Conversations and Community
Exploring Belonging through the Lens of Black Women Engineers

**Introduction**
This Capstone explores the career experience of Black Women Engineers and describes the themes that emerge from analyzing their perspective. It illustrates how crisis decision-making, belonging, balance and perspective, and workplace climate all color their experience. Finally, it offers ways engineering stakeholders can strengthen efforts to develop community—using guidance from a hearer-oriented communication model.

**Methods**
- Literature Review of peer reviewed/scholarly research on STEM Identity and Attribution Bias, Retention in Engineering and Skilled Professions
- Snowball sampling of participants for semi-structured qualitative interviews
- Analysis of themes as a Black Woman Engineer (autoethnography)

**Results**
Interviewee experience provides insight into why Black Women are still leaving Engineering after years of working on pipeline “issues”.

**Community**
Community is key and is often lacking—it fosters resilience required for longevity. Microaggression, isolation, and undermining actions withhold community. Special support is necessary as people are predisposed to prefer homogeneity.

**Perspective in Achievement**
Striving to be the best cannot be at the expense of community—shifting perspective helped find their voices, observing their own interests and desires.

**Crisis Recruiting**
Participants are sold on the benefits of entering engineering without insight into the challenges to expect and the support required to thrive

**Climate**
Workplace culture plays heavily into belonging—colleagues validate or invalidate their personhood. Interviewees share stigma of being treated as less-than and benefit of workplaces where they could be their authentic selves.

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**Recommendations**
- Allow margin (time) for building community—*internally or externally.*
- Provide resources to employees to learn the skills of difficult conversation and communication across cultures.
- Recruit where the diverse candidates are. Treat HBCUs and affinity orgs as valuable partners to address challenges of “homosocial reproduction.”
- Support resilience—strategies may include activities not “normalized” by engineer majority culture.
- Interrogate approaches to bad actors which treat minority engineers as less-than—is the ideal culture the experience?

**Further Information**
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**Literature Cited (Not All Inclusive)**

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