilkerson, 2020). During my twelve years employed at the college, and despite required resume documentation of education and experience of potential candidates, the college's hiring committees have never promoted and/or hired a racially minoritized person to serve in a senior leadership position. Additionally, although the college established non-discriminatory policies intended to promote diversity, inclusivity, and a sense of belonging to the institution, the continued behavior and decisions exhibited by senior leadership do not successfully demonstrate a commitment to its stated diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.

In my role as the Director of Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) at Tri-CTC, I faced excessive levels of explicit and intentional racism and discrimination based on both my race and gender. The intentional acts were documented and recorded through journaling, emails, text messages, and audio recordings. Through the utilization of these documents, I aim to better understand the problem of systemic institutional racism at Tri-CTC from an insider point of view, and as a minoritized Black female who experienced the negative impacts of systemic institutional racism daily at the hands of the white dominant culture at the institution.

The concern for addressing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) at Tri-CTC began in 2008 when the BOG approved a social justice policy which designated a social justice officer (SJO) to serve as the chief diversity and inclusion officer for the college. The policy clearly states the college's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion by stating that Tri-CTC is committed to:

...bringing about mutual understanding and respect among all individuals and groups at the College and to eliminate all forms of discrimination. The College promotes an education system that values cultural and ethnic diversity and understanding; that provides for the preparation of students for full and meaningful participation in a changing world; and that promotes equitable and fair treatment in every aspect of campus life and employment for all persons regardless of race, color, national origin, sex, age, religion, veteran status, or disability. (BOG SJO Policy, 2008)

According to the policy, the SJO reports directly to the president, is a senior-level administrator who serves as a member of the President's Council, and is authorized, including having direct oversight, to carry out the institution's diversity program activities, including developing plans, procedures, and regulations, as well as evaluating the operations of the institution to assure conformity with the social justice policy and proposing and encouraging changes in course content and curriculum, student life programming, and administrative procedures designed to eliminate discriminatory practices. Unfortunately, the policy, although approved, was never implemented and a SJO was never hired nor was anyone appointed to serve as the chief diversity and inclusion officer. The current staff and faculty did not dispute, pushback or raise concerns about the implementation of the policy. As a result, Tri-CTC's efforts to address diversity, equity, or inclusion did not advance and the institution continued operating under the

policy governance mandates that permitted the president to make all decisions, without accountability to others.

The issue of DEI again came up in 2017, when Tri-CTC underwent its regional accreditation renewal with the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). In its final report, the HLC team evaluators noted that across racial lines, student demographics and the college's demographics matched that of the Tri-CTC community service area. However, the team noted that they were "struck with the absence of students, faculty, staff, and Board members of color and no evidence of a plan of action to remediate the situation" (HLC Final Report, p.3). The discernible absence of Black students, faculty and staff attending and employed at the college confirms that diversity and inclusion is an urgent problem that the college needs to address.

Reacting to the HLC final report, I was appointed to the position of director for diversity and inclusion in 2018. My duties and responsibilities matched the description of the position responsibilities for the SJO position; however, my position did not report directly to the president of the college, and I was not placed as a senior-level administrator on the College's organizational chart. I discussed my concern with my immediate supervisor and was told that I would never be placed at the same level as my white peers on the president's council because diversity, equity, and inclusion would never be seen at that level of priority for the college.

In 2020, which represents my last documented issue related to the white dominate culture's lack of commitment to DEI efforts, my immediate supervisor rescinded prior authorization for me to continue my efforts to implement improvement science methods for transformative change at the institution. The consequences of that decision not only created additional barriers to implementing diversity, equity, inclusion, and a sense of belonging strategies at the institution for racially minoritized individuals, but it also caused a temporary directive that jeopardized my ability

to complete my previously approved doctoral research at the college, thus possibly impacting the completion of my doctoral program.

Based on Tri-CTC's prior history of discriminatory and promotion practices, and continued efforts to maintain a racial caste system of structure at the college by not hiring or appointing Black employees at senior-level management positions, it is clear that systemic institutional racism is rampant at Tri-CTC. I believe my race and gender are key reasons for the disparity in my position being aligned within the organizational structure and contribute to the macro- and microaggressions that I faced during my tenure in this role. Therefore, I believe I am in a good position to investigate this problem from an insider's point of view.

1.1.5 Review of Supporting Knowledge

Historically, PWIs were established as systems of privilege and oppression (Flowers, 2020). The continued marginalization of racially minoritized students, staff, and faculty have shaped and reinforced the racial tensions and the ineffective integration of racially minoritized individuals at these institutions (Quaye et al., 2020). By not acknowledging and addressing its history, these institutions remain passive in their approach to promoting diversity, equity, inclusion, and ineffective at bolstering a sense of belonging. Intentional and purposeful scrutiny and action is necessary to positively transition the hostile setting into an inclusive cultural environment (Stachowiak, 2015). Increasing awareness, improving interactions and dialogue, and formulating connections are essential steps in moving the primary focus from diversity to one of social justice.

The term diversity was first introduced to describe a broad set of issues and initiatives on college campuses (Chang, 2005). The concept, which encompasses acceptance, respect, and

understanding that each individual is unique, has evolved over time and its impact has been far reaching over the last three and a half decades (Chang, 2005). As enrollments for racially minoritized students continue to increase and racial tensions unfold, increasing awareness beyond tolerance and improving interactions and dialogue within the campus environment to include acceptance and civility are crucial steps in building a more diverse and inclusive campus environment (Cabrera, 1992; Flowers, 2020; Hurtado et al., 1999; Quaye et al., 2020). Ineffective proclamations of diversity and inclusion efforts only deteriorate the basic principle of diversity. Broad-based diversity initiatives must be embedded into the core mission of the institution (Williams, 2013) and disrupt discussions and acts of privilege and power (Johnson, 2006).

1.1.5.1 Using Social Justice Framework to Define Diversity

The aim of social justice education is to construct an environment that is based on full and equal participation from all groups. Social justice education is a democratic, inclusive, and participatory process that is focused on cultivating spaces where individuals can collaborate, discuss, and share their experiences (Stachowiak, 2015). The concept behind implementing a social justice framework creates inter- and cross-cultural engagement and improves dialogue between the white dominant culture and marginalized populations. Incorporating a social justice lens or approach to define diversity incites the critical awareness of one's socialization and the structures that work to inform it (Stachowiak, 2015). Stachowiak (2015) asserts that a social justice framework concentrates on interrupting and dismantling oppressive patterns and behaviors to generate positive outcomes. Therefore, a social justice framework shifts the accountability of creating a diverse and inclusive campus environment from the responsibility of marginalized populations to the responsibility of institutional leadership. Social justice demands socially just environments that promote safe spaces and encourage marginalized populations to reach their

fullest potential and achieve success. Such environments create a multicultural change on college campuses that embrace differences and improves the understanding of other cultures.

Colleges committed to social justice implement various programs and build curriculums with the intent to expand institutional awareness, encourage and increase opportunities for open dialogues, and hire or designate staff to support and advocate for equity and inclusion at the institution. Examples of everyday social justice academic programs and practices include incorporating courses that focus on social justice issues into the general academic curriculum and training instructors on teaching and/or facilitating discussions about social justice issues. Examples also include creating centers on campus that serve as a nexus of activity focused on research and the exchange of ideas that actively connect individual ethnic groups together in one shared space seeking commonalities and celebrating differences. (Gordon et al., 2017). Colleges achieve success with social justice by empowering faculty, staff, and students to report incidences of discrimination and defining and establishing socially acceptable and safe spaces on campus, such as counterspaces, to gather, meditate, and promote inclusion. Researchers define counterspaces as favorite gathering hubs that eventually become an integral part of the campus climate (Monaghan, 2020), and areas in which personal attitudes, behaviors and the interests of faculty, staff, administrators, and students are expressed (Cabera et al., 1999).

Senior-level administrators must ensure institutional strategic plans include language that is inclusive and endorses co-existing truths (Phan et al., 2015). To achieve co-existing truths, institutional language must be free of implicit and explicit biases that articulate preferences. Such language incorporates a social justice framework that promotes equal participation from all groups (Holmes & Oldham, 2019) and supports positive and equitable interactions and decisions (Kezar & Posselt, 2020). Integrating social justice language in institutional strategic plans and policies

not only elevates awareness but ensures cultural knowledge and understanding exists between the white dominant culture and racially marginalized populations (Bensimon, 2007). Using a social justice framework addresses the internal struggles of racism and discrimination and discourages an antagonistic campus climate. (Phan et.al, 2015). Furthermore, applying a social justice framework that acknowledges the impact white supremacist ideologies have on the system of higher education disrupts the discriminatory behavior that negatively impacts the experiences of Blacks employed at the college.

1.1.5.2 Overcoming Whiteness

From inception, racism and white dominance have been a part of the American higher education system (Ash et al., 2020) and can be traced back to practices displayed during settler colonialism. In her book, *“No Study Without Struggle,”* Patel (2021) states the establishment of higher education is intertwined in the settler colonialism practices of land seizure, erasing to replace entire populations of people, and relying on labor. She further states that curriculum was focused on advancing knowledge with a primary focus of creating dominance. Connecting higher education to settler colonialism provides a clearer understanding of the higher education system and its relationship to how various populations, especially Black and ethnic minoritized populations, experience the system.

Higher education institutions were established for the elite and were strictly a hierarchal system (Patel, 2021P). For much of history, these institutions ensured the admission process excluded individuals based on race and ethnicity and social class. Campus environments were segregated and entrenched with hate and overt expressions of white dominance and power. Historically, institutions of higher education were regarded as institutions that practiced systemic racism and oppression (Flowers, 2020) and its institutional practices and strategies were built on

the ideals and principles set forth during the post-Civil War era (Eckel & King, 2004). Based on the history of higher education, practices addressing diversity, equity, and inclusion cannot be implemented until those in charge of the academic and social integration of racially minoritized populations first acknowledge the history of white supremacy.

The post-Civil War era, also known as the era of Jim Crow mandates, consisted of a racial structure that viewed Blacks as being inferior to whites and created a system of domination known as white supremacy. White supremacy encompasses a centralized assumption that whites serve as the standard of human norm and people of color as the deviation from the norm (DiAngelo, 2018). Instead of challenging the validity of the norms that maintain dominance through the positionality of those in roles of power and privilege, white supremacy creates an environment of white privilege for the white dominant culture (Ash et al., 2020; McClaren, 2009). White privilege relies on ignorance and the denial of not knowing the consequences of white supremacy, which results in using whiteness as a means for demeaning people of color (Cabrera, 2017). The performance of daily activities without living in fear or hostility from others is the ultimate expression of living with white privilege. Remaining silent regarding the inequities Black and other minority groups encounter daily individualizes racism instead of seeing racism as a systemic reality. These implicit and overt acts of white privilege have been referred to as invisible knapsacks of unearned benefits (Cabrera, 2017). As a result, Black and other minority groups regularly experience the effects of white privilege through exclusion, fear, contempt, and resentment. The continued aggression and hate toward Black and other minority groups has transgressed into a form of racism called colorblindness (Bonilla-Silvia, 2015, DiAngelo, 2018).

Colorblindness is intertwined into the acts of white privilege, power, and dominance in higher education daily (Cabrera, 2017; DiAngelo, 2018). In many instances, colleges and

universities represent the first opportunity white and racially minoritized students have to engage in interpersonal and academic interactions with peers, faculty, and staff of different races, ethnicities, and economic classes (Lewis et al., 2000). According to the federal Department of Justice, the third highest rate of race or ethnicity-related hate crimes occur at higher education institutions (Ash et al, 2020; Criminal Justice Information Service Division, 2018). Therefore, it is not surprising that Black and other minority groups, attending and employed at colleges and universities, consistently report increased tensions and overtly excessive acts of racial macro- and microaggressions on the college campus. (Chang, 2000; Hurtado, 1999; Lewis et al., 2000; Lowe et al., 2013)

Colorblindness is an adaptive system of oppression that not only transforms, adjusts, and withstands societal and political challenges of racism, but also transforms and adapts to cultural changes that are present within all societal, political, and education systems (Bonilla-Silvia, 2015, Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Cabrera, 2017; DiAngelo, 2018). The inculcation of colorblindness within higher education has proven to be detrimental to the academic, social, and professional experiences of Black and other ethnic minority populations. Colorblindness and racially biased microaggressions create discomfort, which force many Black and other minority groups to experience feelings of racial isolation and self-segregation (Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Lewis et al., 2000). These experiences influence decisions and adversely impact the number of Black and ethnic minority groups holding administrative positions. A colorblind society cannot exist until there is a disruption in the systemic structure of racial inequities in society and higher education (Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Cabrera, 2017; DiAngelo, 2018). Higher education administrators must surrender control in order to relinquish dominance. Eliminating racially biased practices and ideologies is a major step in addressing white privilege.

1.1.5.3 Summary

The simplicity of racism has changed since the Jim Crow racial structure that existed during the post-Civil War era (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). Racism has transitioned into a complex configuration of prejudice that is now multi-dimensional and has emerged as a new colorblind racial ideology that permits whites to conceal and justify the existence of racism and racial inequality (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). The acceptance of this colorblind ideology serves as a false remedy for racism and discrimination as it allows white students, faculty and staff to deny the presence of race and never address the exclusionary practices and racial inequities that Black and other minority groups face on campus (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Bonilla-Silva, 2017; DiAngelo, 2018, Cabrera, 2017; Lewis et al., 2000).

Post-secondary education has become more racially diverse over the last decade. As student enrollments continue to increase and the complexity of the college campus changes, increasing diversity and inclusion initiatives that increase awareness, encourage conversations, and collaboration is critically important to enhancing the experiences of Black and ethnic minority groups in higher education. Dismantling oppressive behavior and encouraging open dialogue between white, Black and ethnic minority groups provides a pathway for fully integrating diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives into the campus environment. Having a shared language and understanding of the obstacles Black and ethnic minority groups face in higher education is critical to validating their experiences, providing connections, and for Black and ethnic minorities to develop a sense of belonging to the institution.

College administrators can only begin to disrupt whiteness on their campuses by acknowledging racial disparities exists. Self-reflection and establishing safe spaces to openly discuss racial disparities invites Black and ethnic minority groups to share their experiences

(Harper, 2009). College administrators must demonstrate, through active leadership, the urgency of this issue.

2.0 Section 2: Understanding the Problem and Seeing the System: An Evaluation

2.1 Inquiry Questions

Institutional racism perpetuates the racial inequalities inherently that exist within systems of power. Examples of institutional racism can be seen embedded throughout institutional policies and practices, cultural representations of employees, and organizational structures. Each of these reinforce inequitable opportunities and outcomes for Black and ethnic minority members of the organization while allowing white members to benefit from the acts of discrimination (D’Andrea & Daniels, 2007). Further, institutional racism can be defined or expressed in many ways and has legitimized dimensions of our history and culture that have allowed privileges associated with “whiteness” and disadvantages associated with “color” to endure and adapt over time. Regardless of definition or how it is expressed, institutional racism does not exist only within a small sector of society. Instead, institutional racism is also present in the social, economic, and political systems in which we all exist. Within these systems, institutional racism serves to maintain control, dominance, and power over Black and ethnic minorities while perpetuating the concept of white supremacy.

Several scholars offer substantial evidence that institutional racism is present and flourishing within the system of higher education, and especially for Black females (Bhopal, 2017, Cook, 2014, Hughes, 2013, Young & Anderson, 2021). As a result, Black female administrators face an intertwined racism and discrimination based on both their race and gender (Cook, 2014). These biases are portrayed in various ways, ranging from subtle and unconscious stereotypical behaviors to more blatant and explicit behaviors of intentional discrimination. The biases

exhibited typically contracts between the dominant culture's ideals of leadership and the need to guard its political power, cultural dominance, and structural privileges. My experiences as a Black female administrator in an environment that fosters and propagandizes institutional racism not only supports the research, but also is the crux of the study, and serves as the nucleus and focal point for my research methods and procedures. For this study, my focus is on my experiences as a Black female administrator and understanding the system that challenged my intersectionality, attempted to silence my voice, and forced me to confront existing and reinforced cultural boundaries to facilitate transformative change. As a result, the following inquiry questions were designed to guide my research, reflect on the obstacles I encountered while on my journey, and to understand my positionality within the system.

1. How does the dominant white cultural beliefs, norms, and discourse experienced by one Black female administrator perpetuate a sense of institutional racism at the college?
2. How does positionality and intersectionality of one Black female administrator impact their experience within the organizational structure?
3. How does one Black female administrator lead and negotiate transformative change in a non-diverse, non-inclusive, and highly racial and stigmatized environment?

2.1.1 Methods and Measures

Navigating academia is difficult for most, but when including the unspoken cultural assumptions and expectations for Black females, the navigation is intensely more challenging (Cook, 2014). According to Cook's research, most Black females who reach senior-level administrative positions believed that education and hard work would equal success. These perceptions and beliefs are powerful motivators but often ignore societal conditions that serve as

obstacles that keep Black female administrators from attaining their goals. Black females must ignore the hurdles of racism and sexism to break institutional barriers and to overcome the mindset of the white dominant culture. Understanding, through the voices of Black female administrators, the journey of facing such obstacles and surviving the system, is critical to disrupting and dismantling the racially based ideologies that are in place to preserve the history of racism and oppression in higher education.

Autoethnography is a scientific study of self and culture. Autoethnography is typically presented as a scholarly personal narrative that uses a descriptive mode of storytelling in an autobiographical format (Chang, 2008). As a qualitative research methodology, it seeks to describe and understand similarities or differences between self and others within a cultural community (Hughes & Pennington, 2018). This research methodology allows the researcher to also serve as the participant of the study, which helps the researcher to understand themselves in relation to larger social structures and communities and use themselves as a subject of academic inquiry (Burnier, 2006; Chang, 2008). Chang (2018) best describes the research method as a celebration of an individual story.

I have chosen this method for my study because it permits me, as the researcher and participant, to describe my personal experiences with institutional racism by expressing my feelings and experiences in a structured and scholarly way. My autoethnographic account describes and informs others of what it is to be a Black female administrator who is personally entrenched in daily acts of microaggressions, explicit bias, overt racism, and racial segregation at a public institution of higher education. The account also illustrates the techniques and strategies I used to cope with the racial trauma and fatigue I encountered. I chronicled the changes in my mindset and my personal struggles to survive in an environment that was harshly negative, highly

hostile, and intentionally discriminatory against me as a Black female administrator. Through my voice and personal experiences, I recounted my journey, using critical reflexivity, to inform how my experiences may impact and validate the experiences that other Black female administrators encounter in higher education.

I used border-crossing experiences as a means to document the false borders that were erected due to the societal norms and cultural constraints of the white dominant culture. Border-crossing experiences occur when bonds are established with individuals who have different or oppositional experiences, or when individuals are placed in unfamiliar and sometimes antagonistic places. Border-crossing experiences create walls of hostility within an environment. This tool encourages the autoethnographer to self-evaluate and self-analyze feelings that seem familiar and/or strange to them within the culture (Chang, 2008). Employing the border-crossing techniques as a means of documenting my experiences was critical to my analysis because the techniques prompted me to not only confront moments of disorientation, feelings of uneasiness and anxiety, inequity, and discrimination, but also to become more cognizant of my experiences and how my experiences may help others to understand what it is like to be a Black female administrator in higher education.

For this autoethnographic study, I explored the dual culture that existed within the environment of Tri-CTC; one culture that promoted and safeguarded the ideologies of the white dominant culture, and the other that sought diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice for everyone. The goal was to reflect on the interconnectivity of these cultures in an effort to help others understand what it is like to be a Black female administrator working in an environment that endorses behaviors that support systemic institutional racism. My autoethnographic account provides a tangible understanding of the obstacles Black female administrators experience in their

roles of leadership in higher education. My account also allowed me to center my voice as a prime example and demonstrate the impact that continued segregation, alienation, and isolation has on the character and integrity of Black female administrators employed in higher education. Through my account, I identified and provided evidence of ways in which systemic institutional racism affected my positionality and authenticated my experience of the marginalization. Autoethnographic research is valuable because the contexts studied provide cultural understanding and experiences that may be similar to others, which is not often discussed, but is useful in helping others to successfully negotiate and navigate a system that does not acknowledge or value their wealth and experiences.

2.1.1.1 CRT as a Framework

In 1994, Critical Race Theory (CRT) was first used as an analytical framework to assess inequity in education. Since it has been employed as a framework to further analyze and critique research and practices in education (Hiraldo, 2010). CRT is a progressive legal movement that seeks to transform the relationship of race, racism, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). CRT's framework is comprised of five tenets: counterstorytelling, the permanence of racism, Whiteness as property, interest convergence, and the critique of liberalism. CRT evaluates the role of race and racism in perpetuating social disparities between dominant and marginalized racial populations (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Collectively, the CRT tenets provide a deeper understanding of the inconsistencies that Black and ethnic minorities experience within a societal system that promotes white cultural dominance. Subsequently, CRT successfully serves as a theoretical frame to explore the different forms of social inequities reinforced at my institution.

2.1.2 Self as the Participant

For this study, I immersed myself entirely in the culture as an insider, while maintaining my positionality as an outsider to describe my experiences. As a result, I served as the sole participant for this research study. As the primary participant, I operated as the narrator, interpreter, and the researcher while describing my personal experiences in a culture that challenged my cultural standards of thinking and behaving (Goodenough, 1976; Chang, 2008). Using my voice to narrate my story provided a unique perspective to this research. In doing so, I exposed my vulnerability and provided a first-hand account of the ways in which various racists acts and behaviors can manifest and create havoc and destruction on a college campus. When preparing for the autoethnography, I connected to my cultural background and experiences, which I used as a blueprint to help me to understand my positionality and intersectionality, to the dual cultures that existed at the college and with the process of writing. I primed myself mentally and emotionally for the task at hand. I understood the importance of exposing my vulnerabilities as I took on my role as the researcher and the participant of my study. Despite the hurt and harm, I believed telling my story validated the experiences of Black female administrators in higher education. The autoethnographic account of my journey not only addressed the inequities and social injustices that exist in higher education, but also provided credibility to the feelings of distraught, alienation, and trauma experienced by Black female administrators daily.

2.1.3 Data Collection

Autoethnographic methods of data collection and analysis includes various types of qualitative methods (Hughes & Pennington, 2018; Chang, 2008). I collected data from various

points of my journey that extended over twelve years of employment at the institution. For this research, the data selected increased my understanding of my positionality, as an insider, in relation to the larger social and educational system that promoted white dominance. The data also supported the mindset of the white dominant culture that racially minoritized individuals are inferior, and in most cases, do not add value to the overall health and success of the institution. The data used for this study does not represent a comprehensive collection of each event, uncomfortable encounter, or racist act I combatted at the institution. Instead, the collection embodied those situations that had the most adverse effect on my character, my sense of self, and my mental and emotional health. My use of the collected documents facilitated my ability to craft compelling narratives that evoked and captured my lived experiences as a Black female administrator employed and working in the environment, as well as the researcher focused on analyzing the effects of systemic institutional racism at one community college. Within each primary source, I included the use of memory (recall), self-reflexivity, institutional policies, digital footprints of writings on social media and professional media, verbal and electronic communications, and/or poetry, images, music and photography to provide fluid descriptions of my personal experiences. Counterstorytelling, journaling, and personal narratives aroused the emotions, thoughts, and feelings I experienced as a Black female administrator in an environment that was non-inclusive, and discouraged diversity in race and thought. Incorporating all forms of data collection provided the context needed to not only identify the problem, but also emphasize the necessity for a solution.

For my autoethnographic study, I collected and analyzed the following institutional documents to detail the non-performative measures, policies, procedures, and invasive and intrusive acts of racism exhibited by the white dominate culture at the institution.

- Tri-CTC Non-Discrimination, Harassment, and Title IX Policies and Complaint Packets. These documents detailed the proposed institutional support for inclusivity and the elimination of all forms of discrimination at the institution. The documents also assigned the division and position responsibilities for enforcing the policies, as well as the grievance process if acts of racism and/or discrimination were to occur at the institution.
- Tri-CTC BOG Policies, specifically the Social Justice Officer (SJO) position. This policy identified the person to serve as the chief diversity officer for the institution and their level of administration at the institution. According to the policy, the chief diversity officer serves as a senior level administrator with primary oversight and enforcement of institutional diversity and inclusion programs, plans, procedures, and regulations.
- Tri-CTC's Organizational Structure. For the purposes of this study, two organizational structures, both implemented and in existence at the college, were collected and analyzed. The first organizational structure collected was the structure in which the college operated at the beginning of my employment and is the structure reported and submitted as the true organizational structure utilized at the college for all reporting purposes. The second collected structure was created and implemented by the interim president in 2020. The second structure was implemented using policy governance and included those individuals promoted to senior level positions that represented the corrupted promotion practices engaged by the interim president under his tenure.
- Tri-CTC Hiring and Promotion Practices. This data was not easily accessible or readily available to this researcher for perusal or use in my research. Therefore, the data was

collected via emails, text messages, and institutional promotion announcements. Position announcements, including required education, knowledge, and experiences were collected and, through analysis, supported the intentional promotions of non-racially minoritized individuals who did not meet the basic requirements for the position.

- WV Higher Education Institutional Board of Governors appointment article. This article detailed the composition of institutional board members, the terms and qualifications, including race requirements of members, vacancies, and the eligibility of appointments.
- IPEDS institutional data.

Additionally, I collected and analyzed my personal email communications, texts, and journaling notes. These forms of data collections are considered to be the hallmark collections of autoethnographic studies (Hughes & Pennington, 2018). I utilized counterstorytelling, reflexive journaling, and personal narratives as my secondary sources for collecting data. The following definitions describe the purpose of each collection method and the benefits of the methods in relation to my study.

- Counterstorytelling: Counter-storytelling is a major tenet of critical race theory (CRT). Counter-storytelling is used to magnify and elevate minoritized voices, perspectives, and experiences (Castelli, 2021). For this study, counterstorytelling revealed the truths of my experiences and exposed the problems within the system to encouraged discrimination (Hiraldo, 2010). I used counterstorytelling as a means of understanding myself while I conducted this self-reflexive study of my personal experiences in relation to the dominate cultural practices that existed at my place of practice.

- **Reflexive Journaling:** Reflexive journaling is a technique used to describe the researcher as the participant and provide experiences from their own perspective. The journaling includes the researcher/participant's reactions to specific situations that have affected them and provide reflections on the research process. I utilized my journaling as a means to understand my feelings and reactions to the racist and discriminatory acts I encountered daily at the college. I intentionally reviewed my journaling notes and comments for accuracy, looking for any data omissions, untruths, or unsupported and unsubstantiated entries.
- **Personal Narrative:** The purpose of the personal narrative is to reflect and evoke emotions related to my experience. The narrative functions as both an analysis and reporting tool that makes sense of the personally relevant experiences of my journey (Hokkanen, 2017).

2.1.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis and interpretation are not terminal or mechanical processes (Chang, 2008). Instead, they are often conducted concurrently and are intertwined. Chang (2008) describes this process as a balancing act between fracturing, connecting, and zooming in and out between science and art. I adopted these evaluative techniques and continuously reviewed and evaluated my data to identify recurring topics, emergent themes, and patterns in behavior or intention, and patterns of meaning within the data to comprehend how the behaviors and experiences of all stakeholders are connected and interrelated. Although multiple themes and patterns emerged throughout the entire process, I organized the themes to reflect the overarching issues that described the systemic institutional racism that existed at the college, and truly impacted my experiences as a Black female administrator employed there.

Throughout this study, I connected and documented my inner thoughts, emotions, reflections, behaviors, and experiences when accessing, organizing, and analyzing the various documents collected on my journey. I identified and provided cultural meaning to my narrative that not only told my story, but also illustrated, supported, and made sense of the data as it related to my journey. I thoroughly reviewed the experiences of my past and connected them to my present thoughts, behaviors, and expectations. I utilized my literature review, the CRT tenets, and the border-crossing experiences as the framework to explain and interpret the behaviors and events and to guide my writing process.

Additionally, I continuously searched the data, looking for any intentional unintentional data omissions (Chang, 2008), that may shed valuable light on my experiences within the environment. I accomplished this by asking myself the following questions throughout the analysis and interpretation process.

1. What personal biases am I employing that may affect my objective analysis of the events, behaviors, or experiences that occurred in the environment?
2. In my reflexive journaling, did I provide an accurate account of the events/occurrences, or did I accidentally, purposefully, or intentionally omit information (Chang, 2008)?
3. What specific indicators emerge that can explain how my life experiences are culturally, not just personally, meaningful (Chang, 2008)?

The goal of my research was to provide details that not only informed what happened, but most importantly why it happened. It was my hope that my openness and vulnerability would inform and help others who encountered similar experiences to cope and survive in an environment that was discouraging and unjust for Black female administrators.

Finally, I recognize the importance of providing an unbiased and unobstructed view of the culture in my study. I also understand it is critical to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the institution and any unforeseen participants involved in the study. Therefore, to remove any potential risks of revealing personal identifiers, I used a pseudonym for the college. Furthermore, during my review and analysis of institutional data, I incorporated measures to not disclose sensitive information that could be used to identify non-participants of the study, especially other employees of the college.

3.0 Section 3: Autoethnography Results

The results of my autoethnographic study relied on my ability to comprehend and convey institutional racism at Tri-CTC as an insider and through the lens of a Black female administrator. Showing up daily as my authentic self, while intentionally being the voice for those who look like me guided my research results. The following results provide a glimpse of my journey, revealing the deficiencies within the institutional structure that chose to promote whiteness over inclusivity and the non-acceptance of a Black female administrator employed at the community college.

1. Ignoring past behavior encouraged continued inequities.

Through my analysis of Tri-CTC's Title IX, Sexual Harassment, Discrimination and Social Justice policies and the college's Statement of Nondiscrimination, it is inferred that the college maintains a work and educational environment that is "free from all forms of discrimination and sexual harassment" and promotes an education system that "values cultural and ethnic diversity and understanding" (BOG Policies, mctc.edu/content/uploads/IBOG-Policy). Unfortunately, the documentation of my journey as a Black female administrator proves the college's declarations and policies to be false and non-performative. The analysis of data demonstrates Tri-CTC's culture celebrated white privilege and constructed significant barriers that invalidated me, as a Black female, and my experiences as a Black female administrator employed at the college. For example, a thorough analysis of the data revealed that although it was customary to recognize and celebrate staff birthdays, throughout my twelve years of employment at the institution, the only birthdays recognized and celebrated were those of my white peers. Based on the data, this practice became increasingly evident during the last three to four years of my employment at the college.

The data indicates that of the emails sent and/or authorized by the vice president of student services or her designee, not one email invitation for a birthday celebration gathering was in recognition or celebration of my birthday. Instead, the data disclosed a pattern for birthday celebrations. According to email invitations, birthday celebrations generally occurred during the month and weeks prior to and immediately after my birthday. It is also interesting to note here that, according to the documents, if formal celebrations were skipped due to institutional schedules, birthday cards were provided as acknowledgement. Again, the data indicates I did not receive birthday cards either. Similar incidents also occurred during times of bereavement. One particular incident occurred after the death of my mother in December 2020. Although informed of her death, the vice president of student affairs did not send out any notification of bereavement to student services division staff. However, one month later, after the death of my white peer's father, a division wide email notification was sent to staff, not only acknowledging the death, but also a statement within the email indicating that donations were being collected to "support the family in this time of need." These types of explicit bias and institutional inequities were also executed in other institutional practices, such as with official reporting of discrimination and in the promotion practices at the college.

The data analysis consistently showed repeated incidences of microaggressions, discrimination, and racist behavior that violated institutional non-discrimination policies. While journaling, I often wrote about my experiences, including the racial trauma and fatigue, and the "mental and emotional exhaustion" I felt due to the disparate treatment and hostile working environment. The same frustration, hurt, and concern was also documented in emails sent to the vice president for student services, the director for human resources, as well as the president of the institution. Despite the seriousness of the offenses, data discloses such incidents were either not

investigated or were “closed due to lack of information.” For example, in 2012 after the re-election of President Obama, a photo of Obama hanging from a tree with a noose around his neck was left anonymously on my desk. The note on the photo stated, “this can happen anywhere at any time.” The photo, as well as a formal statement, was given to both the vice president for student services and the director of human resources to investigate. The result of the investigation was “inconclusive,” meaning because I could not provide “documented proof” of who left the photo on my desk and because there were no cameras or a means to “identify the person,” the investigation into the incident was closed. Continued review and analysis of my journals and emails indicated the racist behavior continued, and in many cases escalated. Unfortunately, the outcome for each reported incident held the same results or worse, in that they were not investigated at all. Consequently, the data supported this result of the study. Tri-CTC’s practices of ignoring past behaviors, including the impact white supremacist ideology had on the history of the higher education, created an environment that encouraged racism and continued inequities that devalued me as a Black female administrator at the college.

2. D&I position revealed institutional racism and white complicity.

According to the HLC report (2017) and the organizational structure of the college, the HR director has the primary responsibility for enforcing the non-discriminatory policies and ensuring diversity is embedded in the institution’s hiring and promotion practices. Ironically, according to the data, the director, who is a white female, was instrumental, and many times, the primary initiator of the most egregious and detrimental forms of racism and discrimination I experienced at the institution. One such documented incident resulted in the director’s promotion to the vice president for student services. In May 2020, after the sudden retirement of several senior administrators, including the president and the vice president of student services, and the

appointment of the interim president (January 2020), the director of human resources texted me requesting a “private confidential phone conversation”. According to the journaling notes and subsequent emails, the meeting was to discuss realigning position responsibilities and potential reorganization of the division prior to the new vice president being hired. During the call, I was asked several specific questions relating to specific position duties, including advising, student recruitment and retention goals, and the potential impact a reorganization would have on the division. A month later, in June 2020, the interim president announced the promotion of the director to the vice president position. According to the position announcement, the promotion was approved primarily because of the director’s “clear vision for re-organization of the student services division and specific goals relating to academic advising, student recruitment and retention.” I later received a text communication from the director regarding her promotion. In the text, she thanked me for my assistance and admitted that she did not have the required education and or experiences needed for the position and stated that with the new appointment she would “rely heavily on those individuals who do have the knowledge to be successful.” In the text, she specifically stating me as a primary resource for her. According to institutional records, the director’s promotion represents the college’s continued promotion of white employees who do not possess the required education, knowledge and/or skills to a senior-level leadership position. Furthermore, the data effectively demonstrates Tri-CTC’s hiring and promotion practices violated institutional policies to promote racial and gender equity and inclusiveness.

Further analysis of the data confirmed that the dominant culture’s unwillingness to speak against racism consciously supported the various forms of oppression that already existed at the institution which resulted in white complicity. One of the most egregious incidents of racism and white complicity occurred in July 2019. According to institutional emails, calendars, and

journaling documents, I was asked to attend a meeting with an external constituent (Region Workforce), the President, several Vice Presidents and Deans, Assistant Deans of Student Affairs and Academic Affairs. My direct supervisor, and the VP of my division were included. I was not provided the details or the purpose of the meeting, was only told to be in attendance and come prepared to discuss and address concerns regarding a transitional program I oversaw for Workforce. Once in the meeting, the tone and purpose became clear. Of course, as the only Black administrator at the college, I was the only person of color in the meeting room. When I entered, the only chair that was left available was the one located two seats to the left side of the head chair at the conference table. It is important to note that all white administrators were located on the opposite side of the table, with the Region 2 Workforce staff (2 individuals) seated directly beside them. The set-up was reminiscent of an inquisition, placing me in the “hot seat” with the unspoken communication and intentionality that the conversation was going to be aggressive and accusatory. The discussion immediately became hostile. I was not invited into the conversation, instead I was spoken about as if I were not in the room. Instead of my first name being used, I was referred to as “Grooms” or “She - Grooms.” When spoken to, the tone was harsh, the individuals speaking spoke with disgust and actually stated they believed I just need to sit and “listen to their concerns without comment for the entire meeting.” In fact, the director stated, they “were not interested in anything I had to say, they only wanted this meeting to state their disgust and their desired outcome was not a resolution, but instead a reprimand.” The majority of the white senior-level staff present, except for my immediate supervisor, did not look alarmed or surprised by the comments. As the meeting progressed, my supervisor (a white female) requested that I be allowed to respond and also stated they should address me as either “Veella,” or Mrs. Grooms.” She stated the disrespectful and unprofessional behavior should not be permitted and she demanded the behavior

ended. The president stated he did not have an issue with the comments, and they (Workforce) should be permitted to voice their concerns. At one point during the meeting the workforce director was permitted to slam his fists on the table and made statements such as, “Why is she here?” and “She is of no benefit to this institution or our people.” As I reflected on the action in my journal, I struggled with whether he meant I was of no benefit to his students, or did he really mean of no benefit to the human race? The president never corrected or spoke out against the action. The meeting continued in that manner for two hours – two hours in which I was forced to sit and listen to white individuals intentionally state microaggressions, engage in explicit and harmful dialogue, and be empowered by Tri-CTC’s white senior leadership to display their privilege, white complicity, and approval of the harm against one of their employees by an external constituent of the institution. Immediately after the meeting, I retreated to my office and documented my experience stating I felt “humiliated and in total emotional disarray, feeling and experiencing extreme racial trauma and fatigue, emotional and mental harm, and feeling isolated, discarded, and non-human.” The situation was documented by me, with emails sent to the President, Vice Presidents, and Deans present, as well as the Director for Human Resources, clearly detailing my concerns. The following are some of the statements directly from the email sent to the HR director from me.

The remarks made today by both Workforce representatives were not only inappropriate, but were unprofessional, derogatory, and unsubstantiated. To be spoken to in the manner they were permitted to speak to me today, including referring to me by just my last name and attack my character, was very offensive, demeaning, and harmful. For the president of this institution to quietly sit and permit such behavior to occur demonstrates his inability to lead, protect, implement, and adhere to federal and state regulations. Furthermore, for

the only comment to be made by him was one that granted continued permission for use of microaggressions, racial and personal attacks against me to continue, and support unsubstantiated accusations is unacceptable... This email serves as formal notice to you that I will not permit anyone else at this institution, or outside of this institution – including those with signed contracts or relationships with Tri-CTC, to speak to me or any other racially minoritized person in this manner again. I will begin investigating my legal options and completing all paperwork to file grievances and discrimination complaints against individuals and the institution. (Email sent to the HR director, 2019).

I also received individual visits from my immediate supervisor, the Vice President of Student Affairs, and another Assistant Dean for the division, as well as text messages and emails from staff and faculty who heard about the meeting through triangular conversations. The following statements represent the common threads stated in their comments, which were also provided both in-person and in email.

I am sorry...I should have said something...I should have spoken up on your behalf...That meeting was unacceptable and should not have occurred...The president should have stopped the meeting...I felt uncomfortable...I can only imagine how you felt...No one should be spoken to in that manner...That is racism...I should have said something.

Important to note, as documented in my journaling, a couple of them even “released a tear and asked me to forgive them for their inaction. I submitted “a formal complaint to the director for human resources and a meeting to discuss next steps, resolution and corrective action was scheduled. Based on what was stated as the “final step” of the complaint, I received the following email message from the director of human resources.

I first want to say that I am very sorry to hear about this situation. All work situations should be supportive, safe, productive, and professional. I am sorry to hear about this. Nobody should be treated how you have described. I understand how you are feeling, and I want to take action to resolve these issues. As a result, I have met with the president. It has been decided that we (Tri-CTC) will provide our 30 day notice off cancellation of the MOU (memorandum of understanding) with Region II Workforce. Our obligations to serve them, interact with them, engage with the, will conclude 30 days from today. The president stated he would contact you directly regarding your concerns, the situation, and resolution. (Email from the HR Director)

No additional emails or communication was received regarding the matter. Workforce staff still had offices in the building, even after I resigned from my position in 2021.

In its final accreditation report, the HLC accreditation team stated they were struck by the absence of persons of color in leadership positions at the college. The team strongly encouraged Tri-CTC to rectify and remedy the issue by diversifying its faculty, staff, and students' along racial lines. The team further stated the college should share the ownership of diversity among all divisions of the college and not just within the division of human resources. As a result, the director for diversity and inclusion position was created. The D&I position was created with the intent of acknowledging the college's obligation to conform to accreditation guidelines, stimulate institutional change, and demonstrate Tri-CTC's commitment to diversity and inclusion. Unfortunately, the creation of the position had the opposite effect. The analysis of institutional documents, emails, and journaling documents proved Tri-CTC did not use the position as an opportunity to proactively address race and discrimination concerns. Instead, senior leadership continued to consciously support the various forms of oppression that already existed at the

institution, as well as deliberately provide the space and opportunity for the segregation and isolation of racially minoritized staff, including this Black female administrator, and other individuals who actively spoke out against the college's discriminatory institutional policies and practices. The data documents senior leaderships decisions to knowingly and intentionally participate in behaviors that benefit the dominate culture at the institution and support racism and oppressive systems that blocked racially minoritized staff from the access to goals, services, and opportunities afforded to society, specifically the dominate culture at the institution. By ignoring HLC recommendations to challenge the current culture and system, Tri-CTC leadership exhibited behavior that contributed to and reinforced racism that existed at the college. As a result, Tri-CTC leadership became complicit to the struggles of racially minoritized individuals and the effects racism had on one Black female administrator at the college. Additionally, senior leadership's role in supporting systems that differentiate between white and racially minoritized populations made it difficult for one Black female administrator to overcome the whiteness of the campus culture.

3. Pivoting is necessary for growth and resiliency.

My Tri-CTC employment record documents that I was employed at the college for twelve years, with the last six years of my employment in a leadership and/or administrative role at the college. Through those years, in various positions, I experienced various roadblocks and barriers that not only prevented my professional growth at the college, but also caused personal harm, racial trauma and fatigue, as well as mental health – emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and psychological – issues, all documented via my journaling and conversations with allies at the college and at home. As a result, my professional growth was stunted, and I was only able to reach pre-determined thresholds of my administrative career that, despite possessing the education and professional skills, were never equal to the level of my white peers. As I analyzed my journey, using timelines,

coded themes, reflective journaling, external methods of coping, such as music and poetry, I learned my resiliency was due to my ability to shift and identify different opportunities to reach my goals. I documented in my journal what I believed to be the two most difficult and pivotal journeys of my employment as a Black female administrator at the college. The first occurred in May 2017 when I was removed from my office and segregated to another floor, away from other staff in the student services division. According to my journaling and the follow-up email sent to the vice president of student affairs after the segregation, the official reason for my move was due to assigning me additional responsibilities and the administration wanting to “provide me with the space and environment to develop and implement much needed policies and procedures for the institution.” Ironically, the move occurred almost immediately after I was acknowledged for my high student retention rates and my white peers made comments such as: “Black people speak loud,” “it is hard to think and be effective in the division if it is not quiet,” “it isn’t fair that we are compared to one another.” I journaled daily about the experience and my “newfound isolation” on the third floor, which housed faculty offices and for the most part was not occupied during the summer months. The corridor in which my office was located was where nine-month faculty were located. As a result, I was required to arrive to work and have little to no interaction with anyone throughout my ten-hour workday. This segregated transition was the impetus to my decision to not only fight back, but that pivoting was crucial to my growth and resiliency at the institution. The second, and most destructive, humiliating, and racially charged incident occurred June 2020 after the promotion of director for human resources to the newly appointed vice president for student affairs position (NP-VPSA). According to emails, text messages, and recorded conversations with the NP-VPSA, the division was going to restructure with the intent of promoting and encouraging diversity and inclusion into every aspect of divisional planning. In a

July 2020 text message, the NP-VPSA stated “the president wants me to collaborate directly with you to develop and implement minority recruitment initiatives that will intentionally focus on recruiting racially minoritized students to the college, especially during racially dedicated months such as Black History month.” The text further documented that the president was fully aware of the new director for recruitment, but he believed that “you have an advantage over her in this area because you are Black” and the students, as well as the community at-large, would be more willing to accept me at recruitment events. The NP-VPSA further stated that “the college has confidence in the new director’s ability to navigate the environment and be effective in meeting goals,” but they both believed we should put the “best face forward” to ensure we meet institutional goals. According to follow-up emails and conversations, it was determined I would be the person tasked with the responsibility even though recruitment was not a direct job function and/or responsibility identified in my position responsibilities. Through emails, texts, meetings, and informal conversations, I offered to assist and help support efforts, but I repeatedly denounced full responsibility, and adamantly stated my concerns regarding the implicit messaging and microaggressive statements that promoted and encouraged a “tokenism approach” to the recruitment of Black students. Through my journaling, I determined that pivoting for resiliency and the protection of my mental health was necessary after a meeting that occurred in April 2021. At this meeting, which is documented via meeting notes, and later verified by a recorded conversation, I was asked to provide the names of all the “Black businesses located in the colleges recruitment area” to the director of recruitment. When I stated, “I am sure this was not the intent, but I feel compelled to ask, how would I know who they are...Am I expected to know this information because I am Black...Does this mean others would be able to provide a respective list of all the white businesses, Asian owned business, and others.” I was told I was “being too

aggressive,” the comments implying I was acting as an angry Black woman in my response. I was asked to be quiet and told to “shut up, we are moving on.” This incident catapulted the most debilitating, digressive, harmful, and fatal attack to my overall mental health and experiences at the college. I later documented the experience in an email to my immediate supervisor – the director of human resources and vice president of student affairs. In my documentation I again stated my full intent to file a grievance and/or complaint of the microaggressions and explicit racism that have been displayed and have become the “norm” for the institution. The next day, documented by calendar invite and email notification, I was asked to report to her office for discussion. Upon arrival, I was told to sit in a chair across from the desk from her and another white employee in the division. During the meeting, I was informed that the meeting was formal notification to me of my inappropriate behavior and response to a direct request and order from my immediate supervisor. I was informed that I was creating “unnecessary tension and harm” to the division.

Through my journaling, it has been determined that my ability to pivot during these most challenging times at the college permitted me to recharge and trust my ability to respond appropriately to situations that did not provide me with much hope. Pivoting allowed me to grow personally and professionally. Pivoting allowed me to trust and validate myself. In this study, pivoting resulted in my ability to continue to grow personally and professionally.

4.0 Section 4: Learning & Actions

Non-inclusive campus environments breed racism and encourage discriminatory practices that negatively impact institutional climate and the overall success of racially minoritized faculty, staff, and students enrolled and employed at the college. Such environments reveal the intentional complicity with racism and illegal wrongdoings by the white dominant culture. DiAngelo (2018) stated such complicity is present in all white people which makes it impossible for anyone to be exempt from racist and discriminatory environments. Prior to recording my experiences at Tri-CTC I did not believe most racist behavior was explicit in nature. My previous experiences with the white dominate culture indicated that most were engaged in and/or exhibited racist practices through implicit biases and behavior. Although readily practiced, I believed the majority of the white culture to be undercover racists. However, my journey has revealed to me that is not the case. History continues to repeat itself, specifically in the structure of higher education and in relation to the struggles of those who are cast underneath the heel of oppression (Patel, 2021). The daily microaggressions and racial trauma I experienced, at the hands of the white dominant culture, illuminated the continued turmoil and struggles of racially minoritized individuals, specifically one Black female administrator, working in higher education. In this discussion section, I have used my inquiry questions as a guide to examine the struggles I endured, including a depiction of my innermost thoughts, feelings, and fears, as a Black female administrator at a predominantly white community college.

Inquiry Question #1: How does the dominant white cultural beliefs, norms, and discourse experienced by one Black female administrator perpetuate a sense of institutional racism at the college.

As a Black female administrator, I had to incredulously navigate a system that purposefully worked to silence me, isolate me, humiliate me, and dishearteningly segregate me. The environment, especially the last two years of my employment, became a hostile environment. White administrators consciously and deliberately constructed obstacles and barriers that triggered debilitating responses and outcomes for me. DiAngelo (2018) labeled such obstacles as common patterns of white behaviors. The patterns were displayed in institutional policies and procedures and promotion practices. The white dominant culture exercised the patterns through intimidation, white complicity, and microaggressive behavior and comments. In my journaling I often wrote about feeling “smothered and strangled.” I wrote I imagined it “felt similar to being lynched,” meaning the white dominant culture at the college controlled whether I breathed, lived daily with dignity, or simply existed in the environment.

I experienced a multitude of valleys as I progressed through my employment journey at Tri-CTC. Being emotionally, intellectually, and physically present daily was challenging. I did not understand how I could be “present and in plain sight,” but consistently be ignored, humiliated, rejected, and invalidated. The cultural beliefs, norms, and discourse I experienced perpetuated the racism experienced in history because I felt constricted, numb, isolated, and afraid to speak or establish eye contact without first receiving permission. In my journal I recorded that I arrived to work each day feeling oppressed and enslaved, anxiously awaiting to “leave my master’s house (work),” to return home once again to common ground with “my people,” meaning those who looked like me. In her book, *I’m Still Here*, Brown (2018) discussed how difficult it is to be a Black person that must always work to be hypervisible because of their skin (p. 21). Brown (2018) describes the hypervisibility as being both present and absent in the environment while your individual needs are completely invisible to those around you. Being hypervisible became a part

of my daily interactions at Tri-CTC. I fought to be seen and respected as a peer and professional in an environment where the white dominant cultural looked through me and only engaged me when it benefited them. An example of this occurred when I was asked to provide comment and/or input on the restructuring of the division. I was seen (visible) when those in power understood and knew I possessed the vision to restructure the area. However, once they – the white dominant culture – obtained the blueprint I was no longer useful and hence, was discarded. The emotional labor of fighting a system that is deeply embedded in racist thought and behavior is debilitating. Working in an environment that celebrated white cultural beliefs and norms, thus perpetuating institutional racism created harm and trauma for me. I struggled daily, and often journaled about my need to not let whiteness question my abilities, steal my joy, my peace, my dignity, and most importantly my self-love. In my journaling and conversations with my support network, I frequently discussed the similarities between my struggles and those experienced by my ancestors. As with history, the constant uplifting of whiteness at Tri-CTC resulted in harm, emotionally and physically, to me. Tri-CTC's continued application of white supremacy ideologies polarized the environment. Senior-leadership, through their explicit and intentional actions, regulated the environment. Their actions sanctioned the white dominate cultural beliefs that the white race was superior to any other racial identity at the college. Through the institutional policies, procedures, common patterns of white people, intentional and explicit microaggressions, and blatant racist behavior exposed daily at the college, I quickly discovered that my desire to overcome whiteness turned into a daily mantra. My survival as a Black female administrator depended on my ability to understand the system, the players in the system, and to discover self-care techniques that empowered me to exist within a system that promoted hate and invalidated me as a Black female administrator.

Inquiry Question #2: How does positionality and intersectionality of one Black female administrator impact their experience within the organizational structure?

I am Black. I am a Woman. As a young child, I was told I never needed to apologize for being Black or being female. My father instilled in me that I was able to achieve anything I could dream. He taught me that although the world sees me through a different lens, I am responsible for any and all successes I achieve in life. My father often told me that I would experience an even more difficult pathway to success because I am a Black woman. As a result, he taught me to remain humble and to never apologize for being Black or for being a woman. Therefore, I am unapologetically a Black woman.

In their book, *“The Chocolate Truth,”* Seabrooks et al. (2012) state it is difficult to lead like a lady and be respected as a man, but it is increasingly more difficult to do so as a Black woman because “the chocolate adds another dimension to the story” (p. 54). I stand steadfast in my positionality and intersectionality. With that said, I understand that others, especially the white dominant culture, do not agree with my stance nor believe I possess the ability to successfully lead change because of my intersectionality. I know that when they see me they see only my race and my gender. As a Black female administrator at Tri-CTC, one of the biggest challenges I faced was working in a hostile environment that upheld white supremacist ideologies that preserved white superiority which made it difficult for me to navigate and negotiate the organizational culture at the college.

I compare Tri-CTC’s organizational structure to a caste system, meaning the organizational structure is an artificial construction of fixed and embedded rankings that position the presumed supremacy of one group against the presumed inferiority of another (Wilkerson, 2020). In her book, *“Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents,”* Wilkerson (2020) states a caste system uses rigid

and arbitrary boundaries to manage ranked groups which segregates them to their assigned places. Wilkerson further states that ranking and segregation of caste groups aids in the “policing of roles expected of people based on what they look like, and the monitoring of boundaries to keep the hierarchy in place” (p. 216). In my position as a Black female administrator, I had to bypass strategically erected boundaries and accept overwhelming challenges while employed at the college.

When I first began my career at Tri-CTC I kept my head down and worked hard to understand the system. I knew that in order to advance I needed to conform, or at least appear to adapt, to a system that was never intended for me. Consequently, I learned policies and procedures and the governance structure of the college. Unfortunately, approximately two years into my employment, after applying as an internal candidate for the assistant dean of student position, I realized my quest to advance within the system would not be achieved. I quickly learned that my education, knowledge and experience did not matter. A member of the hiring committee (white female ally) informed me that I was “the only candidate interviewed who not only met the education and professional requirements,” but I was “ranked the highest among the internal candidates.” Instead of being rewarded for my skills, knowledge and accomplishments, the white dominant culture consciously decided to dismiss me, based on my intersectionality, and hired an external candidate – a white male - who had no previous experience working at a community college or in a division of student services. In this situation, senior leadership, all members of the white dominant culture, exercised their white complicity and privilege. Wilkerson (2020) states such behavior is an example of modern-day caste protocols and hyper-vigilance. Such protocols permit the dominant caste (white dominant culture) to assert their beliefs, values and norms, or dismiss those considered inferior, into any situation as they see fit. The outcome of this situation

changed my experiences within the college's organizational structure. It was at that point that I first realized Tri-CTC was an oppressive battleground for racially minoritized individuals. My engagement within the system was controlled and limited by the white dominant culture, specifically senior leadership. As a result, my positionality and intersectionality greatly impacted my experiences within the organizational structure, primarily because of the white dominate culture's refusal to accept me or validate my accomplishments. My experiences with Tri-CTC's organizational structure made me fearful of the system and afraid to respond to the injustices and inequities within the system. My experiences taught me I had to learn how to withstand the racist behaviors exhibited by those in power, while also developing self-care practices that helped me to cope and successfully navigate a system full of hate.

Inquiry Question #3: How does one Black female administrator lead and negotiate transformative change in a non-diverse, non-inclusive, and highly racial and stigmatized environment?

Through documentation, reflection, and vulnerability. As a Black female administrator, I realized I could not lead and negotiate transformative change in a non-inclusive and highly racial and stigmatized environment until I first attempted to understand the whiteness of the environment. Once I understood, to the best that any Black person could comprehend, the dynamics and intentional infliction of harm and hate I was able to navigate the environment to implement the desired change.

In her book, *“Braving the Wilderness,”* Brene’ Brown (2019) describes the wilderness as a place where individuals are forced to navigate difficult terrain to a sanctuary of nature and beauty to seek space for thought and reflection. My faith, art, poetry, and music served as my refuge and the space in which I was able to meditate and seek ways to overcome the whiteness of my

environment. As I was able to connect my innermost thoughts and feelings to the hostile and non-performative environment I faced daily. I was able to find the solitude I needed to be vulnerable, emotionally and spiritually, and to begin the physical quest of my journey to overcome the whiteness. In his book, *"Tears We Cannot Stop: A Sermon to White America,"* Dyson (2017) best described the space of vulnerability as the place where we (we implied to be Black people) keep our rage inside of us. He states the space of vulnerability is where we are afraid to cry because once the tears begin to flow, we cannot stop them. Dyson (2017) further states that the space is an internal space where we are most damaged and suffer mental distress and we (Black people) suffer from the hurt, harm, and depression from deep within our souls. Dyson (2017) states that the way Black people find their way out of the turmoil, the consciously inflicted harm experienced by the hands of the white dominate group, and our own internal self-destruction is through our connection with God.

As I recounted my feelings and emotions with my father, who lived through the civil and human rights era, I realized that when I did not flee to my sanctuary, I spiraled out of control into an opaque hole of white supremacist ideologies that cause me despair, anxiety, and depression. Based on my journaling, I knew I needed to "discover a way to cope," a way to "find hope," a way to feel validated and confident in my abilities, and most importantly, I knew I needed to discover a new way to overcome the whiteness and lead change at the institution. Seabrooks et al. (2012) believe to be successful, Black leaders need to adopt a process, driven by a set of internalized values and beliefs, which can withstand the fear of change and pushback from haters. In the book, *"The Chocolate Truth,"* Seabrooks et al. (2012) further state that once Black leaders have adopted such a process, they will then master the art of "functional schizophrenia" and be fully able to cope in an environment that is marred by racism (p. 118). Therefore, I sought to create such a system

for myself. I wanted a refuge system that interrupted the perpetuation of racism and discovered a means to celebrate my culture, my faith, and allowed me to be vulnerable and open to change. My refuge vessel became what I documented in my journaling as my self-care ritual for survival and change. This ritual later became labeled as *The Four Rs to Overcoming Whiteness*.

The Four Rs, labeled as Retreat, Recover, Recalibrate, and Recommit, helped me to reduce my anxiety, stress, and to maintain a “healthy balance between my professional and personal goals,” while I worked to disrupt the racism and discriminatory practices that existed at the college. The Four Rs became a ritual I practiced, in its stated order, each time I felt myself feeling overwhelmed, discouraged, defeated, humiliated, debilitated, spiraling out of control, and lost my drive to continue my social justice fight. The Four Rs also served as a modified improvement science model that utilized the Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) cycle to implement change. Implementing The Four Rs model bypassed senior leaderships attempts to block my efforts to implement change at the college in relation to my doctoral coursework. As a Black female administrator, I successfully used The Four Rs as a crucial strategy to lead and negotiate transformative change in a non-diverse, non-inclusive, and highly racial and stigmatized environment (see Appendix 2).

4.1 Next Steps and Implications

Assessing the campus climate, analyzing critical communication, scrutinizing the actions and practices of senior leadership and understanding my positionality within a campus climate that refused to see me, value me, and/or accept me simply because of my race and gender was critical

to surviving my journey. These techniques were also essential to discussing and determining the next steps and implications of this study.

Through my journey, I learned that successful navigation of a system that deliberately practiced and executed acts of racial prejudice with the sole purposes of creating harm and elevating white supremacist ideologies required me to release my fears of the system. Releasing my fears required me to relinquish my need to control how others perceived me. In doing so, I knew I would experience increased vulnerability within the system and amplify my susceptibility to increased mental and emotional harm. As a result, my journey of survival transformed from simply uncovering ways to specifically overcome the daily obstacles and adversities employed by the white dominant culture, to learning how show up as my authentic self, never apologizing for who I am, and never accepting responsibility for the racist acts and behaviors of others.

Seizing control and thoroughly documenting my thoughts and feelings, as well as examining my positionality and intersectionality within the system, not only facilitated personal growth, but also provides support for other Black female administrators, with similar experiences, to also survive systemic institutional racism. Throughout my journey, I learned the importance of never giving up. I learned that every struggle, every obstacle, every barrier, challenge, and success was a learning opportunity. As a result, I learned that my initial thoughts to withdraw or escape from the hurt only strengthened the white dominant culture's desires and intentionality to harm individuals who looked like me. My decision to fight back helped me to negotiate changes within the system and engage others in the fight for social justice. Through allyship I was able to intensify my efforts and illuminate a larger spotlight on the racist behavior that existed at the college. Increasing awareness of the intentional behavior became an invaluable component of my journey and success. Seabrooks et al. (2012) state isms will always exist and although racially minoritized

individuals cannot control them, we can control our responses to them. As I maneuvered through the campus landscape, I also realized the importance of my voice. I learned to survive I needed to speak my truth, and in doing so I realized that I no longer had to feel numb or dazed, constantly question my own actions or decisions within the laws that exist and the policies that governed the college (Seabrooks et al., 2017). Once I learned how to gain control of my thoughts and actions I became a stronger leader within the very system that refused to recognize me as one and was better apt at responding to the isms I faced daily.

Centering and amplifying my voice empowered me to fight back against the existing injustices and inequities and provides a blueprint for other Black female administrators working in higher education. The lessons I learned from my journey are vital to transforming the systemic institutional racism Black female administrators experience daily. Using autoethnography as a research method provided validation to my experiences and the experiences of other Black females. The self-care practices, including *The Four Rs to Overcoming Whiteness*, described in my study serve as an architectural design for addressing the effects systemic institutional racism has on Black female administrators employed in higher education. This study also serves as a written and digital support tool for Black female administrators. Simply knowing someone else can relate to my journey can stimulate others to speak out and overcome the whiteness.

Establishing training sessions and/or workshops that demonstrate and/or teach Black female administrators the importance of documenting and journaling about the events, behaviors and actions they experience daily are important next steps to this research. Journaling permitted me to escape and reflect on the events and actions of others, which eventually led to creating *The Four Rs to Overcoming Whiteness*. Understanding the system and the dual cultures that existed empowered me to pivot and find additional pathways and strategies for success. The results of

this study can also be used to clearly inform the white dominant culture of the steps needed to implement transformative change at their respective institutions. Forcing the white dominant culture to not only acknowledge the hurt and the harm inflicted, but to also take appropriate action to implement change is the only way change can occur. When addressing this issue, we must be clear and concise in our responses and our expectations for change. This autoethnographic study demonstrated the importance of one Black female administrator standing up against an institutional system of racism. We, as Black females, cannot give in to the struggle. Black female administrators must use their voices to shed light on the issue and also be willing to hold the white dominant culture accountable for their inappropriate behaviors that perpetuate racism in higher education.

5.0 Section 5: Reflections

Understanding Tri-CTC's system of self-imposed restrictions for racially minoritized individuals was critical to my ability to successfully understand my role at the college, and my positionality as an insider within my autoethnographic research. Overcoming the whiteness of the environment required me understand the system as it relates to politics and governance, cultural norms, and the college's leadership's unwillingness to implement change. The use of reflexive journaling exposed the disconnections and imperfections within Tri-CTC's organizational structure, decision-making, and the lack of support for intersectionality at the college.

Through my research, I have learned the beliefs and norms of the dominant culture have profoundly impacted not only my ability to navigate a system of racism, but also acutely affected my ability to circumvent a system that caged me and pressured me to question my abilities and, at times, my mental sanity. Navigating the campus environment as a Black female administrator required me to find a balance between negotiating an imprisoned system, which was created to cause intentional harm, and discovering key survival strategies and techniques that summoned courage and stimulated my resilience and perseverance to succeed. Through my research, I realized the survival strategies and techniques needed to negotiate a system of racism and hate have always been instilled in me. In fact, they were inherently embedded in my upbringing. Reflexive journaling, asking others to confirm and/or review my personal statements, emails, and text messages, and critically analyzing my biases throughout my writing, afforded me the opportunity to connect my past upbringings to current experiences. These connections provided me with the strategies and skills needed to cope and survive a system infused with hate and the harm of reliving my journey through my research and writing.

When I began my autoethnographic study I was already deeply engulfed and exposed to the racists and discriminatory behaviors of the white dominant culture at the college. I felt devastated, frustrated, overwhelmed, and helpless. In fact, as mentioned previously, the reason I chose autoethnography as a research method was because my efforts to implement strategies for transformative change were abruptly halted. As a result, I found myself wondering if I would be able to continue with my doctoral program. I vividly remember the day I could no longer ignore the possibility of ending my research and dropping out of the program. I felt defeated. Just knowing that others could have such control over my educational, personal, and professional goals was incapacitating. I explained, in an email to my committee chair, that experiencing racism first-hand has affected me personally, professionally, and has negatively affected my confidence. Her response changed my perspective. In an email to me, she stated that she knew how hard I had worked and that the threats and intimidation I received are an indication that my hard work is paying off. Her words, and the option to use autoethnography as my research method, gave me the motivation and the confidence to stand up and continue my fight. Throughout my writing, especially on days in which I believed I could not continue or simply felt as if I could not live in the trauma and harm any longer, I reviewed and reflected on that email. I believe it is also important to note that my interactions with my entire dissertation committee restored my trust in a microcosm of the society-at-large. My committee's ongoing support, constructive comments and feedback, and general belief in me as a researcher and a Black woman have influenced my research and writing.

Serving as both the participant and the researcher for this study proved to be both challenging and rewarding. At times, I found difficulty with staying focused and on task, mainly because I wanted to dwell on the obstacles I faced instead of analyzing the system that inflicted

the harm. However, once I acknowledged my experiences had prepared me for my journey I was able to focus on the foundation of my research, which was cultural conflict will occur when colleges choose to engage in white supremacist ideologies and diversity is not valued.

As the participant, I discovered my voice and through my writing I was able to magnify it in a way to support and validate other Black female administrators experiencing the same injustices and inequities I experienced. As a scholarly practitioner, I learned that I am able to not only understand the environment that I am actively engaged in, but I am also able to effectively bring awareness to the existing inequities within the system that chooses to devalue others. As a leader, I discovered that I possessed the skills needed to successfully lead others to implement transformative change. Finally, as a Black female administrator I learned that through sheer determination and fortitude I am able to overcome whiteness. I refuse to allow my race and gender to be trivialized just to accommodate the racist ideologies of the white dominant culture. I have learned to never doubt my abilities. Despite the detours experienced along my journey, I know I possess the vision and mental toughness to be a successful leader.

True. My father told me I did not have to apologize for my race and gender. He taught me that regardless of the situation, if I witnessed discrimination, based on race and gender, I needed to speak out against it. He used to always tell me I had a role to play in the fight. Using autoethnography as a research method forced me to repeatedly relive every step of my journey. This method compelled me to understand my role in the struggle. I just didn't know my role was going to be the leading Black female role.

Through this journey, I have discovered that I have the mental strength to endure and overcome every obstacle I face. I AM a Black female administrator who no longer fears the system of oppression. Instead, I choose to amplify the voices of Black female administrators working and

laboring to survive at every institution of higher education that decide to practice the white supremacist ideologies of the past.

Appendix A PDSA Cycles as Early Learning

The following three PDSA cycles were the preliminary cycles completed for one of Ed.D. courses. These cycles served as the impetus to the creation of The Four Rs to Overcoming Whiteness cycles I implemented as a means to negotiate transformative change at the institution. Completing this assignment, and later using it a part of my reflexive analysis, I discovered the relevance of the assignment to my autoethnographic study. The following PDSA cycles demonstrated the effective use of music to my overall coping strategies while employed at Tri-CTC.

PDSA Form			
Test Title:	Self-care	Date:	June 14 -20, 2021
Tester:	Vealis Grooms	Cycle #:	1
What Change Idea is being tested?	The use of self-care practices, such as listening to specific genres of music, to manage anxiety and/or stress.	Driver:	To reduce anxiety and stress; better self-care.
What is the overall goal/hypothesis you are testing?	Identify a music genre that best helped me with managing my anxiety and stress levels and maintain a healthy balance between professional, personal, and academic goals.		
1) PLAN Details : Describe the who/what/where/when for the test. Include your data collection plan			
1). I will use Pandora Radio to create and listen to pre-selected blended music stations that play music from two different music genres - R&B and Gospel. Randomization of the songs will be controlled by the Pandora station. Generally 3-4 songs from each genre play consecutively before switching to the next genre. 2). For five consecutive days, while commuting to and from work, I will listen to the blended music stations and gauge my engagement/interaction with the music. 3). I will journal and reflect on my thoughts, engagement, and the affects the music had on my stress/anxiety daily. My documentation will focus on whether listening to the music helps me to maintain peace and balance of my thoughts and emotions. 4). I will try this for one week, June 14 - 20, 2021		2) DO Briefly describe what happened during the test, surprises, difficultly getting data, obstacles, successes, etc.	
		I played the pre-selected blended music stations. I permitted the randomization of the songs to be controlled by Pandora Radio. I did not skip, move forward or back to a song. As the songs played, I reflected on how I was reacting to the music, whether through movement/dance, through singing, or just listening. The music played in this fashion for the entire week. I journaled about my experiences once I arrived to work and then again once I arrived home at the end of the day.	
Questions: Questions you have about what will happen. What do you want to learn?	Predictions: Make a prediction for each question. Not optional.	Data: Data you'll collect to test predictions.	What were your results? Comment on your predictions in the box below. Were they correct? Record any data summaries as well.
Will listening to the music constructively impact my thoughts and help me to become more focused and have positive energy?	I predict the music will have a positive impact because both genres of music stimulate happy thoughts and behaviors, and promotes optimistic outlooks on life.	Behavior based collection, mainly am I able to relate, engage, and sing along with the song. *While singing, am I focused on the words or does my mind wonder and focus on anxiety about the day ahead.	I was able to relate to both music genres with no problem. I found myself singing and engaging with the music, but displaying different behaviors and feelings with each. When singing along, the music did stimulate happiness and good memories. Unfortunately, with the R&B I found myself thinking about what I was doing in my life at the time the song was popular. As a result, the music did not actually help me to think positive or be optimistic about my day ahead. I was mainly focused on the past, and not focused on the day ahead. This of course defeated the goal of this project because I was not finding the balance I was looking and realized my anxiety and stress levels did not decrease.
Will one type of music genre have more of an impact on my thoughts, anxiety, and stress levels than the other?	I predict I will not notice a difference between the two genres because they both offer benefits, whether upbeat music or soulful and faith connections, on my thoughts.	Feeling based - do I feel a sense of connection to one music genre more so than the other. *Can I relate the lyrics from the song to what is occurring in my life and do they provide me with an optimistic view for a solution.	I did favor one type of music genre over the other. While singing along with the R&B songs I discovered I was just doing that - singing. I was not totally focused on the song and often did not know where I was in the song to sing-along. I did not find the songs created a change in my thoughts, behaviors, and/or emotions, therefore still feeling the anxiety and stress once the song ended. I also was discouraged and waited anxiously for station to switch back to the gospel music. The gospel music was more calming and provided me with purpose. Through my journaling, I noticed I was able to reflect on my day and connect with my faith.
Will the music help me, unconsciously, engage in successful defensive driving techniques - less road rage and stress?	I predict the music will help with defensive driving because the upbeat and engagement with the songs will help me to focus less on my anxiety and stress and more on the music and self-reflection.	Physical driving - am I calm, driving the speed limit, leaving space between my car and the one in front of me? *Do I feel relaxed? Do I find myself driving to the beat of the music, focusing on maintaining balance and patience.	The music did keep me calm and focused on the road. I found that my driving speed was reflected by the beat of the music. However, I felt more relaxed and in control when the gospel music was playing (adhering to the speed limit). With many of the songs focused on trusting in God and believing in good things happening in our life - being optimistic - I found that my driving was affected, in a positive way, with the words and the message of the song.
4) ACT Describe modifications and/or decisions for the next cycle; what		3) STUDY What did you learn?	
My next cycle I will only play gospel music. I want to assess whether the feelings, emotions, and optimistic attitude about life and my day continues to exist.		I learned, although I like R&B music, it is best used for easy listening, hanging out with friends, and/or reminiscing. The music did not keep me engaged, calm nor helped me to prepare for my day by managing my anxiety and stress. I found a better connection with the gospel music. The music helped me to confess and confirm my faith. It appeared the words related directly to my experiences and gave me hope that changes were going to occur soon and things would get better. As I listened, I was finding a balance in my day. I arrived to work calm and looking forward to better interactions with my peers at my place of practice.	

PDSA Form			
Test Title:	Self-Care	Date:	June 28 - July 4, 2021
Tester:	Veella Grooms	Cycle #:	3
What Change Idea is being tested?	The use of self-care practices, such as listening to specific genres of music, to manage anxiety and/or stress.	Driver:	To reduce anxiety and stress; better self-care.
What is the overall GOAL of the test?	Identify a music genre that best helped me with managing my anxiety and stress levels and maintain a healthy balance between professional, personal, and academic goals.		
1) PLAN Details : Describe the who/what/where/when for the test. Include your data collection plan 1). I will use Pandora Radio to create and listen to gospel station only. 2). For five consecutive days, while commuting to and from work, I will listen to the gospel music station and include intermittent messages to further gauge my engagement/interaction. 3). I will journal and reflect on my thoughts, engagement, and affects on my stress/anxiety daily. My documentation will focus on whether adding the intermittent messages with the gospel music creates a better balance of my thoughts and emotions. 4). I will try this for one week, June 28 - July 4, 2021.		2) DO Briefly describe what happened during the test. I played the gospel station as last cycle and also added the ability to receive intermittent messages. I continued to click the like button on the songs/artists for which I felt I connected with the most. I journaled about my experiences and reflected on the impact the songs had on managing my stress and anxiety.	
Questions: Questions you have about what will happen. What do you want to learn? Will adding intermittent messages (mini-scriptures) enhance the experience?	Predictions: Make a prediction for each question. Not optional. I predict my experience will be enhanced due to expanding and gaining a stronger connection to my faith.	Data: Data you'll collect to test predictions. Behavior based collection through journaling. My documentation will focus on my thoughts and reactions to the message - my ability to apply the message to my situation and remaining optimistic. Also, looking for a stronger connection to my faith through journaling.	What were your results? Comment on your predictions in the box below. Were they correct? Record any data summaries as well. Confirmation that the intervention/change idea continued to work. I was fully engaged and focused on the songs and my engagement. The drive was a very pleasant drive, less stress and anxiety. I felt more relaxed, encouraged, and a stronger connection to my faith. The intermittent messages were balanced throughout the station.
4) ACT Describe modifications and/or decisions for the next cycle; what PDSA Cycle has ended.		3) STUDY What did you learn? This was a very successful PDSA cycle. I was able to test my predictions and I found that some of the predication needed to be expanded to include other levels of my emotions, thoughts and reflections. I learned that music definitely serves as a positive self-care practice for me and that I can use it to find the balance in my life that I am looking for daily.	

PDSA Form			
Test Title:	Self-Care	Date:	June 21 - 27, 2021
Tester:	Veella Grooms	Cycle #:	2
What Change Idea is being tested?	The use of self-care practices, such as listening to specific genres of music, to manage anxiety and/or stress.	Driver:	To reduce anxiety and stress; better self-care.
What is the overall GOAL of the test?	Identify a music genre that best helped me with managing my anxiety and stress levels and maintain a healthy balance between professional, personal, and academic goals.		
1) PLAN Details : Describe the who/what/where/when for the test. Include your data collection plan 1). I will use Pandora Radio to create and listen to gospel station only. 2). For five consecutive days, while commuting to and from work, I will listen to the gospel music station and gauge my engagement/interaction with the music. 3). I will journal and reflect on my thoughts, engagement, and affects on my stress/anxiety daily. My documentation will focus on whether listening to the music helps me to maintain peace and balance of my thoughts and emotions. 4). I will try this for one week, June 21 - 27, 2021.		2) DO Briefly describe what happened during the test. I played the gospel station as last cycle. As the songs played, I continued to be aware of on how I was reacting to the music, whether through movement/dance, through singing, or just listening. During this cycle I also clicked the like button on the songs/artists for which I felt I connected with the most. I journaled about my experiences and reflected on the impact the songs had on managing my stress and anxiety.	
Questions: Questions you have about what will happen. What do you want to learn? Will listening to the gospel music station continue to constructively impact my thoughts and help me to become more focused and have positive energy?	Predictions: Make a prediction for each question. Not optional. I predict the music will continue to have a positive impact because the music reinforces my faith and promotes a optimistic outlook on life.	Data: Data you'll collect to test predictions. Behavior based collection through journaling. My documentation will focus on whether listening to the music continues to help me to maintain peace and balance of my thoughts and emotions.	What were your results? Comment on your predictions in the box below. Were they correct? Record any data summaries as well. I was fully engaged and focused on the songs and my engagement. The drive was a very pleasant drive, free from distractions and mostly free from the anxiety I knew was ahead at my place of practice. I felt less stress/tension in my shoulders and more relaxed as a whole. As with the last cycle, I found myself singing and engaging with the music. The music did stimulate happiness and good memories.
Will the music continue to help me, engage in successful defensive driving techniques - less road rage, stress, and adhering to the speed limit?	I predict the music will keep me calm and focused on the road and my speed will adhere (closely) to the speed limit.	Document speed while driving.	
4) ACT Describe modifications and/or decisions for the next cycle; what PDSA Cycle has ended. Keep music station on gospel and continue with the cycles. Add to the final week intermittent messages (mini-scriptures).		3) STUDY What did you learn? I learned my week was less stressful. I was better focused, journaling was easier. I was also more critical and vulnerable in my writing. I was able to gain a better understanding of the things I can control and focus on making those changes instead of being reactive to the discourse that was occurring at my place of employment. I also notice the stations included mini-scriptures along with the music. I liked listening to those. In fact, I found myself sitting in the car once I arrived just to hear the end of the message.	

Appendix B The Four Rs for Overcoming Whiteness

As referenced in the discussion section of my dissertation, I implemented the Four Rs to Overcoming Whiteness as a significant component of my coping strategies at Tri-CTC. The Four Rs, labeled as Retreat, Recover, Recalibrate, and Recommit, helped me to refocus, pivot, and redirect my overall efforts of addressing the systemic institutional racism that existed at the college. Incorporating this modified improvement plan provided me with the opportunity to effectively deal with the anxiety and stress I encountered daily. The Four Rs became a ritual I practiced each time I felt myself withdrawing and becoming mentally and emotionally overburdened. It is important to mention that I was not able to transition through each component until I was fully able to recognize and document growth in my journaling. Below are the music lyrics, partial or in entirety, I used for each cycle.

Appendix B.1 Cycle 1: Retreat

The lyrics from the song “*God Favors Me*,” by Hezekiah Walker and The Love Fellowship Choir (2013) served as a point of validation for me, helping me to withdraw from what I considered to be the enemy forces. This song helped me to work through the college’s practice of white supremacy ideologies and reminded me of the racial caste system that was in place at the college.

It helped me to understand that the power exercised by the white dominant culture could not defeat me. I utilized this song as my act of regaining my personal power.

The lyrics begin with the following verse:

“This is my testimony everybody of how God favored me in spite of my enemies.

If God did it for me he will do the same for you.

Don’t worry about your haters, your haters can’t do nothing with you.”

Walker and The Love Fellowship Choir continued to sing of the genuineness of love, stating “love is patient, caring, and kind.” The lyrics also spoke that love can be abusive, manipulated, and love’s strength can be misused. However, despite its intended uses, God continues to favor us even when our enemies continuously try to triumph over us.

The chorus, which I played on a repetitive cycle on most days, continues as follows:

“They whispered, conspired, they told their lies (God Favors Me)

My character, my integrity, my faith in God (God Favors Me)

Will not fall, will not bend, won’t compromise (God Favors Me)

I speak life and prosperity and I speak health (God Favors Me)”

Appendix B.2 Cycle 2: Recover

The song I listened to as my source for recovering is “*Just Fine*,” by Mary J. Blige (2007). This song served as my fighting song. When listening to this song, I adapted the lyrics to reflect my stance of being an unapologetically Black woman. Mary J. Blige’s use of language in this

song spoke to me as a Black woman. It aided me in addressing the injustices and inequities in the world, especially at Tri-CTC, while feeling secure and confident in myself. Blige's music invigorated me, and in most cases, served as my only source of sanity for weeks. This song became my anthem. I listened to it on a continuous loop for my hour drive to work. I listened to it in the parking lot prior to walking into the building to begin work, and on most days, I needed to listen to it on my way home just to decompress. The following lyrics are listed in their entirety because this is the song that validates my stance in life.

Verse 1:

“Let it go

Can't let this thing called love get away from you

Feel free right now, go do what you want to do

Can't let nobody take it away, from you, from me, from we

No time for moping around, are you kidding?

And no time for negative vibes, 'cause I'm winning

It's been a long week, I put in my hardest

Gonna live my life, feels so good to get it right

So, I like what I see when I'm looking at me

When I'm walking past the mirror

Don't stress through the night, at a time in my life

Ain't worried about if you feel it

Got my head on straight, I got my vibe right

I ain't gonna let you kill it

You see I wouldn't change my life, my life's just...

Chorus:

Fine, fine, fine, fine, fine, fine, fine, fine, oooh

Fine, fine, fine, fine, fine, fine, fine, fine, oooh

Just fine, fine, fine, fine, fine, fine, fine, oooh

You see I wouldn't change my life, my life's just fine

Verse 2:

Feels so good when you're doing all the things that you want to do

Get the best out of life, treat yourself to something new

Keep your head up high

In yourself, believe in you, believe in me

Having a really good time, I'm not complaining

And I'm still wear a smile if it's raining

I got to enjoy myself regardless

I appreciate life, I'm so glad that it's fine

So, I like what I see when I'm looking at me

When I'm walking past the mirror

Ain't worried about you and what you gonna do

I'm a lady so I must stay classy

Got to keep it hot, keep it together

If I want to get better

See I wouldn't change my life, my life's just

(Chorus again)

Bridge:

I ain't gon' let nothing get in my way (I ain't gone let nobody bring me down, no, no, no)

No matter what nobody has to say (No way, no way, no way)

I ain't gon' let nothing get in my way

No matter what nobody has to say

Verse 3:

Feels so good when you're doing all the things that you want to do

Get the best out of life, treat yourself to something new

It's a really good thing to say

That I won't change my life, my life's just...

(Chorus again)

Verse 4:

So, I like what I see when I'm looking at me

When I'm walking past the mirror

Don't stress through the night, at a time in my life

Ain't worried about if you feel it

Got my head on straight, I got my vibe right

I ain't gonna let you kill it

You see I wouldn't change my life, my life's just..."

(Chorus again)

Appendix B.3 Cycle 3: Recalibrate

For this cycle, I returned to my most important belief – my faith. My faith, including my spirituality, is unwavering. I was taught at a young as “praises go up, blessings come down.” Therefore, I praise God for every part of my life, including the hurt and the harm I experienced as a Black female administrator. I strongly believe that every situation, negative and positive encounter, and every battle is a life lesson. I rely on my faith to get me through all things I face in life. The lyrics from the song “*The Battle is Not Yours*,” by Yolanda Adams (2019), served as my recalibration song. Once I was able to transition through the recover cycle, this song helped me to refresh my point of reference. It served as my pivotal song in that it changed the way I looked at my situation. Listening to this song facilitated my growth and helped me to readjust, revise, and set directional pathways to reach my overall goal of addressing social justice concerns at the college.

Adams begins the song with personal comments, stating that “Hope in Him does not mean that you have to live in fear and discouragement even when you feel attacked by things bigger in yourself.” Those words alone offered me hope. The lyrics begin as follows:

Verse 1:

“There is no pain Jesus can’t feel

No hurt He cannot heal

All things work according to His perfect will

Chorus:

No matter what you’re going through

Remember God is using You

For the battle is not yours, it’s the Lord’s.

Verse 2:

There's no sadness Jesus can't feel

And there is no sorrow that He cannot heal

For all things work according to the master's Holy will.

Appendix B.4 Cycle 4: Recommit

The final cycle provided me the opportunity to reaffirm, or recommit, to my goals. During this cycle, I connected back to the goals I previously set, including my desire to implement transformative change at the college using improvement science. This cycle was important to not just acting, but to also building allyship.

The song used for my recommitment was "*Rhythm Nation*," by Janet Jackson (1989). There are various interpretations behind the meaning and purpose of the song. However, for me, the song served as an anthem for an ideal world. As I listened to the words, I imagined a colorblind world where we collectively, as a nation of people, share the same beliefs and we create a society where there's only one race – the human race. "*Rhythm Nation*," (Jackson, 1989) motivated me to connect my past with my current situation and recommit to my social justice goals.

Verse 1:

“With music by our side

To break the color lines

Let's work together

To improve our way of life

Join voices in protest

To social injustice

A generation full of courage

Come forth with me.

Chorus:

People of the world today

Are we looking for a better way of life

We are a part of the rhythm nation

People of the world unite

Strengthen in numbers we can get it right

One time

We are part of the rhythm nation.

Appendix C The Picture that Represents my Struggle

When preparing to present my dissertation overview, I realized I was struggling to understand what I was experiencing. My body and my mind were in constant turmoil. I found myself trying to understand why I was chosen to experience this journey. Often asking “Why Me!” But then I would answer myself, saying “Why Not You?” I was conditioned, at a very young age, by a father who experienced racism and harm himself, that I was strong enough and courageous enough to stand up, speak out, and fight back. As I wrestled with how to inform others of my lived experiences, of what it felt like daily to face oppression and microaggressions, to be humiliated and disrespected simply because of my race and gender, I came across the following photography titled *Visualizing Racism* (Lacar, 2019). This photography spoke to me on so many levels. Each time I looked at the picture, I saw a different struggle and a different victory. I could actually visualize each part of my journey. I relived and experienced the trauma, hurt, fatigue, and pain. I saw the dual cultures that existed and were exposed at the college. As a result, I chose to use the photography for my dissertation overview as a visual to depict my journey. I am not sure if my committee could see what I saw when I looked at it, but I knew the artwork spoke to me. It allowed me, in a peculiar way, to escape to my safe space, my refuge from harm, to find the peace and solitude needed to overcome the whiteness of the environment and find the vulnerability to tell my story. I discovered that my understanding of the system and my understanding of journey, especially my positionality and intersectionality, was revealed more so after listening to the “*Just Fine*,” (Blige, 2009) lyrics on a continuous loop.



Visualizing Racism (Lacar, 2019)

Appendix D Timeline, Journal Excerpts, and Reflexive Thoughts

My employment at the Tri-CTC began, as what I thought, a typical employment journey would begin in higher education. Because this was not my first professional appointment in higher education, and because I am familiar with the state and the location of the institution, I was not specifically expecting, no on the “look-out” for a diverse student, faculty and staff population attending or employed at the college. However, I must admit that I was astounded by what I witnessed and experienced. After all, my employment at Tri-CTC in 2012; fifty-seven years after the enactment of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and forty-four years after the post-civil war era, both of which hastened the end of legal Jim Crow laws and secured Blacks equal access and rights, as well as enabled Blacks women, and other minorities to break down racial barriers in the workplace. The information contained in this appendix is meant to provide you with a compact overview of journey at Tri-CTC, while providing you with a synopsis of my thoughts, feelings, of specific incidents that occurred and affected my ability to overcome whiteness in the campus environment. Again, the following is not a comprehensive timeline of my employment, nor detailed documentation of events that occurred at the college.

Appendix D.1 Timeline of Events and Thoughts

The following events are additional examples of the racist and discriminatory actions practiced by senior leadership at the college. The purpose of including these events is to provide you with a behind-the-scenes- view of additional events, excerpts from my reflexive journaling

(when available) and my thoughts on some of the non-adoption of institutional policies and practices that were implemented to protect employees from intention hurt, harm, discrimination, and racist behaviors. This is not a conclusive list of events and/or activities. This only serves as additional insight into the systemic institutional racism that exists at Tri-CTC and senior leaderships unwillingness to address, resolve and provide an inclusive environment for all student, faculty, and staff at the college.

Academic Year (AY)	Incident	Reported/Resolved	Impact/Affect
AY 2013/2014	<p>Course Curriculum Design and Implementation.</p> <p>The curriculum, designed and implemented by me, needed to be approved by the institutional curriculum committee. Academic leadership did not want the curriculum presented by me, “an instructional specialist with faculty status” for curriculum review/approval. Instead, a white male, who I hired to serve as an adjunct instructor for one section of the course I developed was asked to present my work. The design and implementation were approved by the committee, who also permitted the white male to list the presentation as part of his portfolio for promotion.</p>	<p>I reported the incident to my immediate supervisor (VPSA) to the academic dean and vice president of academic affairs, as well as the president of the college. I also requested a meeting with the director of HR for advice and guidance. I did not receive any response or approval for a meeting to discuss. Issue was not investigated.</p> <p>Aligned with Results #1 and #2 of this study.</p>	<p>I was devalued as the person who had the responsibility to oversee and implement any course design and or curriculum implementation for the program/course. Instead, the white male was given credit for the course and curriculum design. He was able to list it as part of his portfolio for promotion evaluation. He did receive a promotion/raise for “his great work.”</p>
<p>Excerpt: “Another day of being devalued and ignored. The course is a part of my responsibilities. I am responsible for development, design, implementation and to ensure the curriculum meets institutional</p>			

standards as well as HLC requirements. How is it that I can be tasked with the responsibility but when it is time to present my work to the committee, I am not good enough. Why? I have faculty status required to make the presentation. I am paid as a faculty member. I serve on faculty council. I understand how to present and provide the information. Is it because of the color of my skin? Does my Blackness scare you? Make you feel inferior? Will I make you look incompetent? Do you not understand my course, my program, nor how to develop such a curriculum yourself? I have asked you these basic questions and you cannot provide me with a response. You only tell me it is because he, the white male, has full professorship and you prefer he be the one to present the information. Then, as I have said before, give him full responsibilities for the course and the curriculum. You have institutional policy in place to address such inequities but yet you still practice your white supremacist ideologies. Disgusting! Your racism continues to shine through every action and decision you make at this institution. Disgusting! I am angered by your dismissal of me and my abilities. Why don't you see me and my abilities all the time, and not just when it benefits you? Your leadership clearly mimics Bell's interest convergence theory. Change can only occur if it benefits you. Well, again, I have no choice but to go along with your plans. I must let this white male present and take credit for my work. However, not before I document the incident and report it to the appropriate individuals. I also had a conversation with him. He claims he does not want to do it. My comment was, then don't. Stand up against the inequities. Oh, but he can't because he needs my work for his promotion. Again, senior leadership adopts institutional promotion practices that support the white dominant culture. Sickening.

Academic Year (AY)	Incident	Reported/Resolved	Impact/Affect
AY 2015/2016	<p>False Accusations.</p> <p>Academic advisors (all white females except me) reported to the VPSA that I was spreading rumors about one of them having a "sexual relationship with a student worker." They did not provide documented evidence, just informed the VPSA that "students are talking about it and who else could it be." I received a telephone call while on my way to work from the VPSA that I was to report directly to her office immediately upon arrival to work. When I arrived, the one advisor (the person reported to be harmed by the rumor) was already in the VPSA's office. They were laughing and having general conversation about things they did over the weekend. Once I was arrived, the tone changed. I was informed that the allegations against me</p>	<p>Incident reported HR director. Requested written documentation of the allegation and any supported documents. Also requested documentation of outcome via email. I also followed up the meeting with an email to the VPSA, HR Director, and the advisor who made the false allegation.</p> <p>Aligns with Result #1 and #3 of this study.</p>	<p>My reputation within the division and among other divisions was tarnished. I was now seen as a person who would make false allegations about a staff member and student. Because nothing was done about the false allegations the advisors began having loud discussions with each other and others within the division about what occurred. I was physically threatened. When walking down the hallway was forced to back up against the wall to let others through, many times being physically bumped in the process. Additionally bullying was also reported.</p>

	<p>were serious and could lead to termination of my employment if I was found to be guilty of the statements. I denied the accusations and asked for documented evidence. The advisor admitted that she has been behind closed doors with the student along with the curtain in her office closed but assured the VPSA that nothing inappropriate occurred. I was told that I needed to apologize. I refused. We both were told we could not speak of the incident, or it would be immediate termination of employment. We both had to sign a waiver acknowledging the latter.</p>		
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Excerpt: "Defeated. I feel defeated!"

Academic Year (AY)	Incident	Reported/Resolved	Impact/Affect
<p>AY 2017/2018</p>	<p>Mandatory divisional meeting.</p> <p>All staff were required to attend the meeting, no exceptions. I went to the meeting on time, and no one was in the location. I left, went to the division (I am segregated to a different floor), and no one was in the area. I then went back to my office. I received a telephone call approximately 5 minutes later asking why I was not attending the meeting. When I explained the situation I was told the meeting had been changed to a different location. I was not informed. I stated I was on my way. Approximate 5 minutes later I received another call asking why I was still not in attendance. I stated I was</p>	<p>Not reported because I could not prove my thoughts were correct.</p> <p>Aligns with Result #3 of this study.</p>	<p>Continued racism and microaggression behavior and actions displayed by senior leadership, in addition to white complicity.</p>

	<p>in the room. I was then told, “no you are not if you were I would see you.” I stood; my supervisor then apologized. She stated, “I didn’t see you sitting behind that group of individuals.” I believe a more accurate statement would be she could not see a Black person sitting among the sea of whiteness.</p>		
<p>Excerpt: “I just want to be seen. I just want to be valued. I just want to be respected. I just do not have the energy today to fight this fight. I need to retreat and withdraw to work on me.</p>			

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