

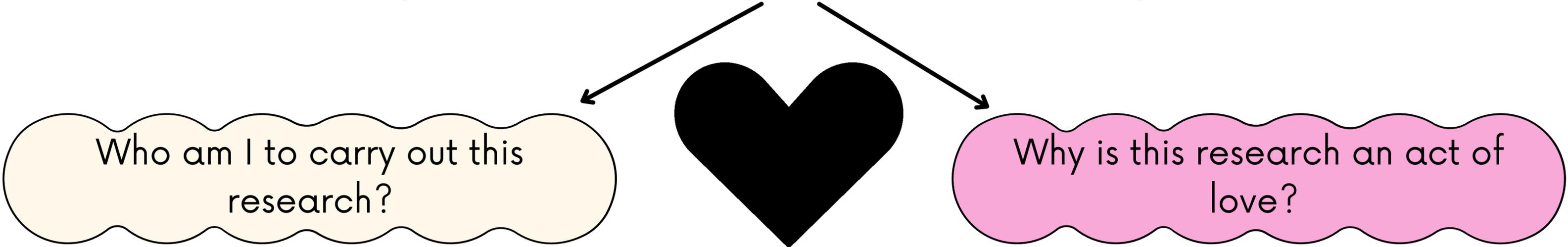


Focusing on Well-Being: Inquiry with Black, First-Generation, HBCU Students

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Specific RQ & Reflexivity

How do Black, first-generation, undergraduate students conceptualize and practice well-being at Howard University?



Who am I to carry out this research?

Why is this research an act of love?

Insider:

- I am a Black student and woman
- I am a first-generation student
- I am a part of the Howard community (alumna)

Outsider:

- I do not have an undergraduate experience in the midst of/aftermath of a pandemic and historic 30 + day sit-in protest

- I carry a lot of love for HBCU students because I once was one
- I have mentored many HBCU undergraduates since graduating two years ago
- Many of my conversations with my mentees center around balancing the pressure of being Black & First-Generation

...One last thing about this research being an ACT OF LOVE:

"Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation and that is an act of political warfare." - Audre Lorde



- When I was in undergrad, well-being was a "fuzzy" topic for me
- I struggled *silently* to prioritize taking time to care for myself amidst what I felt like society "demanded" from me
- In an already oppressive culture, Black students shouldn't have to sacrifice their well-being in order to "achieve"

Key-Ideas from Lit Review

There was not much literature that explored the well-being of first-generation students at HBCUs:

- There was not much literature on first-generation students' well-being overall
- The little research that focused on first-generation students' well-being, did not focus specifically on HBCU students
- Most research that focused on HBCUs and/or HBCU students centered academic/professional outcomes

Themes from literature that explored the well-being of first-generation students:



Stress: First-gen students experience high levels of stress. Mainly relating to academic achievement & financial experiences



Social Support: Receiving social support from administration and peers makes the transition to college less stressful

Socio-Political Context

60% of students enrolled in HBCUs are first-generation students

33% of first-generation students leave college within 3 years of starting

- Elevates the voices of **doubly-marginalized students** at a **historically marginalized institution** of higher education
- Creates space for students to share the ways in which they do/do not prioritize their well-being as they navigate their educational experience **at the intersection of many systems of power** (racism, classism, and capitalism)
- Explores how **institutions of higher education can prioritize the well-being of students who are navigating being the first in their families to go to college**
- Prioritizes **research that focuses on wellness**, not just the academic outcomes of first-generation students



Theoretical Framework

This inquiry project was informed by Black Critical Theory:

- The research question **focuses on the Black community**, specifically,
- The research methods were influenced by the concept of "**liberatory fantasizing**"
 - Engaging Black students in **radical imagining** as a pathway to a better and or/greater future



Methodology



1. Snowball & Purposive Sampling

- Choose based on RQ criteria: First-Gen, Black, Howard Students
- Recruited through a Howard Student Organization: HUImprint
- Interested students e-mailed interest in participating

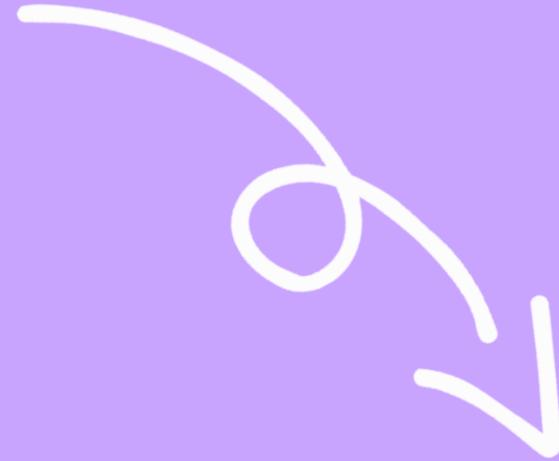
2. Semi-Structured Interview

- 60 minute, one-on-one interviews with each participant
- Discussed themes relating to their personal experiences as a student, Howard University resources, and through photovoice, share what bring them joy and contribute to their well-being

3. Arts-Based Group Visioning

- 60 minute, group zoom session
- Participants participated in an individual and group visioning activity where they created vision boards of an optimal Howard experience from the first-gen experience

Data Analysis:



I decided to use emic coding to see what themes emerged from the interviews and group visioning session.

So, what did I learn?

Conceptualization & Practice:

Conceptualization:



1. All participants defined well-being as a physical AND mental state



2. All participants shared that basic necessities (money, food, shelter) are a prerequisite to experience optimal well-being

Practice:



Besides rest, participants shared little about practices that support their physical well-being



Participants shared that being in a community with friends was the main way they practiced prioritizing their emotional well-being

Overall, what I heard:



Participants shared mixed responses when asked if their well-being was a priority to them.



Participants shared that the stress of being a first-generation student is a barrier to practicing & prioritizing their well-being



Participants struggled to name resources that support their physical health on campus, despite sharing that their physical state of being is a part of their well-being



Participants named their friends and student community as a key resource to their emotional well-being and joy

What I heard: Participants shared mixed responses when asked if their well-being was a priority to them.

"It's definitely important for me to, you know, care for myself, along with everything else going on"

"It's definitely a priority for me to make sure that I'm okay before I do anything else."

"Probably not...I haven't even thought that far into my life...whether I even have well-being or not"

What I heard:

Participants shared that the stress of being a first-generation student is a barrier to practicing & prioritizing their well-being

"I already have, like, a lot of stress on me"

"A lot of stress"

"I just feel like I'm struggling to catch up."

"I can't really just do anything that only focuses on me, like everything that I do has to reflect something or someone or somebody else."

"Having to worry about school, when you're broke. That's kind of depressing."

"Being on Howard's campus is very intimidating. I will say, especially as a first-generation student"

"Because it's like, wanting to do so good. But remembering that you also have to take time for yourself. Like mental health. I'm so busy I don't even remember the last time I prayed."

What I heard:

Participants struggled to name resources that support their physical health on campus, despite sharing that their physical state of being is a part of their well-being

"There aren't much, I mean, we have the cafeterias that have some eating options. They aren't the best. Um, I don't really know how I can elaborate on this question."

"I don't think Howard knows what well-being is for real."

"It's hard to you know, thrive, when you don't really have much food and can't really exercise"

What I heard:

Participants named their friends and student community as a key resource to their emotional well-being and joy

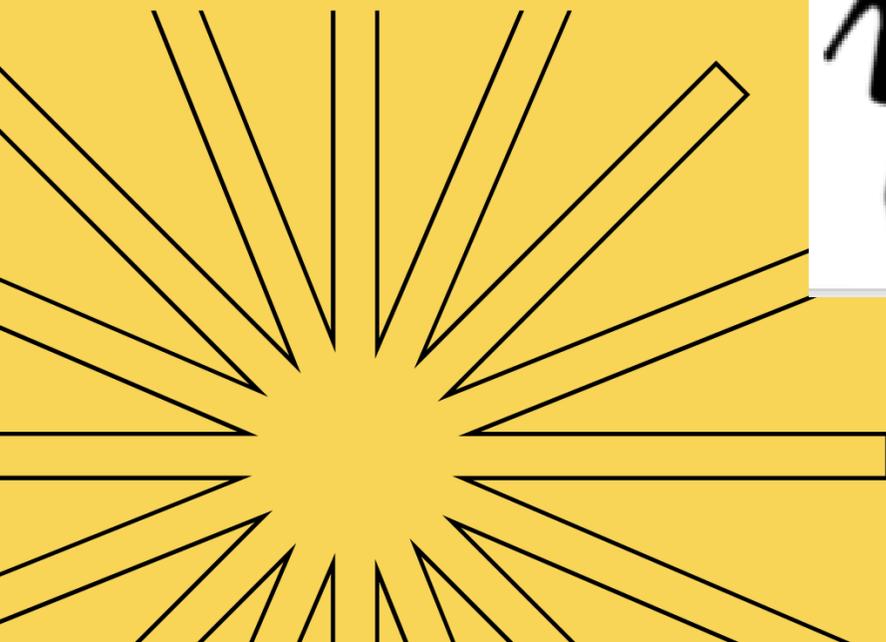
"I love my friends so much"

"It's good to have like, you know, people that actually understand, like, what it is to you know, be a first-generation student go to a school like Howard and just have like that community"

We just recently learned they opened the mental health center. It was closed for the majority of first semester so we couldn't really go there. So really, the only thing you can really rely on was your friends because there was no other, like, resource to use."

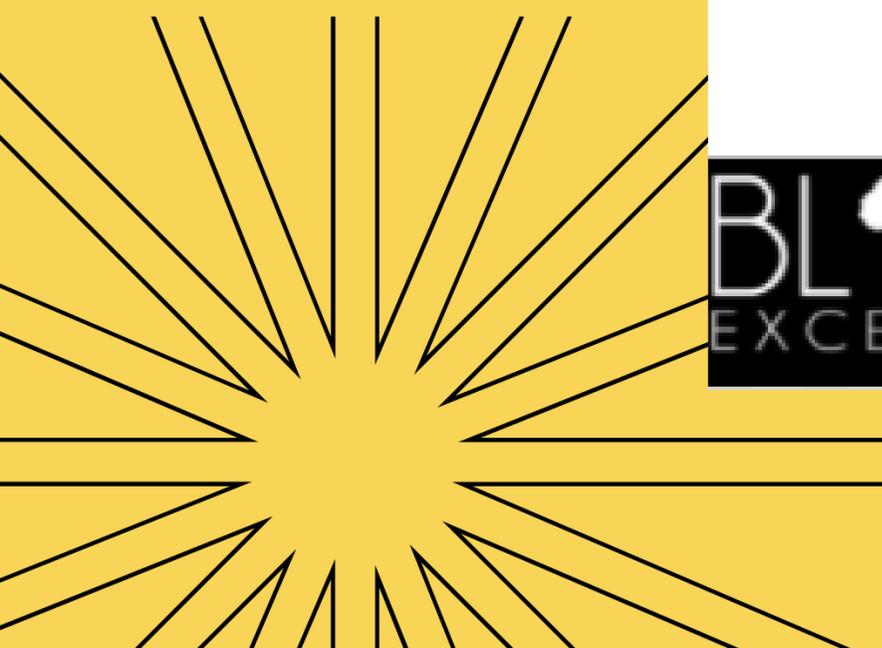
Vision Forward

Question: What would Howard look like if it prioritized well-being for students, from a first-generation perspective?



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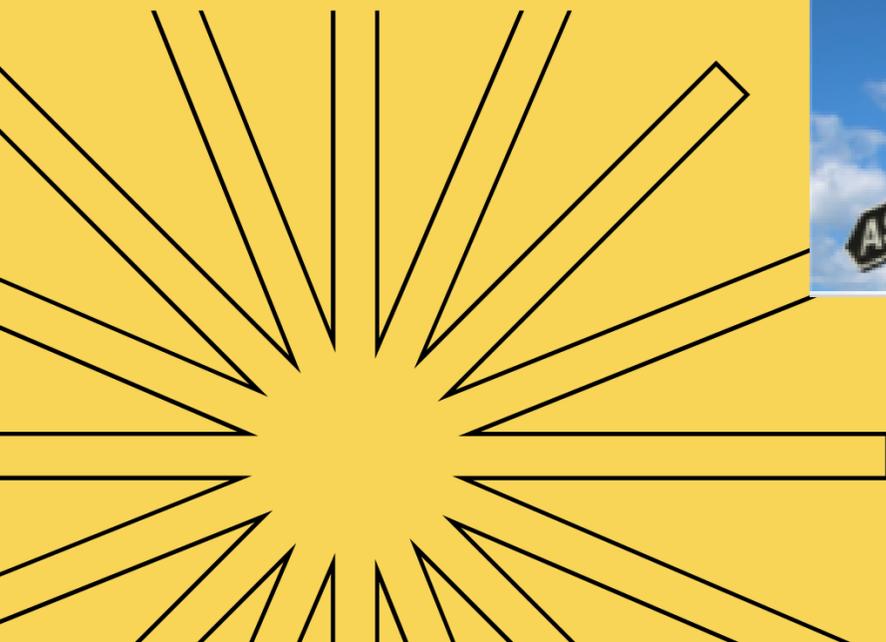


Vision Forward

Question: What would Howard look like if it prioritized well-being for students, from a first-generation perspective?



Student/Faculty Led First-Gen Assembly



Shared Vision Forward

Question: What would Howard look like if it prioritized well-being for students, from a first-generation perspective?



Actions They Desire:

Targeted First-Generation Programming at the University Level

Increased Counseling Services (ex: Accessible Therapists)

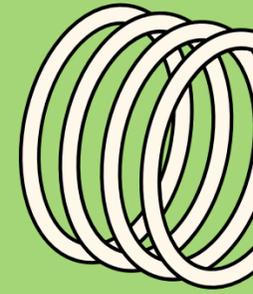
Commitment to improving "the basics" on campus (ex: Food Options, Gym Availability)

Mentorship opportunities (ex: "Buddy-System" to promote connection + accountability)

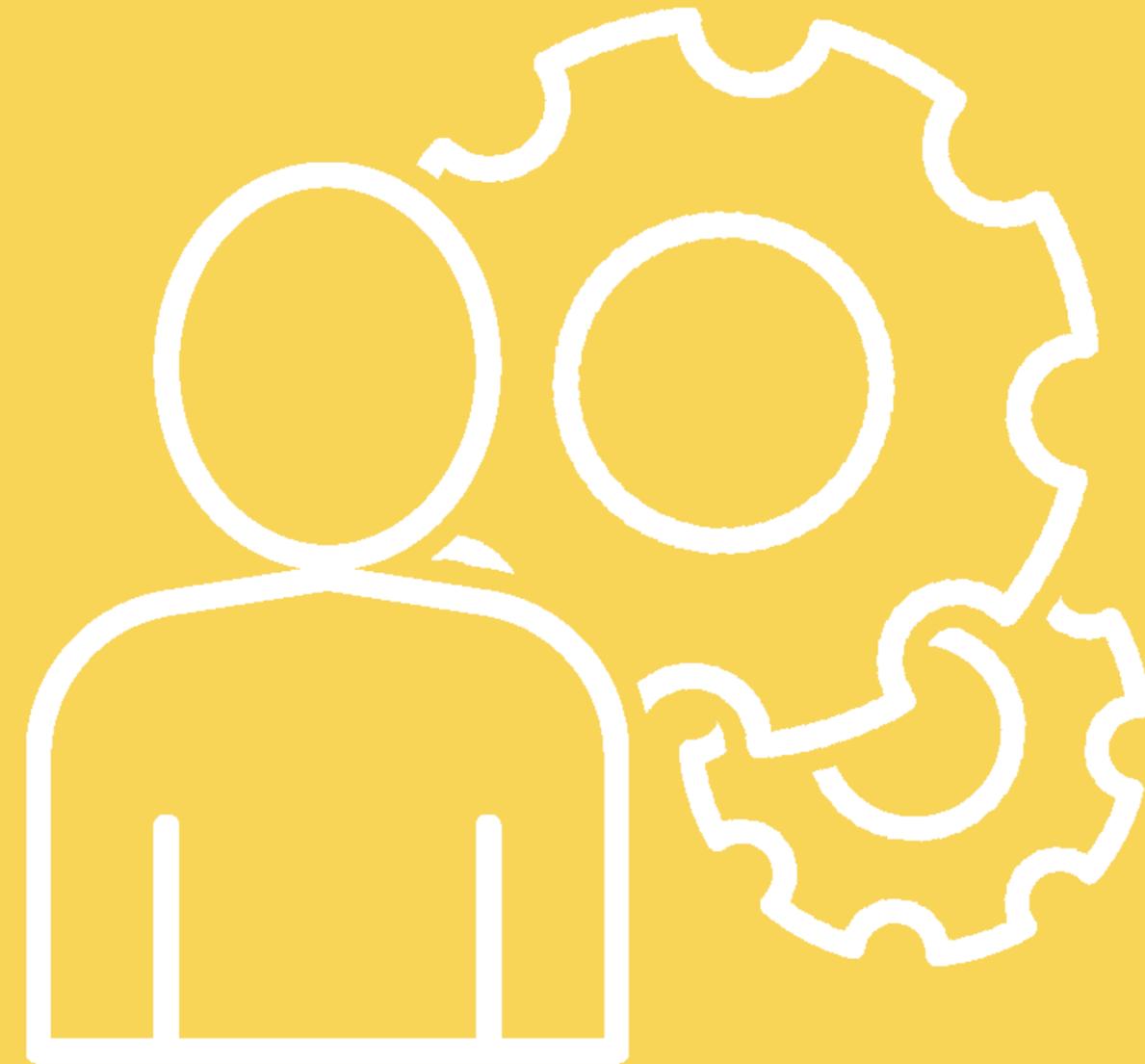
Increased Financial Support (ex: jobs, scholarships, etc.)

Space for Mindfulness (ex: Mental Health Days)

My Takeaways:



- Black, First-Generation students may recognize the importance of prioritizing well-being while on campus **but struggle to practice it** due to constant stress and lack of resources that center the practice of well-being
- **Well-being cannot be a priority if basic needs are limited.** Accessibility to healthy food and exercise options is a basic need that cannot be separated from other well-being resources like therapy/counseling
- Resources and spaces on campus that support **students ability to be mindful and still** are vital to first-generation students
- Social support (specifically **friendships**) are a key source of joy for Howard first-generation students





My Lingering Questions:

All participants struggled to name resources that contributed to their physical health, how much is that due to lack of being on campus for long periods of time?



How different would my learnings be if I interviewed students who were not exposed to HUImprint?



All participants named friendships frequently. What is the experience of students who are less sociable/more introverted?



My Actions

What I am doing:



- Share findings + analysis back to participants and HUImprint
- Serve as a thought-partner and advocate for HUImprint participants as they continue their matriculation at Howard

What I am considering:



- How can I continue to facilitate conversations/brainstorming about supporting the well-being of Black, first-generation students on college campuses?

Citations:

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Thank you for listening!

Questions?

