A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY OF SPELMAN COLLEGE'S STUDENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARD SPELMAN COLLEGE'S TRANSGENDER ADMISSIONS AND ENROLLMENT POLICY AND ITS TRANSGENDER AND GENDER NON-CONFORMING STUDENTS

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Doctor of Education

By:

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To undersigned, appoint by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the entitled

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Presented by Brandon M. Hildreth,

a candidate for the degree of doctor of education in leadership and policy analysis, and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worth of acceptance.

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DEDICATION

To Alabama A&M University, the birthplace of my passion for higher education.

To Spelman College and the advancement of historically Black colleges and universities.

To my family and friends who supported and empowered me as I pursued my dream.

To the Black transgender people who were murdered during this study

Monika Diamond

Lexi

Nina Pop

Tony McDade

Riah Milton

Brian “Egypt’ Powers

Brayla Stone

Merci Mack

Shaki Peters

Dior H Ova

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And others unmentioned.

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To my family and friends, thank you for your continuous support.

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study examined 10 Spelman College's students' attitude toward its new transgender admissions and enrollment policy, as well as their attitudes toward Spelman's transgender and gender non-conforming students. This study was guided by Allport's (1935) Tricomponent Attitude Model and intersectionality theories, which was used to analyze their attitudes toward the policy and its students. Interviews were conducted and coded using six predetermined codes that were informed by the two research questions and the theoretical frameworks.

This study found that most participants supported the policy; however, one participant that felt indifferent and another opposed it. Despite the participants' overwhelming support of the policy, many felt that the lack of understanding of the policy among students might fuel intolerance or opposition. Although participants felt that Spelman's policy was a step towards trans-inclusion, many questioned Spelman's readiness to welcome and support transgender and gender non-conforming students on its campus. Despite participants' overwhelming support for transgender and gender non-conforming students, many had concerns that students' intersectional identities regarding race, gender, religion, and geographical upbringing, coupled with Spelman's ties to Christianity, may create unwelcoming and hostile environments for transgender and gender non-conforming students.

Section One: Introduction to the Dissertation-in-Practice

Background

During the 2016 – 2017 academic school year at Spelman College, President Mary Schmidt Campbell formed the Transgender Policy Task Force to develop policy recommendations for the consideration of admissions eligibility and enrollment status of transgender students and gender non-conforming students (Campbell, 2017). The committee consisted of current students, an alumna, faculty, and administrators, whose role was to use leading research, federal guidelines, polices from other women's colleges, and community feedback to construct policy recommendations. The task force was also responsible for educating the Spelman community on the multifaceted issues facing transgender people, historical and modern perspectives on gender, and how contemporary understanding of gender influences the role of women's colleges. Spelman College, being one of the two remaining historically Black women's college in the United States, required the College to not only examine larger conversations on transgender inclusion in higher education and at women's college, but also found it necessary to examine existing policies and practices at peer institutions through a critical race lens.

Although what prompted Dr. Campbell's decision to coordinate the Transgender Policy Task Force is unknown, Spelman College's decision to reexamine its admissions and enrollment policy mirrors what many women's colleges have done or are currently doing to address the controversial debate on whether transgender and non-gender conforming students[1] should attend these institutions. Weber (2016) described this debate

[1] For this study, I chose to use the terms *transgender* and *gender non-conforming* instead of trans*, which is commonly used in transgender research to symbolize inclusivity of all of genders that may be present within the gender spectrum. As a cisgender male, I did not feel comfortable using a term that is not yet

as being traced back to the 1970s and polarizing within the feminist community. Women's colleges emerged in the United States during the mid-nineteenth century to provide educational opportunities for women, because most of the early colleges and universities only permitted men to attend (Hart & Lester, 2011; Perifimos, 2018). Since their inception, women's colleges[2] have served as a remedy to combat years of inequities among women in education and certain career fields. Women's colleges are recognized for fostering safe environment for women's learning and empowerment (Weber, 2016), and have proven to produce positive student outcomes (Riordan, 1994).

Since Spelman College is recognized as one of the most prestigious historically Black institution, the new policy generated national attention and much needed dialogue on how historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and the Black-American community support Black transgender and gender non-conforming people. Since the inception of HBCUs, these institutions have served as social, cultural, and political symbols within the Black-American community. For decades these institutions have remained some of the top producers of Black graduates and leaders, and are also the birthplace for most of the historic Black fraternities and sororities. HBCUs are highly revered within the Black-American community and are often viewed as microcosms of the Black experience, which often carries both positive and negative associations. Despite their achievement and contributions to the success of Blacks, HBCUs are often portrayed in research as "highly conservative" institutions, which is often cited as a key factor to their slow progress made toward LGBT acceptance, tolerance and inclusion (Coleman,

fully embraced by the transgender and gender-conforming community (Nicolazzo, 2019) or language that may not be available to or used by some people.

[2] For this study, I will be focusing only colleges and universities in the United States; therefore, all further mentions of colleges and universities will be within a United States context.

2016; Harper & Gasman, 2008; Lenning, 2017; Mobley & Johnson, 2015). Coleman (2016) also added that "the Black church and HBCUs have become two powerful pillars in the Black community that perpetuate and foster homophobic environments against the backdrop and in support of Christian values" (p. 3). The linkage between Christianity, Black churches, and HBCUs is deeply rooted and can be traced back to their inceptions in the mid-nineteenth century. Some of the earliest HBCUs were founded by Black churches and with the financial help of White philanthropists (Gasman & Nguyen, 2015; Manley, 1995), shortly after the Civil War. Because of these connections, HBCUs are often portrayed in the media and within research as being unwelcoming, intolerant, and dangerous for sexual and gender minorities (Gasman & Bowman, 2011; Gasman & Nguyen, 2013).

The Policy Announcement

On September 5, 2017, President Campbell wrote in a letter to the Spelman Community, announcing its new admissions and enrollment policy regarding transgender students. According to the Spelman's admissions website and Campbell's letter, the new policy stated:

> Spelman College, a historically Black college whose mission is to serve high-achieving Black women, will consider for admission women students including students who consistently live and self-identify as women, regardless of their gender assignment at birth. Spelman does not admit male students, including students who self-identify and live consistently as men, regardless of gender assignment at birth. If a woman is admitted and transitions to male while a student at Spelman, the College will permit that student to continue to matriculate at and

> graduate from Spelman. (Campbell, letter, September 05, 2017; https://www.spelman.edu/admissions/applying-to-spelman)

This policy became effective fall 2018, which made Spelman College the second, and last, Black women's college to establish a transgender admissions and enrollment policy.

Bennett College was the first; its Board of Trustees approved its policy on January 28, 2017 (Bennett College Policies and Procedures, January 28, 2017). Although both colleges' policies have the same admissions consideration for transwomen, Bennett College does not allow students who transition to men or other genders while enrolled at the College to continue to matriculate (Bennett College Policies and Procedures, January 28, 2017). The slight differences in each college's policy reflects the lack of consensus that exists among women's colleges (Boskey & Ganor, 2020). In addition, this demonstrates how, despite having similar missions and cultural identities as historically Black institutions, the opinions and attitudes toward transgender students' admissions considerations and enrollment status still vary across institutions. Dr. Beverly Guy-Sheftall (as cited in Pennamon, 2018), the founder and director for the Women's Research and Resource Center (WRRC) at Spelman, provided a rationale for Spelman's policy, stating the policy is:

> simply an acknowledgement of the population that was already there, had already been graduating, had already been admitted and enrolled … We felt that it was necessary for us to truly live up to our mission to have a policy and to state that policy clearly (p. 19).

Spelman has a steep history in social justice activism and has often trail blazed many progressive and innovative approaches to diversity and inclusion at HBCUs. For

example, Spelman was the first HBCU with a women's research center, and to offer a women's study major (Pennamon, 2018; https://www.spelman.edu/academics/majors-and-programs/comparative-womens-studies/womens-research-resource-center). Pennamon (2018) stated that the Spelman's WRRC "has been at the forefront of transforming the way students and others beyond Spelman's gates think about critical issues in gender and sexuality studies, human rights, healthcare, and other social issues" (p. 17). In 2011, Spelman was also one of the first HBCUs to hold a conference that focused on LGBT students at Black colleges and across the African Diaspora – the Audre Lord Historically Black College and University Summit (Coleman, 2016; Mobley & Johnson, 2015; Pennamon, 2018).

Campus Response to the New Policy

Despite the many efforts Spelman College had made toward fostering a supportive environment for transgender and gender non-conforming students, the policy evoked mixed emotions among the faculty, students, and alumnae (Pennamon, 2018). It also triggered opposition among some students, which manifested as acts of hate and harassment toward transgender students. In April 2018, four transphobic and threatening notes were placed under the doors of transgender students in Spelman's residence halls (Pennamon, 2018). The controversial notes were posted on social media and ignited the student activist movement - #Spelsafe. The #Spelsafe hashtag symbolized a movement of solidarity among Spelman students, faculty, and administrators – across sexual orientations and gender identities – to condemn these hateful acts. It also mobilized many students to protest Spelman College's lack of awareness of "LBGT issues, events, and spaces on campus" (Pennamon, 2018, p. 18). President Campbell and Vice President for

Student Affairs, Dr. Darryl B. Holloman, both wrote separate letters condemning the acts and reaffirmed the Spelman's commitment to inclusivity. In Campbell's (2018) letter, she wrote to the perpetrators, "You are not Spelman College. Spelman abhors your behavior. Spelman will continue to open its arms to embrace all of our Spelman students whatever their gender identity, sexual orientation or gender expression. Spelman is love, justice, and respect" (para. 3).

Statement of the Problem

The previously described transphobic acts coupled with the activism showed by some Spelman students exposed the conflicting views that exists among students around the new policy and whether transgender and non-gender conforming students have the right to occupy spaces traditionally held by Black cisgender[3] college women. Such, the problem to be studied is whether Spelman's transgender admissions and enrollment policy is supported by Spelman's students. In addition, this study will explore their attitudes toward current and prospective transgender and gender non-conforming students at Spelman.

Currently, little is known about students' attitudes toward transgender policies broadly, and more specifically at coeducational and single-sex historically Black institutions. Greater knowledge is critical, as both policies and students' attitudes are integral to how students experience the campus climate. Most current scholarship that examines power dynamics among social groups on college campuses suggests that dominate groups often significantly influence the campus climate and can create social

[3] *Cisgender* is a term given to people whose biological sex aligns with their gender identity, which is grounded in societal belief of what is the appropriate alignment of gender and sex and falls within the gender binary of male or female (Evans et al., 2010; Killerman, 2013).

rules and norms that normalizes or systemically give advantages to members of dominate groups. For example, genderism[4] on college campuses can manifest in the form of policies, behaviors, or environments that reinforce the gender binary and privilege those who comply with cisgender norms (Evans et al., 2010; Farmer et al., 2020; Goldberg. 2018).

Furthermore, scholarship examining the attitudes toward transgender people is scant, especially within racial and educational contexts. Because of the dearth in literature, it is reasonable to assume that there are gaps in contemporary understandings of why people possess certain attitudes toward transgender and gender non-conforming people, as well as their attitudes toward gender-inclusive polices/laws that legitimizes their protections. However, because transgender and gender non-conforming people are not considered a legally protected class (Westrick & Lower, 2016), there are few laws protecting them from acts of discrimination.

Most early transgender scholarship, especially within education, lumped transgender and gender non-conforming people within the lesbian, gay, and bisexual communities (Dugan et al., 2012; Pryor et al., 2016; Schneider, 2010), which has consequently led many to falsely perceive that the experiences, challenges, and needs of these communities are similar, but they are not (Carter, 2013; Dugan et al., 2012; Marine, 2012; Pusch, 2005). Acknowledging this limitation, and because I was not able to find any studies that focused exclusively on Blacks attitudes toward transgender people within the United States, I did include the scholarship about attitudes toward Black lesbians and

[4] *Genderism* is often defined as the social belief system that reinforce that gender is binary and that only two genders exist – man and woman (Nicolazzo, 2016a; Sampson, 2014). Others extend the term to include the prejudice toward and the discrimination people faced when their gender-identity and gender expression do not fit within the gender binary (Browne, 2004; Farmer et al., 2020)

gays, and "the" LGBTQ community more broadly, to determine whether those findings could be transferrable to transgender and gender non-conforming people.

Most of these studies I found are now outdated, with Lewis's (2003) study on Black-White differences toward homosexuality and gay rights being the most recent. Some of the earlier scholarship about Blacks' attitudes toward gays and lesbians often portrayed Black peoples as the most homophobic group within the United States (Lewis, 2003). Although there are very few studies that validated this claim, the claim is often attributed to the conservative Christian beliefs held by many Black people and the denouncement of homosexuality made by many Black churches and their leaders (Lewis, 2003). Because Black churches have historically played an instrumental role in the political advancements of Black peoples in the United States, Lewis's (2003) study examined Black attitudes in response to the momentum of the gay rights movement of the 1990s through the early 2000s.

Literature on Black cisgender women's attitude toward sexual minorities have mixed findings. Ernst et al.'s (1991) study found that more Black than White cisgender women felt that "AIDS will help society by reducing the number of homosexuals (gay people)" (p. 581). After the publication of this study, it was often thought that Black cisgender women were largely responsible for the intolerance of Black gay cisgender men when compared to Whites (Lemelle & Battle, 2004). Lemelle and Battle (2004) postulated that the root of Black cisgender women's disapproval of homosexuality could be linked to the perceived competition between them and Black gay men for the limited pool of Black men partners. In contrast, Sawyer (2000) and Davis and Brown (2002) found that Black women were more accepting of gay men than Black cisgender men.

As suggested earlier, the findings from studies that examined Black cisgender women's attitudes toward gay men may not fully reflect their feelings toward transgender people or their attitudes regarding movements toward gender inclusion. However, research suggested that sexual orientation and gender are often linked, and that people often perceive someone's sexuality based on their gender expression. Bailey et al. (1997) illustrated this by stating that "the stereotypical gay man in contemporary America [United States] is feminine in a number of respects, including his mannerism, interests, and occupation. The stereotypical lesbian is masculine in similar respects, and additionally, she has short hair and masculine clothing" (p. 170). In addition, Evans et al. (2012) also exposed the harassment and violence some LGB college students face, despite their gender identity, when they "lack conformity to expected sex/gender identity/gender role/sexual orientation linkage" (p. 344).

This gap in current empirical studies on Black cisgender women's attitudes toward transgender people, especially within educational contexts, may lead educators to continue to confound gender and sexual orientation and generalize the attitudes of Black women. This is problematic when existing scholarship already paints Black cisgender women as being intolerant and links their disapproval to their inability to find viable Black cisgender men partners. To potentially challenge the limited extant scholarship, my study that explored Spelman College's decision to allow transgender and non-gender conforming students to attend may provide a foundation for understanding this phenomenon and may contribute to a more contemporary understanding of Black women's attitude toward transgender people and the polices that impact them.

Lastly, according to the *2015 U.S Transgender Survey: Report on the Experiences of Black Respondents,* Black transgender people experience harassment, violence, and even are murdered at a disproportionately higher rate than any other racial and ethnic groups in the United States. Because of this, it is reasonable to assume that this community is one of the most vulnerable groups within the transgender and Black communities. Therefore, it is it necessary and crucial that we examine institutional policies and students' attitudes, so that we can make Spelman College, and possibly other HBCUs, safer and welcoming for Black transgender and gender non-conforming students.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to examine Spelman College's students' attitudes toward its transgender admissions and enrollment policy. The study will also examine how intersecting identities among these students shape their attitudes toward the policy, as well as their attitudes toward transgender and non-gender conforming students who attend Spelman College. The research questions that guide this study are: (1) How do Spelman College students describe their attitudes toward its transgender admission and enrollment policy? And (2) How do Spelman College students describe their attitudes toward Spelman's transgender and gender non-conforming students?

Theoretical Frameworks

Because this study explored Spelman's students' attitude toward its transgender admission and enrollment policy, as well as the institution's transgender and gender non-conforming community, I used two theoretical frameworks: Tricomponent Attitude Model and intersectional theory. The tricomponent model of attitude and intersectionality both informed my analysis because attitude and intersectionality are mutually reinforcing.

A person's attitudes involve their behaviors, values, feelings that can be influenced by social contexts and social identities, including intersectional identities. Because I am interested in Black women's attitudes, I must intentionally consider how race, gender, and other social constructs inform the attitudes I am exploring, the study used an intersectional perspective to gain a better understanding of how students make meaning of the transgender admissions and enrollment policy at Spelman College and their attitudes toward transgender and gender non-conforming students.

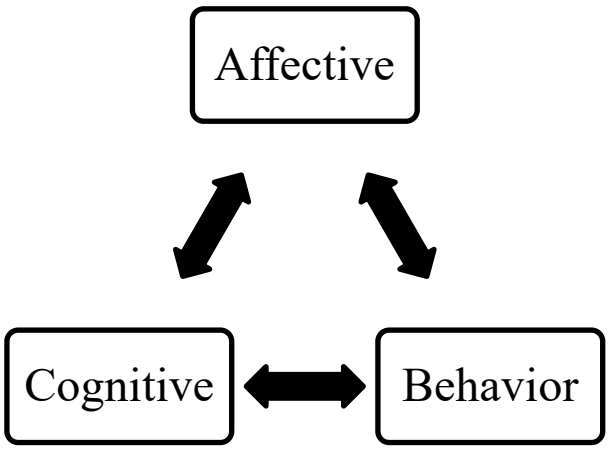
Tricomponent Attitude Model

According to Pickens (2005), *attitude* can be defined as the "mindset or tendency to act in a particular way due to both an individual's experience and temperament" (p. 44), which is based on prominent social psychologist Gordon W. Allport's (1935) book, *Attitudes*. Attitudes are also comprised of a complex combination of a person's personality, beliefs, values, and behaviors. Pickens's (2005) definition highlighted the key role a person's experience plays in shaping a person's attitude, which subsequently defines a person's beliefs, values, and perceptions. As it pertains to this study, the Allport's (1935) Tricomponent Attitude Model (TAM) provided a framework for unpacking Spelman students' attitudes toward transgender and gender non-conforming students, which subsequently influenced their attitudes toward Spelman College's transgender admission and enrollment policy. In addition, the model was used to understand their perceptions of the attitudes of other Spelman students toward its transgender and gender non-conforming students as well as its policy. Pickens (2005) stated that "attitudes cause us to behave in a particular way toward an object or people"

(p. 44); therefore, in this study the "object" is Spelman's policy and the "people" are its students.

Allport's (1935) TAM is utilized primarily as a social theory and theoretical framework in consumer sciences, economics, and psychology studies to understand consumer's attitude toward products. The TAM argued that attitudes have three components: an affect (a person's feelings); behavior (a person's action); and cognition (a person's thoughts and beliefs), which are visualized can be viewed in **Figure 1.**

Figure 1. Adapted from Allport's (1935) Tricomponent Model of Attitudes



These three components are thought to be transactional because they are interrelated and integrate to shape a person's attitude.

According to Allport (1935), the affective components focus on a person's feelings or emotional reaction toward a product or person, which could be either positive or negative. The behavioral component focuses on a person's intentions or behaviors toward a product or person. This component clarifies the potential relationship that could exist between behavior and a product or people. Lastly, the cognitive component focuses on the person's beliefs, thoughts, and perceptions they have toward an item or person. This is often associated with a person's knowledge of the product or person. The product

or person in this study was Spelman's transgender and gender non-conforming students and the policy.

Intersectionality

Intersectional research has become increasing popular within educational research and practice, as educators and scholars have used intersectionality as a tool toward social justice and to demonstrate the necessity of examining social groups from multiple-axes. As a framework, intersectionality has been used in conjunction with or as a part of critical race theory, critical legal studies, feminist theory, and critical race feminism (Hancock, 2007). Its interdisciplinary utility has contributed to the understanding of social group representation and is often recognized as a powerful research paradigm (Hancock, 2007; Severs et al., 2016). Despite its varying definitions, for the purpose of this study, *intersectionality* is the relationship between multiple social identities interacting with each other that shapes one's experiences and life circumstances in relation to social power (Davis, 2008). Critical and feminist scholars argued that intersectionality can be used to analyze intersecting structures/systems of power, with the purpose of understanding the experiences of the oppressed and marginalized, and the experiences of the privileged. In many cases, intersectional research focuses primarily on the intersection of multiple minoritized identities within race, gender, class and sexual orientation, and its connection to experiences of prejudice and discrimination (Hancock, 2007; Granzka et al., 2017; Núñez, 2014).

According to Núñez (2014), higher education scholars are increasingly using intersectionality as a lens to examine how multiple social identities across institutional contexts influence educational processes and outcomes. In addition, intersectionality can

help expose how interlocking systems of power, privilege and domination can shape the generalized experience of unique student groups (Núñez, 2014). Although Núñez's (2014) intersectional research focused on Latinx students in higher education, it is transferrable to other student population, such as Black women in higher education.

As aforementioned, intersectionality is used in multitude of ways within educational research and practice, but for this study I relied on Hurtado et al.'s (2012) intersectional model used as part of their methodology and data analysis. Hurtado et al. (2012) used intersectionality within their diverse learning model to demonstrate how the multiple social identities among people within an organization are influenced by multi-level social contexts that affect their educational experiences. In addition, Hurtado et al.'s (2012) model reinforced the significances of recognizing how micro-, meso-, and macro level social contexts influence campus climate, because social contexts and social identities of students both shapes how college students navigate their campus environments. This model also illustrated how socio-historical events, and the exosystem of the people within the local community and other external forces, shaped college students, which, consequently shaped campus climate.

Hurtado et al.'s (2012) intersectional model allowed me to it make clear connections to how the intersections of social identities among Spelman's students influenced Spelman's climate toward inclusion. Also, Spelman's new transgender admissions policy was a socio-historical event, and Hurtado et al.'s model accounted for the influence of socio-historical events to campus climate. Lastly, external factors outside of Spelman (e.g., family members, religious affiliations, students and policies of

neighboring HBCUs within the Atlanta University Center) influenced Spelman's climate. Collectively, these factors made Hurtado et al.'s model ideal for my study.

Intersectionality also provided insight into how Spelman students, particularly participants from double or multiple oppressed groups, understood transwomen, individuals of trans-experiences, and gender non-conforming students. Lastly, as described in Hurtado et al. (2012), social contexts also played a significant role in shaping Spelman students' intersecting identities, consequently shaping their attitudes and beliefs toward policies that are intended to enhance gender inclusion in historically cisgender women spaces.

Design of the Study

This study is a single holistic case study that is qualitative in nature. Qualitative inquiry has a longstanding history within education scholarship (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), and it is becoming more utilized as an independent research strategy within social policy research (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). Ritchie and Spencer (1994) attributed this to "requirement in social policy fields to understand complex behaviors, needs, systems and cultures" (p. 173). Given this trend and the purpose of this study to gain a deep and contextual understanding of the attitudes of Spelman's students toward its new policy and its gender variant population, using a qualitative case study approach is appropriate.

Yin (2014) defined a case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the 'case') in depth and within its real-word context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not clearly evident" (p. 16). Case studies allow researchers an opportunity to focus on an issue bounded by one location (Creswell, 2007, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2014).

This study is bounded to the students and the admission policy of Spelman College. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), applied research is used to improve the quality of practice within a discipline, which is consistent with one of the goals of this study: to improve how scholar practitioners understand college students' attitudes toward transgender and gender non-conforming issues within higher education broadly and at HBCUs as well as their understanding and support of a particular institutional policy. This case study will also be holistic in nature because it uses single unit of analysis, which will be the collective attitudes of Spelman College's students. According to Yin (2014), holistic case study is appropriate when "no logical subunits can be identified" (p. 55). Also, Baxter and Jack (2008) suggest that single holistic case studies are ideal when examining a person or a group within one environment.

Setting

Spelman College is a historically Black small private liberal arts women's college, which was founded on April 11, 1881 in metropolitan Atlanta, GA. The College is one of the three remaining single-gendered liberal arts[5] HBCUs in the United States. Spelman's mission is to: "educate women of African descent in the disciplines within liberal arts and sciences; foster intellectual, creative, ethical and leadership development of its students; empowers students to engage in global cultures; and to develop a commitment to positive social change" (Bulletin 2017-2019, p. 2).

Spelman College is one of the few highly selective HBCUs, making it one of the most competitive HBCUs to attend. In 2019, Spelman received 9,106 admissions application for first-year, first time students and accepted 3,956, or 43% of its applicants

[5] The three single-gendered liberal arts HBCUs are Bennett College, Morehouse College, and Spelman College.

(Spelman College Mini Fact Book). The fall 2019 first-year cohort enrolled 516 students, which was 13% of the accepted students. The total enrollment for fall 2019 was 2,120 students, which included full-time and part-time students. The racial/ethnic composition of those students was 97.31% Black or African American (n=2,065), 1.42% (n=30) American Indian or Alaska Native, 0.75% (n=16) Non-Resident Alien, 0.24% (n=5) two or more races, 0.34% (n=3) White, and 0.05% (1) Asian. The institution had a first-year to sophomore retention rate of 88% for the 2019-2020 academic year. In addition, during the 2019-2020 the institution had a total number of 270 full-time and part-time faculty of whom which approximately 77% (n=207) identified as women and approximately 23% (n=63) identified as men. Based on the student and faculty count, the institution had an 10:1 student-to-faculty ratio.

Spelman College is considered one of the most prestigious HBCUs and has received recognition globally and nationally for its educational contributions, especially as it relates to the success in educating and producing Black women leaders. According to the *U.S News & World Report* (2020), Spelman College is ranked number one among HBCUs and has held that title for 14 consecutive years as well as ranked the number one HBCU for Social Mobility and Innovation. Spelman also received other top rankings in list such as: most innovative liberal arts college, best undergraduate teaching, national liberal arts college, and best value schools.

Participants

There were 10 participants in this study. All participants were identified using criterion-based selection. Criterion-based selection refers to the process of selecting participants based on attributes that are critical to the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

For this study, participants must be currently enrolled at Spelman College and 18 years old or older at the beginning of data collection. Interested participants received a prescreening script (Appendix A) sent to their Spelman email address. If the participant met the study's criteria, an interview was schedule and a consent form (Appendix B.) was given. Because the data collection took place during the spring and summer of 2020, many of the participants were transitioning to their next year of study or had recently graduated from the College.

All participants had the opportunity to share their grade level and their identities- to the extent they desired. In addition, participants were asked to create pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality, but many declined. Therefore, I labeled the participants by numbers. Based upon the demographic information provided, Table 1. details each participant.

Table 1

Participants Identity Matrix

Participant Number	Classification	Race	Gender	Sexual Orientation	Religion	Family Dynamic	Other
1	Sophomore	Black	Cisgender Woman	Straight	Raised Catholic, but aligns more with Muslim	Parents are immigrants from two African Countries Described parents as "liberal"	Native of Virginia
2	Junior	Black	Cisgender woman	Unknown	Believes in God, non-religious	Unknown	Queer Loosely identifies with American, native of Maryland.
3	Junior	Black	Cisgender woman	Unknown	Christian, non-religious	Father is a pastor	Queer
4	Senior	Black	Cisgender woman	Straight	Christian, but more	Father is a pastor	Queer

					spiritual. Also, into astrology.		
5	Sophomore	Black	Cisgender woman	Straight	Agnostic, but raised Christian	Religious family	Native of New York
6	Junior	Black	Cisgender woman	Pansexual	Christin, but more spiritual	Did not disclose	Did not disclose
7	Junior	Black	Gender non-conforming	Lesbian	Did not disclose	Did not disclose	From Georgia, identifies as a non-traditional student
8	Senior	Black	Cisgender woman	Straight	Christian	Did not disclose	Involved in student government association at Spelman.
9	Freshman	African American	Cisgender woman	Straight	Christian, but open to other faiths	First-generation college student. Liberal parents	From Midwest
10	Freshman	Black	Cisgender woman	Straight	Christian	Conservative family, upper-middle class family	Did not disclose additional information

During data collection, the United States was in the midst of the global health pandemic – the novel coronavirus, or Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome-Coronavirus-2 (COVID-19). The COVID-19 pandemic outbreak affected millions of lives around the world, because of its high contagiousness and rapid spread. At the time of the study's completion, the United States had the highest number of COVID-19 infections and deaths in the World. Throughout the duration of this study, states across the country enacted shelter-in-place mandates, which limited travel to only essential worker and for individuals purchasing essential goods or seeking medical assistance. All schools, including colleges and universities, in the United States closed, and all instruction moved to some form of distance education.

To comply with state regulations, and guidelines by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, I conducted recruitment virtually. In addition to criterion selection, I used convenience sampling, because I was not able to visit Spelman College to recruit students through in-person methods as I had originally planned. These originally proposed methods included meeting with student leaders, class visits, and simply meeting students on campus.

Convenience sampling is defined as

> A type of nonprobability or nonrandom sampling where members of the target population meet certain practical criteria, such as easy accessibility, geographical proximity, availability at a given time, or willingness to participate are included for the purpose of the study. (Etikan et al., 2016, p. 2)

I posted the study's recruitment flyer (See Appendix C) on Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok and used hash tags related to Spelman College to attract Spelman students. I also reached out to students directly on these platforms, if they self-identified as Spelman students or used other monikers (e.g., spelmanite, 1881) that associated them with Spelman, as well as, indicated that their graduation year had not occurred on their account profiles. All of the participants emailed me directly to participate, either based on flyers they had seen on social media or from tweet sent directly to them. Although several participants stated that they would share the study's recruitment flyer to their friends and peers through group messaging and in class, I did not receive any participants through the snowball sampling method.

Data Collection

I conducted 30 to 60-minute virtual individual interviews with all participants. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), "interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behaviors, feelings, or interpret the world around us" (p. 108). Because I was restricted in the ways in which I could collect data, virtual interviews were the most effective approach to understanding the attitude of Spelman's students. Yin (2014) also added that interviews were the most important sources of data for a case study. Ten students agreed to participate in interviews for this study. This number of participants is appropriate given Dworkin's (2012) argument that the purpose is of qualitative research is to focus on depth rather than breadth. I also used a small sample because of the challenges of recruiting participants virtually due to COVID-19 limitations and other socio-political events.

I created a semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix D) and the questions were organized by the components of Allport's (1935) TAM: affective, behavioral, and cognitive. The semi-structured nature of the interview also allowed participants to shape the conversation about their experiences, beliefs, and actions related to the study. The decision to use individual interviews instead of focus groups is in part due to the sensitive nature of the data that were collected. Individual interviews allowed participants to own their thoughts, feelings, and beliefs, which can be difficult in focus groups, as some tend to adopt the views of others in group settings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

I also used one artifact in this study, which was a letter tweeted by the all-inclusive gender and sexuality student organization at Spelman, Afrekete. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described artifacts as physical objects within an environment that represent

a form of communication between the participants and the setting of the study. The letter included 13 campus-wide actions to address homophobia and transphobia violence and hate for the 2018-2019 academic year. The noted that it was created by Spelman students, faculty, staff, and alumnx. This artifact is significant because it was written, in part, by Spelman students. I had intended to use other artifacts provided by vice president of student affairs, to gain additional insight on students' and other campus stakeholder's attitudes toward the study's topics, but because of COVID19 restrictions and my inability to visit campus, I was not able to access these sensitive documents.

Data Analysis

All interviews were transcribed and coded using deductive, emergent and in vivo coding within the data analysis software, Dedoose. It was important for me to capture participants' language by using verbatim transcripts. I reviewed line-by-line, and searched for words, phrases, or statements that could fit within the first level of coding. Six predetermine codes were created, which were based on the two research questions and the three components of TAM. According to Saldaña (2016) preliminary codes can be predetermined before the study that directly answer research questions or align with the study's conceptual and theoretical frameworks. Within these six codes, I looked at intersectional perspectives, because intersectionality is the second theoretical framework guiding this study. After the first round of coding was complete, I reviewed interview notes and data within the six codes, and wrote down emerging themes.

Within each of the six preliminary codes, I looked for shared emotions and experiences and created secondary-level codes. I also used emotional coding in the second-level coding. This type of coding is used to gain a clear understanding of the

emotion of students. This is a particular relevant for this study, because emotions are a component of person's attitudes. According to Saldaña (2016), emotional coding "provides insight into the participants' perspectives, worldviews, and life conditions" (p. 293). The second-level codes help determined which attitudes were shared and shaped by their social group memberships (e.g., gender-identity, student status/class year, religion) as well as their perceptions of other students. I used analytic memos to help make connections in the data and to make to make appropriate recommendations.

As aforementioned, I used one artifact in this study. The artifact was another sources that provided insight on students' attitudes toward the policy and Spelman transgender and gender non-conforming community. I used the same coding strategy for the artifact and I triangulated the findings from the artifact with the data from the interviews. Triangulation was an important trustworthiness strategy that helped to determine whether data sources align or conflict with the various themes from the interviews. Leavy (2017) defined data triangulation as the process of "using multiple sources of data to examine an assertion" (p. 153).

Researcher's Positionality

I recognized that my positionality as the researcher significantly influenced how I interpreted the data, and influenced the relationship between the participants and me. As such, it was critical for me to identify personal bias, values, and assumptions at the beginning of a study (Creswell, 2009). I identify as a Black queer man of trans experience[6] from Atlanta, GA. I was raised by a southern African American moderately conservative Christian family. Growing up in the South and Black, HBCUs played a

[6] Person of trans experience is a term used by people who have or had a transgender experience.

significant role in my life as well as my family. Many of my family members, including me, are graduates of HBCUs; in addition, many of my family members, including I, have worked at these institutions. My identities, personal experience, family and community narratives have shaped my understanding of these institutions. There is a sense of connectedness among people who attended and graduated from HBCUs, because there are cultural experiences and traditions that are unique to the HBCU experience, and can only be fully understood by those who experienced it.

I also recognized that I am a staunch HBCU advocate and supporter. I want these institutions to excel because these institutions positively influenced my personal and professional growth. I also have seen how instrumental these institutions have been for my family, peers, and students with whom I worked as they have advanced educationally and professionally. I want to protect these institutions, because of their cultural and historical contributions to Black peoples, even when they struggle. As is the case with many institutions, HBCUs have a unique set of issues and challenges related to social justice and inclusion. As a scholar practitioner whose leadership is steeped in equity, social justice, and inclusion, I have a personal mission to help shift the narrative and practices at these institutions so that they can be more accessible and welcoming to students.

Lastly, I recognized that the relationship between the Spelman College community and me may have influenced the type of participants the study attracted. In addition, it may have also influenced participants' responses. As an outsider to the organization, I understood that many community members might not have felt comfortable discussing issues related to Spelman, especially when the findings may

critique or paint Spelman College negatively. Also, I shared different identities from the participants, which may have made them more or less comfortable participating in the study. In addition, through the study I asked participants personal questions about their actions, understanding, values, and beliefs toward another subgroup of students. Subsequently, I had to analyze them based on my positionality and interpretations of their experiences and words. Participants may have had concerns regarding the misrepresentation of their words and/or Spelman's culture, because of my out-sider status.

Limitations

There are several limitations regarding this study. Limitations are often associated with the uncontrollable aspects of a study that could influence how the study is conducted and its findings (Price & Murnan, 2004). During the data collection period of this study, the United States was faced with a pandemics and racial unrest around police brutality against Black Americans, which had direct implications for my ability to interact with and recruit participants. In addition, there are several limitations related to nature of the study.

COVID-19

It is important for me to first discuss how COVID-19 affected higher education and the Black American community and its implications for this study. The COVID19 pandemic abruptly and drastically shifted the landscape of education and society, which consequently influenced this study in multiple ways. Colleges and universities among the United States were the first institutions to abruptly end all in-person activities, including and moving all classes to alternative remote formats for the remainder of the spring 2020

semester. This decision preceded many shelter-in-place orders, social distancing guidance, and other COVID-19 prevention measures enacted by local and state governments to reduce the transmission of COVID-19. Most college students were required to leave campus and return to their primary residences, even if that was in another country or nowhere at all. Many significant aspects of the college experiences were cancelled or postponed, such as: graduation ceremonies, student employment, internships, study abroad opportunities, research, athletics, and many more.

Distance learning created unique and new sets of challenges for colleges and universities. COVID-19 exposed unforeseen unanticipated equity issues, as some students did not have access to the technology needed for the academic transition. In addition, some students had to forgo classes completely to work, when they could find employment, to help themselves and their families. Equity issues, including student achievement concerns due to a very quick transition to distance education, were exposed and exacerbated access, motivation, and success issues within student groups who were already under-supported in higher education. Many schools provided virtual events, pass/fail grading, and allowed students to receive hardship/excused withdrawals, but this did not remove the stress of navigating their education and a health pandemic, in increased isolation.

COVID-19 also amplified health disparities in the United States. Black communities were getting infected and dying at disproportionally higher rates than Whites in certain cities and states (Millett et al., 2020). Most of these higher rates were linked to the high number of comorbidities found in of communities of color, which made them more susceptible to contracting COVID-19 and dying from COVID-19

related complications. In addition, these groups represented most of the "essential" workforce, who had to work despite the risk of contracting the disease and possibly exposing it to their families. One of the factors that contributed to the high transmissibility and fatality among people of color was that these groups represented most of the "essential" workforce, who had to work despite the risk of contracting the disease and possibly exposing it to their families. It became evidently clear that people of color were the front-line workers risking their lives to keep upper- and middle-class Americans safe. Many working-class people of color had no choice but to continue to work, despite the lack of adequate testing and treatment for the disease. Working class multigenerational house homes were at most risk, because the household's inability to properly complying with social distancing recommendations. Black students across the United States watched the disease affect their communities and their families, while trying to maintain their own safety.

COVID-19 restrictions, as well as COVID-19 related fatigue, were unavoidable external forces that changed the trajectory of the study. For example, my inability to recruit through in-person means limited my ability to reach a diverse group of students and limited my ability to work directly with Spelman administrators and student organizations. COVID-19 directly implicated how I collected data. In addition, because of many of the externalities (e.g., COVID-19, anti-Black violence, virtual learning) faced by Spelman students, many potential participants may have been too fatigued due to the emotional and physical strain.

Black Lives Matter Protests against Police Brutality

COVID-19 exposed how systemic racism affected the health, employment, and democracy of Black-Americans. In an article written by Lauren Aratani and Dominic Rushe (2020) on the economic impact of COVID-19 on African American community, they wrote:

> Economists who focus on race have long said that the "last hired, first fired" phenomenon dramatically affects [B]lack Americans more than any other group in the US due to the country's history of racism and segregation of [B]lack Americans in the work sector. Workers of color, particularly [B]lack Americans, have long been overrepresented in the lowest-paying service and domestic occupations. (https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/apr/28/african-americans-unemployment-covid-19-economic-impact, n.d., para. 10)

In some communities, the lack of adequate healthcare and economic resources from the government fueled the perception that Black lives were disposable. Other actions by political leaders, such as limiting mail-in ballot options or refusing to explore safer voting options for major elections, created debate on whether these were intentional efforts to suppress Black voters. These racial disparities, compounded by the highly publicized murders of four Black Americans, fueled some of the largest modern-day protests since the Civil Rights Movement. The deaths of Ahmad Arbery[7], Breonna Taylor[8], George

[7] On February 23, three White men killed Ahmad Arbery, a cisgender Black man, on an afternoon job. According to Rojas (2020), despite the local outrage for Arbery's murder, activist had difficulties gaining national attention because of being overshadowed by the COVID-19 pandemic. It took months before Arbery's case generated enough national attention to spark an investigation on his killers, one of whom was a retired police officer.

[8] On March 13, Louisville police officers raided the home and murdered Breonna Taylor, a 26-year-old cisgender Black woman and emergency room technician. Breonna's boyfriend fired at the police, as he thought the intruders were robbers. The police returned fire and killed Taylor.

Floyd[9], and Rayshard Brooks[10] exposed the deadly police brutality toward Blacks, and the slow pace of accountability and justice for Black death at the hands of White officers and White assailants. Thousands of Black Lives Matters protesters gathered in cities around the country and world against systemic racism anti-Blackness, and for transformational policing reform. Because some of the protests overlapped with LGBTQ Pride Month, many Black Live Matters protests partnered with Pride organizations to hold "All Black Lives Matters" protests to bring awareness to the alarming rates of murders among Black trans people.

Many Spelman students participated in these protests. One Spelman student was videotaped being pulled from a car, tased, and arrested by Atlanta police officers while leaving a protest; the police officers involved were later terminated for using unnecessary excessive force. Coping with racial tension and participating in activism likely resulted in emotional and physical fatigue among potential participants. Also, some students may have found this study triggering during those times. The Vice President for Student Affairs and the Dean of Student at Spelman both affirmed this when I reached out to them for help in recruiting students.

Nature of the Study

This study explores topics that many people may perceive as controversial, and may require participants to share personal details of their attitudes toward transgender and gender non-conforming people and the policy that directly affects their access to

[9] On May 25, George Floyd, a 46-year-old Black cisgender man, was murdered by a Minneapolis police officer after he refused to remove his knee from Floyd's neck after Floyd stated several times over 8 minutes "I can't breathe." This account mirrored the death of Freddie Gray, a 25-year-old-black man, who died while being transported in a Baltimore police van after telling officers that "I can't breathe."
[10] On June 12, Rayshard Brooks, a 27-year-old Black cisgender man, was murdered by an Atlanta police officer after resisting arrest for sleeping in his car and failing an alcohol breathalyzer test. Many argue that Rayshard's death is another example of excessive force used by police to deescalate conflict.

education. Most of the participants held positive attitudes toward Spelman's transgender and gender non-conforming community and its admission and enrollment policy. The lack of opposing views may not accurately reflect the overall student climate related to the inclusion and support for Spelman's transgender and gender non-conforming students. In addition, the nature of the study required that participants have a fundamental understanding of gender and gender identities beyond the gender binary; therefore, students may have been less inclined to participant if they had no knowledge of transgender and gender non-conforming students and their issues. These two factors may have influenced the types of participants willing to be included in this study. Thus, this study should be considered as a foundation for more research to gain a deeper understanding of the campus climate toward these phenomena.

Definition of Key Terms

This section is aimed to clarify terms that are used throughout this study:

Admissions consideration – Criterion established by a college or university that determines whether a student would be considered for admission.

Attitude – A person's mindset or tendency to act a particular way due to their experiences, beliefs, or values (Picken, 2005).

Cisgender – The term that describes people whose biological sex aligns with their gender identity, which is grounded in societal belief of what is the appropriate alignment of gender and sex and falls within the gender binary of male or female (Evans et al., 2010; Killerman, 2013).

Dead name – The term used to describe the act of referring to a transgender person, intentionally or unintentionally, as their birth name instead of the actual name that they use.

Enrollment status – This term is most often associated with the number of credits a student is registered for at a college or university for the purpose of aid eligibility or official enrollment verification. For this study, the term is used to describe the status of whether a student can matriculate at an institution or be required to transfer to another institution.

Gender – A socially constructed concept that involves the roles, norms, and values given to individuals based on their biological sex (Phillips, 2005).

Gender-identity – A term to describe a person's internal sense of their gender (Evans et al., 2010; Ho & Mussap, 2019).

Gender non-conforming (also commonly referred to as "gender expansive") – A term given to individuals who challenge cultural expectations of gender behaviors, expressions, and identities (Gordon & Meyer, 2007).

Gender performance – A term coined by Judith Butler (1990) that describes how a person manifests their gender, which helps create or define their gender.

Gender policing –A term used to describe the enforcement of gender policies based on the perceived or actual gender-identity of a person.

Historically Black College or University (HBCU) – According to the Higher Education Act of 1965, HBCUs are defined as "any historically [B]lack college or university that was established prior to 1964, whose principal mission was, and is, the education of [B]lack Americans" (US Department of Education, n.d.).

Misgender – A term used intentionally or unintentionally to describe a person in a way that does not align with their affirmed gender.

Transgender - Transgender is defined as the umbrella term used to describe individuals whose appearance, behaviors, and identities transcends across, outside, or blur gender lines (Beemyn et al., 2005).

Queer – An umbrella term to represent sexual and gender identities that are not heterosexual or cisgender.

Significance of the Study

Transgender and non-gender conforming students are becoming increasing more visible on college campuses across the United States (Beemyn et al., 2005; McKinnery, 2005; Seelman, 2014a, 2014b). As a result, higher education practitioners and researchers are seeking opportunities to better understand how to best serve these students. In addition, more attention is being given to how administrators and practitioners address their needs and promote a safe and welcoming environment for these students. Colleges and universities are highly gendered organizations (Evan et al., 2010; Mctavish & Thomson, 2007; Nanney & Brunsma, 2017; Nicolazzo, 2016a), which makes it difficult, and sometimes dangerous, for transgender and gender non-conforming students to navigate. This affirms the necessity for studies like this one that examine how students understand gender identities beyond the binary, especially within and outside of traditionally cisgender spaces, and the institutional policies aimed at gender inclusion.

Several studies found that transgender college students experience feelings of isolation, alienation, discrimination, and violence (Beemyn, 2005; Beemyn et al., 2005; Bilodeau, 2009; Evans et al., 2010; Nicolazzo, 2016a). Moreover, these experiences often

go unnoticed by students, faculty, and administrators because institutional structures reinforce gender binary norms and provide advantages for those who comply with gendered expectations (Bilodeau, 2009; Seelman, 2014a). In addition, scholarship examining transgender issues, including policies, within an educational context is rather limited, particularly when considered through a racialized lens.

Spelman College's decision to admit and matriculate transgender and gender non-conforming students brings together two common topics that are largely missing in current scholarship and conversation in higher education: policies that influence campus climate for transgender and gender non-conforming students and factors that shape Black women students' attitudes toward transgender and gender non-conforming college students. In addition, examining these topics within the context of a single-sex HBCU is under-researched. Most of what is understood about the experiences of sexual and gender minorities at HBCUs and single-gender institutions come from outdated studies, which consequently contribute to the perception that little to no work is being done at HBCUs toward diversity, equity, and inclusion.

The goal of this study to lay the foundations for future studies on the relationship between cisgender, transgender, gender non-conforming, and other gender identities at HBCUs – and higher education broadly. Findings from this study will not only help Spelman's administrators understand the attitudes of some of their students, but will help practitioners understand how students' experiences shape the perceptions of others, and toward gender-inclusive policies they may have on their campuses. Gasman et al. (2014) stated that "little is said about the role that the institution [HBCUs], institutional policies, and institutional practices lay in the student's experience" (p. 549). Students'

experiences, values, and beliefs along with institutional policy play significant roles in a campus's climate. By better understanding the connectedness of these factors, it may provide practitioners, researchers, and students with tools needed to combat transphobia, queerphobia, genderism, and transgender oppression. Further it may set the stage for collective action toward creating a campus climate and/or culture that is welcoming and safe for all students.

Summary

In 2018, Spelman College, a prestigious and highly selective historically Black women's college, implemented its new admissions and enrollment policy to be more inclusive to transgender and gender non-conforming identities. Admitting and enrolling transgender and gender non-conforming students at women's colleges has been a highly debated topic within higher education (Freitas, 2017); yet, there are little to no research dedicated to this topic within historically Black women's colleges or other racialized contexts. This applied case study examined Spelman College's students' attitude toward the policy and their attitudes toward Spelman's transgender and gender non-conforming students. This study also illuminated Spelman's campus climate toward transgender and gender non-conforming students and provided a more contemporary understanding of how Black college women students, particularly those attending a single gender HBCU, viewed transgender and gender non-conforming people and institutional policy that aim to provide access to gender variant identities.

This section began by chronicling the progression of the implementation of Spelman's transgender admissions and enrollment policy and Spelman students' response to the policy. In addition, the study also used Allport's (1935 (TAM) and intersectional

perspective, because the study examined how Spelman students' intersecting identities influence their attitude toward the new policy, as well as its transgender and gender non-conforming students. I conducted virtual interviews and utilized an artifact to capture other students' attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors. I used deductive, emergent, and in vivo coding in the first cycle of data analysis. I also relied heavily on emotional coding during the second cycle of analysis to make meaning of students' experiences and to reduce the data to identify the themes are salient for this study.

Section Two: Setting of the Study

In this section, I will begin with a historical overview of historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and their admissions and enrollment trends. This will provide a foundation for the next two sections, which are an overview of Spelman College with an emphasis on the contemporary composition of the campus community, its admissions considerations and practices, and enrollment trends. Secondly, I will provide a brief overview of Spelman's history and its various past and current works toward social justice and gender inclusion on its campus, locally, and globally. Next, I will provide organizational and leadership analyses, using information I found on the College's webpage, letters written by administrators, articles, and social media posts. Lastly, I will discuss research implications for the study within the setting and end with a summary of Section Two.

Background of Historically Black Colleges and Universities

According to the Higher Education Act of 1965, *historically Black colleges and universities* are defined as "any historically black college or university that was established prior to 1964, whose principal mission was, and is, the education of black Americans." Based on National Center for Education Statistics, in 2018, there were 101 accredited institutions that were designated as "HBCU" in the United States and are located primarily in 19 southern and border states (Avery, 2009; Brown II & Ricard, 2007). HBCUs are comprised of 2-year, 4-year, public, private, single-sexed, and religious institutions (Gasman & Bowman, 2011). This is similar to other minority-serving and historically predominately White institutions (PWIs) in the United States. According to Palmer et al. (2013), HBCUs make up approximately 3% of post-secondary

institutions in the United States and enroll approximately 14% of the Black undergraduate students (Palmer et al., 2013). In addition, HBCUs graduate approximately 28% of Black Americans; therefore out-performing PWIs in Black student completion rates (Coupet, 2010; Gasman et al.,2010; Richard & Awokoya, 2012) and achieve this with fewer financial resources (Brown II & Ricard, 2007; Gasman & Bowman, 2011).

Despite the significant contributions HBCUs have made to higher education in the United States and the Black community, these institutions are widely understudied and are often missing from larger national studies and conversation regarding higher education in the United States. These gaps have caused many researchers, practitioners, and the media to make assumption about the status of HBCUs; which has resulted in negatively portraying these institutions as outdated, under-performing, poorly managed, and unnecessary. Gasman et al. (2010) described the current state as "some HBCUs are striving, other are barely making it, and most fall in between" (p. 2). However, it is important to note that issues shared by HBCUs are synonymous to other colleges and universities but because there are fewer HBCUs, the issue at one HBCU can also be reflected in literature and the media as a problem at all HBCUs (Gasman & Brown, 2011) – when this is not the case. For example, in Gasman and Bowman's (2011) article, "How to Paint a Better Portrait of HBCUs," they provided a critique of several scholarly articles and media stories that misrepresented HBCUs as it relates to their mission, administrative leadership, and faculty. Within the article, they proclaimed their commitment to producing scholarship that is current, relevant, and accurate so that it shifts perceptions of these institutions within the higher education community and society.

Although HBCU focused scholarship, as well as research that includes these institutions within their sample, is scarce, the bulk of current and existing HBCU research pertains to students (Gasman et al., 2011). Most of the studies are comparative studies between HBCUs and PWIs and examine topics across multiple aspects of higher education, such as: achievement (Cokley, 2000; DeSousa & Kuh, 1996; Reeder & Schmitt, 2013);, retention (Palmer et al., 2009; Palmer et al., 2013; Richard & Awokoya, 2012); college choice (Camp et al., 2009; Conrad et al., 1997; Freeman & Gail, 2002); and campus experiences (Allen, 1992; Boone, 2003; Flemming, 1984; Kimbrough & Harper, 2016). When reviewing the publication dates on most of the studies above, it validates the notion that what we do know about HBCUs is from studies and literary works that are outdated.

Emerging scholarship on HBCUs examines more contemporary issues facing HBCU and their successes. There is a body of scholarship that examines the role of HBCUs presidents (e.g., Anderson et al., 2019; Freeman et al., 2016; Freeman & Gasman, 2014; Palmer & Freeman, 2019), since HBCUs president are often portrayed within scholarship and the Black community as symbolic figures. Some scholars even compare HBCUs presidents to that of leaders of Black Christian churches. In addition, this body of work exposes the complexity of the role of HBCUs presidents and provide insights on their perspectives on the future of these institutions. Other works examine HBCUs leadership and issues through the lenses of governance (Davenport, 2015; Gasman et al., 2010; Minor, 2004, 2005); finance (Davis, 2015; Drezer & Gupta, 2012; Gasman et. al., 2010; Johnson, 2013); and spirituality (Douglas, 2012).

I found that literature that provided details on admissions and enrollment policies and practices of HBCUs was either embedded in enrollment studies or were inferred from literature that discussed the history and mission of these institutions. HBCUs are described mostly in literature as being open-access (e.g., Brown II & Ricard, 2007; Gasman & Bowman, 2011), although a few are considered selective (Gasman & Bowman, 2011; Gasman et al., 2010). Some HBCU's tie their open-access admissions policies (also commonly referred to as "open-enrollment") to their historic mission to provide educational opportunities to Black students who were once denied access to higher education during eras of legal racial discrimination in the United States (Brown II & Ricard, 2007; Minor, 2004). In addition, HBCUs with minimal admission requirements are among the few options some students have for higher education; particularly those who face systemic inequities in the United States' education system which has caused significant opportunity gaps from families of color and from lower socioeconomic status (Hardy et al., 2019). Indeed, Brown II and Ricard (2007) argue that the willingness of HBCUs' to take on the role of educating underprepared students is at the core of their mission that and they "were founded on the premise that everyone deserves an opportunity to pursue higher education … The focus is on helping irrespective of their background and disadvantage circumstances to become productive and successful citizens of the world" (p. 122).

History of Spelman College

On January 1, 1863, 4 million enslaved Blacks were freed after spending 250 years enslaved by Whites in southern states and other parts of the United States (Watson & Gregory, 2005). Approximately 90% of Blacks in southern states were illiterate and

were afforded limited to no educational, social, political, and financial opportunities within the new "freed lands." (Watson & Gregory, 2005). Despite their history of enduring hardship, violence, and the denial of civil liberties, Blacks were tenacious regarding achieving formal education and developing industrial skills to make them self-sufficient. It was not until the federal government enacted the Bureau of Refugee, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (sic.) in 1865, that there was government support to ensuring that Blacks and poor Whites received an elementary education (Watson & Gregory, 2005). Because this legislation was not connected to funding education for Blacks, most education during that era had to be financed by Black churches and with help of White Christian missionaries in the northern states (Manley, 1995; Watson & Gregory, 2005).

This period was also a groundbreaking time for women rights, as women and some men, campaigned for women's right to higher education, to vote, as well as other civil liberties denied to women during that era (Lefever, 2005). Many of the northern missionaries took an affinity toward educating Black women, since it was believed that they would be responsible for educating Blacks as teachers (Watson & Gregory, 2005). These social and economic movements in New England deeply influenced Sophia B. Packard and Harriet E. Giles, who were raised and spent a significant portion of their adulthood in Massachusetts (Lefever, 2005; Read, 1961). Thus, they decided to take a progressive-liberal stance and establish a school for young Black women in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1881 (Lefever, 2005; Read, 1961; Watson & Gregory, 2005).

The Early Beginnings of Spelman College

Spelman was established from a $100 gift to Packard and Giles from the First Church of Medford, Massachusetts along with the financial and administrative support from the Woman's American Baptist Home Missionary Society (WABHMS) (Lefever, 2005; Read, 1961). Packard and Giles open the school in the basement of Friendship Baptist Church, which was a Black church located in southwest Atlanta (Lefever, 2005; Read, 1961). Gregory and Watson (2005) stated that "Packard and Giles often declared that it was genuinely their duty and mission, sanction by god, to educate the masses of newly emancipated Negro women and prepare them for productive American citizenship" (p. 5). The pastor of Friendship Baptist Church, Reverend Frank Quarles, fully supported the school and assisted in gaining the financial support from Blacks within the local community and other Black Christian ministries (Read, 1961). Spelman was initially named the Atlanta Baptist Female Seminary and held its inaugural classes on April 11, 1881 with 11 pupils (Gregory & Watson, 2005; Read, 1961). Since some of the seminary's first students were illiterate, Packard and Giles began offering courses in reading, spelling, writing, and grammar (Lefever, 2005; Manley, 1995). In addition, students took courses in geography and history to address other educational deficiencies.

Packard and Giles always envisioned that the school would serve as a liberal arts institution; however, after receiving an industrial grant from the John F. Slater Fund, the institution added an industrial department that offered courses in: nursing, printing, sewing, dressmaking, laundry, cooking, and "domestic arts" (Gregory & Watson, 2005; Lefever, 2005). As Spelman acquired additional funding and course offerings increased, student enrollment increased to 80 students (Lefever, 2005; Read, 1961). After a few

months, the school outgrew its church basement and was moved to a 9-acre lot of land purchased with a down payment of $17, 500 from the WABHMS in February 1883 (Gregory & Watson, 2005; Lefever, 2005). The land and buildings were former army barracks (Gregory & Watson, 2005; Lefever, 2005), which in present day is known as Fort McPherson. The parcel land included five vacant buildings that were later converted into a chapel, classrooms, dining hall, and dormitory and a living space for faculty, staff, and students (Lefever, 2005).

By 1884, Spelman had grown immensely to 16 faculty and over 600 students enrolled (Lefever, 2005). Packard and Giles were now responsible for procuring funds to maintain the daily operations of the school and to reimburse the WABHMS for the debit amassed for purchased property and land (Lefever, 2005). The founders were able to successfully secure these funds by donations made by Black churches in Georgia, local Black businesses, and individual donations from Black and White individuals (Lefever, 2005). One of its largest financial contributors was from John F. Rockefeller, who made a financial pledge to Packard and Giles based on their dedication to the success and mission of Spelman (Lefever, 2005; Manley, 1995). Gregory and Watson (2005) ties Rockefeller's commitment to educating Black Americans to his mother's display of activism toward enslaved slaves by opening her home as a stop on the Underground Railroad. Rockefeller's wife, Laura Spelman, and many members of the Spelman family were equally supportive of the institution; therefore, on April 11, 1894, the institution's name was changed to Spelman Seminary (Lefever, 2005; Manley, 1995).

As of the 1890s, Spelman Seminary had grown to 30 faculty and an enrollment of 800 students with a property valued at $90,000 (Lefever, 2005). In 1891 the board of

trustees named Packard the president of the board and Giles the first president of the institution (Watson & Gregory, 2005). The mission soon after changed from that of a normal school[11], with and Spelman adding courses that aligned more closely to a liberal arts education (Manley, 1995). To reflect this new change, the institution was renamed to Spelman College on June 1, 1924 (Manley, 1995).

Influence of the Civil Rights Movement

The1950s to the 1970s was a pivotal era for Spelman College, as the socio-political movements across the United States greatly influenced the College and its students (Lefever, 2005; Manley, 1995). Spelman's students, along with students from other institutions within the AUC[12], played a monumental role in racially desegregating Atlanta (Manley, 1995). On March 15, 1960, 200 AUC students organized a sit-in[13] in nine public tax-supported buildings across Atlanta (Lefever, 2005). Among the 200 students who participated, 75 were arrested (Lefever, 2005). That protest ignited a series of other major students-led protest across Atlanta, which raised significant concerns for the Atlanta's government officials (Lefever, 2005). Atlanta's Mayor, William B. Hartsfield met with AUC student activist and other protesters on October 22, 1960 to negotiate possible solutions to end student demonstrations (Manley, 1995). From that meeting, students agreed to end demonstrations while Hartfield met with White merchants (Manley, 1995). As a result, there were several efforts made by the City of

[11] According to Gregory and Watson (2005), a *normal school* is defined as "an institution of teacher training" (p. 77).
[12] At that time, the AUC compromised of: Atlanta University, Clark College, Morehouse College, Morris Brown College and Spelman College.
[13] Sit-ins were a form of protest where people occupied a space, in many cases unwelcomed, to demonstrate to point or an agenda. This form of demonstration was primarily used during the Civil Rights Movement by Blacks in spaces that were discriminatory toward Blacks, especially in public spaces that were funded by Black tax payers or business that were heavily dependent upon Black consumers.

Atlanta to legally desegregate public spaces. In addition, many AUC students were released from jail (Manley, 1995).

Many of Spelman's students used the tools they learned to demonstrate against racial injustice in Atlanta, to advocate for change at Spelman College. Students were allowed representation on the College's Board of Trustees and even helped guide the curriculum at Spelman (Manley, 1995). For example, Spelman students requested courses in pre-engineering, computer science, and mass communication (Manley, 1995). In addition, students advocated for more course that educated them on their Black-American identity and other aspects of the African/Black Diaspora (Manley, 1995). According to Manley (1995), the establishment of Black-centered curriculum was among the few demands that was supported by the college presidents of the AUC. Manley (1995) describes the change to Spelman's curriculum as a "better balance between Eurocentric and Afro-American studies" (p. 46) and also mentioned the expansion of courses on Black women.

Contemporary Spelman College

Spelman College is a historically Black small private liberal arts women's college, which was founded in 1881. The 39-acre campus is located in Atlanta, Georgia and is surrounded by four others private HBCUs within the Atlanta University Center (AUC). Spelman is one of the three single-gender liberal arts HBCUs[14] that remain, and neighbors Morehouse College, which is the only all-men's historically Black college in the United States. As stated in Section One, the mission of Spelman is to: "educate women of African descent in the disciplines within liberal arts and sciences; foster

[14] Spelman College and Bennett College are two historically Black women's colleges, and Morehouse College is a historically Black men's college.

intellectual, creative, ethical and leadership development of its students; empowers students to engage in global cultures; and to develop a commitment to positive social change" (Bulletin 2017-2019, p.2).

Spelman is considered one of the most prestigious historically Black institutions and has received recognition globally and nationally for its educational contributions, especially related to the educational Black women and career success of their graduates. According to the 2020 *U.S News & World Report*, Spelman College is ranked number one among HBCUs, sixth in Top Performers on Social Mobility, sixth in Most Innovative Schools, twenty-second in Best Undergraduate Teaching, thirty-second in Study Abroad, seventy-sixth in First-Year Experiences, and ninety-eighth in Best Value Schools when compared to other colleges and universities within the United States. (News & World Report, 2020) Spelman is also recognized for being an undergraduate institution of choice for Black women who become doctoral recipients in science and engineering (https://www.spelman.edu/about-us/rankings-and-awards). Lastly, the college is also known for its notable Black alumnae and its strong alumnae financial giving.

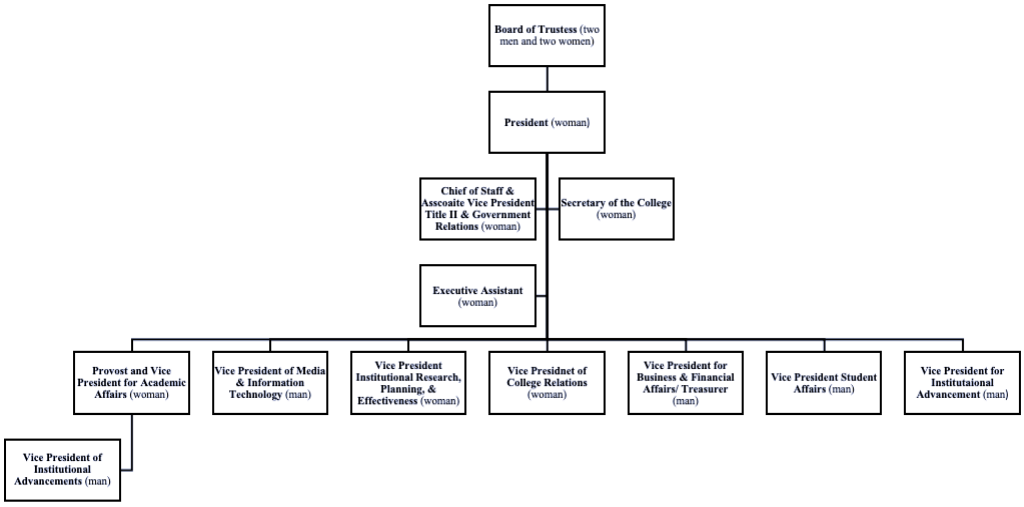
Spelman College is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission and has over 32 bachelor's degree programs and 33 minors. According to Spelman College's *2019-2020 Common Data Set*, most students graduated with degrees from the social sciences (28.60%), psychology (12.90%), and biological/life sciences (12.26%). The college has 270 instructional faculty members in which 230 identify as minorities[15]; 207 are female, and 63 are male. During the 2019-2020 academic

[15] According to the report, *minorities faculty* are those who identify as: Black, non-Hispanic; American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian; Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander; or Hispanic.

year, the institution had a 10:1 faculty to student ratio, which was based on the enrollment of 2,120 students and 270 faculty.

The senior administration at Spelman consists of vice presidents, chief of staff/associate vice present and other executive roles that reports to the college president, in which the president reports to the board of trustees. Only five of the 15 positions are held by men, which demonstrate Spelman's commitment to fostering women leaders and scholars through administrative and faculty positions. This is demonstrated in the organization chart in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Adapted from Spelman College's Administration Organizational Structure



According to Molina (2001), organizational charts align with Weber's (1969) concept of bureaucratic organizations' division of labor and that organization's hierarchy formalizes procedures and rules of actions among its members. This closely aligns with Birnbaum's (1988) Bureaucratic Model; which is one of the four organizational structures for colleges and universities. This model focuses on the hierarchical relationship among members

within a college structure, as well as, how labor is divided, roles are assigned, and information is being distributed among people within the college or university. According to Birnbaum (1989), "bureaucratic structures are established to efficiently relate organizational programs to the achievement of specific goals. When behavior is standardized, the activities and process of organizations are made more predictable, so that organization can be more efficient and effective" (p. 197).

Admission and Enrollment

Spelman College is considered a highly selective institution. According to the *2019-2020 Common Data Set*, there were 9,106 first-time first-year college students that applied for admissions, and only 43% (*n*=3,956) where accepted. Among those students, 516 registered for classes which yielded only 13.04% of the applicants the College accepted. In addition, a vast majority of those students (82.75%) had high school grade point averages of 3.50 or higher, which made the overall mean high school grade point average 3.76. When comparing 2019-2020 data on applications received, acceptances, yield admittance, and first year grade point average to previous years, there have been minimal changes. Furthermore, the College had four years of consecutive increase in admissions application.

Other data from the *2019-2020 Common Data* set includes admissions eligibility of prospective students. Spelman requires applicants to have a high school diploma or a general education diploma; in addition, they must have participated in general college-preparatory program, pathway, or track in high school. Prospective students must have a minimum of 15 high school units, yet 17 units are recommended. Among academic and non-academic factors, Spelman finds the following factors very important in admissions

decision: rigor of secondary school records, high school grade point average, standardize test scores, application essay, recommendations, and character traits.

Additionally, Spelman does place some importance on class rank, extracurricular activity, and volunteer works. However, the College does not use the following factors in admissions consideration: admissions interview, first-generation status, state residency, religious affiliations, and race or ethnic status in admissions decisions. Lastly, Spelman finds standardized test scores to be very important, applicants must have taken the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) or the American College Test (ACT) exam. Among Spelman's first-time and first-year applicant in 2019-2020, the mean SAT score was 1160, which is 9.74% higher than the national average of 1069 in 2019. As it relates to ACT, the same cohort of students had an ACT composite score mean of 24.

According to the *2019 Mini Fact Book***,** in the 2019-2020 academic year, Spelman College had 2,120 undergraduate students enrolled, which comprised of both full-time and part-time students. When comparing enrollment data from the past three year, the Spelman's enrollment number seem to remain relatively consistent s. In addition, 97.4% of Spelman's enrolled students identified as Black or African American, and 73% of students are from outside of the State of Georgia. Most of Spelman students major in disciplines within the social sciences, education, natural sciences, and mathematic.

The WRRC and Gender Advocacy Work

The Women's Research and Resource Center (WRRC) was founded in 1981 by the current director, Dr. Beverly Guy-Sheftall, with grant funding from the Charles Stuart Mott Foundation. According to an interview conducted by *TheHistoryMakers* on September 11, 2007, Guy-Sheftall stated that the WRRC was initially started as a

women's studies minor within the women's center, which had a mission of outreach and research by and about women of African descent. The WRRC was the first women's research center at a HBCU, and Spelman was the first HBCU to offers a major in women's studies. The WRRC currently offer two academic programs, a major and minor in comparative women studies and manages the Spelman archives and special collections. They hosted *SAGE: A Scholarly Journal on Black Women* for over a decade, and have conducted several campus, local, and global community advocacy projects addressing issues of race and gender. The WRRC facilitates faculty and student leadership development opportunities; as well as aiding on and off campus academic departments/programs in the development of curriculum that address issues of gender and race.

The WRRC has also played a significant role in introducing topics around Black queer studies to the Spelman community, as well as to other HBCUs. In 2011, the WWRC hosted the Arcus Project summit, which was a conference that brought together nine HBCUs to discuss topics related to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students on Black campuses as well as gender and sexuality issues within the African Diaspora (Pennamon, 2018). As mentioned in Section One, the WRRC played a pivotal role in facilitating workshops for Spelman faculty and students on topics related to gender and sexuality prior to the implementation of the new transgender admission and enrollment policy. The WRRC also houses Afrekete, Spelman's first and only lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questions, intersex, ally, asexual (LGBTQIAA+[16]) organization.

[16] The plus symbol represents all other identities that are not specifically addressed in the acronym listed and is used to ensure that those that identities are included.

Spelman's LGBTQIA+ Organization – Afrekete[17]

Although it is unclear at the time of this writing, when Afrekete was founded. The organization's Facebook page has postings dating back to late-2009 and the organization's Twitter account profile states that it was created in 2010. According to Afrekete's description on Spelman's Orgsync website, Afrekete is:

> An all-inclusive organization that strives to offer a safe, creative, and liberating spaces for students across the entire spectrum of the LGBTQIAPD+ community and their allies. Afrekete seeks to encourage the voices of students who might otherwise be voiceless in our college setting. We seek to affirm and uplift queer students in the Atlanta University Center by providing programming that creates spaces for them to build community, engage in critical dialogues, and network with outside organizations who are committed to the same mission of a world free of oppression and injustice. Furthermore, we strive to make meaningful connections with the other student organizations within the Women's Research and Resource Center of Spelman, the heart of Spelman's progressive feminist organizations. (https://orgsync.com/37481/chapter).

The Social Justice Fellow Program[18]

The Social Justice Fellow Program (SJFWP), which was founded in fall 2011, is a living and learning initiative at Spelman College which creates opportunities for a select

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[17] I made several attempts to contact student leaders from Afrekete by way of direct messaging on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and through email through the duration of the study, but received no response from members. Many of the participants had either heard of, or attended an Afrekete meeting or programing, but none were active members.

[18] One of the participants was a rising Social Justice Associates at the time of this study and plans to reside in the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Residence Hall in the next academic year. Her social justice interest is voter suppression and plans to dedicate her Fellow's project to combating voter suppression in the State of Georgia.

group of students to “change the world through social justice advocacy” (https://www.spelman.edu/academics/special-academic-programs-and-offerings/social-justice-fellows). These students participate in a wide range of social justice advocacy co-curricular activities such as internships, monthly colloquia, book discussions and project design activities. In addition, participants receive a semester stipend, internship placement, and mentoring from faculty and alumna. The program separates students into two roles: social justice fellows and social justice associates. Approximately 40 rising juniors are selected each year to become social justice associates. Associates attend programmatic activities, reside in the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Residence Hall, and assist social justice fellows on their signature project. Associates then become Fellows their senior year, where they then begin working on their project based on their social justice issue. Past fellows have been interested in addressing social justice issues, including but not limited to: child prostitutions and human trafficking, voter education and advocacy, and global women’s health and wellness and more.

Organizational Analysis of Spelman College

As an outside researcher to Spelman College, this organization analysis is based on: relevant organization theory within higher education, scholarly articles on HBCUs, and other electronic resources. I began by reviewing Spelman’s organizational chart. Molina (2001) define organizational charts “as the rational, conscious and institutionalized arrangement of the division of labor” (p. 79). As mentioned earlier within this section, the college administration is comprised of a group of senior-level executives: the president of the College, nine vice presidents, secretary of the College, the chief of staff, and special assistant to the president (see Figure 1). The president acts as

the head of the organization, whereas, the other senior-level administrators are responsible for the daily management of the College. I was not able to find an organizational chart that expanded below senior-level administrators, despite the College's various academic, student service, and administrative departments/offices that report to these administrators.

Colleges and university structures vary significantly from campus to campus (Minor, 2003, 2004). Ward-Roof and Hands (2016) stated "structure provide direction internally and externally regarding hierarchy and how decisions are made; moreover, structures reveal the culture of a campus and the amount and kinds of resources needed to accomplish goals that align with division priorities" (p. 36). Spelman's organizational chart suggests that these administrators are the key players in decision-making for the College. Research on HBCU governance structure and their decision-making practices is practically non-existent (Minor, 2001, 2004); thus, scholars and policy-makers often speculate and/or call into question the effectiveness of shared governance structures and decision-making practices of HBCU leaders (Minor, 2004). However, as Minor (2004) argued, the criticism HBCUs receive from the higher education community, policy-makers, and on-lookers is largely due to the lack of contextual understanding of these institutions. Thus, it would not be appropriate to assume that staff, students, faculty, and alumnx are not also participants in the decision-making process at Spelman.

Based on Spelman's organizational chart of senior-level administrators, it can be reasonably assumed that Spelman closely aligns with a bureaucratic organization and that administrators have specific roles. Bolman and Deal (2013) argues that organization within the structural framework, one of the four frames, have members with specialized

roles and responsibilities as well as formal relationships with each other. In addition, organizations that possess characteristics of the structural frame are very hierarchical. Although I was not able to retrieve information about senior administrators role in the implementation of Spelman's policy, beyond what was available on the internet, its can be reasonably assumed that Spelman used a bureaucratic approach to design and implement the policy by creating the Transgender Policy Taskforce.

Transgender Policy Taskforce

In 2017, President Campbell created the Transgender Policy Task Force to develop policy recommendations for admission eligibility and enrollment of transgender students. According to the website for Spelman's Transgender Policy Task Force, the committee was comprised 13 members: the vice president for student affairs; the vice president for enrollment management; the vice president for institutional planning and effectiveness; the dean of students; the director of human resources; a resident director; the director of admissions; an assistant professor of comparative women's studies; an associate professor of philosophy and religious studies; associate professor of sociology; a member of the Spelman's student government association; a student leader; and an alumna/trustee member (https://www.spelman.edu/about-us/office-of-the-president/transgender-policy-task-force). Using the structural perspective, the composition of the committee members reflects the bureaucracy within the organization and two common themes within Bolman and Deal's (2013) structural frame: the division of labor among members within the institutions and the hierarchy that existed among the committee members and their influence on institutional decision-making.

Each member represented a distinct constituency group within the campus community (i.e., students, faculty, mid-level managers, senior administrators, alumnx, and board of trustee members), and, each member was responsible for sharing the perspectives of their stakeholders. In addition, President Campbell charged the committee with reviewing current research, federal guidelines, and community feedback, reflecting a division and delegation of labor to committee members. Further, it is reasonable to assume the committee was intentionally designed to reflect the members within each of the hierarchical structures of the organization. The hierarchical structure reinforced the formal relationships that existed within the committee, and the role and responsibilities that come with various roles within the organizational structure. For example, it was critical that vice presidents were on the committee, because these administrators are directly responsible for the daily operations of the colleges and to the president. The inclusion of mid-level managers was necessary because these personnel report to administrators and would be most likely responsible for some implementation of the policy.

Leadership Analysis of Spelman College

Over the past 60 years, over 65 different classification systems have been created to understand the various dimensions of leadership (Aritz et al., 2017; Northouse, 2007). Despite the years of scholarship dedicated to examining leadership, there is a lack of consensus on what defines leadership among scholars (Nirenberg, 2001; Pfeffer, 1977). Northouse (2007) stated that "leadership is a process whereby an individual influence a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (p. 6). In addition, Northouse (2007) argued that leadership has the following four components: (a) it is a process, (b) involves

influence, (c) involves groups, and (d) has a common goal. Based on my review of leadership scholarship within education, researchers most often used leadership theories as an approach to facilitate change among people within educational settings (Everson & Bussey, 2007; Grootenboer & Hardy, 2017; Quantz et al., 2017; Quantz et al., 1991).

Educational leadership scholarship most often involved educational improvements (Ryan, 2006), which as a result often exposed historical and contemporary challenges within education and among their leaders. This study was interested in educational improvements, more specifically those that advance gender inclusive practices at Spelman Colleges and those involving Black gender minorities within historically cisgender Black spaces. Hence the reason this study is positioned firmly within inclusive leadership theory. Although leaders on a campus can embody and utilize multiple leadership approaches and theories, it was evident that the movement toward gender inclusion at Spelman College closely resembles inclusive leadership. Within this section, I have conducted a leadership analysis using inclusive leadership theory and electronic resources on Spelman College leaders[19].

Inclusive Leadership

There is an extensive amount of literature dedicated to topics around inclusive leadership (e.g., Grubb III & Schwager, 2018; Jain, 2018; Javed et al., 2018) but usage of the term varies across disciplines. Based on my review, existing literature on inclusive leadership most often focused on how leaders accept, include, or appreciate people and their thoughts within their organization (Dow, 2017; Jain, 2018; Qi et al., 2019; Randel et

[19] For this analysis, I include students within the term, *leaders*. Since Spelman students have played a very active role in the policy implementation as well as the formation of the #SPELSAFE movement, they have demonstrated acts of leadership toward inclusion.

al., 2018). Some researchers expanded upon the concepts of inclusive leadership to include concepts of social justice and diversity practices within organizations (e.g., Chun & Evans, 2001; Dematthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Rayner, 2009; Ryan, 2006). I also found that many studies that utilize inclusive leadership within educational contexts focus on practices related to students with disabilities (e.g., Dematthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Garrison-Wade et al., 2007; Ryan, 1999). Critical race theory (Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Lopez, 2003; Parker & Villalpando, 2007); emancipatory leadership (Carson, 2010; Ryan, 2006); transformative leadership (Browne, 2004; Shields, 2010); cultural responsiveness (Bradshaw, 2013; Karatas et al., 2012); and democratic (Kilicoglu, 2018; Lin, 2018; Terzi & Derin, 2016).

Inclusive practices have become increasingly popular, and crucial, in education because of growing gaps between the advantaged and the disadvantaged within educational settings (Ryan, 2006). Based on my review of the literature (e.g., Bradshaw, 2013; Browne, 2004; Carson, 2010; Chun & Evans, 2001; Dematthew & Mawhinney, 2015; Garrison-Wade et al., 2007; Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Karatas & Oral, 2015; Kilicoglu, 2018; Lin, 2018; Lopez, 2003; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; Parker & Villalpando, 2007; Rayner, 2009; Ryan, 2006; Shields, 2010; and Terzi & Derin, 2016) inclusive leadership can be broken down in three components: practice, process, and perspective. These three components are interconnected and necessary parts of each other. For example, most literature (Dematthew & Mawhinney, 2015; Ryan, 2006; Thousand & Villa, 1994) suggested that inclusive practices yield positive outcomes for all individuals participating in the education system (i.e., students, administrators, parents, local community, teachers). Yet, in order to implement inclusive practices,

educational leaders must work to include communities who are often missing in decision-making processes. In addition, an inclusive perspective acts as a sense of awareness educational leaders possess to ensure that inclusive leadership is being practiced (Ryan, 2006).

Through the examination of available secondary sources, inclusive leadership appears to be practiced in two ways at Spelman College. First, President Campbell's direction in the creation of the Transgender Task Force symbolizes Spelman's acknowledgement that there was a need to bring different voices and perspectives around into the conversation around gender, gender-identity and Spelman's role in transgender and gender non-conforming students access to higher education and Spelman College. Second, the campus response to the transphobic notes left under the doors of students in the residence hall which ignited the #SPELSAFE movement. The #SPELSAFE movement united faculty, students, staffs, and alumnx across sexual orientation and gender identity at Spelman College and across the AUC. This demonstration represents a collective sense of awareness within the campus community on gender inclusion and the united participation toward inclusion.

Implication for Research in the Practitioner Setting

This study unifies topics that often rarely connect within education research as well as larger conversations within higher education – race, gender, gender-identity, policy, HBCUs, and single-gender institutions. The study also provides a unique opportunity to examine gender-inclusive policy through a racialized lens, which is also missing in leading literature in higher education. Furthermore, the timing of this study was appropriate not only due to the changes in Spelman's policies, but also given

Morehouse College's announcement that it would consider the admission of transgender students' beginning in Fall 2020. These steps not only represent the progressive steps HBCUs are taking toward gender inclusion but symbolizes the potential early beginnings of reshaping the perceptions of these institutions to being welcoming and inclusive to gender and sexual minorities. Although the implementation of policies around transgender admission considerations and enrollment is still relatively new practice at the three-remaining single-gender HBCUs, this study provided an opportunity to begin scholarly conversations about leadership practices, campus climate, and inclusion regarding transgender and gender non-conforming students at these institutions. In addition, the study provided a glimpse into students' attitudes toward transgender and gender non-conforming students within intersectional contexts, which is absent from contemporary literature. Lastly, this study was an opportunity to assess how institutions such as Spelman can continue to create safer campuses for Black gender and sexual minorities.

Furthermore, this case study provided a glimpse of how students interpret, understand, engage with engage other, and act on institutional policy. Students' attitudes about the policy have a direct effect on campus climate; therefore, affirming that more research and discussion should be done on understanding this phenomenon. Despite this study's focus on a gender-inclusive policy at a single-gender HBCU, this can be applied to any scenario involving the implementation of institutional policy aimed at access and inclusion at any college or university. In addition, this study illuminated the far-reaching consequences that could arise when students are misinformed and attempt to interpret policies with their peers and with minimal guidance by administration. However, the

study also shows that students are creating discourse about policy on social media, which provides a new perspective for understanding student engagement around campus issues at historically Black institutions.

This study's finding affirms that more attention needs to be given toward how HBCUs incorporate diversity curriculum within the first-year experience. As shared by many of the participants in this study, many students come to campus with limited understanding of difference, and their beliefs about others may be influenced by their religion, family, peers, and what they have learned on television and social media. Colleges and universities are great places for intercommunity conversations and learning, and tolerance may happen organically because of the environment. However, research has shown us how dominate culture can significantly influence campus culture; therefore, HBCUs should consider using this opportunity to expand diversity and inclusion efforts through structured interventions.

Summary

Spelman College is a historically Black women's college located in Atlanta, GA. The College is one of the most prestigious HBCU and has received various national recognitions for its academic programs, educational accomplishments, and dedication to preparing Black women leaders. In addition to describing Spelman within the higher education institutional landscape, this section also provided an overview of the current-day composition of the campus community, with an emphasis of admission and enrollment practices and trends. Spelman College has a deep history in advocating for: access to higher education for Black women; civil rights and liberties for Black

Americans; and addressing gender and race issues within the campus community and beyond.

Spelman College closely resembles characteristic of Birnbaum's (1998) Bureaucratic Model, which is evident in the hierarchical structure of its administration as well as the division of labor and roles assigned among the members within the organization. For example, The Transgender Task Force had representation from members on all levels within the organizations and each member had a unique purpose and role within the committee. The task force also demonstrated how Spelman College used inclusive leadership, by ensuring that the various voices from the campus community were a part of the conversation regarding its transgender admission and enrollment policy.

Section Three: Scholarly Review of the Study

This study involves topics that do not commonly intersect in current scholarship: race, gender, historically minority serving institutions, and policy. These intersections made it challenging to find scholarship that was directly related to the study's topic; therefore, I drew upon existing literature from various areas to provide a foundation for exploring the attitudes of cisgender students toward Spelman's transgender admission and enrollment policy and transgender and gender non-conforming community. I begin this section by discussing the two conceptual and theoretical perspectives that are guiding this study, Allport's (1935) Tricomponent Attitude Model and intersectionality. Then I discuss the historical issues of access for women and Blacks in higher education, which provides justification on why women's colleges and historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) were established. Next, I broadly discuss the experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming students in higher education, with emphasis on their experiences at women's colleges and HBCUs. This section also includes insight on how Black transgender students perceive their experiences in higher education.

The third section focuses on transgender inclusive policies in higher education, as well as studies that validate the need for such policies at colleges and universities; in particular women's colleges. Although all single-gender HBCUs now have gender inclusive policies, scholarship about these policies is scant. The fourth section discuss the scholarly legal opinions regarding transgender admission and enrollment policy. This is important as these works help illuminate how people, especially college administrators, interpret constructs such as gender as well as statutes and laws affecting women's colleges and transgender and gender non-conforming people. Finally, the last section

focuses on the admission and enrollment practices of HBCUs. This literature provides a foundation for understanding HBCUs' and how it is manifested through their practices.

Allport's Tricomponent Attitude Model (TAM)

Allport defined *attitude* in his 1935 book, *Attitudes*, as "a mental state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence on the individual's response to all objects and situations to which it is related" (as cited in Pickens, 2005, p. 44). Although Allport's (1935) work on human attitudes is now almost a century old, Prislen and Crano (2008) argued that it is still applicable to understanding attitudes today, since individuals' attitudes remains intensely examined across disciplines. Many scholars agree with Allport's notion that "the concept of attitude is probably the most distinctive and indispensable concept" within social psychology (Gawronski, 2007, p. 573). Allport's Tricomponent Attitude Model (TAM) is utilized primarily as a social theory and theoretical framework but has be used in consumer sciences, economics, and psychology studies to understand consumer's attitude toward products (Pickens, 2005); particularly within the context of prejudice. Allport argued via TAM that attitudes have three components: an affect (a person's feelings); behavior (a person's action); and cognition (a person's thoughts and beliefs). Olson and Kendrick (2008) referred to the principles of TAM as the "ABCs" of attitude, "to organize research on attitude formation, and most theories of attitude formation distinguished between these three sources" (p. 112).

Although Allport's tricomponent dimensions of identities has informed many other social theories on attitudes, as suggested by Olson and Kendrick, I decided on this early theory because it could be easily applied to this study. Furthermore, since this study

examined positive and negative attitudes, I felt that it was a more appropriate model than Allport's later theories on prejudice. Next, I will discuss the how TAM is used within education research, particularly those focused on college students, as well as limitations.

College Student Attitudinal Research

There is a large body of research that investigates college students' attitude toward various objects (i.e., credit cards, pornography use, undergraduate courses, intimacy), yet many of the studies (e.g., Curran & Rosen, 2006; Evans, 2007; Knox et al., 2001; O'Reilly et al., 2007) I found were not entirely guided by attitudinal theoretical or conceptual frameworks. These studies were often quantitative in nature, and used Likert-scales to measure students' positive or negative associations and behaviors to objects. Viewing attitudes as evaluative, more specifically as likes and dislikes, aligns with other scholars' (e.g., Bem, 1970; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993) views on measuring attitudes. Most studies that I found that mentioned being guided by attitudinal theories, and more specifically contact theory by Allport (1953), were on prejudices towards social groups (e.g., Pettijohn & Walzer, 2008; Spencer-Rodgers & McGovern, 2002). Pettijohn and Walzer's (2008) study examined whether completing a psychology of prejudice course reduced racism, sexism, and homophobia among college students. The study found a slight reduction in prejudice after completing the course. Spence-Roger and McGovern's (2002) study examined college students' attitudes toward cultural difference, particularly those associated with intercultural communication. Their study found that domestic students felt impatient, frustrated, and uncomfortable when engaging with international students.

Limitations in Attitudinal Research

Despite the significance and prevalence of attitudinal research, many scholars have argued its limitations. Based on my review of existing literature, arguments about limitations are organized within two themes – defining attitude and measuring attitude. According to Gawronski (2007), the end of the 20th century marked continuous debate among scholars (e.g., Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Fazio, 1995; Zanna & Rempel, 1988) on the proper definition for attitude, which lasted until the start of the 21st century as new theories on how to measure attitude emerged. Gawronski also discussed the connectedness of how attitude is measured and how it is defined, which has informed many attitude models and theories. Eagly and Chaiken (1993) argued that attitudes should be an inclusive umbrella term and should be defined as "a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor" (p. 1). This definition takes into consideration the various metaphors used by researchers to describe a person's inner tendencies often associated with attitudes. In addition, inclusivity ensures that what constitutes attitude remains constant against research trends.

Fazio (1995) argued that attitudes as object-evaluation associations. This definition is derived from Fazio's MODE model in which they argued that behaviors and judgment stem from two processes modes – "a fairly spontaneous process based on the automatic activation of a relevant attitude or a more effortful, deliberative process involving careful consideration of the available information" (p. 704). Gawronski (2007) argued that Fazio raised included notions of attitude construction, stability versus malleability of automatic activated attitudes, implicit and explicit measures of attitude, and challenges between single and dual attitude models. In addition, Gawronski (2007)

argued that Eagly and Chaiken (1993) and Fazio (1993) both viewed attitude as being a stable construct across time and context.

In contrast, some scholars (e.g., Schuman & Presser, 1981; Schwarz & Strack, 1991; Wilson, 1998) suggested that attitudes were more unstable than originally assumed. For example, Schuman and Presser (1981) argued the malleability of attitude reflects measurement error, since people generally hold stable attitudes; yet their assessment is influenced by various contexts. Schwartz and Strack (1991) suggested that some attitude measurements are evaluative judgments based on what is asked and the information that is available to the respondent.

Finally, there is a large body of scholarship that discusses strength-related attitudes and how they are measured, which has created controversy within the social psychology community. Scott (1959), which is one of the earlier works I found, identified four characteristics of attitude: precision, specificity, differentiation and hierarchic integration. In 1985, Raden identified 11 strength-related attributes: accessibility, affective-cognitive consistency, certainty, crystallization, direct experience, generalized attitude strength, importance, intensity, latitude of rejection, stability and vested interest (Bassili, 2008). Bassili (2008) argues that the challenge in future research "will be not only to elucidate some of the puzzles [complexities of understanding components of attitude strengths] … but also to provide an account of attitude strength in both explicit and implicit domains. These attributes mentioned in short provides a brief overview of the complexities in measuring attitude.

Intersectionality

In its simplest form, *intersectionality* is most commonly described in research as the process for which individuals' multiple social identities intersect and confluence their experiences (Davis, 2008; Museus & Griffin, 2011). Núñez (2014) expanded this definition to including the power relationship between social identities and how their intersections shape individuals' experiences. According to Davis (2008), intersectional research has identified 13 social categories including, but not limited to: racial phenotype, gender, ethnicity, nationality, economic class, religion, language, and able-bodiedness. Individuals can have identities from dominant and subordinate social groups; therefore, individuals can experience social power, privilege, and oppression simultaneously based on the intersections of their social memberships.

Núñez (2014) argued that intersectionality is not yet a theory, but according to Mattson (2014) intersectionality is considered a "theory, method, a perspective, a concept, and a framework" (p. 10). Intersectionality, in its various forms, has proven to be an effective tool in higher education research in exposing how individuals' identities and other social contexts shape the experiences among students, faculty and administrators (Núñez, 2014). Because this study focused on the attitudes of college students who possessed multiple identities, I utilized an intersectional perspective in my methodology and data analysis. In an effort to provide a functional understanding of intersectionality and its contributions to higher education research, in this section I will discuss the origins of intersectionality and its use within higher education research. I will also discuss how intersectionality is often applied within research and its limitation.

Origins of Intersectionality

Despite its broad use within research, intersectionality is rooted in the work of Black feminism and social justice scholars that aimed to expose the experiences of marginalization and oppression among other women of color (Granzka et al., 2017). Intersectionality is often cited as being coined by legal scholar, Kimberlé Crenshaw. Crenshaw initially used the term in her 1989 work, "Demarginalizing the Intersections of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics," to expose how judicial interpretations of antidiscrimination laws failed to recognize how discrimination is multidimensional and contributed to the marginalization and oppression of Black women. The article provided an analysis of legal cases in which the United States' legal system failed Black women for its inability to protect Black women from acts of sexism and racism within the workplace, as these two constructs were often viewed separately and associated with protecting White women and Black men. Crenshaw (1989) stated:

> Black women can experience discrimination in ways that are both similar to and different from those experienced by white women and Black men. Black women sometimes experience discrimination in ways similar to white women's experiences; sometimes they share very similar experiences with Black men. Yet, often they experience double-discrimination –the combined effect of practices which discriminate on the basis of race, and on the basis of sex. And sometimes, they experience discrimination as Black women-not the sum of race and sex discrimination, but as Black women. (p. 149)

Crenshaw's (1989) description of the multiplied discrimination and the erasure of Black women demonstrates one of the key concepts of Black feminist theory and why some Black feminist activist and scholars, as well as other women of color, found it necessary to separate themselves from the White feminist liberation movements in the United States in the 1960s. Nash (2011) argued that intersectionality can be traced back as far as the liberation movements of the 1960s, if not earlier. This does not minimize Crenshaw's contributions; however, it does highlight how the theory is positioned firmly within social justice movements. Crenshaw's work is often cited alongside other Black feminist theories and paradigms, especially the works of the prominent Black feminist scholar, Patricia H. Collins, on Black feminist thought in the 1990s.

Intersectionality in Higher Education Research

Before the term intersectionality was used in higher education research, scholars were examining the relationship between social identities and their connection to privilege and oppression within college students' experiences. For example, Jones and McEwen's (2000) model of multiple dimensions of identity (MMDI) theory was one the earliest studies that used an intersectional perspective among college students. The model closely resembled the figure of an atom, in which the person's identity was the center of the atom and the outer rings representing social contexts that interlock, and dots located on these rings represents how salient the social context is to a person's identity. Abes et al. (2012) added to this model by incorporating Baxter-Magolda's (1998a) notion of self-authorships among young adults. Baxter-Magolda (1998b) argued that

> self-authorship requires complex assumptions about the nature of knowledge, namely that knowledge is constructed in a context based on relevant evidence,

> that evaluating evidence is necessary to decide what to believe, and that individual has the capacity to make such decisions. (p. 41)

This expansion of Jones and McEwen's MMDI model incorporated how students construct and make meaning of their multiple identities (Núñez, 2014). Jones and McEwen (2002) and Abes et al. (2012) both used intersectionality within identity development of college students; whereas, Hurtado et al. (2012) used intersectionality within their diverse learning model to demonstrate how the multiple social identities among people within an organization are influenced by multi-level social contexts that can affected their educational experiences in a multitude of ways.

Although more higher education scholars are utilizing intersectionality to better understand students, faculty and administrators, intersectional research in higher education is still limited (Museus & Griffin, 2011). Most higher education research is dominated by empirical and conceptual work that focus on students, faculty, and administrators from a single-axis of their identity (e.g., race, gender, class) (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) or commonly used concepts of social identities (Museus & Griffin, 2001). As a result, Museus and Griffin (2011) stated that "research that categorizes students along singular dimensions of identity provide limited information, which can restrict the ability of higher education scholars and institutional researchers to fully – and sometimes accurately – understand and response to problems that exist in secondary institution" (p. 5).

Intersectionality's Application in Research

Núñez (2014) described intersectionality as "an analytical tool to understand the role of interlocking systems of oppression in shaping life opportunity for individuals from

multiple privileged and/or marginalized social categories" (p. 39). McCall (2005) had a slightly different approach to intersectional analysis whereas she describes it as an intercategorical[20] approach that exposed how different social groupings are affected by social inequities as well has how they are influenced by social structures. According to Dill and Zambrana (2009), intersectionality has four main analytical tasks (p. 5):

(1) Placing the lived experiences and struggles of people of color and other marginalized groups as a starting point for the development of theory.

(2) Exploring the complexities not only of individuals' identities but also group identity recognizing that variations within groups are often ignored and essentialized.

(3) Unveiling the ways interconnected domains of power organize and structure inequality and oppression.

(4) Promoting social justice and social change by linking research and practice to create a holistic approach to the eradication of disparities and to changing social and higher education institutions.

Limitations of Intersectionality

Intersectionality has proven to be a useful tool to analyzing individuals' experiences in social sciences, yet, there are also some scholars that argue that there are still several limitations of intersectionality. Mattsson (2014) discussed that despite intersectionality's multiple uses, it is inconsistently used across social sciences fields. One of the most common critiques of intersectionality across disciplines is its tendency to

[20] According to McCall (2005) an intercategorical approach involves recognizing that inequities existing between social groups, that those identity groups are unstable and change, and places those relationships at the center of the analysis.

focus solely on how multiples identities shape individuals' experiences instead of identifying how existing structures of inequality either enhance or limit life opportunities (Cho et al., 2015; McCall, 2005; Núñez, 2014).

Furthermore, some scholars discussed methodological challenges to intersectional research. For this paper, I have decided to focus on three of the more common methodological limitations: inconsistencies in methodological approaches in intersectional research, intersectionality as a theoretical "buzz-word," and challenges associated with accurately measuring identities and social constructs (e.g., power, oppression). McCall (2005) discussed that despite the increase in the use of intersectionality, there has been very little guidance on *how* intersectionality should be studied or its methodology. In addition, McCall (2005) pointed out that because intersectional methodologies differ, it restricts the type of knowledge that can be generated because differing methodologies produce different kinds of knowledge. This connects to the second limitation, arguments that intersectionality is becoming a theoretical buzzword. For example, Davis (2008) argued that although intersectionality has been touted as one of the most instrumental contributions to feminist scholarship, intersectionality is vague, open-ended, and ambiguous. Davis pointed out the paradox of the enthusiasm centered on intersectionality within the feminist community, yet intersectionality lacks clarity and provides no parameters for the theory.

Lastly, Harper (2011) discussed the challenges in measuring the multiple dimensions of students' identities, especially being that many student identities are not static and may change throughout their time in college. Harper also argued that even some of the identity markers used on surveys or other institutional instruments (e.g.,

admission applications) that allow for students to select multiple identities (e.g., mixed-raced or multi-raced) are imperfect and may not fully or accurately reflect students' identities. Both of Harper's arguments illuminated the complexities around measuring socially constructed systems, which are constantly evolving. These arguments also reinforce how personal social identities are and that people may not feel that they fit perfectly within social constructs, thus making measuring social identities extremely difficult for intersectional researchers.

Historical Issues of Access to Higher Education for Women and Black Students

Women's colleges and historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have a deep history of providing educational opportunity to communities of people who were once denied access to higher education in the United States (Allen & Jewell, 2002; Barnes, 2014; Brown II & Ricard, 2007; Gasman et al., 2010; Harwarth et al., 1997; Knight et al., 2012; Perifimos, 2008). Since the landmark civil rights case, *Brown vs. Board of Education*, the relevance of both HBCUs and women's colleges have been questioned by many scholars and critics who argue that these institutions are no longer needed. Their argument is that if there is no need for separate but equal institutions based on race, then the case law should extend to institutions that segregate students on the basis of sex. However, both institutions have remained viable options since there are still systemic inequities that exist for Blacks and women, especially within higher education.

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s expanded opportunities for Blacks and women in the United States, which subsequently had an adverse effect on the enrollment at both types of institutions (i.e., closures or mergers with other institutions; (Hawarth et al., 2017; Perifimos, 2008). According to the Women's College Coalition (1994), in the

1960s there were over 200 women's colleges, but because of dwindling enrollment and other factors there were less than 50 colleges at that time. Similarly, the diminishing number of HBCUs was also reflected in scholarship, and often connected to issues such as: shrinking enrollment (Allen & Jewel, 2002; Avery, 2009; Gasman et al., 2010); financial challenges (Gasman et al., 2010); leadership and governance issues (Gasman et al., 2010); and accreditation (Fester et al., 2012; Wershbale, 2010).

Women Students and the Development of Women's Colleges

In order to understand the various arguments for the inclusion or exclusion of transgender and non-gender conforming students at women's college, it is important to understand the historic role of women's colleges, existing federal statutes that protect single-gender institutions from becoming co-educational, and laws that protect transgender students from harassment and discrimination. These three topics will be discussed in more details later in this section. Many legal authors (e.g., Buzuvis, 2013; Kraschel, 2012) often use the mission/role of women's colleges and existing federal statues to substantiate their stance on gender-inclusive policies and to expose the current discourse among administrators, faculty, students, and alumnae on whether gender inclusive policies advance or disrupt the mission of women's colleges.

Prior to the Civil War women were forbidden to attend colleges and universities alongside men (Kraschel, 2012); therefore, limiting their exposure to disciplines when compared to men. According to Barnes (2014), White families as early as the colonial period in the United States, valued educating their sons over their daughters whether by means of sending them off to boarding schools (which was only afforded to the wealthy) or by saving money for other forms of formal education. As the demand for educating

White girls increased, small advances were made to educate girls during that era. Despite the small efforts, town officials deemed schools that educated girls a waste of resources and the institutions were closed (Barnes, 2014). In the 1650s, the general courts in Massachusetts determined that all children should be able to read and that literary instruction for girls would only be for the purpose of Bible and religion instruction (Appleby et al., 2015). These beliefs regarding educating women created significant gaps in educational advancements for women for several centuries, while educational opportunities for White men increased through the establishment of more formal education structures in the United States. This demonstrates how the interconnectedness of politics, economics, and societal culture for many centuries shaped the education system in the United States; therefore, providing the foundation for institutional and systemic marginalization and oppression of non-White males in education.

According to Turpin (2016), only a few colleges in the United States began admitting women students during that time, establishing some of the earliest forms of coeducation in higher education. To create more postsecondary opportunities for women in the United States, many women's colleges were founded in the mid- to late-nineteenth century (Perifimos, 2008). Many of the first women's college began as seminary schools or female academies (Harwarth et al., 1997; Kraschel, 2012; Renn, 2017; Thelin & Gasman, 2011), which were the only postsecondary options for upper-class White women who wanted to advance beyond secondary and elementary education (Nanney & Brunsma, 2017). Women accessing higher education was described by Turpin (2016) as "hotly contested topics among educators during that era" (p. 12). Many of these institutions struggled because of society's skepticism and criticism through their belief

that higher education would create a "cadre of women unsuitable for marriage" (Barnes, 2014, p. 72). Harwarth et al. (1997) added that many believed that women's colleges would not prepare women for professions and that the quality of education would be sub-par compared to men-only colleges.

There were several women's college that defied nay-sayers by offering courses that mirrored the course offering and rigor of men's colleges (Thelin & Gasman, 2011). This was a goal of many women's college, especially those located in the northeastern region, to provide educational opportunities that were equal to men-only Ivy League institutions (Kraschel, 2012). But a liberal arts education was not a widespread priority across women's colleges during that time. There were still several women's institution that served as "*finishing schools*," offering courses in home-economics and social grace, which were believed to be essential tools of a well-rounded and cultured women of that era. Also, seminaries at that time did not offer degrees to women (Thelin & Gasmna, 2011), which also set them apart from men-only institutions.

Thus, education was a privilege during that era and was dominated by White men and White Christian upper-class women (Kraschel, 2012; Nanney & Brunsma, 2017). With the establishment of Black colleges and universities in the late-nineteenth century, freed Black slaves began accessing education; therefore, paving the way for Black women to advance their education by means of Black women's colleges such as Spelman College. Also, during the late-nineteenth century more colleges pioneered coeducation, which allowed for men and women to be enrolled together at the same institutions.

It was not until after World War II that women across racial and social classes began enrolling in higher education in large numbers. Kraschel (2012) coined this period

as the “golden age” for women in higher education; however, Thelin and Gasman (2011) used the term more broadly to describe the overall shift in society’s view of higher education from being only accessible to those who could afford it to a public good. As a result, this ignited a sharp rise of enrollment across colleges and universities in the United States. As attending college became more popular, many students’ chose institutions based on whether the institution aligned with their identities (e.g., race, gender, religion) (Thelmin & Gasman, 2011). Despite women’s access to higher education, it did not alleviate the discrimination and marginalization many women faced on coed campuses. Thus, many women likely sought out women’s college for their more welcoming and safe environments.

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s marked a significant turning point in women’s rights in the United States and which had direct implications for higher education. This time period is also cited as the “second-wave” of the feminist movement in the United States, which Gelby and Palley (1982) described as a “movement seeking to operationalize self-determination for women in political, economic, and social roles” (p. 4). Despite the significant legal and social advances during this time, enrollment at women’s colleges dropped significantly and many were forced to become coeducational institutions (Hawarth et al., 1997). The feminist movement was also a very polarizing time for Black and White women in the United States. The Women’s Liberation Movement caused many Black women to have to “choose between racial and gendered identities” (Biklen et al., 2008, p. 451). The interconnected systems of racism and sexism Black women faced caused many Black women to question how Black men understood sexism and how White women understood racism. Black women’s quest for

acknowledgement of the “double-jeopardy” of racism and sexism they faced laid the foundation of Black feminism in the United States (King, 1988)

Black Students and the Development of HBCUs

Prior to the Civil War in the United States, Black Americans were prohibited from learning to read and write in southern states (Allen & Jewel, 2002; Brown II & Ricard, 2007; Gasman et al., 2010). The end of the war marked the end of legalized slavery in the United States, and newly freed Black American sought opportunities to become educated and gain skills that would make them economically self-sufficient within their new place in society (Allen & Jewel, 2002). While three HBCUs were founded before the Civil War (i.e., Lincoln University, Cheyney University, and Wilberforce University), most were founded decades later (Brown II & Ricard, 2007; Gasman et al., 2010). Some of the earlier HBCUs began as primary and secondary schools and were established with the financial support of White Christian philanthropist organizations and Black churches (Allen & Jewel, 2020; Brown II & Ricard, 2007; Gasman et al., 2010). Many of these schools transitioned into institutes that focused on developing Black teachers and skilled laborers, since newly educated Blacks were responsible for educating and providing service to the Black community (Allen & Jewel, 2002). Although the focus of these institutes and seminaries were skilled work, some also adopted liberal art curricula and offered courses in literature, history, philosophy, and science (Allen & Jewel, 2002; Gasman et al., 2010).

Another significant financial contribution during the late-nineteenth century was from the federal government through the enactment of the Second Morrill Act of 1890 (Allen & Jewel, 2020; Gasman et al., 2010). Although the law prohibited colleges that

received federal funds from having admission policies that discriminated against students based on race, it did permit southern states to used federal funds to create separate land-grant colleges for Blacks as long as the funds were split equitably (Gasman et al., 2010). Despite the law's aim for equitable opportunities, Gasman et al. (2010) stated that "these newly founded institution [HBCUs] received considerably less funding than their White counterparts and thus had inferior facilities and more limited course offerings" (p. 6).

Black colleges and universities remained racially segregated until the landmark United States Supreme Court case, *Brown vs. Board of Education*, which ruled racial segregation in public schools unconstitutional (Gasman et al., 2010). Since their inception and up until this monumental case in 1954, HBCUs were among the only options for higher education for Blacks in the United States. Very few colleges and universities allowed Black students to attend, and those that did were described as being unwelcoming. Although this case was a triumph for Black Americans, the post-*Brown* era created new challenges for HBCUs as some people used the case language to shift legal arguments in order to thwart efforts to create equitable educational opportunities for Blacks (Gasman et al., 2010).

Another unintended consequence of racial integration is that it placed HBCUs in competition with predominately White colleges and universities for prospective students (Allen & Jewel, 2010) since HBCUs were no longer only choice institution for Blacks (Gasman et al., 2010). This trend lasted well into the 1980s, which was a period where there was a sharp decline in high-achieving Black students attending HBCUs (Allen & Jewel, 2002). Allen and Jewel (2002) coined the term the *Great Migration*, which symbolizes Black students' migration to White institutions. Racial integration was a slow

process in southern states and was met with opposition (Allen & Jewel, 2002), and most of the responsibility of desegregation was placed on HBCUs (Gasman et al., 2010). Many of today's colleges and universities have racial compositions that have remained predominately White and have had very little increase in people of color despite their growth in the population within the United States.

Transgender and Gender-Non-Conforming College Students Experiences

Though literature on transgender and gender non-conforming college students is scant (Dugan et al., 2012; Seelman, 2014a, 2014b), there has been a significant growth in this body of research over the past 10 years (Pryor et al., 2016; Renn, 2010). Until recently, most of the literature about these students has been included within scholarship that focused on lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) students (Dugan et al., 2012; Pryor et al., 2016; Rands, 2009). In addition, most LGBT studies only used very small subsamples of transgender students (Seelman, 2016).

Although LGBT texts have provided a platform for transgender students and gender non-conforming students to be recognized, these texts often focus primarily on sexual orientation and make little to no mention of gender identity (Dugan et al., 2012). Although transgender and non-gender conforming are two distinctly different groups, they are often coupled together within scholarly texts or placed together within the umbrella term, *transgender*. This common practice to merge these groups perpetuates assumptions that their needs, issues, and experiences are parallel – when they are not (Dugan et al., 2012; Marine, 2012; Pusch, 2005).

For example, Dugan et al.'s (2012) study on the perceptions, engagements, and educational outcomes of transgender, cisgender LGB, and cisgender heterosexual college

students, found that transgender students experience harassment more frequently and had a lower sense of campus belonging and educational outcomes than cisgender LGB and cisgender heterosexual students. In addition, Rands' (2009) study also found that transgender research was most often buried within LGB education research, leaving many transgender issues ignored. To remedy this, many higher education scholars and trans activists argue that transgender students must be examined separately to gain a clear understanding of these students (Dugan et al., 2012; Marine, 2012), as well as to ensure that their issues and needs are not misrepresented, diminished by, or overshadowed by those of LGB students (Pryor et al., 2016).

Much of the literature on transgender and gender non-conforming students that is available is conceptual in nature (Dugan et al., 2012) and aimed to inform colleges and universities on how to best support and serve this population using themes from former transgender students (e.g., Beemyn et al., 2005; Seelman, 2014a). The limited empirical research on transgender students is primarily qualitative in nature (Seelman, 2014b), which is not surprising. There are several methodological challenges associated with collecting accurate data on transgender students (Dugan et al., 2012; Seelman, 2014b). One of the challenges is that most national and large-scale surveys do not list transgender as a gender option for participants or do not provide alternative gender options outside of the man-woman binary (Beemyn, 2005; Dugan et al., 2012). Another challenge is that since many transgender students may transition to their affirmed gender identity while in college (Marine, 2012), they may be hesitant to affirm their new identity or still be developing their gender identity. Further, Beemyn and Rankin (2011) found that transgender and other gender variant college students had over 100 different ways of

describing their gender, demonstrating the challenges in trying to find gender terms that will reflect all students within a study. All of these factors combined keep transgender and gender non-conforming students invisible on institutional records and the national college census, as data is not collected consistently on their enrollment (Nicolazzo, 2016a).

Despite these methodological challenges, I was able to find several studies that examined the experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming students on college campuses. Leading scholarship suggest that transgender and non-gender conforming students experience harassment and discriminations related to their gender identity (Bilodeau, 2009; Dugan et al., 2012; Krum et al., 2013; Seelman, 2014a, 2016); experience incidents of violence and assault on college campuses (Krum et al., 2013); endure challenges related to changing institutional documents to reflect correct gender identity (Beemyn et al., 2005; Krum et al., 2013; Seelman, 2014a); are denied access to or feel uncomfortable within gendered spaces or have issues locating gender-inclusive spaces on campus (Bilodeau, 2009; Krum et al., 2013; Pryor et al., 2016; Seelman, 2014b); and feel isolated and lack support from college administrators and faculty (Bilodeau, 2009; Pryor, 2015).

Despite the overwhelming amount of empirical evidence on the negative experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming college students, transgender activist and scholar Z. Nicolazzo has published several works (e.g., Nicolazzo, 2016a, 2016b, 2017; Nicolazzo et al., 2017) on positive kinship-building and kinship-networks formed by transgender and gender non-conforming students. Nicolazzo et al. (2017) was one of the first literary works that examined kinship relationship among transgender

college students. They interviewed 18 transgender college students and had diverse variation of gender, sexual orientation, and racial identities. The study found that kinship relationship was developed in three key sites: material, virtual, and affective.

The material domain represents the relationships that were formed at physical locations on campus or within the local communities. These include places such as: student organizations, offices, or other structures that connected them with people that made them feel safe and embraced their transgender identity. Virtual domains represent relationships and networks formed through the internet and social media. Students used social media outlets to connect with other trans students or trans-supporting people, that for some transcend both virtual and material domains. Lastly, the affective domain represents the wide range of positive and negative emotions shared by people within the transgender community. The affective domain was expressed as overlapping the material and virtue domains because it highlighted the importance of emotional relationships. Lastly, the affective domain exposed that transgender students did not want to be portrayed as a vulnerable or tragic group, but rather as a group that was resilient and had developed skills to cope during episodes within an educational environment that is not always supportive.

Experiences at Women's Colleges

Scholarship on the experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming students at women's colleges is dismal, yet existing literature illustrates both positive and negative experiences. For instance, research suggests that women's colleges appeal to sexual and gender minorities for their "perceived values of embracing diversity and dismantling oppressive systems" (Farmer et al., 2020, p. 146), this is because transgender

and gender non-conforming students place significant value in campuses that can safely access and are accepting. Despite this widespread perception, there is also scholarship that describes occurrences where women's college were not welcoming to transgender students (e.g., Kraschel, 2012; Marine, 2012; Nanney & Brunsma, 2017; Perifimos, 2008). Most of this literature was connected to the practices and polices established by college administrators (e.g., Hart & Lester, 2011; Weber, 2016).

Many of today's women's colleges have either adopted or are currently working toward adopting policies and practices that promote gender inclusion, such as: changing admission and enrollment policies to allow for gender variant identities; updating non-discrimination policies; allowing for students to change documents to reflect preferred name; and, revising institutional documents to reflect gender neutral terms (Weber, 2016). Based on my review of literature, I was able to find four articles that provided insight into the experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming students at women's college through the lens of trans-identified and cisgender students.

Hart and Lester's (2011) article is one of the earliest I found on the attitude toward transgender students at a women's college. The study examined how members of a women's college campus community perceived the experiences of transgender students. Three themes emerged from the study: invisibility, hyper-visibility, and the oppressive environment of the women's college. The invisibility of transgender students was connected to how college administrators unintentionally, or intentionally, excluded transgender students from larger institutional conversations or practices within the college. The hyper-visibility of transgender students was demonstrated through student[21]

[21] The study suggests that most of these students did not identify as being transgender.

activism and their concerted effort to include transgender students. Hyper-visibility was described as being both positive and negative. While student activism pushed transgender issues to the forefront, it consequently caused some transgender students to feel that they received too much attention and that it forced them to engage with people who were unsupportive. Lastly, participants believed that transgender students experienced oppression at the college. For example, transgender students were often excluded from networks and opportunities because of the perception that their gender identity was incongruent with the college's mission. Transgender oppression also manifested in the form of discourse around gender performance, especially when it was incongruent with "normalized" gender expectations.

Marine (2012) detailed the experience of a transman student Lucas Cheadle, portrayed in the 2006 Sundance Video documentary, *Transgeneration*. The documentary exposed the complexities of gender identity and implications for enrollment at women's colleges. According to Marine (2012), as Lucas wrestled with his gender identity, "he felt a deep sense of investment in the college community and in his circle of personal support among students and faculty there" (p. 63). Marine attributed Lucas' increased sense of personal empowerment and the development of his true identity to his attendance of a women's college. This supports the notion that women's colleges can and should be safe environments for gender minorities.

Weber's (2016) detailed the experience of a transman, Roo Azul (the pseudonym chosen by the student), a former Smith College student who graduated in 2006 and served two terms as president of the College's transgender student organization. According to Weber (2016), during Azul's presidency at Smith College, he pressured

administration to address transgender inclusion. He felt as if he failed the transgender community, since one of the key points of his advocacy work was focused on educating other trans-masculinity students on trans misogyny. This consequently caused the focus for transgender inclusion at Smith to be placed on transmen, and not the other gender variant identities.

The most recent is Farmers et al.'s (2020) article on the experiences of transgender and gender-expansive (TGE) students of genderism at a women's college. The study examined 10 participants[22] who expressed experiences of genderism and its influence on: gender identity, gender roles, gender expressions, relations, academics, residence life, and university policies and practices (Farmers et al., 2020). Six themes emerged from the study. The first theme involved the expectation of gender binary adherence in their conduct, roles, and appearances. Participants felt that they were being judged or evaluated by members of the campus community based on their adherence to the gender binary, and more specifically, feminine norms. Students who presented more masculine expression discussed how they were judged based on stereotypes about men or masculinity. The disturbing aspect of this theme is that it perpetuated a culture of what students referred to as "gender policing." Participants described instances where faculty, staff, and students would report to administration students who they perceived to be transitioning to a gender outside of woman, which was against the college's enrollment policy.

The second theme was that participants felt that there was a general lack of awareness of gender diversity at their institutions, which created a perception of gender

[22] The racial composition of the participants was: 7 White Caucasians, 1 Jewish Caucasian, 1 Filipino American, and I Mixed-Race.

bias that was perceived to be rooted in their lack of education. Participants felt that genderism caused misunderstandings and fueled fear within the campus community, for example, participants "felt that they were viewed as a threat to gender binary campus norms" (Farmers et al., 2020, p. 150). The third theme was related to campus climate, many participants described their campus climate as unsupportive and sometimes hostile. Many students felt that they were merely tolerated; whereas, others felt that they were targeted and outcasts. The unwelcome climate showed in various ways, such as administrative policies, attitudes from college staff, and through gender-based microaggressions during social interactions.

The fourth theme was regarding self-advocacy and resilience. Participants were able to eventually find support systems on campus by developing friendships with supportive peers, or otherwise kept to themselves. In addition, participants felt that enduring challenges on campus were transformative, and gave them a greater sense of independence and self-acceptance. Resilience manifested in participants' ability to use their self-empowerment to accept themselves, despite the pressures of a gender binary environment. The fifth theme was regarding the incongruences and mixed messages they received from the College and its community. Participants felt that there were incongruences in the perceived and actual campus climate at the College, especially when their experiences contradicted the widespread narrative that women's colleges were "liberal" and "open-minded" institutions. Incongruences also manifested in the way the College understood gender and advanced the perspective of the gender binary. For cis women, redefining gender was common; whereas, participants felt that expanding the social constructions of gender was not a priority.

Lastly the sixth theme was the emotional toll of genderism. Participants felt the emotional toll of genderism on campus across all aspects of their college experience and through their social interactions with peers, faculty, staff, and administrators. This emotional toll manifested in the form of "depression, anxiety, worry, stress, angst, isolation, rejection, invisibility, paranoia, disconnection, trouble sleeping, feeling unsure of one-self, and overarching feeling of not belong" (p. 8). This theme also exposed how participants felt regarding the College's enrollment policy which required students to transfer if they transition to a gender other than woman while enrolled. This created fear and stress among participants, as many had real and perceived threats of being forced to transfer because of the gender surveillance of college administrators. Some participants even discussed episodes where other students were forced to transfer simply because of the perception of transitioning.

These four articles are interconnected in many ways and expose even deeper problematic gaps that exist within research in higher education, when you critically analyze them through a racial and gender lens. When analyzing these studies through a racial lens, I noticed that all of these studies consisted primarily of White participants. Only two out of the 10 participants in Farmers et al., (2012) identified as being non-White. Although Zoo's racial identity is unknown, I found in another chapter authored by Weber (2016) in which they referenced Zoo's experience at Smith College, Weber described Smith College as being "primarily made up of [W]hite trans people and allies … [and] from economically privileged backgrounds" (p. 189). Therefore, it can be reasonably assumed that Zoo was also White. Similarly, to Zoo, Lucas Cheadle also attended Smith College and is also a White transman. People of color are largely missing

from research with transgender individuals at women's colleges. This is concerning because based on what we do know about transgender people of color, more specifically Blacks trans people, is that they experience harassment and discrimination at disproportionately higher rate than Whites in education settings.

Experiences at HBCUs

Much like the scarcity of scholarship on the experiences of transgender students at women's colleges, scholarship on the experiences of transgender students at HBCUs is also limited and arguably practically non-existent. Studies that do address transgender students' issues and experiences at HBCUs are often positioned with LGB literature, which I will review below. This has created significant gaps in literature that examine the experiences of and attitudes toward transgender students at HBCUs, as well as how HBCUs administrators and students support and foster inclusive and safe communities for transgender and non-gender conforming students at these institutions.

Based on my review of the literature on LGBT students attending HBCUs, many of the studies and articles I found only focused on the experiences of Black LGBT students collectively - although it can be inferred that non-Black LGBT students attend these institutions also. There are several studies that examined the experiences of White students at HBCUS (e.g., Carter & Fountaine, 2012; Conrad et al., 1997; Hall & Closson, 2005); however, most HBCUs scholarship seemed to be centered on Black students and their experiences. HBCUs are often depicted historically and within modern-day contexts as being unwelcoming and slow to address the concerns and needs of LGBT students (Coleman, 2016; Gasman, 2013; Gasman & Nguyen, 2015; Lenning, 2017). According to Coleman (2016), only 21 out of the 106 active HBCUs at the time of their study had

LGBT student organizations on their campus. In an effort to help shift the narrative of these institutions, some scholars have published work that highlights the progress many HBCUs have made to acknowledge and to provide adequate services for LGBT students. The mentioned programs and services including the opening of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Allies Resource Center at Bowie State in 2012 (Coleman, 2016; Gasman, 2013); and the offering of courses on sexuality and gender at Spelman College and Morehouse College (Coleman, 2016; Gasman, 2013). Absent from literature are the policies and practices single-gender HBCUs have made toward a more inclusive campus.

Despite these advancements, the perception of these institutions collectively is often overshadowed by the historical and nationally recognized incidents that exposed how leaders at HBCUs address LGBT issues. In 2002, a man student at Morehouse College was severely beaten with a baseball bat by another student who accused him of making advances at him in the shower (Coleman, 2016; Harris, 2009). The sophomore student that was attacked suffered major brain injuries and the attacker was expelled from the college shortly after the incident. This attack exposed many facets of Morehouse College's institutional homophobia and genderism, including how many of its cultures, traditions, and ideologies/symbols such as the "Morehouse Man" perpetuated heteronormative and cisnormative structures (Coleman, 2016). Coleman (2016) stated that the "incident forced the issue of homosexuality to the surface and forced administrators to move beyond a position of tolerance to a position of recognizing and understanding the diverse sexualities that exist on the campus" (p. 5). Furthermore, in Harper and Gasman's (2008) study on the experience of Black males and conservatism at

HBCUs, students from Morehouse College expressed that gay and heterosexual students rarely engaged with each other and described the campus as a "very heterosexual place" (p. 343).

Almost a decade later, in 2009 Morehouse College was highly criticized for the implementation of the "Morehouse Appropriate Attire Policy," which censored how men dressed. Although the 11-point policy was meant to cover an array of inappropriate clothing and/or appearances, one of the policies prohibited students from wearing "women's" garments to class and campus-sponsored events. Many of the college's administrators justified the policy by claiming that the policy was meant to help mold students into Black global leaders and to help foster learning environments that were free from distractions (Coleman, 2016). Many higher education practitioners and scholars condemned the policy for its insensitivity toward students who may express their gender in non-traditional ways; its use as a catalyst for policing gender variance; and, for upholding hetero-and cis- normative ideologies (Coleman, 2016; Lenning, 2017; Patton, 2014). Most of the research I found that discussed Morehouse's dress code policy (e.g., Coleman, 2016; Patton, 2014) also unmasked the conservative and restrictive dress code polices at other HBCUs. For example, Coleman (2016) listed seven HBCUs that had gender-specific dress code policies that approached gender from the binary of man and woman. Coleman (2016) and Patton (2015) critiques align with other scholars (e.g., Cantey et al., 2005; Kirby, 2011; Lewis & Ericksen, 2016; Mobley & Johnson, 2015) findings that link religious and cultural underpinnings to these types of polices at HBCUs and the beliefs held by their administrators.

HBCUs and Christianity are often associated with being monumental symbols within the African American community (Coleman, 2016; Gasman & Nguyen, 2015; Patton, 2014), as both have played vital roles in fostering community, educating Blacks, and advocating for civil rights during some of the most oppressive eras in the United States for the Black community. Christian ideology has oppressed members of the LGBT community for centuries and is often at the source of disapproval of homosexuality and gender variances within the Black community (Coleman, 2016; Patton, 2015). African Americans are often portrayed as one of the most homophobic and heterosexist groups within the United States (Harris, 2009; hooks, 1989; Patton, 2015). Many scholars have connected this to existing structures of oppression within Black America (Coleman, 2016; Patton, 2014).

Black churches and White Christian philanthropists established majority of the HBCUs in the nineteenth century as mentioned earlier within this section, therefore, Christianity is interwoven into various facets of HBCUs. Mobley and Johnson (2015) stated that "the strong religious and cultural pressure on HBCU campuses at times forces gay and lesbian students to feel as if they are silenced and invisible" (p. 81). Other scholars (e.g., Cantey et al., 2005; Kirby, 2011, Lewis & Ericksen, 2016) theorized that HBCUs hesitate to address queer and trans students' needs because of the historical alignment with the Black Church.

Experiences of Black Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming College Students

There is a large body of research focused on how race influences the college experience for many students of color (e.g., Franklin, 2019; Solorzano et al., 2000; Swim et al., 2003). Many scholars urge others to not view racial groups, or any identity groups,

as being monolithic groups (e.g., Celious & Oyserman, 2001; Jones & McEwen, 2000), as this would fail to take into consideration how other identities intersect and influence identity development and shape lived experiences. Although intersectional literature is growing, scholarship on Black transgender and non-gender conforming college students is practically non-existent. Findings from several studies on transgender and gender non-conforming people of color found that their experiences of inequities intensified because of the positionality of their intersecting marginalized identities (Graham, 2014; Follins et al., 2014), especially in educational settings.

As highlighted earlier in this section, most of what we do know about the experiences and challenges of transgender and gender non-conforming college students come from studies that either have mostly White participants or do not bring attention to how race shapes the experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming people. The absence of Black transgender and gender non-conforming students in studies is not because they are not attending college. In fact, according to the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey (USTS), 41% of Black participants[23] finished some college but did not complete their degrees, and 34% of participants earned a bachelor's degree or higher.

After an extensive review of literature, Nicolazzo's (2016a) study and the 2015 USTS were the only two studies I found that provided empirical data on the experiences of Black transgender and gender non-conforming college students. Nicolazzo's (2016a) study examined the experiences of two Black non-binary college students. Both students had similar experiences in that they wrestled with passing and normalizing their identities. Nicolazzo (2106a) also argued that because students and administrators failed

[23] 12.6% of the study identified as being Black. The study had 27,715 participants.

to view them through an intersectional lens, it made them feel erased in queer and Black spaces on campus. This also caused the students to feel as if they had to choose between race and gender to engage with people and navigate the campus. Nicolazzo's study is one of the few studies that examined Black gender variant students through an intersectional perspective.

The 2015 USTS study, was the only largest study that I found that examined the educational experiences of Black transgender and gender non-conforming individuals. The study focused primarily on K-12 experiences, although it can be inferred that there may be some similarities in K-12 and postsecondary settings. Among the Black participants: 35% identified as transmen; 34% identified as non-binary; 30% identified as transwomen; and 2% as cross-dressers[24]. Black transgender people experienced slightly more incidents of harassment and violence and were more likely to be expelled from school as compared to the entire sample.

Transgender Inclusive Policies and Practices in Higher Education

I conducted an extensive search of gender-inclusive policies in higher education. Most of the literature discussed policies from a coeducational lens, which may not be surprising given the small number of single-sex institutions in the United States. The literature I found either discussed the actions many colleges and universities have taken to add gender-identity and gender expression to their non-discrimination statements (e.g., Beemyn et al., 2005; Beemyn & Pettitt, 2006; Patchett & Foster, 2015; Seelman, 2014b) or the implementation of polices that address gender inclusion in gendered spaces such as

[24] Cross-dressers are people who wear clothing of the opposite gender. This is most often connected to transvestism or heterosexual men that wear women clothing for pleasure or sexual arousal. In most cases, cross-dressers have no desire to become women. This is a highly debated identity, as many feels that cross-dressers are not part of the transgender community.

residence halls, locker rooms, and bathrooms (e.g., Beemyn et al., 2005; Nicolazzo, 2016a). However, Goldberg (2018) stated that policies extend beyond inclusive statements and physical structures and should address how institutions handle official documents that dichotomize students along the gender binary (e.g., housing applications) or how their policies allow students to change their gender on official documents and records. Despite the implementation of various gender-inclusive policies, colleges and universities still uphold strict gender binary systems that largely privilege gender conforming students (Case et al., 2012; Goldberg, 2018; Rankin & Beemyn, 2012), and the colleges with extensive gender-inclusive polices are still within the minority (Nicolazzo, 2016a).

Non-Discrimination Policies

The movement among colleges and universities to include gender-identity and gender expression within non-discrimination statements is documented within scholarship (Beemyn & Petit, 2006; Case et al., 2012; Harley et al., 2002; Pitcher et al., 2016). Having these statements is recommended as a necessary action to ensure gender inclusion. However, Harley et al. (2002) argued that changing campus climate and culture goes beyond amending non-discrimination statements, to require action from all levels within an institution.

In a case study conducted by Case et al. (2012), they examined the change process at a large metropolitan university in Texas during the construction and implementation of a non-discrimination policy that included gender identity. Case et al. (2012) found that the participants endured challenges related to student and faculty resistance to changes, strategies for action, and the manifestation of power and privilege in the institution's

change process. Beemyn and Pettitt (2006) examined colleges that amended their non-discrimination policy to include gender-identity and found that college administrators could not identify how the policy amendment positively changed their campus climate. Likewise, Pitcher et al. (2016) argued that despite the increase in college and universities that include gender-identity and gender expression within their non-discrimination policies, there is little to no evidence these steps positively change campus climate.

Although the effectiveness of non-discrimination policies is significantly understudied and could be debated, these policies should not be ruled out as being meaningless. Pitcher et al. (2016) suggested that college administrators "see policy not as a way to forbid discrimination or to remediate discriminatory acts, but as a way to understand institutions' values, even if the institution may sometimes fail to live up to its espoused values" (p. 127). Indeed, Case et al. (2012) argued that actions toward changing non-discrimination policies often acts as a catalyst for other policy changes at colleges and universities. Thus, what is notable from these studies is that non-discrimination policies can symbolize a college's commitment to protecting non-cisgender identities and gender expression.

Gendered Spaces on College Campuses

Much attention within literature has been placed on gendered spaces such as: bathrooms, residence halls, and locker rooms on college campus, especially as they relate to creating safe and inclusive spaces for transgender and gender non-conforming students (e.g., Krum et al., 2013; Nicolazzo, 2015; Pryor et al., 2016; Seelman 2014a, 2014b, 2016; Willoughby et al., 2012). Despite the push for gender inclusive spaces within colleges and universities, there are very few studies that examine the current state of

issues and policies related to gendered spaces for transgender and non-gender conforming students (Seelman, 2014b). In a study using data from the National Transgender Discrimination Survey (NTDS) that was administered in 2008 and 2009, Seelman (2016) found that 25% of transgender and non-gender conforming people who attended college had been denied access to bathrooms or other gendered facilities at some point during their matriculation. In addition, 21% of the participants had housing assignments that did not align with their gender identity. These findings are similar to those of an earlier study by Seelman et al. in 2012 in which they found that transgender and non-gender conforming students expressed having challenges locating bathrooms that they felt were safe to use (e.g., could use without the fear of being harassed or asked to leave); furthermore, some students reported refraining from using restrooms despite the health risks.

I found two studies that examined residential housing and the experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming college students (Krum et al., 2013; Pryor et al., 2016). Krum et al. (2013) is one of the earliest studies and is frequently referenced in existing literature. This study examined the housing preference of 103 transgender and non-gender conforming college-aged adults based on five common housing options at colleges and universities: same room, but different sex; apartment style; gender identity assignment; evenly split groups; and self-contained singles. The participants preferred apartment style and self-contained singles because these room styles provide a higher level of privacy. Pryor et al. (2016) is a case study that examined the experiences of transgender students who stayed in residential housing during college. There were four themes that were identified as being common across the 12 participants: challenges in

navigating gender expression in gendered spaces; feelings of isolation and discrimination when living in single-room options; coping and persevering despite unfavorable experiences; and the genderism displayed by campus administrators. Findings from Krum et al. (2013) and Pryor et al. (2016) suggested that while single and private rooms may be a popular and preferred option by transgender and gender non-conforming students, these housing options have their downsides.

Admissions and Enrollment Policies at Women's Colleges

Most literature on women in higher education and women's college in the United States often cited three key pieces of legislation that advanced women in education: the Equal Pay Act of 1962; the Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964; and Title IX of the Education Amendment of 1972 – which is considered the most monumental laws for women's education and women's college. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was a landmark case during the Civil Rights Movement because it transcended across race and gender in the United States, which Kraschel (2012) argued set the stage for Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, 20 U.S.C. § 1681 et seq. Section 1681 (referenced throughout this paper as "Title IX"). Title IX states that "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance." (Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, 20 U.S.C. § 1681 et seq. Section 1681). The underpinnings of Title IX can be directly linked to the discrimination women faced on college campuses.

Title IX has significantly shaped college admissions, access and participation in educational programs across grade levels, access to educational services and benefits, and

employment in educational settings. In addition, Title IX does allow educational facilities, programs, and institutions to remain single-sexed, as long as the programs are the same quality and quantity for the two sexes (female, male) recognized at most institutions. Some of the earlier interpretations of Title IX excluded private institutions from complying; however, recent interpretations suggest that all institutions that receive federal funding are required to comply (Buzuis, 2013). Despite being enacted for over 30 years, the statue still causes significant confusion among college administrators in regards to the breadth and scope of its regulations (Compton & Compton, 2010).

One of the earliest attempts of gender-inclusive admission at a women's college can be traced to the 1982 Supreme Court case *Mississippi University for Women* (MUW) *v. Hogan*. The case held that MUW violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution by denying Joe Hogan admission to the MUW School of Nursing because he was male. The institution would only allow Hogan to audit[25] nursing classes; therefore, not allow him to complete and potentially earn a nursing degree from the MUW (Perifimos, 2008). The university argued that its enrollment policy was implemented as a remedy for past discrimination against women in higher education and in careers fields; yet, during that time women dominated the field of nursing. In addition, the university argued that allowing men to attend would adversely affect women students. Instead of demonstrating how the university's admission policy improved women's access to careers in nursing, the university's rationale of the policy perpetuated stereotypes that nursing was a career exclusively for women. Furthermore, since MUW allowed men to audit classes, it

[25] Auditing is practice within higher education that will allow students to sit-in or participate in college classes without receiving college credit. This is most often used for personal enrichment purposes.

undermined its claim that the presence of men would adversely affect their students. Although the Supreme Court's decision did not force MUW to change its admission's policy, the Board of Trustees of Mississippi State Institutions of Higher Education ordered the university to change its policy to allow qualified men.

It was not until the early-2000s that women's colleges made national headlines regarding gender inclusion, and it all started through student activism (including cisgender and transgender students) at one institution within the Seven Sisters[26] - Smith College. Smith College not only served as one of the first women's colleges to face controversy over gender inclusion, but I found it as being one of the most referenced institutions within literature on transgender individuals in higher education for its turbulent journey toward gender inclusion. Perifimos (2008) provided details on the first student-led protest for gender-inclusion at Smith College and is the only article I was able to retrieve through my review of existing literature that discussed these early accounts.

Perifimos (2008) stated that "transgender students at Smith expressed their dissatisfaction with the administration's lack of activism in facing transgender issues, particular because some students experienced intolerance from their classmates because the college seems to have an uncertain policy on transgender applications" (p. 162). At the time, the college's administration said that it would only accept students who were born biologically as female and would allow students who were born female but identify as male to attend. In 2003, students at Smith College voted to make the language in the student body's constitution gender-neutral. The referendum for gender neutrality changed many aspects of the college such as: making language on school documents gender

[26] The Seven Sisters is a network of highly selective liberal arts college located in the Northeastern region of the United States that are historically founded as women's colleges.

inclusive, requiring faculty to use preferred name and personal pronouns, and instituting gender-neutral restrooms (Perifimos, 2008). Despite the vote, the issue polarized the student body. The opposing students called into questioned why students who did not identify as woman would want to matriculate at a women's colleges; in addition, some felt that by making the college more gender inclusive, the institution would lose its identity and historic purpose.

Related, and more recently (i.e., 2013), the college rejected the admission application of a prospective transwoman student, Calliope Wong (Nanney & Brunsma, 2017). Wong contacted Smith College prior to submitting her admission application to discuss her trans identity and to understand the college's admission policy regarding transgender students. The college assured Wong that as long as her application affirmed a gender-identity of a woman and used feminine pronouns consistently throughout her application, her application would be considered for admission (Weber, 2016). Like many other women's colleges during that time, Smith College evaluated transgender admission applicants on a "case by case" basis. Despite Wong's compliance, her admission was decline due to her parent accidently marking "male" on Wong's Federal Financial Aid documents. Wong detailed her rejection on her personal blog, and ignited a national debate on whether transgender students should be admitted into women's college. This incident was significant because it ignited a gender inclusion movement across several colleges within the Seven Sisters. Student groups consisting of transgender students and trans allies began to form at Smith College and other women's college to advocate for firmer transgender inclusive policies. As a response, many women's colleges quickly created such policies.

Despite Smith's well-documented student activism, Mills College is noted in scholarship and the media as at the first women's college to adopt a formal policy on transgender student admission (Elfman, 2015), with other colleges creating policies shortly thereafter. In the early months of 2013, Smith College's administrators began to address the inclusion concerns of students and alumnae/alumnx; yet the college's slow response intensified the movement. Weber (2016) the confrontation between Smith College students and administration as a "battle for transgender women's admission that lasted until every other remaining Seven Sister besides Barnard – which has since updated their policy to admit transgender women – had already changed their admissions policies in favor of inclusion" (p. 30).

Among the few articles that I found, most only discussed the transgender inclusion movement between the network of institutions within the Seven Sisters – which are all prestigious predominately and historically White liberal colleges. Thus, there are significant gaps in current scholarship and media accounts that address how historically Black and less-high profile women's colleges create and implement transgender admission and enrollment policies. One exception is Weber (2016), who described two historically Black women's colleges, Spelman and Bennett College, as being slow to address the needs and concerns of transgender students. These institutions were much like other non-historically Black women's college located in the Southern part of the United States, which lag behind the progressive policies of the Seven Sisters (Weber, 2016). In an attempt to learn more about Spelman and Bennett, Elfman (2015) asked to interview their administrators regarding policies but was declined. The lack of

representation of historically Black women's college in currently literature raises questions about what is happening at these institutions.

Legal Opinions on Transgender Admission and Enrollment Policies

This section focuses on higher education policies and practices as well as the opinions of legal scholars regarding transgender and gender non-conforming students' admission and enrollment in women's colleges. Many of these articles provide recommendations on how women's colleges should interpret statutes and case law when addressing transgender student admission and enrollment status. The most cited legislation and case are Title IX and the legal opinion from *Price Waterhouse v. Hopkins*, although neither were intended to protect transgender students in higher education. Within education and legal texts, women's colleges have been cited for using Title IX to restrict admission of transgender students, which has generated debate among scholars and practitioners on how the statute should be applied to transgender admission. Scholars have exposed how common it is for women's colleges to misinterpret Title IX, urging administrators to reevaluate how they address students on their campus.

For example, Kraschel (2012) and Perifimos (2008) affirmed that Title IX does allow women's colleges to discriminate against students on the basis of sex, because women's college are believed to serve as a remedy for historic discrimination among women in education. Under Title IX, women's colleges cannot accept students outside of their institution's designated sex or they may jeopardize their ability to receive federal funding (Kraschel, 2012) and/or may be forced to become coeducational institutions. Although many articles cite Title IX violations as legitimate concern for women's colleges when accepting students who are not legally documented as female, Title IX

does not suggest that women's college should exclude trans-women or gender non-conforming students who do have female markers on government documents. For example, Kraschel (2012) stated that:

> Title IX does not force an institution not to admit transgender individuals; rather it forces institutions to accommodate them once they are enrolled. It is erroneous for institutions to hold Title IX up as a shield to criticism directed at their exclusive admission policy to deflect attention from their choice not to invest in accommodating non-female identifying students. (p. 35)

Kraschel's quote demonstrates the position of many scholars who criticize women's college for misusing Title IX to justify their unwillingness to implement policies that are more inclusive to transgender and gender non-conforming students.

Price Waterhouse v. Hopkins is commonly referenced alongside Title IX and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act for its anti-discriminatory stance toward transgender and non-gender conforming individuals. This is a monumental case for transgender individuals because it prohibited discrimination based on sex stereotypes and for one's failure to comply with gender norms (Kraschel, 2012). Although this case law is mostly used within the context of employment, Buzuvis (2013) suggested that it may be applicable in educational setting, including women's colleges.

Measuring "Womanhood" Among Transgender Students

Among the few articles that I found, many exposed the lack of consensus on transgender admissions and enrollment policies among women's colleges, which can be directly linked to the varying interpretations of gender and what defines women at women's college in the United States. Brymer (2011) added that the term *woman* is not

clearly defined in the law, which adds to the complexities of determining a student's womanhood from a legal perspective.

There are three primary approaches to policy that are noted in the literature. First, many women's college have admission and enrollment policies that align with academia's contemporary understanding of gender, which allows people to affirm their own gender-identity. Second, others have policies that rely on a person's legal sex status to determine whether a student should qualify for admission. Third, some women's colleges have policies that evaluate students' admission and enrollment status using a "case-by-case basis" approach, a practice I noted previously that was used at Smith College. This requires college administrators to determine a student's "womanhood" and whether their identity aligns with the mission of the institution. Yet, some education and legal scholars question the criteria college administrators use to determine who should be accepted or excluded (Nanney & Brusma, 2017; Weber, 2016) – especially because the construct of gender is unstable.

Most education and legal scholars encourage college administrators to have policies that take into the consideration the complexities of gender and to reiterate the notion that everyone experiences gender differently (Buzuvis, 2014; Kraschel, 2012; Marine, 2011; Perifimos, 2008; Weber, 2016). In addition, a person's biological sex may not have any influence on how a person affirms their gender. They also urged college administrators to use gender-identity as the premise for admission; yet, very few articles provide recommendations on how college administrators should address the enrollment status of students who transition to other gender-identities during their matriculation.

Moreover, this scholarship is not exclusive to women's colleges, which complicates the conversation.

These aforementioned gaps in literature may be directly linked to the "case by case" approach most colleges adopt to evaluate admission and enrollment status of its students. Many argued that the "case by case" approach reinforces the ideology that transgender students should remain undistinguishable and invisible, so they do not alter the status of women's colleges (Hart & Lester, 2011; Nanney & Brunsma, 2017; Weber, 2016). Perifimos (2008) also added that the case-by-case approach places the students at risk for unequal treatment or reinforces trans-normativity[27]. This was supported in the finding of Farmers et al. (2020), since similar practices caused stress and fear among TGE students and fueled gender policing on campuses. Lastly, this is problematic because it often times puts the power of determining passing in the hands of cisgender people. Mattilda (2006) and Butler (2006) suggested that people from gender variant backgrounds consistently fail to pass as they wish to be seen; often because of the United States' high standards toward gender conformity, their "failure" to pass is not the fault of the individual.

The interconnectedness of sex and gender have significantly shaped the social and political landscape in the United States (Crawley et al., 2016; Delphy, 1993). As women's colleges became more diverse institutions, many are faced with students expressing their gender outside of the *norms* of roles prescribed to women. In the case of women's colleges, many students are born biological females with legal status of

[27] According to Nicolazzo (2016), *trans-normativity* is defined as "the belief that there is only one way for trans* people to practice their gender" (p. 1175).

"female," this created a new challenge for women's college when determining whether transgender students should be admitted, or if transitioning, remain enrolled.

Depending on the state, some transwomen may be required to undergo sex affirmation surgery and/or hormonal therapy before they are able to change their gender on legal documents. Weber (2016) argues that using sex status on legal documents could also pose as barriers for students who do not have the resources to afford medical procedures and fees associated with changing legal documents; in addition, many transgender individuals do not have family approval or feel safe enough to make their transition in high school when they are financially dependent on others. This exposes the challenges of using sex as a determinate for enrollment and admission for transgender and non-gender conforming students.

Section Four: Contribution to Practice

Contribution to Practice: Policy Brief for Spelman College

Executive Summary

This qualitative case study examined the attitudes of 10 Spelman College students' attitudes toward the Spelman's revised admissions and enrollment policy, which expanded admissions considerations for transwomen and permits admitted students who transition to matriculate and graduate. In addition, the study also examines the attitudes of these 10 students toward current transgender and gender non-conforming students at the institution. Students' attitudes were analyzed using the three components for Allport's (1935) Tricomponent Attitude Model (TAM): affective, behavioral, and cognitive. Intersectionality theories were also used to inform how the intersecting identities of participants may have shaped their attitudes, since intersectionality theories suggest that the intersections of social group identities (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation, class) can significantly shape lived experiences within the framework of social power. For the first cycle of analysis, I used deductive, emergent, and in vivo coding to place the voice of the students within the three components of attitude and to guide responses to the two research questions. I used emotion coding for the second cycle of analysis to help make meaning of students' experiences and to identify emerging themes.

The study found that most participants supported the policy; however, one participant expressed neutrality and the other disapproved. Despite support for the policy, most of the participants had concerns around Spelman's readiness to adequately support transgender and gender non-conforming students. Also, the study found that participants

held positive views of Spelman's transgender and gender non-conforming students; however, participants expressed mixed views on how other member of Spelman's community view these groups. Based on these findings, Spelman College may benefit from strengthening efforts to educate new and prospective students on its admissions and enrollment policy, as well as regularly assess campus climate to determine the extent to which transgender and gender non-conforming students are welcomed and feel a sense of belonging. This sort of analysis will also inform whether policy revisions and campus readiness need to be addressed. Related recommendations include: considering the values and beliefs students bring to campus and how those my impede gender inclusion, examining first-year experience opportunities for increasing queer and trans consciousness, centralizing queer and trans efforts, and examining the student experience with the African Diaspora and the World (ADW) sequence.

The key recommendations of this study are:

- Explore ways to educate prospective and current students on its admissions and enrollment policy, and the institution's stance on admitting and enrolling transgender and gender non-conforming students.
- Educate students on how admitting and enrolling transgender and gender non-conforming students' align with Spelman College's mission and purpose.
- Explore ways to address students concerns around Spelman's readiness for gender equity as well as combating gender policing toward transgender and gender non-conforming students.

- Annually assess the campus climate toward trans-inclusion or exclusion, particularly as more transgender and gender non-conforming students are admitted or become visible on its campus.
- Consider the belief and values (e.g., religious, family and personal values, ideologies) and intersecting identities students may bring to campus and how their intersectional experiences may create hostile, and possibly dangerous, environments for transgender and gender non-conforming students.
- Assess students' first-year experience, and determine ways to incorporate seminars, or other programming, to raise queer consciousness among students.
- Centralize queer and trans advocacy programs, resources, and services at Spelman College.
- Encourage African diaspora and women (ADW) faculty to revisit student feedback on their experience in the ADW 111 and ADW 112 sequence, particularly around facilitating challenging discussions about gender and sexuality.
- Continue to foster a campus culture where personal pronouns and names are valued and used.

Background

Existing research illustrates how many of today's women's colleges have either adopted, or are currently working to adopt, admissions and enrollment polices that align with contemporary understandings of gender and gender identity (Beemyn, n,d,; Nanney & Brunsma, 2017; Schneider, 2010). While the body of scholarship on transgender topics within higher education is growing, topics within the context of women's colleges

remains limited. Among the few existing studies that examines or discuss transgender students and trans inclusion at women's college, most are centered on historically and predominately White affluent institutions. This scholarship provides a glimpse into students' attitudes toward transgender inclusivity, in part, by highlighting student led movements at predominately White women's colleges (Schneider, 2010). However, gaps exist in understanding how trans-inclusion efforts are viewed among Black students specifically, particularly those attending historically Black single gender institutions.

Throughout existing literature, historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have been widely criticized for upholding conservative policies and practices around gender expression and norms (Coleman, 2016; Lenning, 2017; Mobley & Johnson, 2019; Patton, 2014), under the pretense that it will build more successful students and future leaders (Coleman, 2016). For example, in 2009, Morehouse College was heavily criticized for the implementation of its "Appropriate Attire Policy," which prohibited students from wearing "women's" clothing to class and other institution-related events. Many students felt that this policy prevented them from being their authentic selves, reinforcing that certain policies can send hurtful and inclusionary messages to students and campus communities (Coleman, 2016; Mobley & Johnson, 2019; Patton, 2014). The aforementioned policy no longer exists at Morehouse College, and research shows that HBCUs have made significant strides over the past decade in creating programs and services for queer and transgender students (Gasman & Nguyen, 2015; Jones et al., 2020).

As HBCUs continue to work to implement policies and practices that better serve Black transgender and gender non-conforming college students, it is imperative that

HBCU leaders understand the lived experiences of these individuals across multiple sectors (e.g., education, healthcare, housing, employment) and how their campus may perpetuate or uphold existing systems of oppression (e.g., sexism, genderism, transphobia, queerphobia) and violence toward these students. According to James et al.'s (2016) report of the findings of the *2015 U.S Transgender Survey*, transgender people experience a higher rate of discrimination, harassment, and violence in sectors such as education, employment, housing, and healthcare when compared to other sexual and gender minorities. The *2015 U.S Transgender Survey: Report on the Experiences of Black Respondents*, which is based on disaggregated data from the larger study, found that 34% of the Black transgender participants had received a bachelor's degree or higher; 41% had some college but obtain no degree. From this finding, it can be reasonably assumed that Black transgender people are pursuing higher education, and some face challenges around persistence and degree obtainment.

Lastly, according to the report, *An Epidemic of Violence: Fatal Violence Against Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming People in the United States in 2020* (Human Rights Campaign Foundation [HRC], 2020), transgender and gender non-conforming people of color and those with multiple marginalized identities experienced fatal violence at a disproportionately higher rate than other racial/ethnic groups. In addition, according to reports in 2020, at least 37 transgender or gender non-conforming people were fatally shot or killed, and the vast majority were Black transwomen (HRC, 2020). The HRC marked 2020 as the deadliest year for Black transwomen in the country, since they began collecting data on this epidemic in 2013. These examples of the countless challenges Black transgender and gender non-conforming individuals face living within the United

States and navigating our education system affirm the critical need for HBCUs, and their leaders, to prioritize the safety and success of these students through inclusive policies, practices, and services.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine Spelman College's students' attitude about its admissions and enrollment policy, which includes provisions for transgender and gender non-conforming students. In addition, the study examines their attitudes about transgender and gender non-conforming students at Spelman College. Spelman College, one of two historically Black women's colleges, was last to revise their admissions and enrollment policy to be more inclusive to transgender and gender non-conforming students. This policy went into effect in fall 2018. Spelman College's admissions and enrollment policy states:

> Spelman College, a Historically Black College whose mission is to serve high-achieving Black women, will consider for admission women students including students who consistently live and self-identify as women, regardless of their gender assignment at birth. Spelman does not admit male students, including students who self-identity and live consistently as men, regardless of gender at birth. If a woman is admitted and transitions to male while a student at Spelman, the College will permit the student to continue to matriculate at and graduate from Spelman. (https://www.spelman.edu/admissions/applying-to-spelman)

The safety and the mattering of the lives of Black transgender and gender non-conforming students, especially as they begin at and attend historically Black single-

gender institutions, should remain a top priority for HBCU leaders. Now that all historically Black single-gender institutions (e.g., Bennett College, Morehouse College, and Spelman College) have implemented policies aimed at increasing access to their institutions for transgender and gender non-conforming students, there is a critical need to examine how students at these institutions embrace these policies and transgender and gender non-conforming peers. Furthermore, research will provide a contemporary understanding about how student attitudes at Black colleges advance or hinder trans-inclusivity on college campuses. The purpose of the study is to examine these phenomena through these research questions:

- Research Question #1: How do Spelman College's students describe their attitudes toward its transgender admissions and enrollment policy?
- Research Question #2: How do Spelman College's students describe their attitude toward Spelman's transgender and gender non-conforming students?

Theoretical Frameworks

There are two theoretical frameworks that guided this study. The first is Allport's (1935) Tricomponent Attitude Model (TAM). The TAM is a social theory and framework for understanding people's attitudes toward a product or person. Allport argued that people's attitudes are comprised of three components: affective (a person's feelings); behavioral (a person's actions); and cognitive (a person's understanding and beliefs). This model was selected because of the multidimensional approach to examining a person's attitude.

The second theoretical framework used in this study was intersectionality, and according to Núñez (2014), higher education scholars are increasingly using

intersectionality as a lens to examine how multiple social identities across institutional contexts influence educational processes and outcomes. For this study, *intersectionality* is defined as the relationship between multiple social identities interacting with each other that shapes one's experiences and life circumstances in relation to social power (Davis, 2008). Thus, I used an intersectional lens to explore how the intersectional identities (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation, economic class, family-structure) of Spelman students influenced Spelman's climate toward inclusion (Hurtado et al, 2012). I also used an intersectional perspective to make meaning of participants' lived experiences (e.g., high school and college involvement, peer and family dynamics) and values/beliefs and perspectives that also informed their attitudes. Finally, intersectionality also became a tool used by participants to describe their perception of their peers, the institution, and the social power structures that exist within society and on campus that marginalize transgender and gender non-conforming students.

Methodology and Design

This study is a single holistic case study that is qualitative in nature. Case studies allow researchers to examine a phenomenon in depth, within real contexts, and are bounded by one location (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2014). This study is bounded by Spelman College, its policy, and its students. Participants for this study were recruited virtually using the social media platform, Twitter. I tweeted a recruitment flyer that included popular hashtags associated with the institution. I directly tweeted to 267 potential students about the study; I used information within their account profiles to help distinguish between current and former students. I emailed interested participants pre-screening questions to determine whether they met the study's criterion: enrolled at

Spelman College and 18 years old or older at the time of the study. Ten students agreed to participate. They represented a wide range of social group identities, classifications, academic majors, and goals. An overview of each participant is available in Appendix A.

I conducted semi-structured interviews, guided by the research questions and theoretical frameworks, using the videoconferencing platform, Zoom. They ranged between 30 to 60 minutes in length. I also included an artifact in my analysis: a letter related to the policy that was addressed to Spelman administrators and was tweeted by the student group, Afrekete. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. I coded the interviews and artifact using the six preliminary sets of codes based on the two research questions and three components of the TAM (6 codes = 2 research questions and 3 TAM components). Other codes emerged based on shared themes across multiple participants. Lastly, I enhanced the trustworthiness of the study by triangulated data sources in the analysis process, examining whether themes from the data sources aligned or conflicted.

Findings and Discussion

The two research questions guiding this study sought to explore how Spelman College students describe their attitudes about the revised transgender admissions and enrollment policy, and toward transgender and non-gender conforming students. I used the answers to the research questions, extant research, and trans-inclusive and exclusive practices adopted at other institutions to contextualize the findings and inform this paper's recommendations for Spelman College. I also included several quotes from participants throughout the findings below to highlight their specific contributions to the study.

Attitudes Toward the Policy

The affective component provided the most substantial evidence of students' attitude because it captured how students felt about the policy. Nine participants described their feelings toward the policy as positive and supportive. One participant expressed some indifference and one other disapproved of the policy. Participants who supported the policy expressed that education is a fundamental human right, and one's gender-identity should not be a factor in accessing a quality education. For example, one participant expressed her endorsement, "it's amazing that Spelman has allowed transgender women to enter our spaces. Because they are women no matter what they look like and no matter how they were born." The participants' overwhelming positive

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attitudes toward Spelman College policy aligns with the existing literature (e.g., Hart & Lester, 2010; Kraschel, 2012; Marine; 2012; Nanney & Brunsma; 2017; Weber, 2016), which found that students attending women's colleges have positive views of trans-inclusive policies, which was sometimes illustrated through student led trans-inclusive movements at these institutions. Similarly, Spelman's student-led #SPELSAFE movement was a popular hashtag in 2018, which exemplified Spelman students' solidarity against transphobia.

The participant who felt neutral about the policy based her impartiality on a gender blind attitude toward transgender and gender non-conforming people and their issues. Her perspective raises new questions about how such attitudes effect implementation of trans-inclusive policies in higher education, particularly at single-gender institutions where cisgender identities may dominate. Rands (2009) discussed the consequence of gender blindness within education settings and how it fails to acknowledge and address gender inequities. If gender blindness is pervasive at Spelman College, it would have a profound effect on Black transgender and gender non-conforming students because it fails to recognize their multiplicity of intersecting identities, as well as the social power structures these students have to navigate intersectional identities (i.e., at a minimum, being Black and transgender/gender non-conforming) on and off campus. The gender blind student also expressed concerns with expanding Spelman's existing policy to include other genders, as it might jeopardize Spelman's identity as Black women's college and may thwart the institution's founding mission to educate "women" of African descent. This perspective should not be overlooked because it aligns with the longstanding debate on whether admitting and

enrolling transgender and gender non-conforming students alter or uphold the purpose of women's colleges. In addition, her perspective reinforced concerns that may be shared by other students who did not participate in the study that gender inclusive policies might lead to the erasure of one of the few remaining cultural symbols that was purposefully designed for the advancement of Black cisgender women in the United States.

One of the participants disapproved of the policy, not because of an anti-transgender position, but because she felt that the "one-size fits all" nature of the policy failed to take into consideration the fluidity of gender. This notion illustrates the complexities around creating policy based upon social constructs, particularly gender, which can change at any time for an individual or within society. Existing literature on the experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming college students illuminate how many explore, develop, and express their gender identity in college (Dugan et al., 2012, Less, 1998). These studies affirm that many transgender and gender non-conforming students adopt new gender identities, or relinquish them, at various stages of their college experience. Based upon this finding and the larger context, Spelman College should consider the instability of gender, as well as new and emerging understanding of gender within various intersectional contexts (e.g., race, religion, class) and how they may influence institutional policies and practices.

Regarding the behavior of participants surrounding the policy, all participants had either read or discussed aspects of the policy on Twitter or in person with other students. Participants who were high school students during the implementation of the policy read about the policy through Twitter post made by current students. Other participants recalled discussing the policy with their peers on Twitter or within their inner circles on

campus. This finding illustrates how these Black college students used social media to engage in discourse around institutional policies, which could serve as an emerging tool for HBCU leaders to engage with students on new and existing policies and practices. Supporting this, Davis et al. (2015) argued "postsecondary educators should begin to seriously explore the potential to intentionally and strategically harness the power of these revolutionary transformations in technology use to better serve the needs of students to enhance their success" (p. 410). Although some may have concerns about the negative implications of social media for student success, Junco et al. (2010) found that college students who regularly used Twitter had higher graders and increased college engagement than students who did not. Thus, institutions may want to embrace social media as a tool to engage Black college students around institutional matters. It is worth noting that participants were recruited using Twitter, which may mean they rely on social media more than some of their peers.

Students who were enrolled at the time the policy was implemented received emails from administration about the policy. Unlike their regular use of Twitter, none of the participants read the email's content. In addition to Twitter and in person peer conversations, two participants played a more active role in community dialogues. One participant recalled discussing the policy at an Afrekete meeting. The other held a position on the student government association, which allowed her to have deeper conversations with administrators and students about the policy. She shared that she worked closely with the vice president of student affairs and the dean of students on communication strategies for the policy. She also solicited feedback from her peers about how they perceived the policy. In addition, she attended more formal discussions, such as

scheduled town hall meetings, related to the policy implementation; these events were hosted by administration and with the support of the student government association. Students' behaviors regarding the policy suggest that Spelman College may want to consider how students mobilize around institutionalize policies, particularly those around gender and sexuality, as it may provide insight into how students will express their support or opposition of policies. In so doing, they may be better prepared to communicate with the community about such policies in the future.

The cognitive component provided insight to students' understanding of the policy. All had a general, albeit reportedly loose, understanding of Spelman's policy. Participants accurately described Spelman's admissions considerations; however, many either inaccurately described or did not know Spelman's stance on whether students can remain enrolled if they transition to a transman, gender non-conforming, or any other gender expansive identity. Once I shared Spelman's policy in its entirety, and presented it beside other women's colleges' and Morehouse College's policies, they were pleased to learn how inclusive Spelman's policy was in comparison to some other single-gendered institutions. For example, one participant stated that, "I honestly don't remember, I kinda just figured that they had one [transgender admissions and enrollment policy], if Morehouse had one." The participant with strongest understanding of the policy contributed it to her role in the student government association.

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As aforementioned, most participants learned about the policy through peer discussions on Twitter and other spaces on campus. They affirmed that what they did know about the policy was shaped by peer anecdotes instead of through formal communication from the institution. For example, one participant stated,

> I remember it was a big deal when they put that [policy] out, like I wasn't at Spelman yet, but I have been following Spelman for years … so when she [Dr. Mary Campbell, president of Spelman College] put it out there about transgender students I probably read it. So before I came to Spelman, I probably have seen the policy. I just learned more about it when I got here.

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One participant recalled learning more about the policy in their African Diaspora and the World (ADW) class, after they stumbled across a news article that announced Spelman's new policy when conducting research for an assignment. Although the study found that Spelman students engaged in policy discussions primarily with their peers, their lack of attention to policy correspondence from Spelman administrators may lead students to overlook the trans-inclusive efforts made by the college, which could have a negative influence on campus climate.

A common theme emerged in the interviews when discussing Spelman's policy: participants felt that there was likely a potential lack of shared and accurate

understanding of the policy, and this perception may fuel intolerance or opposition of the policy. Albeit a different kind of policy, participants' beliefs mirror existing scholarship on plagiarism, which is also a commonly misunderstood policy by college students. Academic honesty and integrity remain a common concern among colleges and universities, yet most research examining plagiarism among college students exposed how factors such as subjective interpretations of plagiarism, students' inability to grasp plagiarism concepts, and inadequate writing skills perpetuate policy violations (Greenbeger et al., 2016; Guillifer & Tyson, 2013; Jackson, 2006; Powers, 2016). Understanding plagiarism policies may provide a useful example for institutions to preemptively plan to better educate about policies, particularly if misunderstanding has grave consequences for students.

Attitudes Toward Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Students

Similar to findings about attitudes toward the policy, exploring the affective component provided considerable insight into how Spelman students felt about transgender and gender non-conforming students. All participants expressed positive feelings toward transgender and gender non-conforming students, as well as toward diversity broadly. This is noteworthy because contemporary views of Black people toward transgender and gender non-conforming people have been under-examined in scholarship across disciplines. In addition, there is limited literature about Black college students' support of transgender and gender non-

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conforming students and policies. The finding from this study is promising, as there is some scholarship about HBCUs that suggests that Black cisgender heterosexual students contributed to chilly climates and violence toward queer and transgender students (need citation). Despite the participants overwhelming feelings of support, the participant who expressed attitudes of gender blindness felt indifferent toward transgender and gender non-conforming students. As mentioned in the previous section that although some may perceive gender blindness as positive position, it may perpetuate the erasure of Black transgender and gender non-conforming students' experiences and their needs. This participant also had reservations in outwardly supporting transgender and gender non-conforming students and their concerns because of the tendency for people to mislabel advocates as members of the transgender and gender non-conforming communitiy. She shared, "I'm more indifferent. But, I wouldn't be opposed to be an advocate. If I were approached, I would think about it. It's stupid, people assume that if you are an advocate you also identify." Her beliefs highlight two areas, gender blindness and allyship development. Both have a substantial body of literature within higher education; however, little scholarship has examined these two phenomena intersectionally or within the context presented in this study (e.g., Black women, HBCUs, women's colleges).

Because most participants felt overwhelmingly supportive of transgender and gender non-conforming students, I asked them about their perceptions of how other students felt. Participants were mixed about whether other students were supportive of transgender and gender non-conforming students. Four participants stated that students held positive attitudes toward transgender and gender non-conforming students, whereas the remaining did not believe that students had positive attitudes toward this population. The participants with positive perceptions of other students expressed that Spelman students had a strong sense of solidarity that transcended gender differences. In addition, Spelman fosters a culture that promotes the inclusion of students' voices on campus issues. For example, one participant said, "I feel like most people at Spelman are very accepting ... I think that to be yourself is simply amazing and I am proud of my sisters who continue to do that. I think they are so brave and strong."

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Despite participants' positive views of their peers and Spelman's climate for diversity, they acknowledged that Black transgender and gender non-conforming people are doubly marginalized and they could face potential dangers and challenges at Spelman College. Participants also reflected on what would motivate gender non-conforming students to remain enrolled at Spelman College. Many understood how Black ciswomen-centered environments may force gender non-conforming students to either conform to cisgender expectations or hide their gender in spaces that reinforce or promote "sisterhood" or "womanhood" in an effort to minimize the attention placed on their difference. This finding aligns with Hart and Lester's (2011) finding that transgender students can feel both invisible and hyper-visible at women's colleges. After reflecting further, many participants shared why they thought gender non-conforming students would want to remain enrolled. One described an experience with a transman student stating, "a lot of people asked her [this transman uses feminine and masculine pronouns] why would you want to stay at Spelman if you know you want to be a man? And she said that everyone was so accepting of her because she built this community and she loves it so much." This quote demonstrates the power of inter-community dialogue that Spelman students experience and how supportiveness can extend throughout genders. It also reflects the potential for HBCUs, especially those that

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are perceived as conservative Christian institutions (which is discussed in more detail below), to achieve inclusion for queer and transgender students.

Two additional patterns emerged among the six participants who perceived that their peers had largely negative feelings toward transgender and gender non-conforming students: the religiosity of Black Christian cisgender students and classroom experiences.

"I think a lot of it [opposition] has to do with Spelman being a Christian school, and a lot of people that come are staunch southern conservatives."

Participants described rigid beliefs held by southern conservative Black Christian cisgender students and Spelman's deep historical ties to Black Christian values. They shared that they may fuel feelings of intolerance toward transgender and gender non-conforming students. For example, one participant stated, "I think a lot of it [opposition] has to do with Spelman being a Christian school, and a lot of people that come are staunch southern conservatives." Participants expressed that intersections of identity (e.g., race, religion, gender, geography) influenced participants' perception of others' attitudes and Spelman's climate toward transgender and gender non-conforming students.

Participants cited hallmark Spelman symbols such as Sister's Chapel and the institution's motto, "Our School for Christ," to illustrate the institution's proximity to Christianity and its influence on campus. Many of these participants sympathized with transgender and gender non-conforming students for having to navigate conservative spaces, particularly those that privilege students for complying with rigid conservative views that are informed by Christianity, Blackness, and narrow views of gender. For

example, one participant reflected the challenges of navigating those spaces as a Black cisgender Christian. She said, “Spelman is a very Christian faith college. Even with me being spiritual, I sometimes don’t feel like I am connected as much.” This quote illuminates perceptions about how prevalent Christian values are on Spelman’s campus, which is consistent with extant literature about HBCUs (Coleman, 2016; Lenning, 2017; Mobley & Johnson, 2019). Participants also shared that there is a common assumption that Spelman College is comprised of children of southern Black Christian religious leaders. Thus, participants’ perceptions about their peers’ attitudes were not surprising. They shared that students are most likely bringing to campus conservative values surrounding race, gender-identity, and gender roles, which many felt could inhibit campus tolerance to transgender and gender no-conforming students.

Participants’ feelings about other students, as well as Spelman College in general, were shaped by their chilly, and sometimes oppressive, experiences in their ADW class. Many had firsthand experiences where instructors failed to facilitate safe and inclusive conversations around gender-identity, as well as, failed to challenge oppressive ideologies held by students around gender and sexuality. One participant shared how she had to follow up with a gender non-conforming student at the end of class because the instructor

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failed to interject in a heated debated around gender identity. Also, many felt that instructors avoided the topic altogether. For example, one participant said,

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Their experiences provide a glimpse into how some students perceive other students', as well as faculty members', feelings toward transgender and gender non-conforming students. In addition, it demonstrates how failing to challenge oppressive ideologies contributes to perceptions of an unwelcoming climate and can influence students to uphold beliefs that may be harmful and dangerous for transgender and gender non-conforming students.

By reviewing the data through a behavioral lens, findings revealed participants' actions toward transgender and gender non-conforming students. They shared examples of positive behaviors and actions toward transgender and gender non-conforming students. Three behavioral themes emerged: Spelman's culture around the usage of personal names and pronouns; positive peer engagement; and campus involvement in trans-related programming. Without prompting, all participants introduced themselves using their personal pronouns in their interview, which demonstrated their acknowledgement and understanding in the significance of using and honoring individuals' personal pronouns. Several participants noted that Spelman fosters a culture where students are strongly encouraged to use and respect others personal pronouns. Despite their own use of personal pronouns, and its wide use on campus, they did share

accounts of students who intentionally disregarded transgender and gender non-conforming students' personal pronouns. This aligns with findings from Farmers et al.'s (2020) study; they found that transgender and gender expansive students felt that students, faculty, and administrators willfully ignored personal pronouns. Despite largely wide-spread appropriate use of personal pronouns, two participants shared that Spelman's use of gender specific language on institutional documents may be perceived as exclusionary toward transgender and gender non-conforming students. They suggested adopting words and phrases like "sibling" instead of "sisterhood," and "Morehouse brothers" to promote inclusion for transgender and gender non-conforming across Spelman and Morehouse campuses. This suggestion was also listed on the letter posted to Afrekete's Twitter page, which affirms that this is a more widely held belief.

In addition, all participants shared forming positive peer relationships with transgender and gender non-common people; most of which formed as early as high school. For example, one participant said, "in high school there were people that were trans and gender non-conforming that I was friends with." From this quote, it is evident that some students are introduced to gender variant-identities prior to Spelman and they may bring those positive attitudes to campus. Also, many participants expressed that they made positive connections with other students while at Spelman, either at Spelman or at other institutions with the Atlanta University Center. Although most participants had close relationships with transwomen and gender non-conforming students at Morehouse College, in contrast, most participants had limited encounters with transgender and gender non-conforming at Spelman College. It is possible that this lack of connection at Spelman is not because there are no transgender or gender non-conforming students, but

they are not out. This aligns with the findings of Hart and Lester's (2011) study in that transgender students are perceived to be invisible by students, faculty, and staff at a women's college.

Most participants, particularly those who were sophomores and above, had attended at least one general meeting, informative program, and/or demonstration/protest organized by Afrekete. However, none of the first-year students knew about Afrekete and the interview was their first time learning about the organization. Despite their involvement or awareness, or lack thereof, all participants were uncertain about how active the organization was on campus or where to find current information about how to get involved. As a researcher, I shared their sentiment as I, too, had difficulties finding information about Afrekete and connecting with student leaders/members within the organizations. Many participants recalled learning about Afrekete's programming either by happenstance or word of mouth. One participant thought the organization catered largely to a small tightly-knit community of students. Another participant said that Afrekete focused more on queer issues/inclusion rather than on transgender and gender non-conforming students. This raised questions about whether trans-inclusive efforts will or should bring about new student organizations on Spelman's campus specifically for trans-identified students.

The cognitive component revealed participants' understanding of transgender and gender non-conforming students and their experiences. Understanding among participants varied, with most describing their understanding as being general in nature. Several participants expressed that they had a solid understanding of transgender experiences and issues across various contexts (e.g., education, healthcare, housing

insecurity, public safety). Three common themes emerged among participants when they discussed what shaped their understandings of the transgender and gender non-conforming people were: peer and family dynamics; literature and media representation; and their ADW class experience at Spelman College.

Eight participants attributed their awareness of transgender and gender non-conforming people to peers and family members who identify as queer or trans. Participants said that through their peers' and families' lived experience with oppression, they were better able to understand the challenges faced by transgender and gender non-conforming people. Three participants expressed that literature and media heavily influence their understanding of transgender and gender non-conforming people. Two said that their first exposure to transgender people was through television shows, such as *Pose*, which is centered around the experience of Black transwomen in the ballroom scene in New York in the late-1980s and 1990s. In addition, several participants primarily learned about transgender and gender non-conforming people from social media. This is not surprising as most people learn and know about these communities through the lens of television, print, and social media (Snead, 2014).

"I didn't know what queer meant until I started Spelman"

Lastly, the study findings suggest that the ADW class was met with mixed emotions among participants. All participants indicated that their ADW class played an instrumental role in shaping their understanding of sex, gender, and gender identity across the African diaspora, and could identify examples of how the class positively

affected other students. In addition, many participants commended Spelman for having a sequence of first-year classes that educated Black students on intersectional topics within the context of race, ethnicity, gender, gender-identity, sex, and sexuality. For example, one participant stated that "I didn't know what queer meant until I started Spelman." Yet, despite the class' influence, as highlighted in the previous section, some participants had mixed feelings about their ADW experiences. Three participants had positive experiences; in contrast, the remaining seven had negative experiences and/or held negative views of their ADW professors. Many participants described that instructors intentionally avoided controversial topics around gender and sexual identity. For example, one stated,

> So, I would say my first semester teacher didn't cover it well … it's something that rushed over completely … I think they need teachers that better understand these concepts, that can teach students that are coming from all over to try to dismantle the negative bias and thoughts they have about LGBT students.

Another participant stated, "some professors are showing a video, and I was lucky to have an actual conversation. Just professors don't have the depth, don't have the range, don't have the ability to have that conversation because they themselves don't know." Also, another participant stated, "the professor that teaches the class kind of glazed over stuff. Let's say gender identity and sexuality, if were let's say conservative and they didn't really spend a lot of time going in depth about some of the topics". These examples of students' experiences in the ADW class may be worth further investigation about the course's overall efficacy. Although it is evident that the ADW sequence is part of the first-year experience (since it is a required class for first year students), participants

in this study were unable to confirm the nature, learning outcomes, and its linkage to program and institutional goals.

Recommendations[28]

Although the participants largely held positive attitudes toward the revised admissions and enrollment policy, many expressed having concerns with the potential consequences of students not knowing the breadth and scope of the policy regarding transgender and gender non-conforming students. Participants raised concerns that the intersections of race, religion, and geographic upbringing of students, coupled with the institution's affiliations with Christianity, may slow some students' support of the policy.

Participants also had positive attitudes toward transgender and gender non-conforming students at the Spelman. However, participants had mixed perceptions about other students' attitudes toward these communities. Most of the participants felt the students, faculty, staff, and administrators were welcoming to transgender students and gender non-conforming students and shared examples of how Spelman demonstrated gender inclusivity; yet, some felt that some cisgender students' strong Christian beliefs, as well as chilly classroom environments, fueled intolerance.

Moving forward, Spelman College should consider the following recommendations regarding its policy and the ways in which the College can promote an inclusive and safe campus for transgender and gender non-conforming students.

[28] It is important to note that many of these recommendations use examples from and research about predominately and historically White women's colleges. Spelman College should view these recommendations through intersectional frames and make adaptations to best serve its historically and predominately Black campus.

Explore ways to educate prospective and current students on its admissions and enrollment policy, and the institution's stance on admitting and enrolling transgender and gender non-conforming students.

This study found that students formed their understanding of Spelman's policy, and its stance, through peer-to-peer interpretations (either in-person and/or Twitter dialogues) instead of through formal communication from the institution. Misinterpretations or misunderstanding of the policy was common among participants, which may provide a glimpse into how other students may comprehend the policy and perceive Spelman's stance toward transgender students. In addition, these common misinterpretations could place transgender and gender non-conforming at greater risk of experiencing harassment and violence due to gender policing. Gender policing is a form of gender prejudice, profiling, or establishing social expectations about gender performativity (Butler, 1990; Farmers et al., 2020).

Educate students on how admitting and enrolling transgender and gender non-conforming students' align with Spelman College's mission and purpose.

As was the case with one student in this study, others may have concerns that future expansion of trans-inclusive policies may change the identity and culture of Spelman College. Because gender is a social construct that is fluid and capable of changing with time, Spelman should thoughtfully consider ways to routinely assess how inclusive its policies and practices are for all gender identities supported by the institution. In addition, the College may need to redesign some traditions and experiences, particularly those that may be deemed as essential to the Spelman

experience yet perceived by students as perpetuating genderism. For example, one participant suggested that Spelman College adopt the use of "sibling" when referring to Spelman College and Morehouse College students. The recommendation to replace "sisterhood" to "sibling" also echoes one of the action items listed in the letter posted on Afrekete's Twitter account, which was an 11-point letter of recommended actions to combat homophobia, transphobia, and queerphobia at Spelman College. In addition, it mirrors modern-day student-led movements at other women's college regarding trans-inclusive language, such as a recent 2020 student publication written by the editorial staff at Wellesley College titled, *Wellesley College Must Rethink it Exclusionary Language Surrounding Gender.*

Explore ways to address students concerns around Spelman's readiness for gender equity as well as combating gender policing toward transgender and gender non-conforming students.

Although most participants applauded Spelman College for its efforts toward making higher education more accessible for transgender and gender non-conforming students, many felt that the policy implementation was premature because they felt that Spelman College was not prepared to safely accommodate transgender and gender non-conforming within a conservative Black Christian environment. The intersections of Blackness, Christianity, and southern-origins were often linked in participants' description of their perception of Spelman and its students when considering trans-inclusive efforts. Many participants based their concerns around Spelman's readiness, perceived ineptitude of administrators to quickly respond to transgender issues, and the

lack of adequate resources for transgender and gender non-conforming students. One participant shared a chilling account of campus police routinely misgendering a transgender student. She said,

> my issue is with public safety. At Spelman we have a curfew, well there was a time when men would have to be off campus by 12 o'clock. So public safety would consistently confuse her for male, and would try to make her leave campus, which was offensive. And I knew that made her uncomfortable.

This example of gender policing is a common issue for transgender and gender non-conforming students at women's colleges and can be both dangerous and harmful (Farmers et al., 2020). If not already, Spelman leaders should be aware of phenomenon and actively seek ways to combat gender policing, particularly when done by faculty, staff, and administrators.

Spelman College's decision to include transgender and gender non-conforming communities in its policy is monumental, and the institution has an obligation to support these students through their matriculation. Freitas (2017) argued this point stating,

> while these policies are very positive, they are only one step towards creating spaces that support trans students … it is not enough to accept student and disengage from their holistic development once attending the school. Institutions must reach beyond acceptance and provide open support and solidarity for transgender students. (p. 307)

Therefore, Spelman College should continue to solicit feedback from students, particularly non-cisgender students, on what services and support interventions are needed to achieve gender inclusion.

Annually assess the campus climate toward trans-inclusion or exclusion, particularly as more transgender and gender non-conforming students are admitted or become visible on its campus.

Part of this assessment is to be transparent about the number of transgender and gender non-conforming students. Missing within many institutional documents that include current student demographics (e.g., annual *Spelman Fact Books*) are data on the number of transgender and gender non-conforming identified students. This may consequently perpetuate the erasure of these students, despite the institutions efforts and attempts to accept them on its campus (Ford et al., 2020). Ford et al. suggested that having data on transgender and gender non-conforming students can inform the educational trajectories of these students, as well as help to identify gaps and other essential needs and services such as housing, healthcare/wellness, and other student-related services.

Consider the belief and values (e.g., religious, family and personal values, ideologies) and intersecting identities students may bring to campus and how their intersectional views may create hostile, and possibly dangerous, environments for transgender and gender non-conforming students.

There is a robust body of literature that affirms the value of diversity among students on college campuses (Pike et al., 2007; Whitt et al., 2001). However, diversity can lead to conflict and institutions must be prepared to create an environment to address conflict productively. Failure to do so may lead to students who do not share the

homogeneous cisgender normative viewpoints feeling ostracized and perpetuating a climate of genderism (Farmers et al., 2020). Participants perceived Spelman's Christian affiliation, coupled with some rigid Christian views of gender roles and norms, as factors that led to student intolerance. As such, Spelman should strongly consider ways to have intersectional conversations around difference and tolerance. Christian colleges, such as Calvin College and Campbell University, have been recognized for their inclusivity for queer students. They may be helpful resources for information about programming and services that intersects faith, sexuality, and gender.

Assess students' first-year experience, and determine ways to incorporate seminars, or other programming, to raise queer consciousness among students.

Many participants held the belief that students come to Spelman with limited to no exposure to gender identities beyond the gender binary, and that students may encounter transgender and gender non-conforming students for the first time while at Spelman College. This was the case for some of the participants in this study whose first exposure to transgender people were through images from televisions shows or on social media. This phenomenon is not unique to Spelman. The transition to higher education is critical for college students' educational, career, achievements, and academic development (Jenert et al., 2017; Schaeper, 2020; Trautwein & Bosse, 2017). Spelman has existing first-year programs and courses; yet some participants had concerns about whether they adequately prepare students for queer inclusion and tolerance. Students recommended improving the first-year experience as part of the 11-point letter addressed to administration. This recommendation should not undercut the great work Spelman

College has done to incorporate intercultural competencies within its first year experience and curriculum; however, a deeper analysis of potential opportunities for improvements may not only strengthen inclusion efforts at Spelman, but may also provide a framework for other HBCUs and women's colleges.

Centralize queer and trans advocacy programs, resources, and services at Spelman College.

Although Spelman College has a plethora of programs geared toward queer and trans inclusion and gender advocacy (e.g., Social Justice Advocates, the Women's Resources and Research Center, comparative women's studies degree programs, Afrekete, and the new Queer Studies Chair), these efforts appear to operate as independent entities that play unique roles. Spelman College should consider centralizing queer and trans advocacy work through the formation of a taskforce, committee, or designated personnel whose function would be to advocate and promote queer and gender inclusion at Spelman, as well as ensure that institutional policies, practices, and services are inclusive. For example, many of the participants were aware of Afrekete and its efforts, but many were unclear about how to get involved in the organization or if it focused on matters related transgender and gender non-conforming students. For a simpler and immediate approach, Spelman College could consider centralizing all queer and trans-related information and resources on its webpage. Mills College's LGBTQ+ Resource webpage (https://www.mills.edu/student-life/student-resources/lgbtq-resources.php), which includes academic, student life information, campus resources, and health services off campus could be a good model for such an effort.

Encourage African diaspora and women (ADW) faculty to review student feedback on their experience in the ADW 111 and ADW 112 sequence, particularly around facilitating challenging discussions about gender and sexuality.

Although many of the participants felt the courses informed their awareness of gender, gender-identity, and sexuality across the African diaspora, many shared chilly, and some hostile, discussions around gender and sexuality. In addition, many participants described situations when ADW faculty intentionally avoided or perpetuated problematic views of gender and sexuality. Resources from the University of Florida Difficult Dialogues National Resource Center (https://www.difficultdialogues.org/resources) or the University of Alaska Anchorage and Alaska Pacific University's handbook, *Start Talking: A Handbook for Engaging Difficult Dialogues in Higher Education* are possible examples that Spelman may adapt to help faculty engage campus communities in conversations about important issues.

Continue to foster a campus culture where personal pronouns and names are valued and used

Spelman College should continue to foster a culture where personal pronouns are respected and students are informed of their significance toward achieving gender inclusion. However, as Spelman continues work toward gender inclusion, the institution should consider how to employ gender-inclusive language elsewhere. Highlighted in a previous recommendation, there is a call from some students for more gender inclusive language at Spelman College. Students at women's colleges have led movements to

change gender-inclusive language on institutional documents. For example, in 2013, Smith College students decided to remove “she” and “her” from the student government constitutions (Freitas, 2017; Schneider, 2010). Spelman College should continuously review ways to promote gender inclusive language in official documents and public statements. Several women’s colleges have already made some of these changes to adopt gender-inclusive language; Smith and Mount Holyoke Colleges may be good resources for these efforts.

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Appendix A

Participants Identity Matrix

Participant Number	Classification	Race	Gender	Sexual Orientation	Religion	Family Dynamic	Other
1	Sophomore	Black	Cisgender Woman	Straight	Raised Catholic, but aligns more with Muslim	Parents are immigrants from two African Countries Described parents as "liberal"	Native of Virginia
2	Junior	Black	Cisgender woman	Unknown	Believes in God, non-religious	Unknown	Queer Loosely identifies with American, native of Maryland.
3	Junior	Black	Cisgender woman	Unknown	Christian, non-religious	Father is a pastor	Queer
4	Senior	Black	Cisgender woman	Straight	Christian, but more spiritual. Also, into astrology.	Father is a pastor	Queer
5	Sophomore	Black	Cisgender woman	Straight	Agnostic, but raised Christian	Religious family	Native of New York
6	Junior	Black	Cisgender woman	Pansexual	Christin, but more spiritual	Did not disclose	Did not disclose
7	Junior	Black	Gender non-conforming	Lesbian	Did not disclose	Did not disclose	From Georgia, identifies as a non-traditional student
8	Senior	Black	Cisgender woman	Straight	Christian	Did not disclose	Involved in student government association at Spelman.
9	Freshman	African American	Cisgender woman	Straight	Christian, but open to other faiths	First-generation college student. Liberal parents	From Midwest
10	Freshman	Black	Cisgender woman	Straight	Christian	Conservative family, upper-middle class family	Did not disclose additional information

Section Five: Contribution to Research

Contribution to Research

Manuscript Submissions for the Journal of LGBT Youth

In this chapter is a draft of a manuscript to be submitted to the *Journal of LGBTQ Youth*. The draft is formatted to meet the submission requirements outlined by the publication. More information on the manuscript requirement can be found at https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/wjly20/current

A Qualitative Case Study of Spelman College's Students' Attitude toward its Transgender Admissions and Enrollment Policy and other Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Students

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Abstract

This qualitative case study examines the attitudes of 10 Spelman College students about the inclusion of transgender and gender nonconforming identities within its admissions and enrollment policy. Despite positive attitudes toward the policy and expressed support for Spelman's transgender and gender non-conforming students, many had concerns about whether the campus was safe and ready to fully understand and embrace the policy and these communities. This study's findings introduce much-needed conversation about how students view trans-inclusive policies and practices, especially within the context of higher education and, specifically, women's colleges and historically Black colleges and universities.

Keywords: transgender, gender non-conforming; HBCUs; historically Black colleges and universities; women's colleges; attitudes

Research examining transgender related topics within higher education has increased significantly over the past decade, yet many gaps remain on how institutions should support and create inclusive environment for their transgender and gender non-conforming students (TGNCS). Although colleges and universities have made significant strides to make their campus more inclusive to TGNCS, many higher education leaders still struggle to create policies and establish best practices that are consistent across the country and addresses the needs of these students. Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) are largely absent from many of the leading scholarly conversations about TGNCS and there are even fewer studies that examine how college students understand and engage with institutional policies that are aimed to advance gender inclusion.

On September 5, 2017, Dr. Mary Schmdit Campbell, president of Spelman College, announced that Spelman College amended its admissions and enrollment policy to be more inclusive to gender variant identities (Campbell, 2017). Effective beginning the 2018-2019 academic year, prospective students who live consistently as women, regardless of the sex assigned at birth, would be eligible for admissions consideration. Also, current students who transition while enrolled at Spelman could matriculate and graduate from the institution. However, students who identify as men, regardless of the sex assigned at birth, would not be considered for admission.

Spelman College, founded in 1881, is a historically Black private liberal arts women's college located in Atlanta, Georgia. It is one of the most prestigious historically Black institutions and *U.S News & World News Report* (2020) has ranked it as the number one college among historically Black college and universities (HBCUs) for 14

consecutive years. Spelman has received numerous recognitions and awards for its academic programs, as well as the institution's contributions toward the educational and career advancement of Black women (Ranking and Awards, n.d.).

Bennett College, which is the only other historically Black women's college in the United States, modified its admission and enrollment policy in response to growing call for gender inclusion at women's colleges. It did so on January 28, 2017 (Bennet College Policy & Procedures, 2017). Spelman College followed suit shortly thereafter. Despite having similar admissions criteria, the policies themselves differ significantly. In contrast to Spelman's enrollment policy, Bennett's policy is less inclusive. To be admitted and graduate, Bennett students must self-identity as women throughout their matriculation at the college. The differences in these two policies demonstrate how two institutions, with similar cultural backgrounds and academic standards, can approach admissions and enrollment for transgender and gender non-conforming students (TGNCS) differently. These variations are not unique. Rather, there is a lack of consensus among women's colleges across the country on the best practices or considerations for admitting and enrolling TGNCS (Boskey & Ganor, 2020).

Trans-inclusive policies at Spelman College mark a new chapter for the institution, and for HBCUs collectively, to work toward gender inclusion. These efforts are more crucial now given the recent studies that report that prospective and current Black TGNCS are likely to navigate chilly, and possibly dangerous, environments on and off-campus (Garvey et al., 2019 Nicolazzo, 2016a). Despite these studies and a growing body of literature about TCNCS at colleges and universities (Beemyn, 2019; Beemyn et al., 2005; Hart & Lester, 2011; Marine, 2012; Nicolazzo, 2016a, 2016b, 2017), the

research is still limited, particularly when considering attitudes and behaviors of students about TGNCS at woman's colleges and HBCUs. This study is an effort to address that gap by focusing on students' attitudes toward inclusive admissions and enrollment policies at Spelman College.

Purpose of the Study

Transgender students and gender non-conforming students are increasingly out and present on today's college campuses (Beemyn, 2019). As such, it is reasonable to assume that similar trends exist within the Black community. According to *A National Epidemic: Fatal Anti-Transgender Violence in the United States in 2020,* an annual report by the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), in 2020, at least 26 transgender or gender non-conforming people were fatally shot or killed. The HRC reported 2020 as the deadliest year for transgender and gender non-conforming people, and Black transwomen remain the largest group affected by the epidemic. Although their report was not specific to college campuses, the larger national context is relevant for all transgender and gender non-conforming people and their sense of belonging and feeling welcomed generally, including on college campuses.

As more colleges and universities, and more specifically HBCUs and women's colleges, make higher education opportunities more accessible to Black TGNCS, it is imperative that campus leaders and scholars understand how transphobia, cisnormativity, and genderism affect these efforts; in addition, they must actively work to ensure that our campuses are safe and inclusive for these communities. Institutional polices, like the admissions and enrollment policy in which I am interested, are designed as a measure to combat discrimination and oppressive structures and systems toward TGNCS within

higher education. Scholars argued that they are essential for an inclusive and safe campus (Freitas, 2017; Goldberg et al., 2018; Wagner et al, 2018). Yet, how college students understand, adhere, and perceive such policies and their consequences is largely unknown.

Now that all remaining single-gender HBCUs have revised their admissions policies to consider trans-identities, scholarship examining how HBCUs students embrace these students are critical to understand the effectiveness of diversity and inclusion efforts at these institutions. In addition, the study will inform how college students broadly understanding policies aimed at trans-inclusion on their campuses. College students play a significant role in creating the environments for their campus. Therefore, by understanding students' attitudes it will give scholars and campus leaders with a better sense of the extent to which students are aware of these policies and how they contribute to a safe and inclusive campus. The study will also uncover whether more work is needed to maximize the intended outcomes of these policies, and whether higher education leaders should examine students' attitudes toward institutional policies more broadly, particularly those designed to increase access to populations that may be deemed as controversial (e.g., undocumented students, justice impacted students).

This study was part of a larger study that also explored Spelman College students' attitudes about TGNCS. For the purpose of this manuscript, I focus on students' attitudes about the recent gender-inclusive admissions and enrollment policy. Although I am not focusing in great depth about students' attitudes toward TGNCS students, they do play a role in the overall policy context. The research question I will answer is:

- How do undergraduate students at Spelman College describe their attitudes toward its transgender admissions and enrollment policy?

Theoretical Framework

To guide the study, I employ Allport's (1935) Tricomponent Attitude Model (TAM). The model is utilized primarily as a social theory and theoretical framework in consumer sciences, economics, and psychology studies to understand consumer attitudes toward products. Although the focus of this study is not on consumers and products, I found the model was a useful framework to understand individuals' attitudes toward other elements, in this case, policy.

According to the TAM, attitudes have three components: affective, behavioral, and cognition (Allport, 1935). The *affective* components focus on a person's feelings or emotional reaction toward an object, which could be either positive or negative. The *behavioral* component focuses on a person's intentions or behaviors toward that object. This component clarifies the potential relationship that could exist between behavior and an object. Lastly, the *cognitive* component focuses on the person's beliefs, thoughts, and perceptions they have toward an object. This is often associated with a person's knowledge of the object. For the purpose of this study, the Spelman policy will be akin to a product/object in TAM and Spelman's students will be the people reacting to the policy. I will use this theoretical framework to conduct a multidimensional analysis of Spelman students' attitudes about the policy.

Review of Relevant Literature

Because the literature specific to this particular policy and institutional context (i.e., students' attitudes about admissions and enrollment polices at Black women's colleges) is limited, I pulled from related studies to inform my research. First, I provide

an overview of the literature and legal briefs about transgender admission and enrollment practices at women's colleges. Next, I explore literature that examines students' attitudes toward TGNCS and trans-inclusive policies women's colleges. Lastly, I present a review of scholarship focused on transgender students at HBCUs, particularly at those that examined policies related to gender expression.

Women's Colleges and Transgender Admissions and Enrollment Practices

Admitting and enrolling TGNCS at women's colleges has been a highly debated topic within higher education; Weber (2016) traced the debate as far back as the 1970s and described it as polarizing within the feminist community. Existing scholarship that examined transgender topics within the context of women's colleges is scarce, and research examining these topics within racialized contexts across education fields is practically non-existent. However, below, I review the legal studies and higher education scholarship that are salient for this study.

The few legal briefs that I found provided recommendations for how women's colleges should interpret Title VII of Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VII) and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX). These legal analyses largely supported admitting transgender students (Buzuvis, 2013; Heise, 2019; Kraschel, 2012). These two monumental laws significantly reshaped the landscape for women within the workplace, as well as within higher education. Although both laws were not enacted with the intent to advance transgender people, they helped provide some legal protections and rights for them.

Some women's colleges used Title IX to justify their exclusion of TGNCS. However, legal scholars took this justification to task, debunking common

misinterpretations of Title IX law (Buzuvis, 2013; Heise, 2019; Kraschel, 2012). Although these briefs provided legal opinions for how Title VII and Title XI can be applied to advance gender inclusion at women's colleges, they also illuminated how precise documentation about a student's gender must be provided if the institution intended to include TGNCS. For example, if a student provides documentation that is inconsistent or misaligns their sex or gender, it could jeopardize TGNCS admissions consideration and/or enrollment. In some states, there have been advances that have made changing legal documents for transgender and gender non-conforming people quicker and less burdensome. However, access to services to legally change names and gender markers remain a significant barrier for transgender and gender non-conforming people in the United States (Wolfe & Walde, 2020). As such, relying on laws like Title VII and Title IX to foster gender inclusion, is only as effective as other factors allow. Thus, TGNCS students may fact potential road blocks no matter what the law or institutional permits for their enrollment and graduation from a women's college.

Students' Attitudes toward TGNCS at Women's Colleges

The limited scholarship about the TGNCS primarily focuses on predominately White liberal arts women's colleges within the Seven Sisters.[29] Researchers found TGNCS described their collegiate experiences as both positive and negative (Farmers et al., 2020; Hart & Lester, 2010; Kraschel, 2012; Marine; 2012; Nanney & Brunsma; 2017; Weber, 2016). For example, Hart and Lester (2011) conducted a case study that included faculty, staff, and students at a highly selective women's college that recently adopted an admissions and enrollment policy designed to be more inclusive. They found that

[29] The Seven Sisters is a network of highly selective liberal arts college located in the Northeastern region of the United States that are historically founded as women's colleges.

participants described transgender students as being invisible and hypervisible. Transgender students were invisible because they were largely unrecognized and unacknowledged, particularly by campus leaders. Transgender students were also hypervisible, called on to serve as spokespeople to the campus community about trans* experiences. Despite claims that the campus sought to be more welcoming, invisibility and hypervisibility were markers of oppression and discrimination. Thus, these efforts failed.

Other scholarship chronicled trans-inclusive movements at women's college (Marine, 2012; Schneider, 2010), which were largely spearheaded by students across the gender spectrum. Because of student activism, many of today's remaining women's colleges have either adopted or are currently working toward adopting policies and practices similar to coeducational colleges and universities to promote gender inclusion (Marine, 2012; Schneider, 2010). For example, institutions are changing admission and enrollment policies to allow for gender variant identities, updating non-discrimination policies, allowing for students to change documents to reflect their preferred name, and altering institutional documents to reflect gender inclusive terms (Marine, 2012; Weber, 2016).

HBCUs and Transgender Students

As mentioned, research exploring transgender and gender non-conforming topics at HBCUs is largely absent. Most empirical studies on gender and HBCUs are comparative and binary in nature, focusing primarily on socio-cognitive and academic performance (e.g., Cokley, 2000; Gasman et al., 2014; Kim & Conrad, 2006) between cisgender men and women. This is not because transgender and gender non-conforming

people are not present on HBCU campuses. Instead, many of the studies are rather dated and researchers may have intentionally or unintentionally approached gender within the binary of men and women, as is often the case even in more recent scholarship (Hyde et al., 2018; Robins & McGowan, 2016). Studies that mention transgender or gender non-conforming students often focus on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ) students' experiences collectively. This approach leads to transgender students' issues, needs, and achievements getting lost within this *"*LGBTQ*"* umbrella, and conflates gender expression and sexual orientation (Carter, 2013; Dugan et al., 2012; Marine, 2012; Pusch, 2005).

The extant literature about LGBTQ topics within HBCUs reported a very chilly, and sometimes violent, climate for non-cisgender and non-heterosexual students (Coleman, 2016; Harper & Gasman, 2008; Lenning, 2017; Mobley & Johnson, 2015, 2019; Patton, 2014). As many colleges and universities in the United States modified their policies and practices to make their campuses more welcoming to LGBTQ students, many HBCUs maintained the status quo or lagged behind their counterparts (Cantey et al., 2013; Gasman, 2013; Kirby, 2011; Lewis & Erickson, 2016). Scholars argued that this often due to the connection of many of these institutions with deep conservative and Christian roots and their ties to African American community (Coleman, 2016; Lenning, 2017; Mobley & Johnson, 2015, 2019).

HBCUs and Christianity are powerful institutions within the African American community (Coleman, 2016; Gasman & Nguyen, 2015; Patton, 2014), as both have played vital roles in fostering community, educating Blacks, and advocating for civil rights during some of the most oppressive eras in the United States for the

Black Americans. However, Christian ideology has also oppressed and demonized members of the LGBTQ community for centuries and it is often at the epicenter of homophobia and transphobia within the Black community (Coleman, 2016; Patton, 2015).

As an example of the complexities of gender within the Black community, in 2009, Morehouse College, an all-men's HBCU, which is a neighbor of Spelman College within the Atlanta University Center (AUC), was highly criticized for the implementation of the "Morehouse Appropriate Attire Policy." The policy, when enforced, censored how men dressed (Mobley & Johnson, 2019; Patton, 2014). Although the 11-point policy was meant to cover an array of inappropriate clothing and/or appearances, one of the points prohibited students from wearing "women's" garments to class and campus-sponsored events. Many of the college's administrators justified the policy by claiming that it was meant to help mold students into Black global leaders and to foster learning environments that were free from distractions (Coleman, 2016). Many higher education practitioners and scholars condemned the policy for its insensitivity toward students who may express their gender in non-traditional ways, its use as a catalyst for policing gender variance, and for upholding hetero-and cis- normative ideologies (citations). Since drawing attention to this policy, critiques of other conservative and restrictive dress code polices at other HBCUs emerged (Coleman, 2016; Lenning, 2017; Patton, 2014). For example, Coleman's (2016) study noted Morehouse's policy, but included six other HBCUs that were not single gender that also had gender-specific dress code policies.

There is limited scholarship about how HBCUs, like Morehouse and Spelman Colleges, have rebounded and reformed their practices, services, and programs to be

more inclusive to LGBTQ and gender non-conforming students. Some exceptions include research about queer gender-inclusive practices in student housing and the development of LGBTQ student organizations (Gasman, 2013; Lewis & Erickson, 2016). Spelman College has been a leader in many of these efforts (Mobley & Johnson, 2015; Spelman College, 2019; Williams, 2014). For example, Spelman was the first HBCUs to offer a women's research center, the Women's Research and Resource Center (WRRC), and the first to offer a women's studies major (Mobley & Johnson, 2015; Williams, 2014). More recently, they announced a new queer studies chair position, which would make Spelman the first HBCU to offer an academic program in queer studies (Spelman College, 2019). Scholars have also highlighted its LGBTQ student organization, Afrekete, and student leadership projects that address topics around sexuality, gender, and inclusivity at HBCUs (Coleman, 2016, Pennamon, 2018; Williams, 2014). Given Spelman's leadership among HBCUs to improve the climate for TGNCS, it is an ideal case to examine students' attitudes toward a relatively recent admissions and enrolment policy.

Methodology and Method

This study is a qualitative single holistic case study. Case studies allow researchers to examine a phenomenon in depth, within real contexts, that are bounded by one location (Creswell, 2007, Yin, 2014). A case study is an appropriate method for this research because I am interested in studying attitudes (i.e., phenomena) and this study is bounded to Spelman College, its policy, and current students. The primary data sources are interview transcripts with Spelman students; however, I also analyzed an artifact as a supplemental data source.

Participants Recruitment

I recruited participants using convenience sampling by way of the social media platform, Twitter. This was a useful strategy, as the study was conducted during a global health pandemic, and students were taking courses on-line and were not living on campus. Spelman-related hashtags, as well as comments and retweets made from official Spelman departmental and student organization Twitter accounts, helped me identify current Spelman students. Descriptors within user profiles such as "1881," and "spelmanite," coupled with their graduation years were also used to narrow down potential students. Interested students responded to recruitment tweets about the study by email, and pre-screening questions were emailed to those expressing interest to ensure that participants met the study's criteria. The study criteria required that participants were currently enrolled at Spelman and were above the age of 18.

Out of 267 students I contacted directly using Twitter, only 10 responded who met the study's criteria. Participants represented a wide range of social group identities, classification, and educational majors and goals. Nine identified as Black women; among those, one identified as cisgender and queer. One participant describes themselves as primarily a woman, and at times, they describe themselves as gender non-conforming. Most participants identified as Christian; four participants considered themselves more spiritual than religious. Two of the participants were daughters of religious leaders. Lastly, nine of the participants identified as heterosexual, and one as queer.

Data Collection

I conducted interviews using the video conferencing platform, Zoom. The interviews ranged between 30 to 60 minutes in length. I used a semi-structure interview

protocol that asked participants to reflect on their experiences at Spelman and thoughts about the admissions and enrollment policy. These questions were framed by the three components of attitudes within Allport's (1935) model. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed, with participant consent.

In addition to the interview transcripts, I used a letter of community demand for institutional changes related to LGBTQ inclusion and against anti-LGBTQ+ hate and violence from the 2018-2019 academic year as a data source. Although the letter indicated support from faculty, students, and alumnx, it was tweeted from Afrekete's Twitter account. Because none of the participants were members of Afrekete, this artifact provided another glimpse into students' attitudes toward the campus climate and actions administrators should take to make the campus safe and welcoming for TGNCS.

Data Analysis

For the transcripts, I used deductive, emergent, and in vivo coding in the first cycle of analysis (Saldaña, 2016). The deductive codes were the three components of TAM (Allport, 1935). I identified additional codes based on emergent themes across multiple participants. I used emotion coding for the second cycle to help make meaning of students' experiences and points of views and to identify additional emerging themes that were shared among students. I also coded the artifact deductively using the predetermined set of codes from the framework.

Positionality

My positionality significantly influenced how I interpreted the data, and influenced the relationship between the participants and me. As such, it is critical for me to identify personal bias, identities, values, and assumptions (Creswell, 2009). I am a

Black queer man of trans experience[30] from Atlanta, Georgia. I was raised by a southern African American, moderately conservative, Christian family. I am also a graduate of a historically Black university, and I once worked at one. I recognize that my intersecting identities and experiences at HBCUs inform how I conduct this study. Because I am not affiliated with Spelman College, I am interpreting Spelman culture and norms from an outsider perspective.

Trustworthiness

To enhance the trustworthiness of the study, before coding I asked participants to review interview transcripts for accuracy. Elo et al. (2014) describe this as *conformability,* which is process that ensures that "the data accurately represents the information that the participants provided and the interpretations of those data are not invited by the inquirer" (p. 5). I triangulated findings from the artifact and interview transcripts to demonstrate the credibility of the findings and to determine whether data sources align or conflict with themes (Leavy, 2017).

Limitations

There were uncontrollable external factors that influenced several aspects of this study: the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), racial unrest and the Black mattering movements, and the focus of the study. During the data collection process, the global COVID-19 pandemic began. The pandemic disproportionately affected Black and Brown Americans (Millet et al., 2020). In addition, the United States experienced heightened racial unrest related to the high-profile murder of four Black Americans. I anticipate that my participant numbers were lower than expected because of stress and anxiety related to

[30] Person of trans experience is a term used by people who have or had a transgender experience.

coping and living within these two experiences. Also, because of the complexity and controversial nature of the study topic at an institution like Spelman, students with limited understanding or lack of awareness of transgender and gender non-conforming people, their issues, as well as gender and gender-identity, may also have been less inclined to participate in this study.

In addition, because I am not affiliated to Spelman College, my access to students was limited to those I could find on Twitter. Because most Spelman students were not on campus due to COVID-19, I was not able to recruit students in person, as originally planned. Further, students may have been reluctant to discuss personal their views, beliefs, and experiences with an outsider of Spelman College, and someone who did not share the same gender identity as them. In addition, because of the reliance on Twitter for access to participants, the salience of Twitter and other social media may be greater for those who participated than other students at Spelman.

Findings

Affective

Nearly all the participants expressed support for the policy; however, one reported a more neutral position, and another disapproved. Many of the policy supporters held a common belief that education is a fundamental human right, and that people should have access to education regardless of their sex or gender identity. For example, one participant stated, “it’s amazing that Spelman has allowed transgender women to enter our spaces. Because they are women no matter what they look like and no matter how they were born.”

The participant who was more neutral about the policy attributed her feelings to believing that transgender and gender non-conforming people are no different from other

people. She stated that she views people as humans instead of by labels. However, her perspectives about gender were complicated. She expressed concern should the policy expand, as it could jeopardize Spelman's identity as a women's college. The student who disapproved of the policy stated that she felt that policy had limitations and that there should not be a "one-size fits all approach" to the policy; the policy should take into consideration the fluidity of gender-identity. She did report that despite the policy's shortcomings, she felt the institution was moving in the "right direction."

Despite overwhelming support and praise for the policy, many had concerns about the campus' readiness and whether the institution could adequately support TGNCS. Some felt that the policy implementation was premature because they felt that Spelman College was not prepared to safely accommodate TGNC within a conservative Black Christian environment. They cited factors such as lack of available resources for TGNCS and administrators' failure to urgently address TGNC related issues that arise on campus. Many of them discussed intersectional factors related to race, cisgender identity, Christian-faith, and geographic background of students. Participants stated that these complex factors, coupled with their perception of Spelman College as a Black conservative Christian-affiliated institution, might lead to opposition, or slow embrace of the policy by other students.

Behavioral

All the participants shared that they had either read or discussed details of the policy on Twitter or in-person with other students. Those who were still in high school when the policy was first implemented shared that they read exchanges about the policy among Spelman students on Twitter. Among those who were Spelman students at the

time of implementation, all expressed receiving emails from administrators about the policy, but none admitted they read the email content.

Although most of the discussion about the policy was via social media, one participant shared that they discussed it in an Afrekete meeting. Despite participants' knowledge of Afrekete, and many attending several of their programs, none were active members. Another had considerable engagement with the policy because of her role in student government. She shared that she worked closely with the vice president of student affairs and the dean of students to develop how the policy would be communicated to students. She also solicited feedback from students about how they perceived the policy. Lastly, she attended town hall meetings about the policy.

Cognitive

Participants had a general understanding of the policy; however, none described their understanding as deep or complete. The participant who had the strongest understanding of the policy was involved with the student government association. However, without prompting, all participants accurately described Spelman's admissions considerations for transwomen. Yet, they either inaccurately explained or did not know Spelman's enrollment policy for students who do not identify as women. After I shared Spelman's policy, and juxtaposed it against policies of other women's colleges, many were pleased that Spelman had one of the most inclusive policies among women's colleges. A few participants noted that Spelman's admissions and enrollment policy was identical to that at Morehouse College. One participant assumed Spelman had a policy because she knew about Morehouse's, "I honestly don't remember. I kinda just figured that they [Spelman College] had one, if Morehouse had one."

Many of the participants expressed their knowledge about the policy was incomplete. This, as well as other students' lack of understanding, could fuel misinformation about the policy and Spelman's stance on TGNCS. Some recognized that misunderstandings could place transgender and gender non-conforming at greater risk of discrimination, harassment, violence, and gender policing. For example, one participant shared an account of a transwoman student who was routinely denied access to campus by campus police due to misgendering. Although this anecdote was used to critique Spelman's readiness, it also demonstrates how misunderstanding or lack of awareness of the policy can oppress TGNCS.

All participants discussed gender and gender identity within their required African Diaspora and World[31] courses (ADW), which for some, informed their understanding of gender, trans and non-binary identities, and the significance of Spelman's policy within Black contexts. For example, one participant shared that she first learned about queer identities in her ADW class. Others lauded the courses as essential because some students may not have met or heard of trans-identities prior to enrolling at Spelman. Although most participants valued their ADW experience, they had mixed views of the climate created by cisgender students and ADW faculty when discussing queer, trans, or gender non-conforming identities in class. Some participants described chilly and hostile classroom environments when they discussed trans identities. These classroom experiences, whether positive or negative, informed their views on Spelman's readiness for the policy.

[31] ADW111 and ADW 112 a set of courses that are part of Spelman's first-year experience. This two semester course sequence promotes self-discovery, experiences of Black women throughout history and across the African diaspora and the world

Discussion and Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, Spelman students largely had positive attitudes toward the institution's policy. Elements of the TAM created the study's themes about these attitudes. Next, I take the TAM a step further to discuss the findings in greater depth.

Students praised Spelman's efforts to create the policy. However, although most expressed positivity, many expressed some reticence. Other cisgender students' views, which are informed by their intersecting identities (e.g., race, gender, religion, geographic location) and Spelman's ties to Christianity, may slow other students' support of the policy. This finding is consistent with previous scholarship (e.g., Coleman, 2016; Gasman & Bowman, 2011; Gasman & Nguyen, 2015; Harper & Gasman, 2008) that highlights the challenges queer, trans and gender non-conforming face at conservative HBCUs. Additionally, it affirms the need for more intersectional research aimed at examining and challenging oppressive structures (e.g., respectability politics, genderism, transphobia, queerphobia) that have historically oppressed queer and TGNCS at these institutions.

The participant who had a more neutral, but complicated, stance toward the policy highlights the possibility of gender-blind ideologies among students, which ultimately reinforces the gender binary. More research should be conducted on the effects of gender blindness on gender inclusive efforts at HBCUs, particularly those affecting TGNCS. This participant also represents a population of students who may have concerns that future expansion of the policy may jeopardize Spelman's identity and culture. To address this, single-gender colleges, including HBCUs, should regularly affirm how admitting

and enrolling TGNCS aligns with their mission and purpose, as contemporary understandings of gender evolve.

The participant who opposed the policy represents a population of students who sees its limitations, particularly among those who feel that gender is too unstable to be bounded by a policy. This finding calls into question the efficacy of institutional policies that are centered on students' identities that are fluid. It also demonstrates the need for HBCUs, as well as single-gender institutions, to consider establishing regular policy review cycles to ensure that policies are appropriate and effective over time as conceptualizations of identities continue to unfold.

The behavioral component illuminated students' actions related to the policy. Most participants had discussions about the policy with their peers, primarily through Twitter. This is not surprising because many of the participants described Twitter as the most popular platform to converse about happenings on campus. Other social media platforms (e.g., Instagram, Tumblr, Snapchat) also played a role in introducing them to trans-related topics. A few participants expressed attending trans-centered events organized by Afrekete. What is evident is that peer-to-peer information sharing about important campus issues, like the policy, was more effective than formal communication from the institution. More research should be conducted on whether peer-to-peer interventions raise trans- and queer-awareness, as well as their efficacy as a mechanism for discussing institutional policies at HBCUs.

The cognitive component exposed what students knew about the policy. All participants admitted that they did not have a deep understanding of the policy, and some recognized how their, as well as their peers', understanding of the scope of the policy

could directly affect the campus' climate for TGNCS. Other areas within policy research provide a glimpse into the adverse effects when college students misinterpret policies. For example, scholarship examining college students' difficulties grasping plagiarism policies argued factors such as varying interpretation of policies, students' grasp of plagiarism concepts, and below-level writing skills contribute to confusion, misinterpretations, and violation of these policies (Guillifer & Tyson, 2013; Jackson, 2006; Powers, 2016). Plagiarism policies are different than the admission and enrollment policy at the heart of this study; however, the implications of policy misinterpretation explored in the plagiarism studies suggests that the purpose of policies may not be fully realized if they are not clearly understood. More research is needed about the implications of policy misinterpretation for students and for the campus culture.

Conclusion

This study provided foundational knowledge about students' attitudes toward trans-inclusive policies and practices at an historically Black women's college, addressing a gap in the literature. Although existing literature revealed that most trans-inclusive movements at historically White women's colleges have been led by students (Kraschel, 2012; Marine, 2012), little is known about how Black students engaged in or supported trans-inclusive movements and policies within historically Black Christian cisgender spaces.

The study found that Spelman students held positive attitudes toward the admissions and enrolment policy, which was expressed through their feelings, actions, and comprehension. Spelman's decision to implement this policy was a step toward gender-inclusion. Despite their positive attitudes, participants also revealed concerning

perceptions they had of their peers and of Spelman College's ability to be fully trans-inclusive. Participants raised valid concerns that could mirror how other students view trans-inclusive policies and efforts at their single-gender institution. These concerns should not be overlooked. More trans-centered research and campus climate assessments are critical if these institutions plan to admit and enroll TGNCS and consider other policies to further support a more gender inclusive women's college community.

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Section Six: Scholarly Practitioner Reflection

I have organized the reflection into three sections: a self-reflection, practitioner reflection, and researcher reflection. It is important to first discuss how this process has changed me personally, because who we are and our experiences mold us into the scholarly practitioners we become. The section also explains how this study made me reflect on my own journey with gender-identity, and its connection to the study and trans-abolitionist work. Next, I will discuss what I have learned throughout this research experience and ways it has informed my practice, particularly around policy and amplifying student voices. Lastly, I will reflect on my experience as a researcher, as well as discuss my future research agenda.

Self-Reflection

My dissertation journey had several high and low moments, many of which I attributed to the normal set of achievements and challenges new scholars face in completing their dissertation. However, what made this experience unique was the number of unintended external circumstances that had significant implications for the study. As soon as I began the data collection for the study in March of 2020, the United Sates was grappling with widespread novel coronavirus (COVID-19) infections and related deaths. Many states adopted shelter-in-place orders, which consequently forced many in the U.S., especially Black Americans, into unemployment and economic hardship. Because Black Americans represented a significant portion of essential workers, many had to work despite the risk to the health and safety of them and their families. As I spent many days of the pandemic at home, I wrestled with my own privilege of being able to experience most of the lockdown protected from COVID-19

and employed, as I know that was not the case for many people in my community. I also could not help but think about how COVID-19 was affecting students in every level of education, especially Black students, as this pandemic could further the educational achievement and degree attainment gaps that already exist.

The mattering of Black lives took center stage during these months, as protest and demonstrations against the murder of Black lives occurred across the nation and the world. The deaths of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Rayshard Brooks, and the many other Black lives lost, exposed institutionalized systems of police brutality, anti-Blackness, White supremacy, and transphobia within the context of the hardships COVID-19 caused for many Black Americans. Black mattering movements ignited across the country, as the country attempted to join in solidarity around this cause; yet consequently, it triggered an uprising in anti-Blackness, White nationalism, and resistance against acknowledging how policing and the justice system fail Black Americans. I experienced moments of racial battle fatigue while compartmentalizing those feelings to be present at work and to complete this study.

Also, 2020 was marked as of the deadliest year for Black transwomen in the United States by the Human Rights Campaign. Despite the many efforts of Black trans and Black feminist activist to bring visibility to this epidemic, many of the victims' stories were overshadowed by larger Black mattering movements, which were centered largely around the death of Black cisgender men. Therefore, I am committed to bring visibility to Black gender issues, particular those who are trans and gender non-conforming, within higher education. I also commit to other forms of trans abolitionist work within my practice and research.

Despite all these circumstances, I was able to find moments of resilience and affirmation that my Black body matters and that my research matters. The health pandemic and mattering movements shifted my views of students as being simply "students," but to viewing them as human beings with lived experiences. I will discuss this in more detail later in this section.

I am extremely thankful to my dissertation chairs, colleagues, and friends who encouraged me to continue to research and reminded me that this work is critical for Black queer and transgender college students, particularly those attending historically Black institutions. This project moved from being more than just a study that would satisfy my degree requirements to a step toward activism for Black transgender and gender non-conforming students in and outside of historically Black spaces. It also caused me to deeply reflect on my own identity, rediscovering things about myself that I had tucked away, which may have played a significant role in why the study's topic became important to me.

Of Trans-Experience Identity

It was not until this project that I acknowledged, and possessed the language to define, my own trans-experience identity. Although this is a relatively new term, the notion of gender fluidity has been around for hundreds of years. However, like many of the participants in my study, most of what I knew about trans-identities were influenced by mainstream or popularized identities. It was not until recently that I had the language to describe the period of my life where I was navigating between my sexuality and my gender identity. I spent several of my young adult years experimenting with my gender identity and gender expressions, as the Black gay-scenes in Atlanta provided a safe space

for this exploration. I even went by a feminine name, which many friends still call me to this day. I remember that period as one of the most liberating eras of my life, yet one of darkest as well. Because of this, I decided to forfeit that gender identity and persona for one that would help me advance within my career, which reminded me of how others may have conformed to binary gender expectations and identities for survival.

At this time, I feel comfortable living consistently as a Black queer man, as I have a new understanding and appreciation for gender identity development, In addition, I feel confident stepping outside of traditional gender norms and expectations about my gender. I also have developed strong relationships with other men who recognizes the complexity and fluidity of gender, thereby affirming my identity and belonging in masculine spaces.

One of the biggest take-aways from this study is that it allowed me to confront my past in ways I did not imagine. Throughout the duration of the study, I began to see myself in prospective and current gender queer students at historically Black colleges. I could not help but think about what I needed at their age to safely explore gender and/or sexual identities on a college campus, especially at a historically Black institution. I plan to do more self-exploration on my gender journey, with hopes that I may share my story with others someday. Also, I hope that stories like mine illuminate how gender-identity is expanding within the Black American community.

Practitioner Reflection

As I reflected on the research experience, what became very clear was the need for practitioners and policymakers to include students' voices in policy decisions, as well as a need to evaluate their understanding of policies and how they will affect campus climate. Student voices are arguably one of the greatest tools that practitioners have for

understanding students' experiences and needs. Therefore, student voices are what shapes our practices, processes, policies, and the procedures we implement on our campus. Although I was able to find enough students to achieve data saturation and to complete the study, it forced me to think about what voices were present, those who were missing, and why. Admittedly, I began this study with an oversimplified expectation that students would openly and willingly talk about their thoughts and opinions, particularly those around social justice. I had moments of frustration because I could observe students actively engaging in activism on social media, yet pass over an opportunity to discuss ways to improve their school's campus climate, and possibly that of others campuses. I was forced to reconcile my own assumptions about what compels students to share their stories. Each potential student I contacted via Twitter reminded me of the humanistic aspect of students, and that they are more than just a number at an institution, or emails within a university listserv. Once I captured their attention, students' stories were amazing.

In addition, this project also provided an opportunity for me to deepen my understanding of educational policies, particularly those at the intersections of college access and campus climate. As a practitioner who has spent almost a decade working in enrollment management at minority-serving institutions, I often only viewed enrollment policies through the lens of race and class, because many of the leading conversations around admissions and enrollment practices are centered on these two social categories within higher education. This study required that I examine admissions and enrollment policies, as well as their influence on campus climate, on a micro-level (Spelman College) and on macro-levels (comparing policies across women's college regardless of

designation). It became very clearly throughout this study that enrollment management leaders should critically examine enrollment policies, practices, and procedures, as these significantly influence who should have access to education and by what conditions.

Because the landscape of higher education is continuously changing, new student groups will emerge with their own unique set of challenges. This study highlights a student population who may be perceived by some as controversial, especially within the context of "traditionally" gendered spaces. Higher education is becoming more inclusive to student populations who are often met with opposition. Yet, this study illuminates the challenges of implementing inclusive policies related to social constructs (e.g., gender, immigration status, justice-impacted) that are continuously changing. In addition, it highlights how admissions and enrollment policies, despite their inclusive intent, can adversely affect how students navigate their campuses if other supporting interventions are not implemented.

Research Reflection

This research experience was one of the most rewarding and fulfilling moments within my educational and professional career. I was able to finally investigate, and possibly publish, work in an area that I am passion about and one that could contribute positively to higher education research and Black queer studies. In addition, this experience has taught me the importance of developing a deep connection with topics within the field and allowing myself space to grow during the research process. I have a much deeper understanding of educational policies, more specifically their strengths and their limitations, than from when I started this study. I also appreciated the process of allowing concepts to marinate in my head for weeks, so that new emerging themes and

perspectives can emerge. Although I carried a lot of guilt associated with the length of time it took for me to finish this dissertation-in-practice, I would not have been able to make the connections I made in this project if I would have rushed the process.

Lastly, during the data collection process, I made connections with other higher education scholars. Despite my initial struggles with recruiting students on Twitter, I surprisingly gained a huge following of doctoral students and researchers who applauded and affirmed my research. I hope to continue building connections with other researchers in the hope of beginning to collaborate with other scholars on topics that align with my research agenda.

Research Agenda

This project helped me discover my research agenda. Admittedly, up until the start of this project, I had several research interests. I quickly realized that it would be practically impossible for me to develop a deeper connection and understanding of topics, if I were to attempt to spread my efforts across different areas. During this project, I was able to negotiate what topics I was most interested in, as well as which areas would yield the most benefit for the higher education community. Therefore, I have decided to focus my research agenda on critical analysis of Black queerness within higher education, as well as educational policies and their implication for minority serving-institutions. Black queer studies will remain my passion, as I spent most of my graduate career dedicated to examining Black queer topics at HBCUs. However, I have recognized that exploring these topics may be difficult living on the west coast, and without proper support from administration. Therefore, I have decided to broaden my research agenda to include Black queer topics broadly, so that I am not limited to one institution type. Lastly, I have

been privileged to have spent my entire career working at minority-serving institutions. I would like to continue examining policies issues that are unique to these institutions to highlight policy challenges, advancements, and opportunities for these institutions.

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Appendix A

Participant Prescreening Script

Introductory Statement:

Greetings,

I am contacting you because you have expressed an interest in participating in a research study that I am conducting. The purpose of this research study is to examine Spelman College students' attitudes toward its transgender admissions and enrollment policy as well as its transgender and gender non-conforming students. Participation in this study will consist of a 45 to 60 minutes interview that will be conducted in-person on Spelman's campus or by video conferencing. Each option is available to participants.

To determine if you might qualify for this research study, I will need to ask you a question regarding your enrollment status at Spelman College. Your participation in the pre-screening activity is completely voluntary and you do not have to answer the question if you do not wish. Also, your participation in the pre-screening activity will be completely confidential. However, your response will be audio recorded and will be kept on a secured file for seven years. If for whatever reason any personal identifiers are recorded, the audio file will be modified to remove any content that may compromise the identity of the participant. Do I have your permission to proceed?

Meets Pre-Screening Eligibility:

Based on your response, you are eligible to participate in this research study. As I mentioned, your response has been audio recorded and will be stored on a secured file for

seven years, regardless if you continue to participate in this research study or not. If you would like to keep a copy of this script for your records, I can provide you with a copy.

If you are interested in participating in this research study, next I will provide you with the Participant Informed Consent Form and discuss the arrangements for your interview.

Does Not Meets Pre-Screening Eligibility:

Based on your response, you unfortunately are not eligible to participate in this research study. Thank you again for your interest in participating in this research study. As I previously mentioned, your response has been audio recorded and will be stored on a secured file for seven years, despite not participating in the research study. If you would like to keep a copy of this script for your records, I can provide you with a copy.

Appendix B

University of Missouri, Columbia
CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Principal Investigator: Brandon Hildreth
Project Title: "A qualitative case study of Spelman College's students' attitude toward its Transgender Admission and Enrollment Policy and its transgender and gender non-conforming students"
Project Number:

This research project satisfies the graduation requirement for a doctorate degree of education from the educational leadership and policy analysis program at the University of Missouri, Colombia. The purpose of this study is to examine Spelman College's students' attitudes toward the Transgender Admission and Enrollment Policy that was implemented fall 2018. In addition, this study will examine Spelman College's students' attitudes toward transgender and gender non-conforming students at the College. The findings from this study will be used to begin scholarly conversations about students' attitudes toward transgender and gender non-conforming students at historically Black colleges, in addition to, the policies that influence their experiences at these institutions.

How long is the interview?
Individual interviews should take at least 45 - 60 minutes. Participant can end the interview at any time or decline to answer any question.

What are the risks of participating?
There is little to no risk to participate in this study. However, some of the interview question may be deemed sensitive in nature. In addition, some interview questions may evoke personal emotions from past experiences that may be uncomfortable or difficult to discuss.

What are my rights as a participant?
Participation in this study is completely voluntary.

What is the cost to participate?
There is no cost to participate in this study

Will you be compensated for your participation?
There will be no compensation given to participate in this study

Confidentially
The interview (whether by means of in-person, video conference, or audio conference call) will take place in a closed room to ensure confidentially. The participant has the opportunity to create a pseudonym or participant ID# to ensure confidentiality. All

interview material that details the participants' responses by means of: audio, interview notes, or interview transcriptions will remain confidential and stored in a secured file until the completion of the study. In addition, all interview material will be destroyed at the end of this study.

Who should I contact if I have any questions, concerns, complaints regarding this study?
If for any reason the participant has questions or concerns regarding this study. The participant can contact:

Dissertation Chairs of this Study:

Dr. Jennifer Fellabaum-Toston
University of Missouri, Columbia
Department Chair, ELPA
Associate Teaching Professor, Higher Education
Director and Program Coordinator, Missouri Statewide Cooperative EdD
fellabaumje@missouri.edu

Dr. Jeni Hart
University of Missouri, Columbia
Dean, Graduate School
Professor, Higher Education
hartjl@missouri.edu

Institutional Review Boards

MU Human Subjects Research Protection Program/IRB
Office of Research
University of Missouri
573-882-3181
irb@missouri.edu

Spelman College Institutional Review Board
Office of Sponsored Programs
404-270-5890
irb@spelman.edu

Participant's Consent
I have read this consent form and understand the study's purpose, my roles as a participant, the study's risk, and who to contact if I have questions or concerns. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can remove myself at any time within the study.

A copy of this consent form will be provided to all participants prior to the study

Appendix C

Recruitment Flyer

Participants needed for research examining college students' attitudes towards educational policy in higher education

Participant Eligibility:

- Must be enrolled at Spelman College
- Must be over the age of 18

This research will examine Spelman's students' attitudes towards its Transgender Admission & Enrollment Policy, as well as, its transgender and gender non-conforming community. The findings from this study will be used to begin scholarly conversations about college students' attitudes towards transgender and gender non-conforming students at historically Black colleges, in addition to, the policies that influence their experiences at these institutions.

As our United States combats the novel coronavirus, for the safety of the study participants and the principal researcher, interviews will be conducted virtually through Confer Zoom meeting. The interviews will be 40 – 60 minutes.

The principal investigator for this research is Brandon Hildreth, and by contacted at bmhv22@missouri.edu

*There is no compensation to participate in this study

University of Missouri IRB Project: 2014978
Spelman College IRB Protocal: 777F40

Mizzou
University of Missouri

Appendix D

Spelman College's Student Interview Protocol

Interview Information
Participant Identification Code or Pseudonym: _____
Interview Date: _____
Interview Start Time: _____ AM/PM Interview End Time: _____ AM/PM
Interview Method (phone, in-person, skype) _____
Approval to audio record interview: _____

A. Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. My name is Brandon Hildreth, and I will be conducting this interview. I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis program at the University of Missouri, Colombia and the principal investigator of this study. The purpose of this study is to examine Spelman College's students' attitude toward the Transgender Admissions and Enrollment Policy that went into effect fall 2018. Also, to examine their attitudes toward transgender and gender non-conforming students at Spelman College. There are no right or wrong answers to the interview questions, and you can decline to answer any question. Your responses will be confidential, and you have the option to provide either a pseudonym or participant identification number to secure your identity. For accuracy, I will be audio recording this interview – do you approval or decline to being recorded?

As stated in the Participation Consent Form, the findings from this study will be presented in a published dissertation as well as professional and scholarly journals. Also, findings from this study will be accessible to the Spelman College community; however, participants will remain confidential. This interview should take approximately 60 minutes and is structured with predetermined question as well as follow up questions to gain a deeper understanding of your response. Please feel free to ask to me to repeat any questions or to rephrase a question for provide clarity – if necessary. If at any time during this interview you wish to discontinue, please feel free to let me know so that we may end the interview. Do you still wish to continue?

B. Interview Question

Questions	**Research Questions/ Theoretical connection**
1.) Tell me about yourself and your journey to and through Spelman College. a. **Follow up question:** how would you describe yourself or identities that you hold, for example your: i. Race/ethnicity ii. Gender-identity iii. Sexual orientation iv. Religion v. National origin vi. Any other identities you would like to share?	
2.) How would you describe Spelman's transgender admission and enrollment policy?	
3.) What do you know about the people within the transgender and gender non-conforming community? a. **Follow up question**: How did you learn about Spelman's transgender admission and enrollment policy? b. **Follow up question**: What do you know about the experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming students at Spelman/?	RQ2 – Cognitive RQ2 – Cognitive

	RQ2 - Cognitive
4.) How does your understanding of transgender and gender-non-conforming students shape your understanding of gender and gender-identities? a. **Follow up question:** How does you understanding of transgender and gender non-conforming people shape your understanding of Spelman's policy	RQ2 – Cognitive RQ1 – Cognitive
5.) How did you learn about the transgender and gender non-conforming people at Spelman? a. **Follow up question:** Where did you get this information from?	RQ2 – Cognitive RQ2 - Cognitive
6.) How do you feel about people within the transgender and gender non-conforming community? a. **Follow up question:** How do you feel about transgender and gender non-conforming students at Spelman College? b. **Follow up question:** Does your identities shape your feelings about transgender and gender non-conforming people? If so, how?	RQ2 – Affective RQ2 – Affective RQ2 – Affective
7.) What feelings or emotions do you have regarding people within the transgender and gender non-conforming? And why? a. **Follow up question:** What feelings or emotions do you have regarding Spelman's transgender admissions and enrollment policy?	RQ2 – Affective RQ2 – Affective
8.) Can you describe past interactions with someone or people within the transgender and gender non-conforming community? If so, how was that experience? a. **Follow up question:** Have you ever interacted with transgender and gender non-conforming students at Spelman College? If so, how was that experience? b. **Follow up question:** How does your identities (or background) shape your interactions with transgender and gender non-conforming people?	RQ2 – Behavioral RQ2 – Behavioral RQ2 – Behavioral
9.) Can you describe the actions have you taken regarding Spelman's transgender admissions and enrollment policy?	RQ1 – Behavioral
10.) Have you participated in any campus events/activities regarding Spelman's transgender and enrollment policy? If so, describe the experience	RQ1 – Behavioral

11.) Have your participated in dialogue around the topic of transgender and gender non-conforming people or Spelman's transgender admission or enrollment policy in your classroom? a. **Follow up question:** What other spaces on campus have you had these types of discussions?	RQ1, RQ2 – Behavioral RQ1, RQ2 – Behavioral
12.) Can you describe how you have expressed your support or disapproval of transgender people? If so, how? a. **Follow up question:** What influenced your actions?	RQ 2 – Behavioral RQ2 – Behavioral
13.) Can you describe how you have expressed your support or disapproval of Spelman's College transgender admissions and enrollment policy? a. **Follow up question:** What influenced your actions?	RQ1- Behavioral RQ1 – Behavioral
14.) Where do you see Spelman College going next as it relates to gender-inclusion?	RQ1
15.) Do you have any additional information you would like to share that you think would be considered helpful in understanding the attitude of Spelman's students toward its transgender and admission policy, as well as, its transgender and gender-conforming students?	

C. Closing Statement

Thank you for participating in this study. If you need to contact after this interview, please use the contact information provided on your copy of the participation consent form

VITA

Brandon M. Hildreth was born and raised in Atlanta, Georgia. Brandon graduated from John McEachern High School in Powder Springs, Georgia in 2004. He earned a Bachelor's degree from Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical University, which is a historically Black university in Normal, Alabama. In 2012, he earned a Master's degree in Student Affairs Administration in Higher Education from Ball State University. He has spent almost a decade working in higher education administration at several minority-serving institutions leading educational partnerships, enrollment management, and social justice education efforts. His expertise is in high school dual/concurrent enrollment, college transition and preparation programs, and K-12 to college curriculum alignment and pathway development.

Brandon has presented at several national and state-level conferences. He has served, and continues to serve, on several state-level committees working on establishing policies and laws that inform best practices for postsecondary institutions. In addition, he serves in various leadership roles in national higher education professional organizations.